Research Article

Pauline Soteriology in the Gospel of Mark

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1. Independent researcher

This study, the third in a series, argues that canonical Mark is a deliberately reserved text: a gospel composed to be performed by its author, carrying a public surface for every hearer and a further sense that the author supplied in the telling — reserved not from outsiders but for the exposition, by a writer whose narrative required the eyewitnesses not to have understood what his gospel taught. Mark announces the method himself — “nothing is hidden except in order to be disclosed” (4:22) — and shows it at work, staging the disciples’ failure to read the feedings and the catechesis that reads them (8:17–21). The study traces the method’s execution across a series of features that a plain reading leaves unexplained: a lamp that "comes" in a rare construction the New Testament otherwise attests only in Paul; a right-and-left architecture, drawn from the singular lampstand vision of Zechariah 4, that resolves at the cross; a salting verb (ἁλισθήσεται, 9:49) reproduced verbatim from the one verse of the Septuagint that carries it — the covenant-of-salt command of Lev 2:13 — with the fire of judgment set where the salt of the covenant stood; and an ending whose stone is named by the verb that, of a stone, the Greek scriptures use only at the betrothal-well of Genesis 29. The study’s central focus is Mark’s salt sayings. At the hinge of the salt sayings stands a marked form (ἅλα) — not the neuter ἅλας Mark writes twice in the same verse, but the Septuagint's accusative of ἅλς, the ἅλα of that same verse's "salt of the covenant" — anchoring the imperative "have salt in yourselves" to the covenant that made an offering acceptable and unlocking Paul’s idiom “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1). Read as a reserved sequence, the salt of Mark 9:49–50 discloses a complete statement of Pauline soteriology — justification by participation in Christ, in which the universal fire of judgment becomes, for those who carry the covenant-salt, the fire of an acceptable sacrifice — and the covenant disclosed under the salt opens, in the marriage teaching that follows it and at the tomb, into a second figure of the same bond: the one-flesh union of the bridegroom and his people, the two covenant arcs closing together at the rolled-away stone. The study then argues that the gospel’s first readers answered this reserved gospel as a controversy: the sayings source mocked (proto)-Mark’s salt through a bilingual pun calling it foolish (μωρανθῇ); Matthew systematically re-

axised the salt, lamp, and measure across his Sermon, turning each from a disclosure about Christ into a rule for disciples; and (proto)-Luke dissolved the unified salt into scattered proverbs and severed the salt from the marriage teaching it had introduced. This reception refines the documentary model of the previous studies, casting the synoptic relationships as a sequence of answering moves over the gospel Mark reserved. A final section argues that the tradition assigning Mark to Peter's interpreter is a product of the same Roman settlement — attested in 1 Peter, 1 Clement, and Acts — that produced the gospel's last, reconciling layer. The reading is offered as a hypothesis — the most economical account of features that resist a plain explanation and of a Pauline gospel that otherwise proclaims no soteriology at all — rather than as proof, with its load-bearing data distinguished throughout from the interpretive frame that gathers them.

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1. Introduction

This is the third of three studies, and the most venturesome of them. The first established, on statistical grounds, a documentary model of the synoptic gospels: Mark composed first, Matthew drawing on Mark and a sayings source, Luke drawing on all three.[1] The second argued that Mark is composite — that canonical Mark is an expansion of an earlier proto-Mark, enlarged by an author in the orbit of Paul's mission, who added to the inherited gospel a program of Gentile-facing material keyed to Isaiah.[2] Each study rests on firmer ground than the one that follows it. The first is a quantitative argument with a measurable result; the second a source-critical argument disciplined by formal criteria; the present study, which asks what canonical Mark *means* and how its first readers answered it, is the most interpretive of the three, and the reader should weigh it accordingly. What is offered here is not proof of the kind the first study aimed at, but a reading — one that accounts for a striking quantity of the gospel's oddities, and that can be tested, where it can be tested at all, by asking of the features whether accident is a more economical explanation than design.

The reading is this: that canonical Mark, and the proto-Mark beneath it, contain a Pauline soteriology in a deliberately reserved form — a gospel written to be performed by its author, who supplied in the telling what its surface withheld. That Mark's theology is Pauline in its shape is not itself a novel claim: Marcus[3] has argued at length that Mark writes as an interpreter of Paul, and the affinities of his

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Christology and his soteriology with the Pauline mission are widely recognized. What is argued here is not the presence of that theology but its *manner* — that Mark did not set his Pauline soteriology on the surface of his gospel, where it could be read by anyone, but reserved it: built it into the text in such a way that the surface would carry one sense to the crowd and a second, disclosed sense to those instructed to hear it. The claim is not that Mark is Pauline; it is that Mark's Paulinism is reserved.

The signs that Mark works in this way are not invented for the occasion; several have long been noticed[4][5]. The disciples are famously dull, Peter, the sons of Zebedee, the Twelve, and Jesus's own family failing again and again to understand him[6]; a lamp is said to "come" rather than to be brought (4:21)[7]; the narrator remarks that Jesus "did not speak to them except in parables" (4:34a); at the hinge of the gospel's most concentrated theological sequence a marked form of a single word appears — ἅλα — where the neighboring clauses twice write the ordinary ἅλας (9:49–50)[8], and the general inscrutability of Mark's salt sayings[9]; a young man flees naked at the arrest (14:51–52) and a young man sits clothed in the empty tomb (16:5)[7]; and the gospel ends not in proclamation but in silence — the women flee the tomb and say nothing to anyone (16:8)[7] — with the stone found already rolled away, named with a verb whose scriptural home is a marriage begun at a well[10]. These are not the habits of a plain text.

The study proceeds from its firmest ground. It begins with light. The lamp of Mark 4:21 does not behave as lamps do: it *comes*, an intransitive of motion that personifies it, and it comes toward a destination the surface does not name. Set beside two later scenes — the request of James and John for the places at Jesus's right and left, refused (10:35–40), and the two figures crucified at his right and his left (15:27) — it discloses an architecture drawn from Zechariah 4, the vision of a lampstand flanked by two anointed ones, one to the right and one to the left, who attend the Lord of the whole earth.

The correspondence can be pressed in the one way these readings can be pressed: by asking what the odds are that it is accidental. The lamp is where the method shows itself most clearly, because the correspondences are concrete and the template is singular; what follows applies two questions to the rest of the material: "Is this accident?" and "If not, what is it saying?"

From light the study turns to the measure saying that stands beside the lamp (4:24–25), and to the secret seed parable that follows after that. The study then reviews the esoteric pairs highlighted in the previous study, and then turns to salt, and dwells there, for the salt sayings of Mark 9:49–50 are the center of the gospel's reserved theology and the center of this study.

The argument is twofold: that beneath the surface proverb Mark has built, out of the salt of Leviticus "with all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Lev 2:13), and out of Paul's idiom "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1), a complete statement of justification — the worshipper made acceptable to God not through the cult or through moral achievement but through participation in Christ; and that the marked form ἅλα is where the two readings part company: on the page, the word is simply salt, and the imperative a moral proverb about savor and peace; in the telling, when the hearer is shown where the form is at home, it is the Septuagint's ἅλα of the covenant, and the imperative an instruction to have within oneself the covenant that makes an offering acceptable — now the covenant sealed in Christ.

It then asks how Mark's first readers answered him, and the answers are themselves evidence that there was something to answer. Matthew, in particular, answers Mark point for point, with full comprehension and hostility, dismantling the salt, the lamp, and the measure across the Sermon on the Mount and replacing Mark's soteriology with his own. And we also argue that the sayings source answers proto-Mark with hostility, creating "moronic" salt. (Proto)-Luke, on the other hand, attempts to be a unifier, and offend neither side. He retains almost all of Mark's text but drives the wedge of his travel narrative between the two halves of Mark's pericope. That these independent authors should respond so differently — and so deliberately — to the same Markan material is hard to explain unless the material was, in fact, doing what is claimed.

One of these responses leads to a refinement of the documentary model the earlier studies built. The sayings source, on the account given here, was not a neutral early collection but the work of a bilingual author of the Jerusalem circle who, alongside the traditional sayings of Jesus, composed at least one saying to answer proto-Mark directly — the salt saying. Its weapon was a pun available only to a writer who knew both tongues: the Aramaic root *tpal*, which means at once *to lose savor* and *to be foolish*, so that the saying charges, under its breath, that Mark's salt is not the profound thing he made of it but a thing misheard — that Mark, in a word, played the fool with what Jesus said. Matthew, rendering the saying into Greek, preserved the charge in his choice of μωρανθῇ, "become foolish," where a saying about salt would have led any innocent translator to write "become tasteless." Read so, the synoptic documents fall into a sequence of answering blows: proto-Mark first; the sayings source firing back; proto-Luke attempting a synthesis; canonical Mark answering in turn, with a pro-Gentile expansion; Matthew answering again, with his own reworking of Mark's gospel; and with canonical Luke inheriting the

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quarrel. It is a controversy the tradition had settled by the time Papias wrote, and the settlement shaded what he remembered (§11.1).

Four further sections round out the study. One traces a third hand in the gospel — a light, late layer of framing and glosses, attested by neither Matthew nor Luke, that turns the secret back toward the Twelve (§9.2). One reads the silent ending, whose rolled-away stone carries the same reserved technique into the resurrection scene (§10). One asks what proto-Mark was like once the expansion is subtracted, and follows the gospel's treatment of Peter through its three layers to the question of why the tradition gave this gospel, of all gospels, to Peter's interpreter — a question the first epistle of Peter and the Roman settlement it belongs to can answer (§11). And the last is a cumulative reckoning of the odds against so many correspondences arising by chance, and of the alternatives to the reading offered (§12).

A final word on what is and is not claimed. The performance frame is a hypothesis, not a datum, and the readings that depend most heavily on it are the least secure claims in these three studies. Where a reading can be anchored — in the manuscripts that carry ἄλα, in the singular template of Zechariah 4, in Matthew's telling word μωρανθῇ — it is anchored, and the argument leans there. Where it cannot, it is offered as the most economical account of features a plain reading leaves unexplained.

1.1. The Reserved Text: Mark's Own Method

The reading offered in this study supposes that Mark wrote to be understood on two levels — a surface for every hearer, and a further sense supplied in the telling to those being taught. This is not a frame imposed on the gospel from outside. Mark states it himself, and states it twice, in the one short passage where he pauses to say how his teaching works.

The first statement is the famous one. Jesus says: "to you has been given the mystery [τὸ μυστήριον] of the kingdom of God, but to those outside everything comes in parables" (4:11). The teaching is deliberately divided — a sense given to those addressed, withheld from those without — and the citation of Isaiah that follows, that they may look and not perceive and hear and not understand (4:12), makes the division purposeful: the outsiders are meant to receive only the surface. Who the "you" is, the verse does not say; §9.2 will argue that Mark left it open, and that it is the hearer in the room.

The second statement is the more remarkable, and it is less often read as what it is. A few lines later, after the saying of the lamp, Mark has Jesus say: "For nothing is hidden except in order to be made manifest, nor is anything secret except in order to come to light" (4:22). The grammar is exact and it is doing real work. Mark does not say that hidden things happen to come out in the end; he says that nothing is

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hidden except for the purpose of (ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα) being revealed. Concealment, in this sentence, has no other reason for existing than eventual disclosure. The hidden is hidden so that it may be shown. That is not a platitude about truth winning out; it is a precise description of a method — a way of writing in which meaning is deliberately covered over for the very purpose of being uncovered by those who are shown how. And Mark seals it with his standing summons: "if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (4:23) — the formula by which, throughout this gospel, he marks the places where the surface is not the whole.

These three sentences — the mystery given to the hearers, the hiding that exists for the sake of disclosure, the call to the hearing ear — are framed by the two sayings this study reads as the gospel's method in miniature. Before them stands the lamp (4:21): a light that comes and must not be left under the measuring-basket or the bed but set on its stand, where it gives light to all. After them stands the measure (4:24–25): "with the measure you measure it will be measured to you, and still more will be given... for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken." The lamp is the reserved sense — hidden for now, destined to be raised and seen. The measure is the economy of its disclosure — given without stint to those who have, who receive and so receive more; withdrawn from those who have not, left with a surface that finally yields nothing. And binding the lamp to the disclosure principle is a single word: the lamp comes (ἔρχεται, 4:21), and the hidden thing comes into the open (ἔλθῃ εἰς φανερόν, 4:22) — the same verb of arrival, the light and the secret alike moving from concealment into the light.

In this one passage, then, Mark has done three things at once: declared that his teaching has an inside and an outside, declared that its concealment is purposive and aimed at disclosure, and given — in the lamp and the measure — a model of how the reserved meaning is hidden, raised, and apportioned. What the rest of this study traces is the method here announced, carried out: in the lamp, in the pairs, in the salt, in the silence of the ending.

What kind of text does this describe? Not, in the first instance, a book. Mark was composed to be heard: read aloud, in a gathering, by a reader who performed it. That much is the settled result of a generation of work on the gospel's orality — its paratactic style, its episodic structure, its devices of repetition and framing built for the ear rather than the eye[11][12][13][14]. The present study takes that result as its starting point and asks the question performance criticism has rarely pressed: what did the performer say besides the text? A gospel delivered aloud by someone who had been preaching its content before he wrote it down is a gospel whose written surface was never the whole of what its audience received. The performer explained; the text is what he explained. On this account "reserved" does not mean withheld from

outsiders. It means reserved for the telling — carried by figures that are incomplete on the page and completed in the exposition, before a congregation, by a teacher who knew where each marked word was at home. The audience of the disclosed sense is not an elite within the church; it is the church, taught. And once the text circulated beyond its author, the exposition went with it, as the thing one had to be taught in order to read the book — which is how a written gospel can remain, for its first generation, a performed one.

Why would an author build his text this way, rather than simply say what he meant? The answer lies in a constraint the narrative imposed on him, and it is a hinge of this study. Mark's soteriology, as the following chapters argue, is Paul's. But the men who had known Jesus were not preaching Paul's gospel; Paul's own letters say so, at Antioch and at Jerusalem (Gal 2). An evangelist who held that gospel therefore faced a problem of plot before he faced one of theology. He could not have Jesus state the saving doctrine plainly in the story, because then the disciples' failure to carry it would be unaccountable — they would have heard it and dropped it. The doctrine had to be taught in figure; the disciples had to be shown not grasping it; and the sense had to live where the author could supply it, in the telling. The dullness of the disciples in Mark is thus not an incidental feature of the gospel but a structural necessity of a Pauline gospel written while the Jerusalem preaching was still in the field. "To you has been given the mystery" is, on this reading, not a claim about secrecy at all. It is the narrator telling his hearers that they are receiving, in the exposition, what the men in the boat did not.

That the disciples' incomprehension is a Markan construction serving a purpose, rather than an artless report, has been recognized for sixty years: Tyson[15] read it as polemic against the Jerusalem church, Weeden[16] as an attack on a rival Christology carried under the apostles' names, Kelber[17] as the gospel's verdict on the Jerusalem community after the war. The present study stands in that line and departs from it in two respects. The opponent is not a "divine man" Christology of the kind Weeden posited — a Jesus of wonders without a cross — but the ordinary preaching of the Jerusalem mission, which differed from Paul's in what we know it differed in: the law, the table, the nations, and the terms of salvation. And the mechanism is not polemic alone but narrative necessity: the disciples fail to understand because the story needs the saving sense to have passed them by. The standard objection to the polemical reading, that 16:7 sends the women to the disciples and Peter and so rehabilitates them, is taken up in §10 and §11, where the previous study's stratification bears on it directly: the exclusion of the Twelve from the secret belongs, on that reconstruction, to the expansion, and sharpened when the author's distance from Jerusalem did.

A text that works this way would not have seemed strange in Mark's world, where staged disclosure was a familiar religious mode. The Greek mystery cults guarded their ἀπόρρητα, the things shown to initiates and not to be spoken abroad[18]; Jewish apocalyptic sealed its revelations and reserved their meaning for the wise; the community at Qumran read its scriptures through an interpretation it did not share with outsiders; the philosophical schools distinguished an outer teaching from an inner. These were different institutions with different contents, and the point in setting them side by side is not that Mark drew on any one of them, but that a meaning withheld from the surface and disclosed to the prepared was a recognizable feature of the religious landscape. A first-century author who built such a structure into a gospel would have been doing something his readers had categories for.

It is necessary to distinguish this claim from an older one that has rightly fallen out of favor. An earlier generation of scholarship sought to derive early Christianity itself from the Hellenistic mystery religions, reading its sacraments and its risen Lord as borrowings from the cults of Isis, Mithras, or Dionysus. That program overreached: the alleged parallels were often loose, and the mystery sources frequently later than the Christian texts they were said to have shaped. Nothing in the present study depends on it. The claim here is not about the origin of Mark's content, which we locate in Paul and in the Jewish scriptures, but about the manner of its presentation. Mark need not have borrowed a single idea from any mystery cult to have written a gospel that reserves its sense; he needed only to write in a mode his world already knew.

That mode, moreover, is native to the very theology this study finds in Mark. Paul — a Jew, schooled in a tradition where revelation comes as a disclosed secret — speaks habitually in just these terms: he imparts "God's wisdom in a mystery [ἐν μυστηρίῳ], the hidden wisdom" (1 Cor 2:7), gives milk to the immature and solid food to the mature, and reserves for the τέλειοι what the rest are not yet ready to hear. A gospel carrying Pauline soteriology in a reserved form is therefore not a foreign graft but the natural literary expression of a theology that already understood itself as a mystery disclosed.

Mark shows the method at work on his own page, twice. After the sower, the parable is delivered to all and then explained (4:13–20) — the one place the explanation is written down, and it opens with a rebuke that assumes explanation was needed: "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" And after the second feeding, Jesus makes the disciples recite the numbers of the loaves and the baskets and tells them they still do not understand (8:17–21): the facts in their possession, the meaning not. These are the exposition staged within the narrative — a teacher drawing out of a figure what the hearers could not draw for themselves — and they are the model for what the

gospel's own performer did with the rest. The single point on which everything that follows depends is this: that the surface of Mark's text can carry one meaning while holding another, and that the held meaning is completed not by the page but by the telling. Of Mark's competence to build such a text we need assume little — a writer working in Greek, steeped in the Septuagint, who knew at least that Zechariah's two figures were anointed ones, a thing the Hebrew carries and the Greek does not. The chapters that follow ask, case by case, where Mark has set a marked word or left a gap, and what remained for the teller to show.

2. The Lamp That Comes

The clearest case, and the one on which the method can be most nearly tested, is the lamp. In Mark 4:21 Jesus asks, μήτι ἔρχεται ὁ λύχνος — "does the lamp come, to be put under the basket or under the bed?" The verb is ἔρχεται, *comes*.

It is worth being exact about the verb. ἔρχομαι is among the commonest in the Greek of the gospels, but overwhelmingly in its ordinary senses — to come, to go, to come about. The use here is not ordinary. The lexicon[1] isolates a distinct and rare sense, "to change place or position, with the implication of being brought — be brought," and finds it in only two places in the New Testament: this verse and Romans 7:9, where Paul writes that "the commandment came" (ἐλθούσης τῆς ἐντολῆς)[2]. But the two are not alike. Paul's subject is an abstraction — a commandment, arriving as concepts do in argument. Mark's is a physical object, a lamp, made to come as though under its own power. In that sense Mark's usage is not merely rare but unique: the one place in the New Testament where a concrete thing is made the subject of this coming. The commentators who render the clause "is the lamp brought in" are not wrong about the plain sense; but a lamp that "comes" is a marked construction, and the markedness is not empty.

Mark means the word to be heard two ways. On the surface it says only that the lamp comes — is brought in, set on its stand. But the reserved ear catches more, for ὁ ἐρχόμενος, "the Coming One," is in this gospel and across the tradition a title of the awaited deliverer — "blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (11:9). Beneath "the lamp is brought" stands "the Coming One comes." The lamp that comes is phrased as the one who comes.

Its rarity, used in this sense, might have raised a flag with the listener too. Suppose we pick the word "approaches" as an English translation. We could say "the lion approaches its prey" or "the time approaches"; "my package approaches," however, is not wrong but it sounds a bit off. Matthew and Luke

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remove this oddity and make the lamp the object of a human hand — one lights it, one places it (Matt 5:15; Luke 8:16) — Mark alone lets the lamp itself come.

By itself this would be a thread too thin to pull. What gives it weight is that the same right-and-left structure that belongs to the lamp's scriptural source recurs twice more, and unmistakably: once on the road to Jerusalem, when the sons of Zebedee ask for the places at his right and left (10:35–40), and once at the crucifixion (15:27). In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees a golden lampstand flanked by two olive trees, "one on the right and one on the left" (4:3, 11), which the interpreting angel names "the two anointed ones"[3] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (4:14). This configuration — a lampstand, two figures at its right and left — occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew scriptures. The motif of two figures positioned right and left of a central figure, common enough in the gospels, has in the Old Testament this one home.

Mark twice puts that configuration to use. First, the sons of Zebedee ask to sit "one at your right and one at your left" in his glory (10:37) — and are refused: those places, Jesus says, are "not mine to give, but for those for whom they have been prepared" (10:40). The right and the left are reserved, withheld from the inner circle, kept for others already appointed to them. Then, at the crucifixion, the reservation is filled: "with him they crucified two bandits, one at his right and one at his left" (15:27). The places James and John were denied are given, at the end, to two condemned men, nameless, outside the circle of the Twelve, flanking Jesus on the cross.

Read against Zechariah, the architecture completes itself. Jesus is the lamp that comes; the cross is the lampstand on which the lamp is raised up; and the two crucified beside him, lifted on their own wooden crosses at his right and his left, are the two olive trees, the anointed ones who attend the Lord of the whole earth. What the prophet saw as a single vision — a lampstand and, flanking it, two anointed attendants — Mark has distributed across his gospel: announced in the lamp that comes in chapter 4, prepared in chapter 10 where the places at the right and the left are named and reserved "for those for whom they have been prepared," and consummated at the cross in chapter 15, where the lampstand is raised and the two are set in their places.

One link in this reading is left implicit on the surface, and Mark returns, probably in expansion, to supply it. The two crucified at the right and the left occupy the places "for those for whom it has been prepared" (ἡτοίμασται, 10:40); but nothing in the surface names those men as *anointed*, and it is the anointed ones of Zechariah whose places they fill. The missing term is furnished elsewhere in the gospel — and furnished, tellingly, by material this study's predecessor lists as a candidate for the expansion — Luke lacks it at Mark's position, and there is a possible seam, but it fails the size criterion[2]. At Bethany a woman pours

ointment over Jesus's head, and when she is reproached he defends her on a single ground: "she has anointed my body beforehand for burial" (14:8). The anointing *is* a preparation — a preparing of the body for death. Anointing and preparation are thereby identified: to be anointed, in this gospel, is to be prepared for death, and to be prepared is to be anointed. The places at the right and the left, then, "prepared" for those who will fill them, are the *anointed* places; and the two condemned men who fill them, dying at Jesus's side, are beneath the surface the two anointed ones, the olive trees of the vision, exactly as the pattern requires.

If the term is supplied by expansion material is not an embarrassment to the reading but a confirmation of how the gospel grew. Proto-Mark laid down the architecture — the coming lamp, the reserved right and left, the crucified pair — but left "prepared" undefined, its anointed sense available to the instructed ear and unstated on the page. On that grading, the expansion returned and tightened the connection, adding the Bethany anointing that makes preparation legible as anointing. The surface oddity of that scene has often been noticed: the women come to anoint Jesus at the tomb (16:1), so that his body is anointed twice, once before death and once attempted after — a redundancy on the plain reading. On the reserved reading the redundancy dissolves, for the Bethany anointing is not embalming but designation: it supplies the gospel with the word *anointed* at the hinge of the passion, and so completes, from within the expansion, a reserved connection the base had left for the interpreter to make. The same hand that built the lamp came back to strengthen it.

It may be objected that a cross is not an olive tree — that the identification of the crucified men's crosses with Zechariah's olive trees trades on nothing more than that both are tall wooden uprights of roughly arboreal shape. But the objection mistakes a constraint for a weakness. Mark was not free in either term. The instrument of Jesus's death had to be a cross; it was fixed by the passion he received, not chosen for its resemblance to anything. And the lamp's oil had to be olive; olive oil simply *was* what lamps burned, and Zechariah's flanking trees are olives because the lampstand they feed is fed by olives. Mark could alter neither the cross nor the olive; both were given to him. What Mark could do — and, on this reading, did — was notice that the two given things answered one another.

Now the question the method asks: "Is this an accident?" Several things must coincide for it to be. First, that Mark gave his lamp a rare and marked construction — a physical object made to "come," a usage unique to him in the New Testament. Second, that of the three Synoptics Mark alone made the lamp a subject that comes at all, where Matthew and Luke make it the object of a hand that lights and places it. Third, that he has the places at right and left sought by the inner circle and refused. Fourth, that he has

those same places filled, at the crucifixion, by two condemned men. Fifth, that a doubled anointing equates "prepared" with "anointed." And sixth, that the one passage in the Hebrew scriptures uniting a lampstand with two anointed ones at right and left is the very text these features compose between them. Each is unremarkable only so long as it is taken alone. Their convergence — the lamp made to come on its own, the right and left refused, the right and left filled, prepared and anointed equated, all falling together on the single scriptural pattern that gathers them — is not what coincidence produces. The architecture is built.

And if it is built, it says something — for the content is not neutral, and at its center is an identification the whole pattern has been moving toward: the cross is the lampstand. Zechariah saw a lampstand and, flanking it, two anointed ones at the right and the left, attending the Lord of the whole earth (4:14). Mark has set that vision at Golgotha. The upright cross is the stand; the two crucified at Jesus's right and left are the two anointed ones — "those for whom it has been prepared" (10:40), occupying now the anointed ones' places; their crosses the olive trees; and the figure they flank, the crucified man between them, is the one Zechariah calls the Lord of all the earth.

This is why the lamp of the early saying *comes* and is raised: the lamp announced in chapter 4, which must not stay hidden under basket or bed but be set upon its stand, is set upon its stand at the cross.

The reading, once made, gathers the gospel's deepest reversals into one image. The places of honor at the Lord's right and left, sought by the leaders of the Twelve and denied them, are filled by two condemned outsiders — the judgment the gospel passes everywhere on the apostolic circle. The lampstand of the vision, the sacred light-bearer of the temple, one of the holiest furnishings of the temple cult, is now the wood of an execution — the cult's light displaced by the cross. And the man who hangs there as a criminal is declared, in the silent grammar of the pattern, the Lord of all the earth, the nations included, not of Israel alone. The instructed reader, shown the figure, sees at the cross what the uninstructed sees only as two criminals incidentally present: the lampstand raised, its two anointed ones in place, and between them, lifted up to give light to the world, the Lord of the whole earth.

2.1. Barabbas

The lamp is assembled from pieces set far apart — the coming light of 4:21, the right and left of 10:35–40 and 15:27, the anointing of 14:8, the lampstand of Zechariah. The reader who holds them together sees what no single verse says. Mark uses the same distributed technique with a name.

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At the trial before Pilate the crowd is offered a choice between Jesus and a prisoner named Barabbas (15:6–15). The name is Aramaic, and Mark, who elsewhere translates his Aramaic for a Greek-speaking audience, here leaves it untranslated. But he has supplied its parts elsewhere. Bar he glosses at 10:46, where blind Bartimaeus is introduced as "Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus" (Βαρτιμαῖος, ὁ υἱὸς Τιμαίου) — bar rendered, in so many words, as "son of." Abba he glosses at 14:36, in Gethsemane, where Jesus prays "Abba, Father" (Αββα ὁ πατήρ). The hearer who has been given both parts can read the name at the trial: Bar-abba, son of the father.

The surface does not require this. To the crowd the name is just a name. Mark does not translate it at the point of use, does not gloss it, does not point to it — exactly as he does not tell the reader that the lamp is the Coming One or that the salt is the covenant. What he does instead is place the two halves of the meaning in the hearer's hands at other points in the narrative, and leave the assembly to the telling. The technique is the lamp's, worked in a single word: a meaning withheld on the surface and completed for the hearer who is shown the pieces. Consider the other choices Mark had — he could have glossed the name in place and gone on to explain what it meant, which would have put the meaning on the surface; or he could have glossed it nowhere, which would have left no sign that the name mattered. What he did instead was gloss the parts and withhold the whole — which is to say, he placed the significance in the reserve.

And the disclosed reading is pointed. At the moment the crowd must choose, they are offered two who can be called son of the father: the one so named on the surface, and the one who in Gethsemane called God Abba and was declared God's Son at the baptism (1:11), the transfiguration (9:7), in Mark's introduction (1:1) and by the Centurian after his death (15:39). The crowd chooses the guilty son of the father and releases him; the true Son of the Father goes to the cross. The irony is available only to the hearer who has assembled the name — which is to say, it is reserved, in exactly the gospel's characteristic way.

The pairing points beyond irony. It has long been recognized that the Barabbas episode echoes the two goats of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16): two victims presented together, one released and one put to death, the released one and the slain one together accomplishing the removal of sin. The ritual requires that the two goats be alike — indistinguishable[19], separated only by a random drawing of lots — and it is precisely this likeness that the name supplies. Barabbas and Jesus are made a matched pair by being, both of them, "son of the father": the decoded name is what renders the two figures interchangeable in the way the ritual demands. Read through the assembled name, the scene discloses what its surface only

stages as a crowd's choice: the substitution at the center of the atonement, the Son of the Father dying so that the guilty go free. The two-goats reading is not itself new; what the reserved name adds is the mechanism — the likeness the ritual requires, established by a title decoded from pieces the gospel has planted elsewhere.

3. The Measure (Mark 4:24–25)

The basket under which the lamp was not to be hidden was a measuring-basket, the μόδιος — and the measure is what the next saying takes up, joining the two by more than proximity. Having stated that nothing is concealed except to be revealed, Mark turns at once to the terms on which the revelation is received: "Take heed what you hear. With the measure you measure, it will be measured to you, and more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given; and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (4:24–25).

On the surface this is a proverb about receptivity, or about generosity returned in kind — give much, get much. Read as the sequel to the disclosure-saying it follows, it is something more exact: it is the economy of the mystery, the rule governing who receives the hidden thing now being brought to light, and in what amount. What one "hears" is the reserved teaching; the "measure" one brings to it is the measure of one's receptivity, the openness with which one takes what is disclosed. To the one who brings that measure, more is given — the more he receives, the more is opened to him. And the second half is sharper than a proverb about generosity would ever be: from the one who has not, *even what he has is taken away*. The hearer who brings no receptivity is left not merely without the reserved sense but, in the end, without even the surface — for a surface whose meaning has been withheld yields, on its own, nothing. The one who takes what the telling gives is given more.

What it is that one will receive, the saying does not here say. But once the preceding lamp parable is decoded, the most obvious candidate is the light of Christ. It may also point to the Holy Spirit: the later gospel of John joins the two explicitly, saying God 'gives the Spirit without measure' (οὐ… ἐκ μέτρου δίδωσιν τὸ πνεῦμα, 3:34)." Here it is enough that Mark has stated the principle: the reserved meaning is not distributed evenly. It is apportioned by the measure each brings, given without stint to those who can receive it and withdrawn from those who cannot — the same two-level economy the whole gospel runs on, stated in the abstract before it is filled with its content.

Matthew, characteristically, empties it. He takes the measure-saying out of Mark's discourse on hidden and disclosed and sets it down in the Sermon on the Mount, in the midst of teaching about judging

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others: "with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you measure it will be measured to you" (Matt 7:1–2). The measure is no longer the receptivity by which one takes the mystery; it is the severity with which one judges a neighbor. The saying that in Mark governs the disclosure of a reserved salvation becomes, in Matthew, a rule of ethical reciprocity — exactly the transformation he works on the salt, and on the lamp: the reserved soteriology lifted out and a plain morality set in its place. That Matthew should three times perform the same operation — on the lamp, the measure, and the salt, three Markan sayings we have identified as load-bearing — is itself a sign that he found in them a common thing to answer: a disclosure about Christ in each case, which he turned in each case into a rule for disciples.

4. The Seed That Grows in Secret

One more saying belongs to this cluster, and it follows hard on the measure. Mark alone preserves it — Luke does not have it, and Matthew has something very different for it — and it is, on its surface, the slightest of parables: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow — he knows not how. The earth bears fruit of itself: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he sends in the sickle, for the harvest has come" (4:26–29).

The parable says, in the plainest terms, that the decisive thing happens *unseen and of itself*. The sower scatters and then withdraws into the ordinary round of sleeping and waking; the growth proceeds without him, by a power he neither supplies nor understands — "he knows not how." The word Mark uses for it is αὐτομάτη: the earth bears fruit *automatically*, of its own accord. And the parable does not leave the hidden thing hidden forever: it ends at the harvest, when the ripe grain stands ready and the sickle comes (an image that carries the apocalyptic charge of Joel 3:13, "put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe"). This is the same shape as the lamp and the disclosure-saying that precede it — a thing that works concealed and is manifested only in its time.

When Paul wanted to say how the work of the gospel actually advances, he reached for precisely this image and precisely this point: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth [ὁ… αὐξάνων]; so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:6–7). Mark's sower who "knows not how" and Paul's planter who "is nothing" are the same figure, making the same confession — that the growth of the kingdom is by a power not human and not earned. And Paul, in the same passage, does not stop at "God gives the growth." A few verses on, the metaphor turns from

field to building and then names what the growing power is: "you are God's temple, and God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Cor 3:16). The increase that is God's and not the planter's is, by the end of Paul's own argument, the indwelling Spirit.

Read along that thread, the seed that grows of itself in Mark is the hidden working of the Spirit — the life that is in the seed and not in the sower, given and not achieved. The parable, on this reading, is the narrative form of the Pauline principle that salvation comes by grace and not by works: the field yields of its own accord, the laborer's striving notwithstanding, because the life is in the seed and the giving is God's.

This is, admittedly, reading here a lot that is not stated. We can not know for certain what the informed interpreter would have provided. The last step — from the hidden growth to the Spirit that works it — the parable does not mark. There is only one faintly marked word, αὐτομάτη, "of its own accord," rare enough in the New Testament to appear elsewhere only of the prison gate that opens by itself for Peter (Acts 12:10)[4]. The reading rests on the shape of the parable, on its position following the measure, and on Paul's thread, not on a coded word. It is offered as a plausible continuation of the material that preceded it — and it is worth noting that the Spirit has now surfaced as the reserved candidate twice in this cluster, at the measure and here. The recurrence is suggestive, and it points in a single direction: the Holy Spirit[5].

Matthew, characteristically, did not discard the secret seed but recast it. In the parable chapter that gathers his Markan parable-material, the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24–30) stands exactly where Mark's secret seed stands in the sequence — after the sower and its sequels, immediately before the shared mustard seed — and keeps its distinctive frame of a man who sows and then sleeps while the growth proceeds without him. But the point is inverted in Matthew's usual manner. Both parables end at a harvest; the difference is what the harvest discloses. Mark's harvest manifests the hidden grace — the grain that grew of itself now standing ripe. Matthew's harvest executes judgment: the wheat and the weeds grow together until a reaping that sorts the righteous from "the sons of the evil one." The grace-parable is remade into a judgment-parable.

5. The Pairs and Their Reserve

Our previous study[2] argued that canonical Mark is built, in part, out of matched pairs — episodes doubled, an inherited member facing Israel and an added member turning to the nations. The argument there was source-critical: the pairs were identified by formal means, and the second member of each

proved, on inspection, to be the one Luke lacks and the one keyed to Isaiah's new Exodus. What was treated there as evidence of *composition* is taken up here for a different property, the one that matters for an esoteric reading: the pairs do not explain themselves. Their meaning is carried beneath the surface, and Mark expects it to be supplied.

Four such pairs were drawn out. There are the two feedings — five thousand fed in Jewish country with five loaves and two fish (the same five and two as the wilderness manna, five days' portion and the sixth day's double), twelve baskets gathered for the twelve tribes; and four thousand fed toward the Gentile side, seven loaves and seven baskets for the nations[6] — the same act performed twice, its doubling pointless on the surface and pregnant beneath it. There are the two sea-crossings, the storm stilled and the walking on the water, the first deliverance and the new. There are the Twelve appointed and the Twelve sent. And there are the two healings of the senses, the only two cures Mark works with spittle, opening sight and opening hearing — Israel's eyes and the nations' ears. In each, the surface shows a duplication a plain reader would think redundant; the sense lies in the pattern the duplication makes, and the pattern is not stated.

That is the crucial point for what follows. Mark nowhere tells the reader, on the page, that the two feedings are Israel and the nations, that the twelve baskets are the tribes and the seven the peoples, that the second sea-crossing is Isaiah's new Exodus. He lays the pairs down and leaves them. And we know he did not think the pattern self-evident, because he shows us the very witnesses of the feedings failing to read it: "do you not yet understand?" Jesus asks the Twelve, who had gathered the baskets with their own hands and still could not say what the gathering meant (8:17–21).

The pairs are one of the clearest cases, before we ever reach the salt, of Mark's settled manner — a surface that withholds, a meaning that must be brought to it. What the pairs do across the whole gospel, leaving a pattern unsaid, the salt will do at its center, and in a smaller compass. It is to the salt that we now turn.

6. Salt: A Loaded Substance

Mark did not choose salt at random for the center of his reserved theology. In the world he wrote for, salt was among the most heavily freighted of substances — sacral, covenantal, and incorruptible — and a brief account of what it carried will show how much was available to a writer who made it his figure.

Salt's deepest association in the Jewish scriptures is with the covenant. Three times the texts speak of a "covenant of salt": the grain offering must never lack "the salt of the covenant of your God" (Lev 2:13); the

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priestly portion is "a perpetual covenant of salt" (Num 18:19); the kingship of David and his sons is held "by a covenant of salt" (2 Chr 13:5). In each the meaning is the same — an *indissoluble* bond, perpetual and incorruptible, salt standing for what does not decay. The logic was natural in the ancient world: salt preserves what would otherwise rot, and so became the emblem of permanence. It seemed, indeed, to be itself indestructible — dissolved in water and recovered unchanged, surviving the fire that consumed everything else — and this apparent incorruptibility made it a fitting sign of a covenant meant never to fail. The same association gave salt its role in hospitality and alliance: to share salt was to enter a bond, so that "to eat a man's salt" sealed a sacred tie between host and guest, and "salted with the salt of the palace" (Ezra 4:14) meant bound in fidelity to the king.

Above all, salt belonged to sacrifice. Leviticus requires it of every offering — "with all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Lev 2:13) — and it is this requirement that matters most for what follows. Salt was not itself the sacrifice; it was what *qualified* the sacrifice, the added thing that made the offering acceptable to God. The worshipper brought the victim; the salt of the covenant made it fit to be received. This relation — salt as that which renders an offering acceptable — is the hinge on which Mark's salt theology will turn, and it was wholly familiar to anyone who knew the Levitical cult.

The wider culture only deepened the charge. The Greeks reckoned salt a thing dear to the gods, a divine substance, and its incorruptibility carried something of the eternal; it was besides a commodity of real value, the stuff of bonds and oaths across the ancient Mediterranean[20]. None of this is needed for the argument, but all of it stands behind the word: when Mark reaches for salt, he reaches for a substance already saturated with covenant, sacrifice, permanence, and acceptability before God.

That this charge passed into specifically *Christian* usage is the last and most pertinent point, for it shows that "the salt of Christ" was not a private coinage but a category the early church came to know. Augustine recalls being marked with the cross and "seasoned with his salt" (*condiebar eius sale*) from his mother's womb — a salt of Christ administered, like the cross, in the rites of Christian beginning[9]. The connection of salt with baptism recurs in the early church. More strikingly, among Jewish-Christian groups east of the Jordan — those the Clementine literature reflects, with Ebionite affinities — there is evidence of a eucharist of bread and *salt* rather than bread and wine, salt standing where the blood of the covenant would later stand. And the Mandaeans, a small baptizing community of debated but evidently ancient origin, hold all things subject to ritual purification save one: salt alone is reckoned already pure[21]. Across these scattered witnesses salt keeps its old sacral weight and acquires a new Christological one. When this study argues that Mark built a mystery on the salt of Jesus, it is arguing

that he gave deliberate, reserved form to an association that surfaced, elsewhere and later, in the open practice of the church.

6.1. Reading the Text as Mark Wrote It

Before the salt sayings can be read, they must be recovered from the form in which they ordinarily reach us, for the divisions of the passage, its printed punctuation, and the available translations work, in different ways, to hide what Mark put there.

The first thing to recover is the unity of the speech. From John's question at 9:38 to the final imperative at 9:50, Mark gives a single, unbroken discourse in the mouth of Jesus. The chapter-and-verse divisions that parcel it into separate sayings — the exorcist, the cup of water, the millstone, the three amputations, the three Gehenna warnings, the salting with fire, the salt proverb, the closing imperative — are not Mark's. They are later impositions, and they are not neutral ones: they reflect, in good part, the way Matthew and Luke broke the material up and redistributed it across their own gospels. To read Mark's speech through divisions retrojected from what the later evangelists did with its pieces is to read it through their dismemberment of it. Read instead as Mark wrote it — one continuous argument — the passage moves from the validation of those who act in Jesus's name, through the stakes of judgment, to the salt in which judgment is transformed, as a single sustained thought.

The conventional punctuation obscures the most important joint in that thought. Modern texts and translations place a period, a full stop, after "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (9:48) — and so set the salt material that follows apart as a fresh and seemingly unconnected saying. But the next clause opens with γάρ: πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἁλισθήσεται, "for everyone will be salted with fire" (9:49). The γάρ is a connective of reason: it makes the unquenchable fire just described the very fire of the salting, the ground of the statement that follows. The fire of Gehenna and the fire that salts are, by Mark's own conjunction, one fire. To break the sentence before γάρ — as the printed punctuation does — is to sever exactly the link on which the passage turns, leaving the salting to float free of the fire that explains it. Remove the imposed stop, let the γάρ do its work, and the terrible fire of the warnings becomes the purifying fire of sacrifice in a single, continuous motion.

From this recovered text the reading proceeds, and three of its words must be heard as Mark's Greek carries them but English cannot reproduce.

The first is the verb of the salting itself. ἁλισθήσεται, "will be salted" (9:49), is — as §6.2 will set out and §6.4 will build upon — a form with one home in the Greek scriptures: the covenant-of-salt verse of

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Leviticus (2:13), whose wording and clause-shape Mark's sentence reproduces. In English the word is an ordinary verb; in Mark's Greek it is a citation.

The second is the climactic salt. The standard critical text — read against the later Byzantine smoothing, and on the manuscript evidence set out below — carries at the saying's final word not the regular ἅλας but the marked ἅλα, a form anchored, in the earliest recoverable state of the text, at precisely the point where the proverb turns into address. What that form is, and where it comes from, is the question of §6.2; here it is enough that it is not the word of Mark's own neighboring clauses.

The third is the phrase ἐν τίνι in the question "in what will it be seasoned?" (9:50). Its natural surface sense is instrumental — "with what will you season it?" — and so the versions always render it. But the surface is not the whole. Through the lines just before, the speech has rung the change on a single pattern — the name of Jesus joined to a person, four times across five verses: "in my name" (9:37), "in your name" (9:38), "in my name" (9:39), "in the name" (9:41) — and it has sealed the pattern with a formula: ὅτι Χριστοῦἐστε, "because you are Christ's" (9:41). A hearer who has been carried through that refrain of the name, and brought to rest on the belonging of the hearers to Christ, does not arrive at ἐν τίνι hearing only "with what"; the question stands open to "in whom" — and answers itself from the refrain that prepared it: in Christ, in his name, in his person. The grammar permits both; the context licenses the second; and the saying is built to hold them at once.

This is why these sayings cannot be carried into English intact, and the loss is of two kinds. The first two words translation simply erases: English has one verb where Mark has a citation, and one noun where Mark has two — the choice of ἅλα over ἅλας, the whole Septuagintal signature folded into a single accusative, leaves no trace in any rendering; "salted" and "salt" are all a translator can print, and the allusion dies on the page. The third, translation is forced to resolve: a version must print either "with what" or "in whom," and whichever it prints, the other is lost. The reserve does not survive translation not because translators have erred but because in the one case English lacks the distinction and in the other it must decide what the Greek declines to decide. In the Greek the two readings coexist in one set of words, the open sense available to every hearer and the disclosed sense delivered in the telling. It is in that reserved space — between an ordinary verb and a citation, between salt and the salt of the covenant, between “with what” and “in whom” — that the argument of the following sections lives.

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6.2. Have ἅλα in You: The Salt of the Covenant

The closing imperative of the sequence, ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἅλα (9:50), reaches at its climax for a conspicuously marked form. The accusative of the neuter τὸ ἅλας is ἅλας— neuter nouns of this class take the same form in the accusative as in the nominative[7] — and Mark writes that nominative twice in the same verse. What he writes as the object of his imperative is ἅλα. The form admits two parsings. The standard lexicon, treating it under the neuter noun, pauses to account for it "prob. a back-formation fr. ἁλατ on the model of σῶμα, σώματος"[8] — an analogical by-product, intelligible but secondary. But ἅλα is also, and without any analogy to explain it, the perfectly regular accusative of the older noun ὁ ἅλς — the word for salt that the neuter ἅλας was in the process of displacing, and the word the Greek scriptures had used before the displacement was complete. On the first parsing the form is an anomaly; on the second it is an archaism with a home. Which parsing is right for Mark is the question this section answers, and the answer will come from the Septuagint. On either parsing, one thing is already fixed: measured against Mark's own neighboring clauses, the form is marked.

That Mark wrote ἅλα here, and here only, is clear from the manuscripts.[9] In Vaticanus and several other witnesses the two proverb-clauses keep the regular nominative ἅλας and only the accusative object reads ἅλα. Other witnesses generalize ἅλα backward into the earlier clauses, an assimilation that presupposes the form was already fixed at the climax. At the rhetorical hinge of his most theologically loaded sequence, Mark declines the ordinary word and reaches for the marked one.

That the form is genuinely marked, rather than a spelling indifferent to its readers, is confirmed from two directions: the lexicon pauses to derive it, and — as the manuscript evidence shows[10] — ancient scribes repeatedly smoothed it away. The first correctors of both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus took the trouble to change it back to ἅλας. Scribes normalize toward the ordinary form, not away from it; the correction is testimony from readers far closer to the language than we are that ἅλα, in this slot, was not the ordinary word. For those correctors the old ἅλς was dead, and what they saw was an error to be mended. What they mended, this section will argue, was a citation.

Three explanations might account for the form innocently. The first two fail outright; the third fails in a more instructive way — it succeeds as morphology and fails as innocence.

The first is that ἅλα is simply the regular accusative of Mark's noun. It is not: the neuter takes the accusative in the same form as the nominative, and Mark writes that nominative, ἅλας, twice in the same verse.

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The second is that Mark habitually declined the noun this way — that for him the word went on the γάλα model, nominative and accusative alike in -α.[11] Had that been so, he would have written ἅλα in the proverb-clauses as well, for that is what the paradigm gives. He does not. Whatever the form is, it is not Mark's habitual declension.

The third explanation is the serious one: that ἅλα is an ordinary variant Mark picked up from use — a speaker straddling two byforms of one word, as Koine speakers did, mixing them without design. Here the right answer is not denial, for the byform is real; the right answer is to ask where the byform lived. And in the scriptures Mark's gospel breathes, the accusative ἅλα lives above all in one verse — the verse this whole discourse has been quoting.

Leviticus 2:13 in the Greek reads: πᾶν δῶρον θυσίας ὑμῶν ἁλὶ ἁλισθήσεται· οὐ διαπαύσετε ἅλα διαθήκης κυρίου ἀπὸ θυσιασμάτων ὑμῶν· ἐπὶ παντὸς δώρου ὑμῶν προσοίσετε κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ὑμῶν ἅλας[22] — "every gift of your sacrifice shall be salted with salt; you shall not let the salt of the covenant of the Lord cease from your sacrifices; with every gift of yours you shall offer to the Lord your God salt." Three things in this one verse bear directly on Mark's two verses.

The first is the verb. ἁλισθήσεται, "shall be salted," is a hapax form in the Septuagint: the verb ἁλίζω occurs in the whole Greek Old Testament only twice, and this exact future passive only here.[12] Mark 9:49 — πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἁλισθήσεται — reproduces it verbatim, in the same clause-shape, πᾶς with a dative and the verb, πυρί standing where ἁλί stood. The verse that opens Mark's salt sequence is built, word and syntax, on the one verse of his Bible that contains this verb.

The second is the accusative. Within Lev 2:13 itself, both accusatives of salt occur, and they are distributed by function: the old ἅλα stands inside the covenant phrase — ἅλα διαθήκης, "the salt of the covenant" — while the neuter ἅλας stands as the plain object of the offering command. One verse, both forms, the archaic form in the covenant slot.

The third is Mark's mirror of that distribution. Across 9:49–50 Mark sounds the salt five times — ἁλισθήσεται, ἅλας, ἅλας, ἅναλον, ἅλα — and his two accusative-slot forms divide exactly as Leviticus divides them: the neuter ἅλας in the general proverb, the old ἅλα as the object of the climactic imperative. The mixture that the third explanation would attribute to a speaker's indifference tracks, form for form and function for function, the distribution of the source verse. A byform is innocently in a writer's text when it arrives from common use; it is not innocently there when its home in his scriptures is the verse he has just quoted, and when he deploys it in the same slot his source does. The third explanation thus

resolves the morphology and, in resolving it, surrenders the innocence: ἅλα is not an anomaly signaling that something has gone wrong with the Greek, but an archaism signaling where the Greek comes from. It is the ἅλα of ἅλα διαθήκης.

On its surface the imperative says what any moralizing reader would take it to say. ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἅλα — "have salt among yourselves" — is an ethical instruction continuous with the proverb that precedes it (καλὸν τὸ ἅλας, "salt is good"): keep the savor, preserve the bond of fellowship, be at peace with one another, as the following clause makes explicit. Read this way the salt is a quality the community maintains, and the saying asks nothing that those outside could not absorb as general wisdom. Nothing on the surface disturbs them; in translation, nothing can — English has one word where Mark has two, and "salt" is all a version can print.

The disclosed reading emerges when the hearer is shown where the word is at home. ἅλα is the accusative of the older ἅλς — the form the Greek Torah sets inside the covenant phrase itself, ἅλα διαθήκης (Lev 2:13), in the very verse whose hapax verb Mark has just sounded at 9:49. Shown this, the sentence turns from moral maintenance to participation. The salt is no longer a property the congregation generates among themselves but the covenant-salt — the thing that made an offering acceptable to God — now to be in them; and ἐν ἑαυτοῖς shifts accordingly from "among yourselves" to "within you." Have the salt of the covenant in you: and whose covenant it now is, the discourse has been saying since 9:38 in every ringing of the name, and the supper will say without reserve — τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης (14:24), the covenant no longer of salt but of blood, no longer Levitical but his.

Surface saying and disclosed saying occupy the same written words, and only the interpretation, disclosed in the telling, separates them. This is the salt mystery's mechanism in miniature — not a cipher awaiting a key, but a citation awaiting a reader: a sentence whose final word is at home in one verse of the scriptures, placed where only the hearer who is shown that home will hear what the sentence is holding. The scribes who corrected ἅλα to ἅλας show what became of the sentence when the home was forgotten; the reading offered here is what the sentence says when the home is restored.

6.3. The Two Readings, Set Side by Side

Read on the surface, the close of the discourse is a string of loosely connected salt-proverbs:

"And if your eye makes you stumble, tear it out; better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to be thrown with both eyes into Gehenna, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. For

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everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt loses its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

It is hard to say, on this reading, what the salt sayings are doing there at all, or why three of them stand together.

Read as the interpreter would have disclosed it, the same words carry a continuous argument, which may be set out with the Greek in parentheses and the withheld senses supplied in square brackets:

"...whoever welcomes one such child *in my name* welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons *in your name*, and because he was not following us, we tried to stop him." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him. No one who does a work of power *in my name* will be able soon after to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. And whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because *you belong to Christ*, will certainly not lose his reward. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a donkey's millstone around his neck. And if your hand makes you stumble, cut it off; better to enter life maimed than to go with both hands into Gehenna, into the fire that is never quenched. And if your foot makes you stumble, cut it off; better to enter life lame than to be thrown with both feet into Gehenna. And if your eye makes you stumble, tear it out; better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to be thrown with both eyes into Gehenna, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched — for everyone will be salted (ἁλισθήσεται) with fire [Leviticus's own word, from the one verse of the scriptures that carries it: the fire that, for those who bear the covenant-salt, is the fire of sacrifice that makes the offering acceptable to God]. Salt is good [the old covenant of salt, the bond that made worship acceptable to God, was good]. But if the salt becomes saltless [if it loses the power to make an offering acceptable], in whom (ἐν τίνι) will it be seasoned? [Salt seasoned again is covenant renewed, and the question answers itself from the refrain just heard: in Christ, whose name has rung through the speech, whose the hearers are.] Have salt (ἅλα) in you [the salt of the covenant, ἅλα διαθήκης, the salt that makes one acceptable to God] and be at peace with one another."

What the surface presents as miscellany the disclosed reading presents as a single movement from judgment to acceptance. The section that follows unfolds it.

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6.4. The Pauline Soteriology of Mark 9:38–50

Read in the reserved manner established earlier, the whole of 9:38–50 is a complete and pastorally urgent statement of justification — not by apostolic standing, but by participation in Christ. Its parts cohere into one argument.

It opens by validating those outside the apostolic circle. John reports an exorcist casting out demons "in your name" who does not follow the apostolic group, and is told to leave him be: "the one who is not against us is for us" (9:38–40). This is the gospel's narrative defense of communities working in Jesus's name without apostolic authorization — the very situation Paul defends against the Jerusalem pillars. The pattern that carries it — the name of Jesus joined to a person — is struck here and sounded four times across five verses (9:37, 38, 39, 41),[13] and it closes on a formula: the cup of water given ὅτι Χριστοῦἐστε, "because you are Christ's" (9:41). The predicate genitive of belonging to an absolute Χριστός is Paul's own idiom for participation — ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ (1 Cor 3:23), εἰ δὲὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ (Gal 3:29), Χριστοῦ εἶναι (2 Cor 10:7; cf. Rom 8:9) — and 9:41 is arguably its one Synoptic occurrence. The refrain of the name, sealed by the formula of belonging, is laid down deliberately, for it is what the climax will draw upon.

The stakes are then raised to their highest pitch. Three escalating warnings invoke Gehenna, closing on "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (9:42–48). The fire of final judgment is established with maximum urgency — and it is established, by the γάρ that opens 9:49, as the very fire of the salting that follows. From terror the sequence turns, in one motion, to assurance.

The first of the salt sayings, "For everyone will be salted with fire" (9:49), arrives on the heels of the most fearful image in the gospel, and the γάρ binds the two together: the fire that salts is the fire just described. Then, in the next breath, "Salt is good." A hearer who has followed the surface is meant to be brought up short. We have been at hellfire; how is salt now good?

The incongruity is the door into the meaning, and Mark has hung the door on a single word. ἁλισθήσεται, "will be salted," has one home in the Greek scriptures: the verb ἁλίζω occurs in the Septuagint only twice, and this exact future passive only once — at Leviticus 2:13, where every gift of sacrifice ἁλὶἁλισθήσεται, "shall be salted with salt": the verse of the salt of the covenant, without which no offering may be made. Mark reproduces the form verbatim, in the same clause-shape — πᾶς with a dative and the verb — with πυρί, the fire, standing where ἁλί, the salt, stood. The sentence that opens the salt sequence is built, word and syntax, on the one verse of Mark's Bible that carries this verb; the verse stands cited before the salt sayings even begin, ready for the interpreter who will unfold it. And in that verse, salt and fire are not

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opposites but partners in a single act. The burnt offering is wholly consumed by fire on the altar — and it is salt that qualifies it, the salt of the covenant. The salted victim is the burned victim; the fire does not destroy it but takes it up, sends it to God as a sacrifice he receives. Fire and salt together make the offering acceptable: the fire consumes, the salt consecrates, and what ascends is received.

The citation was heard anciently. Some witnesses add to 9:49 the gloss "and every sacrifice will be salted with salt" — importing not Leviticus generally but the wording of the one verse Mark's verb is drawn from, the copyists restoring the source's dative around the source's own verb.[14] The reading offered here is not a modern imposition on the verse; it is what the earliest readers who left a trace of their understanding took the verse to mean — and their trace points where Mark's word already pointed.

Read against that, the sequence resolves. The fire of 9:49 is universal — everyone will be salted with fire — and it is the fire of judgment and of death, which no one escapes. But fire is two things at once, depending on what passes through it.[15] To unsalted matter it is mere destruction, the Gehenna that consumes and does not receive. To the salted it is the altar-fire that consecrates, the death by which an offering is given to God and taken up. Everyone goes into the fire; the salt is what determines which fire it proves to be. And so "salt is good" is no reversal but the point: salt is good because salt is the thing that turns the universal fire from destruction into sacrifice.

What, then, is the salt? Here the surface gives out and the word itself answers: the ἅλα Mark reaches for at the imperative is the ἅλα of ἅλα διαθήκης — the salt of the covenant, in the accusative of the very verse his verb is drawn from (§6.2)[16] — the thing that made an offering acceptable to God. And whose covenant it now is, the gospel discloses: participation in Christ. To have the salt is to be in him; and to be in him is to make one's passage through the fire of death the death he died, an offering presented and accepted rather than fuel consumed.

Two things, on this reading, unlock the passage: the salt of Leviticus, which makes fire and salt partners rather than opposites, and Paul's idiom of the body presented as an offering — the believer's death folded into Christ's and so made a sacrifice God receives, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1). The parallel with Romans is one of theology, not of language: Mark nowhere quotes Paul, and Paul nowhere speaks of salt. What they share is the logic — the listener is equated with a sacrificial offering and dying in Christ turns death into an offering — and it is that logic the salt carries. But the pericope is not without Paul's language altogether: the belonging-formula Χριστοῦἐστε (9:41) stands three verses upstream of the salt, naming in Paul's own idiom the participation the salt will figure.

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The salted are those who die in Christ, whose dying is therefore a sacrifice that ascends; the unsalted go into the same fire with nothing to consecrate them, and are not taken up but destroyed. "Everyone will be salted with fire" means everyone must pass through the fire of death — and the whole of salvation hangs on whether one carries into it the salt, the being-in-Christ, that makes the fire an altar rather than a Gehenna.

The proverb that follows turns on the same axis. "Salt is good" honors the old covenant of salt — the bond that once made worship acceptable through the sacrificial system. Then: "but if the salt becomes saltless" (ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας ἄναλον γένηται) — and on the Levitical logic just established, for salt to lose its saltness is precisely for it to lose its power to make an offering acceptable. The question that follows is then not idle: ἐν τίνι αὐτὸ ἀρτύσετε; The construction will bear the instrumental sense, "with what will you season it?" — and that is how it is normally read. But the refrain that governs the whole unit has been joining the name of Jesus to persons since 9:37, and has just sealed itself in the formula of belonging. Read with that refrain, the question asks in whom the salt will be seasoned again — and salt restored to its power is, on the logic just established, covenant renewed — and it answers itself: in him, whose the hearers are. That Mark shaped the question so, rather than receiving it already shaped from the proverb tradition, follows from the priority of his form of the saying, argued in §7.[17]

The salt and the blood do the same Levitical work — each makes the offering acceptable — and so the salt of chapter 9 points forward to its open disclosure at the supper, where the cup is "my blood of the covenant" (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης, 14:24). What is reserved under the salt in chapter 9 is spoken plainly over the cup in chapter 14: the covenant renewed in Christ's own offering, taken into those who receive it.

The whole of 9:38–50 is thus a single argument, and its shape is a soteriology. It opens by validating those who act in Jesus's name outside the apostolic circle — "the one who is not against us is for us." It raises the stakes to the fire of judgment. And it resolves the terror into assurance: the salt of the covenant, received by being in him and not by standing among the pillars — and not, as Matthew's answering Sermon will make the quarrel explicit (§8.1), by works of righteousness — turns the fire that takes everyone into the altar-fire that consecrates rather than the Gehenna that destroys. What a gospel exists to proclaim — how a man is saved — Mark does not set on the surface in a sermon; he builds it into the salt, on the one verse of his scriptures his own verb cites and his own copyists confirm they heard, and discloses it in the telling. The three salt sayings are not a miscellany. They are the center of the gospel's reserve, and what they reserve is justification by participation in Christ.

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6.5. After the Salt: The Covenant of Marriage (Mark 10:1–12)

The salt sequence may not close at 9:50. What follows it, at once, is a teaching on marriage — the one-flesh union that God joins and no one may separate (10:1–9) — and this section argues that the juxtaposition is deliberate: that the covenant of salt and the covenant of marriage are two figures of one covenant, set side by side by the same hand, and joined beneath the surface by the same rare verb. Both members sit in proto-Mark on the criteria of the previous study[2], though of the marriage pericope only the controversy and the one-flesh teaching do; the house explanation at 10:10–12 is argued in §9.2 to be later.

The claim must be graded honestly at the outset. There is no γάρ at 10:1 as there is at 9:49; there is instead a genuine change of scene, a departure for Judea and new crowds. What is claimed is therefore sequence, not syntax — that Mark placed the marriage teaching here — and sequence-evidence is weaker in kind than the conjunction-evidence on which 6.1 recovered the unity of the discourse. But arrangement is how this gospel is generally agreed to argue, and this particular arrangement has an anchor in the scriptures that can be checked.

The anchor is the verb of 9:49. ἁλίζω, whose future passive Mark lifts verbatim from Lev 2:13 (§6.4), occurs in the whole Septuagint exactly twice, and its second and only other home is Ezekiel 16:4 — in the identical collocation: ἁλὶ ἡλίσθης, "you were not salted with salt," as Lev 2:13 has ἁλὶἁλισθήσεται.[18] And Ezekiel 16 is not a stray occurrence; it is the one text in the Greek scriptures where salt, covenant, marriage, breach, and renewal form a single narrative. It opens with "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her loathsome practices!" Then the infant Jerusalem, on the day of her birth, is not washed and not salted (16:4) — unsalted, unqualified, owed nothing; the Lord passes by and says to her, "from your blood, life" (ἐκ τοῦ αἵματός σου ζωή, 16:6)[19]; grown, she is taken in marriage by covenant — "I swore to you and entered into covenant with you, says the Lord, and you became mine" (εἰσῆλθον ἐν διαθήκῃ μετὰ σοῦ… καὶ ἐγένου μοι, 16:8)[22]; she breaks the covenant (16:59); and the chapter ends with the Lord renewing it unilaterally — "I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your infancy, and I will raise up for you an everlasting covenant" (16:60, 62). The interpreter who traced the verb of 9:49 to its home in Leviticus and asked, with 9:50, in whom the failed salt can be seasoned again, finds in the verb's only other home that question answered as a story: the unsalted one, taken into covenant-marriage by grace and not desert, the covenant broken and then raised again everlasting — by the Lord's act, not hers. Even

the covenant's closing formula, ἐγένου μοι, "you became mine," is the idiom of belonging on which the salt discourse turned at 9:41: Χριστοῦἐστε, you are his.[20]

Read with that text in the ear, the teaching that follows the salt stops looking like a change of subject. On its surface, Mark 10:1–12 is a halakhic dispute: Pharisees testing, Moses cited, a certificate of divorce debated — a controversy any hearer could follow, and the kind the public scene is built to carry. And the center of the teaching, is covenant. Jesus answers Moses with Genesis: "the two shall become one flesh... what therefore God has joined together (συνέζευξεν), let no one separate" (10:6–9, citing Gen 2:24). Marriage, in this teaching, is not a contract men make and unmake with certificates; it is a joining God effects — which is what a covenant is. The prophets had already fused the terms: Malachi's indictment of divorce names the abandoned wife γυνὴ διαθήκης σου, "the wife of your covenant," and κοινωνός σου, "your partner" (Mal 2:14)[22] — divorce prosecuted as covenant-breach, in a text about the very question the Pharisees raise. To ask about divorce, in the scriptures this gospel breathes, is to ask about breaking covenant; and Mark has the question asked in the first breath after the imperative to have the covenant-salt within.

That the one-flesh text carried, in Mark's own circle, precisely the disclosed sense this study has been tracing, the Pauline literature attests directly. Ephesians quotes the same verse Mark quotes — Gen 2:24, "the two shall become one flesh" — and says of it: τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο μέγα ἐστίν, "this mystery is great," and I speak of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31–32).[21] The word is Mark's own word for the reserved teaching (τὸ μυστήριον, 4:11), applied in the Pauline mission to the very proof-text of Mark 10. And 1 Corinthians takes the one-flesh text as the grammar of union with Christ himself: "the one joined to the Lord is one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:16–17), with the community betrothed "to one husband" (2 Cor 11:2). In the circle from which this gospel comes, the one-flesh verse was already the participation verse. Mark did not need to invent the disclosed sense of his marriage teaching; he needed only to place the teaching where the salt had prepared its hearing.

The chapter's architecture, on this reading, is two covenant arcs that interlock.

The covenant as sacrifice: the ἅλα διαθήκης of 9:49–50, disclosed at the supper as τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης (14:24) — on the page in canonical Mark, and, if the suggestion of §11 is right, in the telling alone in proto-Mark, which had the cup and the vow but not the words. The covenant as marriage: the bridegroom announced and his taking-away foretold (2:19–20); the one-flesh joining that God effects, taught on the heels of the covenant-salt (10:6–9); and the betrothal-stone rolled from the tomb (16:1–8; §10). Ezekiel 16 is the text that holds both arcs in one hand — the salt, the covenant, the marriage, the

blood in which there is life, the breach, and the renewal — and the verb of 9:49 is the hinge on which Mark hangs them side by side.

There is a redactional confirmation, and it is Luke's. His great wedge — the travel narrative — enters exactly at this joint: he follows Mark's order to the exorcist (Luke 9:49–50 = Mark 9:38–40), opens the wedge at 9:51, and rejoins Mark's order at the children (Luke 18:15 = Mark 10:13). The block his insertion severs from its Markan setting is not the salt sequence alone but 9:41–10:12 entire — the covenant-salt and the covenant-marriage together. And the two covenant-carriers reappear inside the wedge denatured in parallel ways: the salt at 14:34–35, the mocking form the sayings source built on Mark's opening (§8.2); the divorce teaching at 16:18,[22] a bare halakhic ruling — no Pharisees, no house, no Genesis, no one flesh, no "what God has joined." Two members of one severed block, each preserved as a token and stripped of its covenant. Whatever Luke's motive — and §8.2 argues it was irenic rather than hostile — his knife fell on the pair as a pair, which is easiest to explain if the pair was there to fall on. Matthew's handling points the same way from the opposite direction: he preserves the Markan sequence intact — his community discourse (Matt 18, reworking Mark 9:33–50) runs directly into the marriage pericope (19:1–12) with Gen 2:24 and the one-flesh teaching in place — while extracting the salt to his Sermon; and in that Sermon the two members of Mark's pair stand nearly adjacent once more, the relocated salt (5:13) a few lines from the short divorce ruling (5:31–32). The two evangelists who reworked Mark's arrangement each treated the salt and the marriage teaching as belonging to one operation. They read the joint this section reads.

What this section claims, then, and what it does not. It does not claim a syntactic bond between 9:50 and 10:1, and it does not claim that Mark cites Ezekiel 16 — the contact is a single verb and the thematic architecture it opens. It claims that the placement of the marriage teaching after the covenant-salt is design; that the design is legible in the one verb whose two scriptural homes are the two covenants; that the disclosed sense of the one-flesh teaching — union with Christ, a mystery — is attested in Mark's own milieu rather than supplied by this study; and that the two later evangelists' parallel handling of salt-and-marriage as a unit is the reception such a design would leave behind. The reading of 6.2 and 6.4 does not depend on this section; this section is what those readings, if right, would predict — that the covenant disclosed under the salt does not end at the salt, but opens, in the next teaching, into the marriage by which the covenant was always going to be figured, and toward the tomb where the stone of betrothal waits to be rolled away. The full weight of the Ezekiel connection is deferred to the conclusion, where it is offered as a conclusion rather than a premise.

7. The Sayings Source Answers Mark

If the reading argued here is right — if Mark's salt is the intricate, reserved thing this study has made it — then a familiar fact about the other gospels falls into a new order. The salt saying exists in two forms. There is Mark's: the three salt-clauses, the covenant of Leviticus, the fire of Gehenna turned to sacrifice, the marked ἅλα at the close. And there is the other form, shorter and differently pointed, the form in which salt is the disciple's savor, to be kept or lost, with no covenant and no fire. The relation between the two is usually told one way: Mark, it is said, reworked a simpler traditional saying into his odd Levitical shape. This study reverses the account. The simpler form is not Mark's source but his antagonist's reply; it is Mark's salt, mutilated on purpose.

Where Mark writes that the salt may "become unsalty" (ἄναλον γένηται), the other form writes that it may "become foolish" — μωρανθῇ, from μωρός, the root of our *moron*. Both Matthew (5:13) and Luke (14:34–35) carry it against Mark — but on the model of these studies that agreement proves little by itself, since Luke knew Matthew. What settles it is the Evangelion, which attests the form for the proto-Lukan line, before canonical Luke's use of Matthew. The mocking salt stood in the tradition independently of Matthew.

Commentators have long found the word strange: salt does not become *foolish*, it becomes *tasteless*, and the standard explanation is that the saying stood first in Aramaic, where a single root — *tpal* — carries both senses at once, *to lose savor* and *to be foolish*, so that a translator might render the one by the other. That explanation is almost right, and it is right about the mechanism. But what it treats as an accident was an instrument. A writer with both tongues — and the sayings source, on the account given in the previous studies, was the work of just such a bilingual hand — could reach for *tpal* precisely because it says two things, and could mean both. The surface reads "if the salt becomes tasteless." The ear that hears the Aramaic beneath it hears "if the salt becomes foolish." And the salt in question is Mark's. It is a joke at Mark's expense, and a pointed one: that the elaborate salt of his gospel, his covenant and his sacrificial fire, is not profundity but a thing misheard, a saying its author garbled into nonsense. Mark, in a word, is told he has played the fool with what Jesus said. The charge is false, and on the reading offered here knowingly so — a deliberate construction reframed as an incompetent one, which is what polemicists do.

The reconstructions of the sayings source open the saying with Mark's own words. Καλὸν τὸἅλας, "salt is good," is the clause that stands at Mark 9:50, and it stands at the head of the source's version too.

Matthew, who has rebuilt the saying's opening for his own ends ("you are the salt of the earth"), no longer carries it; Luke does. So the parasitism is not confined to a single pun: the mocking saying takes not only Mark's subject but Mark's own opening phrase.

It is worth being exact about which part of this carries the weight. On its plain sense the saying is an unremarkable proverb about a substance: salt that has lost its savor is good for nothing, which is true, and which any hearer could take home without suspecting a target. That surface is real, and most of the saying's features are fully explained by it. Two features resist that explanation. The first is μωρανθῇ. A translator rendering a saying about salt writes *tasteless*; he has no reason to write *foolish* unless the second sense is wanted. The second is weaker, and it is not the mere fact of a shared phrase. A proverb might naturally open "salt is good," and one document borrowing a common clause from another proves little on its own. What the surface does not explain is the *use* the clause is put to: it stands at the head of a saying that then calls the salt foolish and casts it out. That is not a borrowed opening; it is a concession set up to be demolished — the target's own words granted, then turned against him. Shared wording alone would be inert. Shared wording in the shape of a refutation is not.

The disposal that follows escalates, and the escalation is deliberate. The salt is fit "neither for the soil nor for the manure pile"; it is thrown out. A modern reader hears the manure pile as simple abuse and misses the point of the sequence. In an agrarian economy the manure pile is not a place of contempt but the last useful destination — where everything with any remaining value ends up, to be returned eventually to the field. Salt that fails even that test has no use at any level of the hierarchy. And what is done with it, ἔξω βάλλουσιν, is the language of expulsion. Foolish, then useless, then cast out: three stages, in order, each lower than the last. Whatever the surface says about a substance, this is the shape of a verdict.

A saying that mocks Mark's salt as foolish must come after Mark's salt, for one cannot ridicule what does not yet exist. The derision presupposes its target. The simpler form is therefore not the primitive saying Mark elaborated but the later saying an opponent composed against Mark's elaboration — and its wit depends entirely on Mark's version being already in the field, already known, already elaborate enough to be worth puncturing.

A second consideration points the same way. Mark's salt is not a saying but a structure: three occurrences of the word, two interlocking metaphors from Leviticus, the covenant of salt and the salt that makes a sacrifice acceptable, the fire of judgment bound by γάρ to the fire of the altar, the whole mirroring Paul's logic at Romans 12:1. To suppose Mark built this out of the flat one-liner is to suppose he reverse-engineered an intricate scriptural architecture from a scrap. To suppose the reverse — that the one-liner

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is what remains when the architecture is pulled down — asks far less. The elaborate does not grow from the plain by accident; the plain is readily got from the elaborate by demolition.

Set in the sequence the previous studies trace, the saying takes its place in a controversy. Proto-Mark went out first, carrying the salt in its reserved form. The sayings source — composed, we suppose, within the Jerusalem circle, by a bilingual author holding both the sayings of Jesus and a grievance against the Pauline gospel — answered it, and its answer was this saying: Mark's own phrase conceded, his construction called foolish, and the remains declared unfit for the dung heap. From the source the mocking form passed downstream, into Matthew, who built it into his counter-gospel, and into the proto-Lukan line, where canonical Luke and the Evangelion attest it. Canonical Mark, meanwhile, carried the original salt forward unrepentant.

Two forms of one saying thus descend along the two branches of a single quarrel — the reserved salt down the Pauline line proto-Mark began, the mocking salt down the Jewish-Christian line the sayings source began. And μωρανθῇ is the moment, fossilized in a word, when the one line fired at the other.

8. The Synoptic Responses to Mark's Reserved Meaning

The mystery encoding of canonical Mark did not go unnoticed by the authors who engaged with it. Proto-Luke and Matthew represent two distinct responses — disassembly, reflecting some degree of discomfort and systematic hostile counter-argument — and their differences are themselves evidence that canonical Mark's mystery encoding was a real and consequential theological program.

8.1. Matthew: Systematic Hostile Counter-Argument

Matthew's response to Mark's reserved sayings is the most revealing of the two, because it is the most precise. It is not the behavior of an author who missed Mark's meaning, but of one who grasped it exactly and wrote against it — and what betrays the comprehension is the *uniformity* of the operation. Across the cluster of sayings this study has read, Matthew performs a single transformation, again and again and always in the same direction: he rotates each saying off its vertical, Christological axis — grace descending from God to the hearer — onto a horizontal, communal one, where the saying becomes a rule for how disciples are to behave toward one another and what they must achieve. The reserved soteriology is lifted out; an ethic of works is set in its place. That he should perform the same surgery on saying after saying is what marks it as deliberate rather than incidental.

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The lamp and the salt show the operation in its clearest form, for here Matthew makes the same move twice with the same words. Mark's lamp *comes* — a personified light whose arrival, this study has argued, is the coming of Christ; Mark's salt is the thing of Jesus's that the initiate is to have within him. Matthew takes each and turns it into a predication about the disciples: ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, "you are the light of the world," and ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς, "you are the salt of the earth." The referent shifts from Christ to the community; the mood shifts from disclosure about Jesus to exhortation of the hearers; and to the lamp Matthew appends the purpose clause that fixes the new sense beyond mistaking — "so that they may see your good works." The personified coming-lamp and the reserved salt-of-Christ become, by one identical stroke applied to both, emblems of the congregation's moral visibility. The ἐν τίνι construction on which the salt mystery turned — the reserve's "in whom" — is removed entirely; there is nothing left for an interpreter to supply.

The measure undergoes the same axis-rotation. In Mark it governs the *reception of the mystery* — the disclosure given without stint to those who bring receptivity and withdrawn from those who do not, a transaction between God and the hearer. Matthew lifts it out of that setting and sets it down in the Sermon amid teaching on judging others (Matt 7:1–2), where "with the measure you measure it will be measured to you" becomes a rule of social reciprocity: judge gently and be judged gently. The vertical economy of revelation becomes a horizontal ethic of fair dealing — the same transformation worked on the lamp and the salt, applied now to a third saying.

One saying in Mark's discourse Matthew treats more aggressively still: he removes the episode, but he does not let its saying go. The validation of the unnamed exorcist who casts out demons in Jesus's name without following the apostolic circle (Mark 9:38–40) — "whoever is not against us is for us" — has no parallel in Matthew's narrative. But the logion at its heart survives in his gospel with its polarity reversed. Where Mark's saying protects the outsider — the man who works in the name yet does not follow the circle is *for* us — Matthew's reads "whoever is not with me is against me" (12:30), relocated to the Beelzebul controversy and turned to the opposite purpose: not a shelter for the unattached but a demand for alignment. The reversal is exact, and it runs in the direction Matthew's whole program runs. Mark's saying draws the boundary by attachment to Christ, and draws it wide enough to include the one outside the apostolic circle; Matthew redraws it as a boundary of allegiance, admitting no neutral ground. This is not rotation toward works but something sharper — the inversion of a saying's very sense — and it falls on a saying whose plain meaning was never about works at all but about authority: who may act in the name, and on whose sanction. A saying that authorized activity outside apostolic control could not be

reoriented toward righteousness; its subject was the wrong axis. So Matthew did not reorient it. He turned it over. What Mark had made a door, Matthew made a wall.

In place of the soteriology he has emptied, Matthew installs his own, and states its principle at the head of the Sermon: "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Where Mark located acceptance in participation in Christ — the salt that makes the offering acceptable regardless of moral attainment — Matthew sets a threshold of achieved righteousness. The whole Sermon then unfolds as the positive doctrine that fills the space the gutted sayings leave: not those who say κύριε κύριε but those who do the will of the Father (7:21); the house that stands is the one whose hearer *does* the words, not merely hears them (7:24–27). Matthew's Gehenna is populated by those who did not do enough; Mark's Gehenna is what the salt of Jesus carries one through, whatever one's moral performance.

That μωρός should surface again in Matthew, and repeatedly, is not incidental. The sayings source, as §7 argued, had already struck at Mark's salt with the bilingual pun that called it foolish — μωρανθῇ, the salt "become moronic." Matthew inherits the weapon and generalizes it into a structural motif: across his Sermon and his parables, foolishness is redefined as the failure to *do*. The man who hears the words and does not act on them is the μωρός who built on sand (7:26); the five μωραί virgins are shut out for want of oil they failed to provide (25:2–3). And Mark's salt, on the charge Matthew now carries forward, is foolish for the same reason: it rests on participation rather than performance. The jibe the sayings source aimed at the salt in a single word, Matthew expands into a standing verdict on any salvation grounded in faith rather than works — not only answering Mark, but amplifying the answer the sayings source had begun.

The objection will be raised that none of this need be counter-argument at all — that Matthew simply held a different theology, drew on different sources, and composed his Sermon independently, so that the divergence from Mark is difference rather than rebuttal. But difference alone does not account for what is observed. It is not that Matthew's theology happens to differ from Mark's; it is that he takes Mark's particular sayings, from Mark's particular cluster, and subjects each to the same transformation on the same axis in the same direction, and inverts the one member whose axis the rotation could not turn. Independent composition does not produce a systematic, single-directional reworking of another text's specific material. What the pattern shows is comprehension and intent: these are incompatible soteriologies, and Matthew knew it.

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8.2. What Luke Did with the Salt

Let us look first at what (proto)-Luke did, before we attempt to explain his actions. The measure and the lamp sayings he does not significantly disturb; but the salt he treated differently. From the sayings source he had the mocking form — Mark's opening "salt is good" conceded and then demolished, the salt called foolish and cast out (§7). This he placed among his other sayings material, and with his Markan material he left no salt at all where Mark had built it. The setting he emptied he did not leave otherwise intact: as §6.5 has set out, his travel narrative is driven through the block in which the salt had stood, severing Mark 9:41–10:12 — the covenant-salt and the covenant-marriage together — from its Markan place, and the marriage teaching reappears inside the wedge as stripped as the salt does, a bare ruling at 16:18 with no Genesis, no one flesh, and nothing that God has joined.

This is puzzling behavior, and it grows more puzzling the harder one presses it. Luke is elsewhere highly faithful to Mark's order and to his wording; why should this one stretch of Mark be treated so, and treated so thoroughly — the block severed, both its members carried off, and each stripped of the covenant it carried? If he did not perceive what Mark was doing, the operation is a remarkable coincidence: the wedge falls precisely on the block, takes both its covenant-carriers, and denatures each in the same way. But if he perceived it and was hostile to it, why keep the material at all? Why retain the divorce teaching, in any form, once its covenant has been cut away? Luke keeps everything, and keeps it broken.

Consider what we can reasonably infer about Luke. His soteriology is neither Mark's nor Matthew's. Where Mark reserved meaning is a justification by participation in Christ's sacrifice, and Matthew presses a righteousness of Torah and works, Luke preaches something that stands apart from both: repentance and the forgiveness of sins, salvation arriving *today* for the poor, the sinner, the outsider, the nations. His watchword is "repentance for the forgiveness of sins, preached in his name to all the nations" (24:47); his salvation comes to a tax-collector's house in an afternoon (19:9) and to a dying criminal with a word (23:43). It is a gospel of mercy and inclusion rather than of mechanism — less concerned with *how* the atonement works than with *who* is welcomed, and on what terms of turning and being received. The tax-collector who beats his breast goes home justified over the Pharisee (18:14); the prodigal is embraced before he can finish his confession. This is grace, but grace as *pardon*, not grace as the believer's incorporation into a sacrificial death. Luke's gospel does not carry Mark's sacrificial soteriology, whether reserved or open: the salt apparatus is dismantled, and the ransom clause of Mark's plainest saying (10:45b) is absent from Luke, who keeps only the service it is attached to (22:27).

We take canonical Luke and Acts to be one author, with the consensus. Whether that author also wrote proto-Luke, decades earlier, is less settled. The first study found Luke's Sondergut and his triple-tradition redaction material indistinguishable in vocabulary[1], which favors one hand across the strata; but the Sondergut straddles them — the Evangelion attests much of it — and the decisive comparison, the material absent from the Evangelion against the material attested in it, with Acts alongside, has not been run. It is the natural next step. One literary hint points the other way, toward a different hand. Acts stops with Paul alive at Rome though its author knows he died (20:25, 38); the ending may be a device of the same kind as the prologue and the "we" passages — a later writer taking his predecessor's standpoint — and if so, it tells for a successor rather than the same hand writing thirty years on.

And the author of Acts is irenic — his governing aim is unity. Consider, in that light, the larger thing proto-Luke is doing. A war of words was raging between the Pauline faction and the Jewish-Christian faction at Jerusalem, and proto-Luke takes the primary document of each side and stitches them together — the first to do so. He is aiming, it appears, at a middle ground; and his soteriology may be read in the same light, as a compromise between the two.

Seen this way, his handling begins to make sense. Luke is trying to be as fair as he can to both sides, and to give offense to neither. He cannot leave Mark's salt apparatus intact — that would never satisfy the Jewish-Christian side of the debate. But he wants to preserve as much of Mark's text, in some form, as he can, so as not to affront the Pauline side. The broken salt is the natural outcome of those two pressures at once: a saying that mocks Mark, preserved rather than suppressed, and set among Luke's own material where it offends no one by standing alone. The unifier kept his opponents' jibe in the book, and simply took it off its target. The marriage teaching came away with the salt for the same reason: it was the second carrier of the covenant the salt had introduced, and it could not stay where the salt had been without carrying the salt's sense. Luke kept it as he kept the salt — in the sayings-source form, a bare ruling (16:18) that commits no one to anything, set in his own material where it stands alone. This is, we believe, the more parsimonious account of his behavior on our source model.

The trajectories of response may be summarized:

The sayings source — full awareness, open hostility: crafts the "moronic" rejoinder that mocks Mark's salt directly.

Proto-Luke / Luke — full awareness, but irenic rather than hostile: dismantles Mark's salt saying while preserving almost all of Mark's text in some form, harmonizing the traditions rather than attacking one

— the unifier's hand.

Matthew — full awareness, systematic hostility: a sustained counter-argument running across the whole sequence of Mark 9:38–50 and 4:21–25, with the Sermon on the Mount as an alternative soteriology set against Mark's.

The spectrum of these responses is itself evidence that canonical Mark's mystery encoding was a real and consequential theological program rather than a modern scholarly inference.

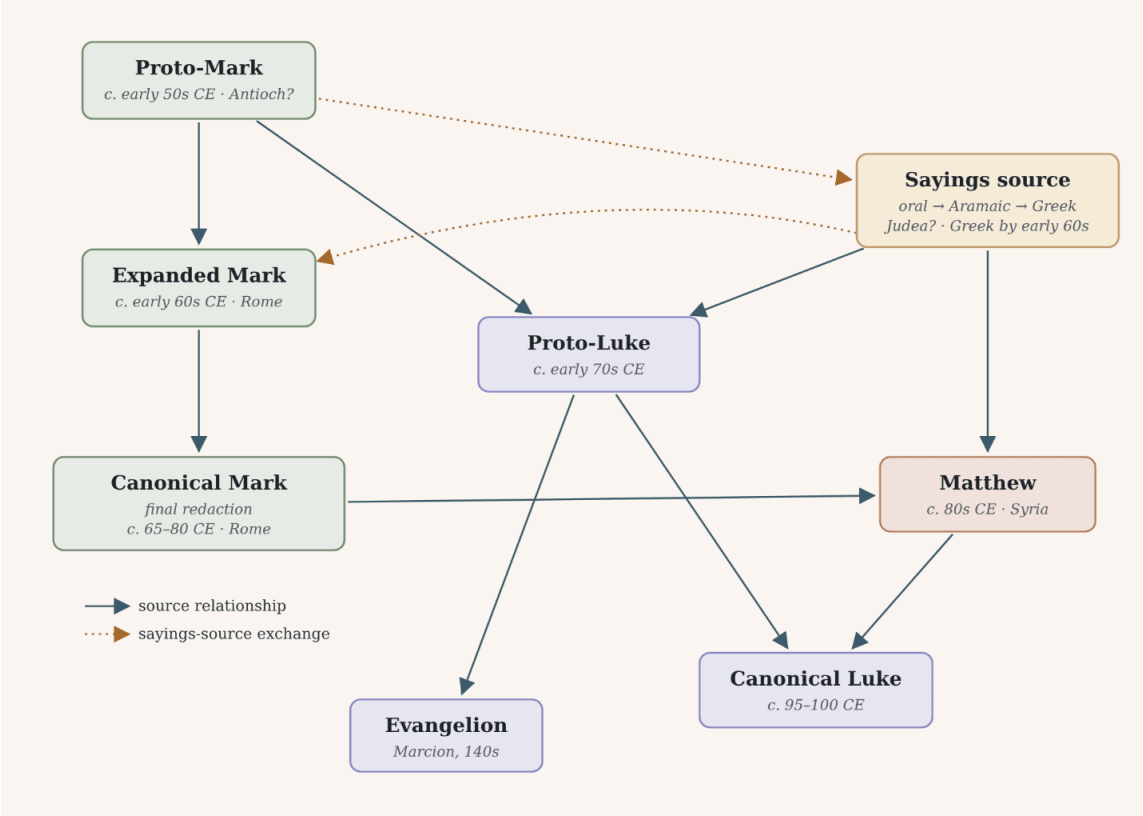
9. Later Layers in Canonical Mark: The Sayings Source and a Third Hand

The relationship between Mark and the sayings tradition has been argued before, though under different assumptions. Fleddermann[23], working within the Two-Source framework — Q an independent document, Luke unaware of Matthew — concludes that Q is consistently prior to Mark. The present model does not share those premises: it takes Luke to have known Matthew. That difference in premises substantially affects the results. Many cases of Mark/Sayings Source overlap we attribute to Luke's knowledge of Matthew. The exact content of the sayings source, however, is not our focus here. Suffice it to say that on the layered account offered here, priority is not fixed in one direction: proto-Mark came first and the source answered it, while the later expansion of Mark drew in turn upon the source, now grown and circulating.

The salt saying, argued above, shows the exchange running one way — the sayings source answering proto-Mark. It also runs the other way: canonical Mark, in the expansion, drawing on the source. The previous study details one such case, the greatest commandment[2] (12:28–34), and four more can be added to it. "What defiles a person" was examined there as expansion material (§4.7.1). Two others come from that study's §6, both bound up with the fig tree, identified there as expansion: the faith to move a mountain (11:23), and the cursing of the fig tree itself. The second of these is uncertain — Luke's fig tree, given a reprieve (13:6–9), differs so greatly from Mark's cursed one that the two may well be unrelated; but if they are related, it and the faith to move a mountain follow the same trajectory through the Synoptics as the other items here. The fourth is the anointing (14:3–9). Luke has no anointing at Bethany, but he has the story — a host named Simon, a woman, an alabaster flask, a reproach answered — set in Galilee at a Pharisee's table and turned to forgiveness (7:36–50). The two are one story in two forms, and the relation between them is that of the Mark/Q overlaps: the sayings source carried it, as it carried the

centurion, and Luke expanded the source's form as he expanded that one, while Matthew followed Mark's. The expansion set its form at Bethany and turned the anointing toward burial, for a reason given in §2. All five are attested in Marcion[24]. Finally, the mustard seed (4:30–32) is treated in the next section.

Two consequences follow. The first is chronological: the sayings source stands between proto-Mark and canonical Mark in time, so that it can answer the earlier and feed the later without difficulty[23]. The second is for the documentary model. The relationship between Mark and the sayings source is not a line but an exchange: proto-Mark provokes the source, and the source is drawn upon by Mark's expansion in turn. The diagram of the model records this with two further connections, the dotted lines marking where influence passed between Mark and the sayings tradition in each direction. It also divides Mark into three stages where the previous studies had two: proto-Mark, the expanded edition, and the canonical text as finally redacted by the later hand of §9.2. The dates and places given for these are refined relative to the previous studies. Proto-Mark is placed in the early 50s, on grounds set out in §11. The expanded edition takes the early-60s date the earlier figures gave canonical Mark. The final redaction is placed between the expansion and Matthew's use of the text. Proto-Luke is placed in the early 70s. The places given are probable rather than established. The dates of Matthew and canonical Luke are unchanged.



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9.1. The Mustard Seed

A further instance of canonical Mark answering the sayings source is the mustard seed (4:30–32), and it is instructive because it comes bundled with material of Mark's own. The parable is double-tradition: it stands in Matthew (13:31–32) and in Luke (13:18–19), and it is attested in Marcion's Evangelion[24]. Its presence there places it in proto-Luke and so before canonical Luke's use of Matthew — which is to say it reached Luke from the sayings source, not from Mark. Luke confirms this by its placement: he carries the mustard seed not in a parable discourse answering Mark's but far off in the travel narrative, in a location owing nothing to Mark's arrangement.

This is the pericope's one point of friction with the criteria, used in the previous study, that identify borrowed material, and the friction is only apparent. Luke and Mark do show contact in the mustard seed — both lead into the parable with a double question where Matthew has none — but the contact is agreement through their shared source, whose two-question form Matthew alone smoothed away, not Luke's copying of Mark. Both drew the parable from the sayings source; naturally their versions resemble one another, as two copies of one original will. Luke has the seed and the great tree with the birds, Mark has the seed and a great shrub with the birds, and Matthew conflates both arriving at a shrub/tree. What Luke does not reflect is the frame canonical Mark built around the mustard seed.

For he did build a frame. Beside the borrowed mustard seed he set a parable of his own, the seed that grows secretly (4:26–29) — sown, sprouting the sower knows not how, coming to harvest of itself while he sleeps. The two are paired deliberately: a seed whose growth is hidden set next to a seed whose greatness is hidden in its smallness, the pair making a single point about a kingdom that works unseen until its disclosure. He follows the mustard seed with the other half of his frame, "Using many parables like this he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He did not speak to them except in parables…" (4:33-34a). That theme — hiddenness resolved in an appointed disclosure — is the reserve this study has traced throughout, here cast in parable. The mustard seed is the source's; the secret-growing seed and the pairing are Mark's; and the arrangement turns a borrowed saying to the expansion's own ends, exactly as the greatest commandment and the saying on defilement were turned[2].

Together the seeds of this section fit another of our criteria from the previous paper: they form a contiguous block of a kind the previous paper's criteria would recognize. Also, there are definitely seams in this area of Mark, but they support a separate sort of insertion, which we turn to next.

9.2. A Redactor's Frame — a Third Hand in Mark

Section 8 showed Mark's reserve answered from outside: mocked by the sayings source, re-axised by Matthew, dissolved by Luke. It was also answered from inside. Canonical Mark carries, above the expansion, a small number of glosses by a later hand whose consistent effect is to make the reserve smaller: to name the recipients of the secret, or to set beside a reserved saying an explanation that discharges it on the surface. The hand was not an enemy of the gospel it glossed; it revered the Twelve and kept Paul's table, and it supplied the explanations its church needed. This section identifies that hand where it can be caught, grades the claim, and leaves its date and setting to §11.1.

Begin with the frame. At 4:1 Jesus gets into a boat on the sea and teaches the crowd from it, the whole crowd on the land. At 4:35–36, "on that day, when evening had come," he is still in that boat: "leaving the crowd, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat." The phrase "just as he was" (ὡς ἦν) is decisive — it presupposes that he has been in the boat continuously, never disembarking — and it is one of the seams the previous study used to define the type[2]. The boat scene runs unbroken from 4:1 to 4:36: one setting, one crowd, one continuous occasion.

Into the middle of that continuous scene, however, two brief notes drop Jesus into private company off the boat. At 4:10: "when he was alone (κατὰ μόνας), those around him, together with the Twelve, asked him." And at 4:34b, closing the discourse: "but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." Between these two notes the crowd and the boat vanish; after the second, at 4:36, they reappear, and Jesus is taken across "just as he was" — as though he had never left the vessel he is logically still sitting in. The private-teaching notes require Jesus off the boat and alone; the frame around them requires him on it and before the crowd. The two cannot describe one occasion. The notes have been dropped into a scene that had no room for them, and they are a matched pair: the one opens the private teaching, the other closes it, the brackets of a single editorial act. If the opening bracket is intrusive on structural grounds, the closing bracket is most economically assigned to the same hand.

What the two notes accomplish runs contrary to the expansion's characteristic practice. Everywhere else these studies have looked, the expansion's reserve withholds its disclosed sense from the inner circle: the disciples whose hearts are hardened at the water (6:52); the Syrophoenician woman, an outsider, who answers Jesus' figure in kind (7:28); the Twelve who handled the baskets and still cannot read the loaves (8:17–21). The secret is disclosed past the Twelve, not to them. The two notes do the reverse — not by creating the secret, which is Mark's own, but by fixing its recipients. Mark's text reserves the mystery for

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an undefined “you”; the inserted phrases resolve that “you” into the apostolic circle, and shut the door behind them. Here the Twelve are the ones let in and the crowd shut out — the exact inversion of the pattern the expansion sustains.

Two conclusions follow. The first is that these notes are not the expansion’s own work; they belong to a later hand, concerned to reclaim the gospel’s secret for the circle the reserved gospel had bypassed. The second is that the verses most often cited as the charter of Markan esotericism[6] — “to you has been given the mystery” — may not carry the meaning most readers give them: not Mark’s secret entrusted to the Twelve, but Mark’s open “you” resolved toward them by a later frame. The reserve was a secret kept from the Twelve, disclosed in the telling over their heads; a subsequent hand, uneasy with a gospel that excluded the pillars, framed the parable discourse so as to make the pillars its recipients. That later frame is what most readers have taken for Mark’s doctrine of the secret. So the parable chapter has been worked twice above its base: proto-Mark beneath, the expansion’s secret-growth material set into it, and a redactor’s privacy frame enclosing the whole.

The frame is the clearest instance of the hand’s gesture, but not the only one. Twice more in the gospel a saying is delivered openly under the flag of reserve, the disciples withdraw, and indoors, when they ask, an explanation is given that is narrower than the saying it explains.[24] The indoor setting is not itself evidence — Matthew drops Mark’s house scenes habitually, and nothing here is assigned on a setting. What is worth looking at is what the explanation does to the saying.

At 7:14 the crowd is summoned with the hearing-formula — “hear me, all of you, and understand” — and given the saying that nothing entering from outside can defile a person. The formula elsewhere in Mark marks a saying that carries more than its surface, and this saying names neither food nor mouth; “goes into the mouth” is Matthew’s addition (15:11), not Mark’s. Then, in the house, an explanation reduces the saying to a teaching about foods, and a participle appended at 7:19 — καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα, “cleansing all foods,” hanging from no noun in its own clause — states the reduction outright. The same chapter carries, at 7:3–4, a parenthesis explaining Jewish washing customs “for the Pharisees and all the Jews” to a reader who does not know them, breaking off the sentence begun at 7:2 and resuming it at 7:5, with the Latin ξεστῶν inside it. The hand that declared all foods clean is the hand that had to explain what the Pharisees were washing.

What the defilement saying reserved, we do not claim to know. Several construals are available to a reader of this study: that what enters from outside is what God places within, the covenant working inward; or the cup of the covenant itself; or the Holy Spirit. The last is the strongest, and for a reason the

others cannot match: it is the only one with a mark behind it. At 1:10 the Spirit descends εἰς αὐτόν — into him, where the other evangelists write ἐπί, upon — a marked preposition of the kind that anchors the salt; and it alone supplies a reserved sense for what comes out of a person as well as what goes in: an unclean spirit.[25] The mark, however, sits at the baptism and not on the saying, and where the saying itself is unmarked this study makes no assignment. What can be said is formal, and it is enough: the flag of reserve stands over the saying, and the explanation given in the house does not discharge it.

At 10:1–9 the one-flesh teaching, argued above and below (§6.5, §10) to carry an important part of Mark's reserved meaning, closes on "what God has joined together, let no one separate." Then, in the house, the disciples ask, and the teaching becomes a ruling on remarriage and adultery — the husband's case at 10:11, and at 10:12 a wife who divorces her husband, a provision at home in Roman law and not in Jewish. A teaching about covenant has been made into a rule about marriage.

Two consequences for grading. The hand is a more secure inference than any single item in it. The boat seam shows the frame to be an insertion on structural grounds alone. The participle at 7:19 hangs from nothing in its own clause. And that the items fall into one interest — the reserve made smaller, for a reader who needs the Jewish practices explained — is more than chance supplies. But every item is smaller and more deniable than the expansion's blocks, which are measured in pericopes and marked by narrative seams. The third hand should be held below the expansion in confidence accordingly. It is taken up again at §11.1.

What the third hand did in the parable chapter, then, it did at least twice more: not creating the reserve, and not discharging it, but setting beside a reserved saying an explanation small enough to live with.

10. The Silence at the Tomb

Mark ends where no gospel should. The women come to the tomb, find the stone rolled away and a young man who tells them Jesus is risen and gone before them to Galilee; and then they flee and say nothing to anyone, "for they were afraid" (16:8). There the gospel stops. The abruptness has troubled readers since antiquity — two later endings were supplied to repair it — and it is read here as the last and boldest instance of Mark's reserved method: a surface that discloses nothing and a depth that discloses everything, delivered not on the page but in the interpretation. Two things stand beneath the silence, and they are the gospel's final two points: that the news does not reach the apostolic circle, and that a marriage has been accomplished.

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The first is plain once looked for. The young man commissions the women to carry the news "to his disciples and to Peter" (16:7) — Peter named, singled out. And then, in the narrative Mark actually gives us, the message is not shown being delivered: the women flee and say nothing to anyone. Whatever Mark assumed his readers knew of what followed, the text he wrote closes before the news reaches the apostolic circle, and closes with Peter, named a verse earlier, not yet told. One need not read this as a polemical withholding[26] to notice that it rhymes with a pattern already traced: as the places at the right and the left, sought by the inner circle, went at the cross to two condemned outsiders, so here the resurrection is disclosed to the gospel's audience while the narrative leaves the disciples, and Peter at their head, on the far side of the telling. The gospel that everywhere shows the inner circle failing to grasp what outsiders receive ends on the same note — the surface closing before its own good news arrives at the door of those who followed Jesus closest.

And the deeper thing is a marriage. The clue is in the stone, and above all in the women's question about it: τίς ἀποκυλίσει ἡμῖν τὸν λίθον, "who will roll away for us the stone?" (16:3).[27] The verb is ἀποκυλίω. The compound occurs four times in the whole Septuagint: three in the account of Jacob at the well (Gen 29:3, 8, 10), where the stone is rolled from the well's mouth, and once in Judith, of the body of Holofernes rolled from his bed (Jdt 13:9).[28] Of a stone rolled away, the Greek scriptures know only the betrothal-well of Genesis 29. The verb even discriminates between the two things a stone could do at Mark's tomb. When the scriptures roll stones to *seal* a mouth in the earth — over the cave at Makkedah, shutting men in and later closing it over their bodies (Josh 10:18, 27) — they drop the ἀπο-. The away-rolling compound belongs to the well of the betrothal; the sealing of a grave-mouth over the dead takes other forms. Mark's tomb is given the well's verb, not the grave's.

One element of the type-scene Mark conspicuously lacks: there is no well — though the well and the tomb are alike in the one respect that matters, each a mouth in the earth sealed by a stone; Genesis says it three times over, the stone ἐπὶ τῷ στόματι τοῦ φρέατος, "on the mouth of the well" (29:2, 3, 8). The well's absence is the point. Mark has taken the betrothal-scene's stone and set it at the mouth of a tomb, the place of new life and marriage exchanged, on the surface, for the place of death. The well is precisely what the surface withholds — the reserved term, carried into the tomb by the marked verb, and given back, like the covenant under the salt, in the interpretation. This is the reserved method working at the ending exactly as it works at the salt: the surface shows a tomb and some frightened women, while beneath it, signaled by a marked word, stands a betrothal.

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That scene is the best-known instance of a fixed biblical form, the betrothal type-scene: a man comes to a foreign land, meets a woman at a well where a stone must be moved, and is joined to her in marriage[25] [26]. It is the scene of Jacob and Rachel, as its kin are the scenes of Isaac and Rebekah and of Moses and Zipporah. Once the verb has pointed to it, the rest of the scene's markers stand out at Mark's tomb. There are the women, approaching. There is the question of who will move the stone, which is Genesis's question too, posed there as an inability — "we cannot, until all the shepherds are gathered and they roll away the stone" (29:8) — and here as the women's τίς. And there is the stone's size: both texts pause to call it great, Genesis λίθος… μέγας (29:2), Mark μέγας σφόδρα (16:4).

And the well of Genesis 29 is a place of sheep. Three flocks lie beside it, waiting for the stone to be moved (29:2); Rachel's own name means "ewe," a sense the Hebrew carries though the Greek Ραχηλ loses it; and Jacob's first act once the stone is rolled away is to water her father's sheep (29:10). The type-scene Mark has reached for is not merely a betrothal but a betrothal among flocks, at a stone that stands between the shepherd and the sheep.

Mark has prepared for this. At the tomb the young man's message — "he is going before you into Galilee," προάγει ὑμᾶς (16:7) — echoes the promise of 14:28, the same verb and the same ὑμᾶς, which Mark had there tied to the struck-shepherd oracle of Zechariah: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zech 13:7, cited at 14:27). The shepherd struck, the flock scattered, and now the risen shepherd going on ahead of the regathered sheep. So the two figures meet in a single image at the empty tomb. At the well, the stone is rolled away and the shepherd waters the flock; at the tomb, the stone is rolled away and the flock is called to follow the shepherd. The betrothal type-scene and the shepherd oracle converge on one picture — the shepherd-bridegroom, the flock-bride, and the stone no longer standing between them[29].

Read so, the stone rolled from the tomb is the stone rolled from the well: the barrier removed between the bridegroom and his bride. That Jesus is the bridegroom is not imported; Mark has said so. Early in the gospel he calls himself the bridegroom who will be "taken away" from the wedding guests (2:19–20), his death already figured as the bridegroom's removal. And in the teaching set directly after the covenant-salt (§6.5), he teaches from Genesis that "the two shall become one flesh," and "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (10:6–9).

A third moment joins these two. At the supper, immediately after the cup has passed, Jesus swears abstinence: "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (14:25). The vow has long puzzled readers as a solemn renunciation with no evident occasion. The

betrothal customs of the period supply one. Jewish marriage of the era fell in two stages, betrothal and wedding, separated by an interval in which the bridegroom was absent, preparing a place for the bride; a shared cup marked the betrothal, the marriage feast came only later[27][28]. Against that frame the supper reads as a betrothal rite performed: the cup is shared, the abstinence is sworn, and the feast is deferred to the day the bridegroom returns — "when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." It is the same structure as 2:19–20, where the bridegroom is taken away and his absence is what the wedding guests fast through. The cup binds the betrothal; the vow marks the departure between the stages.

A gospel that names Jesus the bridegroom at its opening, teaches the one-flesh joining after the salt of the covenant, and enacts the betrothal over the last cup, closes with the betrothal-stone rolled back at a tomb. The bridegroom, taken away in death, is united to his people; the tomb-opening is that union effected — the stone rolled from the mouth, the bridegroom joined to his people. What remains ahead is only the feast: the cup he swore to drink new, in the kingdom, with the bride already his.

The reading finds support on both sides of Mark. On one side stands the theology Mark is reserving, already current in his own circle: the one-flesh union of Christ and his people was the common coin of the Pauline mission with which proto-Mark stood in contact — the one-flesh text named a mystery of Christ and his people, the community betrothed to one husband (§6.5, on Eph 5:31–32; 2 Cor 11:2; 1 Cor 6:16–17). What Mark reserves at the tomb, his contemporaries already believed. On the other side stand the later readers who drew the reserved sense into the open. The Fourth Gospel set Jesus at Jacob's well itself, evoked the betrothal scene deliberately. What Mark reserves at his tomb, John makes plain. And the tomb read as the ruined Temple — the Isaian thread Hanhart pursued — points the same way: the old cultic order ended, and a new covenant opened in its place.

We now pause to ask "what are the odds?". Jacob at the well is both bridegroom and shepherd. Mark gives us the bridegroom theme at 2:19–20, at 10:6–9, and at 14:25. The shepherd he gives us at 6:34 (like sheep without a shepherd) and at 14:27. Mark gives us the verb linked to the well and the circumstances of women approaching and wondering how the stone will be moved. All of this is coincidence if Mark does not intend for this scene to evoke the well.

If this is not coincidence, we must ask what Mark meant us to understand by it, and the answer requires being explicit about the character of the scene he evokes. The well of the betrothal type-scene is not a neutral meeting-place. In its modern students' reading it trades throughout on the well as a figure of the woman and of fertility, the opened well a charged and sexual thing[25]. Mark is not squeamish about sending us there. One of the chapters his salt-verb cites, Ezekiel 16, is among the most frankly sexual

passages in the scriptures (16:25-34). A gospel that has already reached for Ezekiel 16 has reached for that register.

Read so, the stone at the well's mouth is what closes the bride, and the rolling-away is her opening. In the Genesis scene the sense runs beneath the surface exactly as Mark's does: on the face of it Jacob waters his kinsman's literal flocks, but the scene is also a union, the woman is named Ewe, and Jacob rolls away the stone, waters the "sheep", and kisses her (29:10-11). The surface waters sheep; the depth "waters" the bride.

So while no wedding is celebrated at Mark's tomb, a union is signaled there, and it is the union that matters, for it is where life is given. What passes to the bride is what Mark has reserved throughout: the Spirit, the eternal life-giving essence of God, given now to the flock-bride at the opening. Mark does not equate the seed and the Spirit; he lets the one picture the other, the bodily giving of life standing for the divine[30].

And Mark has already shown, at the gospel's other end, how that giving is done. At the Jordan the Spirit descends into Jesus at his baptism — εἰς αὐτόν, into him (1:10) — the water and the Spirit together, the one the vehicle of the other. Baptism is where the Spirit is put into a person; Jesus's own is the pattern, the believer's the participation. The tomb-union is that same giving raised to its widest scope: the Spirit made available not to one man in a river but to the whole flock-bride at the opened tomb. What baptism effects in each, the union opens to all.

Nor is the figure smuggled in at the end. Mark planted it at his middle. In the parable of the seed growing secretly the sower scatters and then "knows not how" it sprouts and swells (4:26–29) — read here as the Spirit's hidden work, life rising by a power beyond man. That is what the tomb enacts: life given to the bride and springing up by the same unseen power. The parable and the empty tomb are the one reserved thing said twice — a sowing, and life coming from it by no human means.

The two-stage shape of the thing, already glimpsed at the cup, finds its warrant in the Genesis scene itself, and in an order that is easy to miss: the union comes first, the wedding long after. Jacob meets Rachel at the well and is joined to her there in the scene's charged language, but the marriage is years away, deferred until the bride-price has been served. Sexual union early, wedding late, the two widely parted. Mark's timing keeps that order. The union is accomplished at the tomb; the wedding waits for the kingdom, when the bridegroom drinks the cup new.

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That deferral raises a question the gospel does not fully answer: when does Mark look for the bridegroom's return? Canonical Mark plainly expects an end-times coming, in the Danielic clouds of chapter 13 and at the trial. Whether proto-Mark did is less certain; the clouds are absent from its trial scene[29], which leaves the question open, though nothing in the tomb-union depends on how it is resolved.

Does Mark tell us that Jesus appeared to people shortly after his death? The gospel that ends with the empty tomb does not. He says that Jesus will go ahead of them to Galilee, but then this message is not passed on to Peter. Given Mark withholds secrets from the twelve as a pattern, we might speculate that Mark means for there to be no post resurrection appearances. But Mark does not say, so neither can we.

The order is the theology. In Genesis the union is at the well, and the feast — in the Hebrew a *mishteh*, a feast of drinking — comes only when the years of service are done (29:20–22). Mark keeps that order and gives it its meaning. The Messiah was expected to bring the end; Mark's brings the Spirit, and the end waits. What the prophets promised for the last day — God's own life put within his people (Ezek 36:27), the seed planted — has been given already, at the opened tomb; the wedding, the cup sworn off at the supper and drunk new in the kingdom (14:25), is still to come. The church lives between the two, as Jacob served between the well and the feast: already joined, still waiting. Other texts of the New Testament set the marriage supper at the end (Matt 22:1–14; 25:1–13; Rev 19:7–9), and so does Mark. What is his, perhaps uniquely, is that the joining came first, and came at the tomb — with the Holy Spirit delivered to the flock.

10.1. Ezekiel at the Tomb

The union at the tomb is not a new figure but the salt's covenant, followed to its end. The verb of the salting, ἁλίζω, has two homes in the Greek scriptures (§6.5). One is the covenant of sacrifice at Leviticus 2:13. The other is the covenant-marriage of the Lord and Jerusalem at Ezekiel 16, where the unsalted foundling is taken by covenant — "and you became mine" (16:8) — and taken by blood: the Lord passes by the unsalted infant and says to her, "from your blood, life" (ἐκ τοῦ αἵματός σου ζωή, 16:6). Mark's covenant is sealed the same way, over the cup: "my blood of the covenant" (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης, 14:24).

In Ezekiel the covenant is then broken (16:59), and then, in the chapter's last word, restored by the Lord's own act: "I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your infancy, and I will raise up for you an everlasting covenant... and you shall know that I am the Lord" (16:60, 62)[31]. A marriage-covenant broken by the bride and renewed by the bridegroom alone: that is the story Ezekiel tells, and it is the story Mark's

ending enacts. The bridegroom is taken away, and the stone is rolled back from the mouth of the earth. The salt of Mark 9 asked in whom the failed covenant would be seasoned again; the tomb of Mark 16 is the answer performed.

A second figure carries the same chapter's vocabulary, and he appears twice. The verb περιβάλλω — to wrap about, to clothe — occurs in Mark exactly twice, and on both occasions in the same participial form and of the same figure: a νεανίσκος περιβεβλημένος. The first is the young man who follows at the arrest, wrapped in a linen cloth over his bare body, and who, seized, leaves the cloth in their hands and flees naked (14:51–52). The second is the young man at the tomb, seated on the right, wrapped in a white robe (περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκήν, 16:5). A unique figure-word and a unique clothing-verb, twice, and nowhere else in the gospel: the pair is welded at the level of the lexicon.

Set the pair against the chapter whose verb the salting already cites. Ezekiel 16 tells its covenant as a sequence of clothing. The foundling lies naked (16:7); the Lord covers her and enters the covenant with her (16:8); and he clothes her — καὶ περιέβαλόν σε, the same verb (16:10). At the breach the clothing is taken back, her lovers stripping her and leaving her naked again (16:39). And in the chapter's last word the covenant is raised up everlasting (16:60–62). Mark's two young men stand at that cycle's two poles, and in the cycle's own word: at the breach, a νεανίσκος περιβεβλημένος stripped to nakedness and fled; at the renewal, a νεανίσκος περιβεβλημένος, seated, in white.

That the two scenes mean dying and rising was argued by Scroggs and Groff[30], who read them as a baptismal figure — the initiate stripped, buried with him, and raised re-vested. The reading offered here does not displace theirs; it supplies its scriptural template. What they located in the baptismal practice of Mark's circle, Ezekiel had already written as the shape of a covenant: unclothed at the breach, clothed at the renewal. And the reason to prefer that chapter over the general stock of nakedness-and-glory imagery is not the fit alone but the company it keeps. The salting verb, ἁλίζω, singled out this chapter (§6.5). Having been pointed there, Mark's gospel keeps drawing from the same chapter — the blood covenant made with the infant (16:6), the marriage covenant made with the grown foundling (16:8), and the clothing taken and restored (16:10, 39). The two-scene figure wears that chapter's wardrobe in the gospel whose salt cites that chapter.

The silent ending belongs to proto-Mark (§11), and it cannot be had without its announcer: the women flee and say nothing, and what they say nothing about is what the young man has just told them. Remove him and there is no message to withhold, and no ending to be silent at. The fleeing young man is the less certain of the two, standing as he does beside material the previous study assigns to the expansion, and

he might on that account be thought to have come in with it. But he is welded to the tomb figure by a verb this gospel uses nowhere else, and by a noun it uses of no one else; and a figure so bound is bound to the layer his twin belongs to. The pairing is therefore not a consequence of the layer assignment but a reason for it. The salt and both young men sit together in proto-Mark: one layer, one chapter, one hand.

The later evangelists' handling is at least consistent with the figure having been read and disliked. Both remove the man. Matthew puts an angel at the tomb (28:2–5); Luke, two men in dazzling clothes (24:4) — and the doubling is characteristic of him, matching the two men of his transfiguration and the two of Acts 1:10, a writer exchanging a single anonymous human witness for something evidentially and celestially proper. Neither retains the fugitive of the arrest at all. On the model of Matthew and Luke as close readers of Mark that §§8.1–8.2 have applied to the salt and the lamp, this is the same documented behavior at a new site: they found a man where Mark had put a man, and would not have him there. No weight is placed on any reconstruction of their motive — embarrassment at an odd vignette accounts for the fugitive's disappearance as readily as recognition would, and the removals are offered as consistent with the reading, not as evidence for it. What the passage carries on its own is the lexical fact: the gospel's only two περιβεβλημένοι are one figure, naked at the breach and clothed at the renewal, in the wardrobe of the chapter his salt already cited.

11. The Character of Proto-Mark

This study's predecessor was largely with the expansion — what canonical Mark added to the gospel it inherited. It is worth asking what the inherited gospel was like: not its seams and additions but the base into which they were worked. The method is subtraction. Having reconstructed the expansion on independent grounds, we set it aside and ask what remains; the remainder is proto-Mark.

Three things belonged to proto-Mark from the first. The first is its soteriology and Christology — the Pauline salvation and the figure of Jesus this study has traced through the salt and the light. These sit in base material, and they are the theological center of the gospel at every layer; the reserved reading is not a late overlay but proto-Markan, the earliest gospel already speaking in two registers. The second is its openness to the nations: the Gerasene delivered in the Decapolis and sent to proclaim what had been done for him (5:1–20) stands in proto-Mark, and with it the outward turn the expansion would enlarge rather than invent.

The third is the esoteric method itself: a teaching that carries more than its surface and waits on an interpreter to disclose it. The sower already works this way — though there its decoding is given openly,

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to all who hear, not withheld for a private circle.

A fourth thing may be said of the base negatively, and it concerns the three places where canonical Mark says on its surface what the rest of the gospel reserves. The absolute ἐγώ εἰμι — the self-declaration that carries the divine name of Exodus and the "I am" of Isaiah's God — is spoken by Jesus twice in Mark: on the water (6:50) and before the high priest (14:62). Both fall in material the previous studies assign to the expansion: the first inside the block Luke never received[2], the second in the night trial[29]. The third occurrence is not his at all: proto-Mark knows the formula but places it only on the lips of impostors (13:6). The ransom clause at 10:45b, "and to give his life a ransom for many," is the gospel's one surface statement of how the death saves. Luke's form of the service saying — "I am among you as one who serves" (22:27) — carries the service without the ransom, and the clause is read here as the enlargement's, set on the end of a base saying, by the criterion the previous study applied to larger units. (The request of James and John that precedes it, 10:35–40, is held in the base on structural grounds: the lamp's architecture depends on 10:40. Luke's line carried the dispute that follows, relocated to the supper (22:24–27), though not the request itself.) And the covenant declaration over the cup (14:24) is argued[32] to be of the same kind, more tentatively. Three open statements, then — a self-naming, a ransom, a covenant — and all three the enlargement's[33]. What the base encoded, the enlargement states: not in exposition, which it never supplies, but in a formula let stand on the surface. The enlargement is by a degree the less reserved text. It is also, as the next paragraphs show, the harder on the Twelve, and the two movements go together.

And the disciples of proto-Mark already fail. The threefold denial, the sleeping in Gethsemane, and the sharp rebuke at the first passion prediction — "Get behind me, Satan" (8:33) — all belong, on our reconstruction, to proto-Mark. Even the silent ending, the women fleeing the tomb and telling no one (16:8), is the base's (§10.1). The earliest gospel was already hard on the disciples, and hard on Peter in particular.

But it was hard on them as followers. In proto-Mark the disciples fail the way the heroes of Israel's scriptures fail — David, the patriarchs, the prophets — as chosen men who fall short of their calling. Yet they are not explicitly excluded from the mystery. We do not see them shut out as we do in canonical Mark (8:16-21). And the revelation to Peter along with the two-stage healing of the blind man shows Peter grasping at least half the truth. Their failures are the failures of those who belong: moral failures, failures of nerve and of comprehension, but not exclusion.

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Half is the right measure, and the confession shows why. Peter's "You are the Christ" (8:29) is, as far as the sources let us see, what the historical Peter preached: Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Mark has it silenced, and what Jesus then says "plainly" (παρρησίᾳ, 8:32 — the word's one use in this gospel) is the suffering Son of Man, which Peter rejects. And at 12:35–37, base material (Luke 20:41–44), Mark's Jesus himself asks how the scribes can call the Christ David's son. The base does not deny Peter's title; it declines Peter's content for it. The earliest reader we can name took the scene this way: Tertullian reports that Marcion read the command to silence as Jesus refusing to let a wrong conclusion spread (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.21). Marcion had his reasons, but the reading was available in the second century without a modern lens[34].

What the expansion does is not to add failure — there was failure enough already — but to change what the failure means. Under the expansion the disciples' shortcoming is recategorized: no longer the stumbling of companions but exclusion from the secret itself. They do not understand about the loaves (8:21)[2]; "their hearts were hardened" (6:52). The dull disciples of canonical Mark do not merely fall short; they are on the wrong side of the reserve, the ones from whom the disclosed sense is withheld while it is given to others. Failure of nerve becomes failure of standing. The change is not of degree but of kind — a moral falling-short reread as an epistemic shutting-out. That the incomprehension motif is redactional, and distinct from the silencing commands and from the parable theory of 4:10–12 with which Wrede had fused it, was shown by Räisänen[31], who declined to assign the strands a common origin. The stratification argued here gives each a location: the silencing commands to the base, the incomprehension recast as exclusion to the expansion, and the parable-theory frame — the one strand Räisänen found hardest to place — to the third hand (§9.2).

And it is joined to a second, institutional move: the cursing of the temple which set the cult the disciples' leaders represented on the far side of the same divide. The pillars and their institution are aligned, together, with what the gospel now supersedes. This is the anti-cultic and anti-Petrine edge that this study and its predecessor have traced — and it is the expansion's, laid upon a base whose disciples failed but were not yet shut out[35].

This is also where the standing objection to every polemical reading of Mark is met. Weeden's critics have always pointed to 16:7: the young man sends the women "to his disciples and to Peter" — Peter named — with the promise of Galilee, and a gospel that meant to write the Twelve off would not have written that verse. But 16:7 is an intention, not an arrival, and the base shows it miscarry in the next verse. That is not a reversal of the base's Peter; it is the last instance of him. He confesses and is silenced; he is taught plainly and rejects it; the blind man who sees men like trees walking is set beside Caesarea Philippi as the

measure of what he has seen. Every attempt to reach Peter in this gospel half-fails, and the ending repeats the pattern with the roles shifted: Jesus means to reach him, and the message does not arrive, this time through a failure that is not his own. The verse the objection leans on is the base's, and so is the silence that follows it; together they say what the base says of Peter throughout — sought, and not yet reached. What the expansion added was a different thing: not a message that fails to arrive, but a failure the narrator now lays to the men themselves — "their hearts were hardened" — a verdict where the base had a mischance. The two attitudes toward Peter that readers have struggled to hold together in one author are two layers — a follower the story keeps trying to teach, and an insider the story keeps out — and 16:7–8, read together, belong wholly to the first.

That reframing sets up the last movement, treated above in §9.2. If the expansion shut the Twelve out of the secret, a later redactor let them back in — framing the discourse so that the mystery is explained privately to the disciples after all, the door the expansion had closed reopened for the pillars. The sequence, then, runs in three stages. Proto-Mark: disciples who fail as followers do, within a gospel Pauline in its soteriology, open to the nations, and reserved in its method. The expansion: those same failures recategorized as exclusion, the secret withheld from the circle and the cult superseded along with it. And the redactor: the circle readmitted, the secret returned to the Twelve, the exclusion undone[36]. Failure, then exclusion, then restoration — the disciples′ standing rewritten twice above a base that had only ever shown them stumbling[37].

The base can also be placed in time and, more tentatively, in space. Proto-Mark is earlier than the expansion, which Matthew has, and earlier than proto-Luke's copy of it, which shows no knowledge of the expansion and none of the war. It knows the Jerusalem preaching from inside and reserves Paul's against it, which suits a companion of Paul's at about the time Acts records their parting (15:36–39), around 50. Where it was written is harder to say, and the usual evidence for Rome, Mark's Latinisms, more likely belong to the expansion than to the base. Of the Latin words and idioms in canonical Mark, Luke's line attests only the two that carry content, the name Legion (Luke 8:30) and the denarius of the tribute scene (20:24). The stylistic ones are absent from it: κεντυρίων, κῆνσος, μόδιος, φραγελλόω, and idioms such as ὁδὸν ποιεῖν and συμβούλιον διδόναι. (The σπεκουλάτωρ of 6:27 stands in base material, but in a pericope Luke's line does not carry at all, so it cannot be tested either way; re-copying would account for it as well as for the rest.) Matthew carries several of them.

Luke is often said to avoid Latin loanwords, but the evidence independent of Mark is mixed: he keeps everyday Latin words in his own material (δηνάριον, ἀσσάριον, σουδάριον) and in Acts, and prefers Greek

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equivalents chiefly for terms of office and Latin idiom — which is enough to weaken the inference here, since those are most of the items in question. In the one double-tradition case, Luke's "last lepton" (12:59) stands against Matthew's "last quadrans" (5:26), which may be his preference or the sayings source's wording. The pattern nevertheless is what we would expect if the Latin idiom entered with the expanded edition: an author re-copying his own gospel in a new city writes as he now speaks.

One small item makes the point concretely. At 12:42 the widow's two lepta are glossed "which is a quadrans," a Jewish coin explained by a Roman one usually said not to have circulated in the East, and Luke (21:2) has the lepta without the gloss (but cf. Luke 12:59). Whether the gloss is the expansion's or a later hand's cannot be settled, but on either reading it was made for a Roman reader after proto-Luke's copy was taken.

The same is true of the one notice in Mark that names people its audience knew. At 15:21 Simon of Cyrene is "the father of Alexander and Rufus." Luke (23:26) follows Mark through Simon and lacks the sons, so the notice was not in proto-Luke's copy. Paul greets a Rufus at Rome around 57, "chosen in the Lord," with a mother who had been a mother to Paul himself (Rom 16:13). The identification is unprovable, since Rufus is a common name, but it has been found plausible since Swete. If it holds, the expanded edition names to Paul's church a family Paul knew. That is the expansion's circle, and its city.

Strip the Latin from the base and nothing in proto-Mark points to Rome. Its author translates his Aramaic and explains no Jewish practice: he writes for Greek-speaking believers who know Judaism. That describes Antioch or the Syrian churches around 50 better than it describes Rome, and it leaves the expansion, in the early 60s, as the first Mark we can place in the capital. Its sharper edge against the pillars makes sense in that time and place, with Paul in prison and Mark one of the three Jewish co-workers still with him (Col 4:10–11).

11.1. Why Peter? Papias, 1 Peter, and the Third Hand

The reconstruction just given leaves one fact to be explained. Of the four gospels, Mark is the hardest on Peter: he is silenced, called Satan, found asleep, shown denying, and left untold at the end. Yet it is this gospel, and no other, that the tradition assigned to Peter's own interpreter. The earliest form of the claim is Papias's, preserved by Eusebius (*HE* 3.39.15): Mark, "having become Peter's interpreter (ἑρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου γενόμενος), wrote down accurately, though not in order (οὐ μέντοι τάξει), as much as he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord; for he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of the moment but not as though making an ordered

arrangement (σύνταξιν) of the Lord's oracles — so that Mark did nothing wrong in writing some things as he recalled them. For he took care of one thing only, to omit nothing he had heard and to falsify nothing in it."

The form of this notice is the first thing to see. It is not a description; it is a defense. Three charges are answered in it — that Mark's gospel is out of order, that its author was no eyewitness, and that it is incomplete or inaccurate — and each is answered by the same move: the deficiency is conceded and then excused by Peter. The order is Peter's occasional teaching, not Mark's fault; the lack of eyewitness standing is made good by Peter's; the completeness is Mark's fidelity to what Peter said. Someone had measured this gospel against a better-ordered one, and by implication a fuller one, and found it wanting; the elder's answer is that its warrant is not its order but its source. What it was measured against is in Papias's own syntax. Peter, he says, made no σύνταξις of the Lord's λόγια; in the next sentence Matthew συνετάξατο the λόγια (3.39.16) — the same root, denied of the one and affirmed of the other. Whether that ordered composition was our Matthew or the sayings collection behind it, as the first study argued, the notice presupposes canonical Mark in circulation beside it and in need of a credential, and Peter is the credential supplied.

Where did the credential come from? Eusebius tells us one more thing about Papias in the same chapter: he used testimonies from the first epistle of John and from the first of Peter (3.39.17). The first epistle of Peter closes with a greeting: "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does Mark my son" (5:13), the letter having been written "through Silvanus, the faithful brother" (5:12). A reader who held that letter as Peter's, and who had before him a gospel under Mark's name, had the whole of the elder's tradition available by inference: Peter at Rome, Mark at his side, the gospel Peter's preaching in Mark's hand. Nothing in Papias's notice requires more than the letter and the gospel. The later tradition behaves as inference does rather than as memory: Irenaeus has Mark write after the deaths of Peter and Paul (*Haer.* 3.1.1), Clement of Alexandria during Peter's lifetime and without his involvement either way (Eusebius, *HE* 6.14.6–7), the anti-Marcionite prologue after Peter's death in Italy, Origen "as Peter guided him" (*HE* 6.25.5) — a growth in circumstantial detail with no agreement on the one circumstance a memory would have fixed. By Tertullian the notice is doing openly what it was made to do: against Marcion, "what Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's, whose interpreter Mark was," as Luke's gospel is affirmed to be Paul's (*Adv. Marc.* 4.5). The attribution is a legitimating device, and it was already one in its earliest attestation.

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This does not require that no Mark ever knew Peter; it requires only that the notice is derivable from 1 Peter and that its shape is apologetic. But the letter it derives from is itself the more telling datum, because of what kind of document it is. The present study assumes the majority view: that 1 Peter is pseudonymous, written from Rome in the last third of the first century. On that view it is a document with a program. It carries Peter's name over Paul's theology — "in Christ" (3:16; 5:10, 14), the household code (2:18–3:7), the submission to governing authorities of Romans 13 (2:13–17), the servant of Isaiah 53 as the pattern of the passion (2:21–25) — and it places Paul's two companions, Silvanus and Mark, at Peter's side in the greeting. It is Peter and Paul made one circle, under Peter's name, from Rome. Nor is it alone. 1 Clement, from the same city within the same generation, sets "Peter and Paul" side by side as the two pillars who suffered through jealousy (5.3–7), the first time the pairing is made. And Acts, whatever its provenance, is the same gesture at narrative length: Peter is given Paul's gospel to speak at the council — "we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (15:11) — Paul circumcises Timothy and takes a vow in the temple (16:3; 21:26), Antioch is never mentioned, and Mark's desertion is recorded as a quarrel about Mark and not about doctrine (15:37–39). Baur saw this in 1845 and built too much on it; the observation outlives the system. Across three documents of one generation the breach that Galatians 2 records is being closed, and closed from Peter's side of the name and Paul's side of the content.

The third hand belongs here, and the fit is specific. What the glosses of §9.2 do is readmit the Twelve to the secret (4:10, 4:34b), explain Jewish custom to a reader who does not know it (7:3–4), and declare all foods clean (7:19) — the one piece of Pauline practice the tradition assigns to Peter personally, as the lesson of his vision at Joppa (Acts 10:15). That is a Gentile, Roman hand, Pauline in practice and Petrine in loyalty, whose one editorial conviction is that the pillars must not be shown shut out — the profile, point for point, of 1 Peter's author and of Acts' program. And it works as a reconciler works, not as a partisan: it does not delete the expansion's exclusion, which was already in circulation and could not be recalled, but frames it; it corrects the narrator, not Jesus, because the sayings were fixed and the setting was not. The study does not claim that the glossator wrote 1 Peter. The evidence does not reach that, and the argument does not need it. It claims one city, one generation, and one tendency — the settlement of the Pauline and Petrine missions into a single Roman church — and it claims that the glosses and the attribution are two products of that settlement. The hand that let the Twelve back into Mark's reserved teachings belongs to the church that gave Mark's gospel to Peter.

That places the third hand in time. It is later than the expansion, whose exclusion of the Twelve it reverses, and earlier than the copy of Mark that Matthew used: Matthew's omissions of its glosses are his own, made for reasons his gospel makes plain (a Torah-observant evangelist does not write that Jesus cleansed all foods), and nothing in our Mark need be later than his copy. The window is therefore roughly 65 to 80, and the place is Rome — on the evidence of the notices for a Roman reader, and of the text itself, which was at Rome in the expanded edition (§11). This makes the hand not the contemporary of 1 Peter and 1 Clement but their predecessor: the earliest trace at Rome of the settlement those texts would write out in full a decade or two later. The circle that let the Twelve back into Mark's gospel is the circle that would go on to call its author Peter's son.

A word is owed on consistency with the first study in this series, which used Papias positively — his report that Matthew compiled the λόγια in a Hebrew dialect, "and each interpreted them as he could" (*HE* 3.39.16), as early testimony to a Semitic sayings collection variously rendered into Greek. Both notices confer standing: the one puts the λόγια in an apostle's hand, the other puts the gospel in an apostle's mouth. The first study took from the Matthew notice only what is left when the attribution is set aside — a description of a document [38]— and the present study takes from the Mark notice only what is left when its attribution is set aside: the fact that it is a defense, and of what. Papias himself — an Asian, a chiliast on Irenaeus's report (*Haer.* 5.33.3–4; *HE* 3.39.12), writing two generations after the quarrel from a church that had made its peace — is used in both as a witness to what was being said in his day, not to what had happened in Peter's. And on the one point where the notice can be checked against the gospel it describes, the gospel contradicts it: a text this hard on Peter did not come from Peter's interpreter. The attribution is the settlement's, not the author's.

12. What Are the Odds?

The readings offered in this study have been made one at a time, each defended on its own ground. It remains to ask what they amount to taken together — for an argument of this kind is not the sum of its parts but their product, and the question a reader is entitled to put is whether the whole accumulation can be coincidence.

It helps to say first what the alternatives are, because "coincidence" is only one of them, and not the strongest. A reader who declines the thesis of this study may hold that the patterns traced here are accidents of a text rich enough to yield patterns to anyone who looks; or that they are deliberate, but were built to be caught unaided by hearers who knew the Septuagint, so that nothing was reserved and no

interpreter was needed; or that they are deliberate and were never meant to be caught at all — the private craft of an author composing for the text's own integrity. The thesis of this study is a fourth account: that the patterns are deliberate and were built for the author's own exposition, completed in the telling before a congregation that could not have found them alone. Each of the three alternatives is answered by a different part of the evidence, and the order below follows them.

Against accident. Consider what must be accidental if Mark is not the writer this study has described. It must be accident that the one Old Testament text joining a lampstand to two anointed figures at right and left is the text his personified lamp, his refused right-and-left, and his crucified right-and-left compose between them. It must be accident that the one verb by which the Greek scriptures name a stone rolled away is the verb Mark chose for the stone at the tomb — the verb whose single such home is the betrothal-well of Genesis 29 — and that he set it at a tomb his gospel had already prepared to be read as a marriage, having named Jesus the bridegroom, made the one-flesh union his teaching, and sealed a betrothal over the cup; and that the tomb keeps the well's own furniture, the women approaching, the great stone, the question of who will roll it away. It must be accident that the gospel's only two περιβεβλημένοι are one young man — naked at the breach, clothed at the renewal — and that these are the two poles of the covenant-cycle in Ezekiel 16, the one chapter outside Leviticus where Mark's salting verb is at home. It must be accident that the one occurrence of ἅλα in the entire New Testament falls on the single word on which the reserved sense turns, the object of "have salt in yourselves," the accusative the Greek Torah keeps for the salt of the covenant — while Matthew, Luke, and Mark's own neighboring clauses write the ordinary ἅλας; and that the verb of the salting, ἁλισθήσεται, has a single home in the Greek scriptures, the covenant-of-salt command of Leviticus 2:13, so that Mark, having taken the verb from that verse for 9:49, reaches into the same verse again for the marked accusative of 9:50. It must be accident that the name of Jesus, joined to a person, rings three times in the lines before ἐν τίνι and closes on "you are Christ's," preparing the very "in whom" the question withholds on its surface; that Mark, who nowhere else strings sayings on a shared word without a cumulative argument, gathered three salt sayings into one place here; that Luke's great disturbance falls on this sequence; and that the sayings-source author, a writer demonstrably at home in Aramaic[1][32], reached, of all the words for salt gone wrong, for the one that means foolish, and that Matthew preserved the jibe and built it into the headline of his Sermon.

No one of these, perhaps, would compel. But they are independent of one another: the lamp has nothing to do with the pun, the pun nothing to do with the placement of ἅλα, the placement nothing to do with

where Luke's seam falls, or with the empty tomb. Independent improbabilities multiply. We do not pretend to put a number on the product — the priors are not ours to know, and an author with one such habit is the likelier to have others, so the factors are not perfectly independent and a naive multiplication would overstate the case. The point is qualitative: somewhere in this accumulation the threshold is passed beyond which coincidence stops being the economical account, and design becomes the simpler hypothesis. We judge it long passed.

The objection that must be met here is the one every reading of this kind invites: that a text long enough will yield patterns to any reader determined to find them, so that the catalogue above proves only the ingenuity of its compiler. The objection is sound as a warning, and the answer to it is the probabilities. Each is a singularity or close to it: the one occurrence of ἅλα in the New Testament; the one home of ἁλισθήσεται in the Greek Old Testament; the one verb the Greek scriptures use of a stone rolled away; the one text that sets two anointed figures at the right and left of a lampstand; the two περιβεβλημένοι in a gospel that has no third. These are not features that would be in the text regardless. Each had a small chance of being there at all, and a smaller chance of being there at the place the reading requires — and rarity of this kind is not a judgment but a count, which anyone with a concordance can repeat. The question is therefore not whether patterns can be found in Mark, but whether these patterns are built from parts that were unlikely to be found anywhere. That the method does not fire on everything is the same point from the other side: the seed parable carries no marked word and is graded accordingly (§4), and the lamp's anointing link, resting on the Hebrew, is counted a corollary rather than a coincidence (§2).

Against cued allusion. Grant, then, that the patterns are built. The strongest alternative to this study is not that they are accidents but that they were built to be heard — by a first audience that had the Septuagint in its ear and caught, without being told, what later readers lost when the ear was lost. That account fits a compact signal. A congregation that had chanted Leviticus 2:13 might hear ἅλα and know what covenant it belonged to; a hearer of 16:3 might catch the well's verb. What it does not fit is a structure distributed across the gospel with nothing on the surface to bind its parts. The lamp is the case. A lamp that comes in chapter 4; the places at the right and the left asked for and refused in chapter 10; those places filled at the cross in chapter 15 — three scenes, eleven chapters apart, with no cue in any of them that the others are its complement, composing between them a single chapter of Zechariah. No hearer assembles that on hearing, however many times he hears it and however much Zechariah he knows, because the pieces do not announce that they belong together. The same is true of the feedings,

whose Israel-and-nations design spans two chapters and is marked by nothing but numbers, a change of basket-word, and a geography. A compact allusion can be cued; a distributed architecture cannot. If it is deliberate, somebody had to say so. Allusion carries the salt; only exposition carries the lamp — and an author who had to expound the lamp was an author who expounded.

Against private design. The remaining alternative is that the patterns were built and never spoken: an author's craft, laid into the text for its own sake. For a gospel composed to be performed by its author, this is not a rival account but a contradiction in terms. The performer is his own expounder; whatever he built for the text's integrity he delivered with the text, and a design never spoken is a gospel written for oneself. Two readings of the evidence remain, then, and the text itself decides between them: either Mark meant his hearers to puzzle the patterns out, or he meant to explain them. And here Mark has laid the firmest ground himself. We are not left to guess whether his audience could read his surface and find his meaning, because he shows us an audience trying and failing. After the second feeding — after the pair this study and its predecessor have read as the gospel's most prominent reserved doublet — Jesus turns on the Twelve: "Do you not yet perceive or understand? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?... When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets did you take up?... And the seven for the four thousand?" (8:17–21). The men who had been present at both feedings, who had handled the baskets, cannot read what the feedings mean — and the scene does not leave them to puzzle it out. It supplies the catechesis: the numbers are drawn from them, the pattern is set before them, and their failure to read it is named. Mark stages the exposition of a reserved pattern on his own page, over the very pair whose meaning the previous study reconstructs. That is his testimony, from inside the text, that the feedings carry a sense which must be given and was not found.

Draw the inference. If the disciples who saw the loaves broken could not read the feedings, what of Mark's own hearers, who did not see them but only heard them narrated — and who were, most of them, unlettered, unable to follow the chains of Isaiah and Leviticus on which the meaning hangs? They could no more decode the salt than the Twelve could decode the bread. Mark knew this. He cannot have expected the surface of his text to deliver its message to such an audience, because he has written into the text itself the spectacle of a closer audience failing at exactly this task, and the remedy applied. And if the surface could not deliver the message, the message was delivered another way — supplied, in the reading, by one who knew what the text reserved. The scribes who leveled ἄλα to ἅλας within a century or two are the confirmation from the far side: readers far closer to the language than we are, attending to the

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text with a copyist's care, had already lost what the word held. The surface failed its readers early. That is what a text completed in the telling looks like once the teller is gone.

The prior. One more consideration bears on all three steps, and it is the one most easily overlooked. What this study claims Mark reserved is not an exotic doctrine recovered from a cipher. It is what Paul says openly in letters written in the same decades, to communities that overlapped with Mark's: justification by participation in Christ, the body presented as a living sacrifice, the believer as God's temple and the Spirit dwelling in him, the one-flesh union as the mystery of Christ and his people. It is what the Fourth Gospel will say openly a generation later — the living water that becomes a spring within the believer, named outright as the Spirit (John 7:38–39) — in a scene it stages at Jacob's well. The prior that Mark's community held this theology is therefore high, not low; it is the theology of the mission that produced him. Compare the kind of reading that deserves a low prior: one that finds in a first-century text a doctrine nobody in its world held — a Mark who taught, say, the rights of animals. Such a reading must be carried entirely by the text, because nothing outside the text makes the doctrine available to its author. The reading offered here is in the opposite position. The question it asks is not whether anyone believed what the salt is read to carry, but only whether Mark's text carries it covertly or not at all. And here the second consideration cuts deepest. A gospel is, by the nature of the thing, a proclamation — of salvation, and of the resurrection that secures it. This was Paul's whole burden. Yet Mark, alone of the four, proclaims neither openly. He has no resurrection appearance; his gospel ends with the women fleeing the tomb and saying nothing to anyone. And he has no plain soteriology — no Sermon, no discourse that sets out how a person is saved, and the one clause that comes nearest (10:45) is argued in §11 to belong to the enlargement, where the reserve is relaxed by a degree — a formula is let stand where no exposition is — and not to the base, which has none. It is barely conceivable that a companion of Paul would compose a gospel with no message of salvation in it at all. Far likelier that the message is present and reserved, hidden as the resurrection is hidden, by a writer who withholds on the surface what he means to disclose in the telling. The absence of an open soteriology in Mark is not a hole in the gospel; it is the negative imprint of a soteriology kept back. And the theology the reserved passages yield, when they are read, is exactly the one the prior predicts.

John as the exposition written down. One further witness bears on the prior, and it is the Fourth Gospel. Whatever its relation to Mark — and the case that John knew Mark is now at least respectable[33] — John says on his page what this study argues Mark supplied in the telling. The living water offered at Jacob's well is named outright as the Spirit (7:39). The bridegroom is announced by his friend (3:29), and the

betrothal scene at the well is played with a Samaritan woman — the nations as bride. The temple saying that Mark leaves in the mouths of false witnesses (14:58) John explains to his reader in a gloss: “he was speaking of the temple of his body” (2:21). Light, which Mark personified in a lamp that comes, John puts on Jesus’s lips as a title (8:12), and the ἐγώ εἰμι that proto-Mark withheld altogether John uses as a refrain. More telling than any of these is that John states the principle. His disciples do not understand at the time and understand afterward (2:22; 12:16; 13:7), and Jesus tells them why: “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now; when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (16:12–13). That is the plot constraint of §1.1, spoken by the character it constrains — a Jesus who withholds in the story what is to be supplied after it, by another voice. Mark built a gospel on that principle and left the supplying to his performer. John, writing when the performer’s generation was gone, wrote the supplying in. Nothing in this study depends on the comparison; it is offered because the Fourth Gospel is the one early text that shows, from inside, what a reserved gospel looks like once its exposition has been put on the page.

This is why the reconstruction offered in these pages is not, in the end, an imposition on Mark but a recovery of what he must have provided. He did not write his salt to be puzzled out by the clever; he wrote it to be explained, as the feedings had to be explained, as everything in this gospel that the disciples fail to grasp had to be explained. He stood behind his salt sayings and told his hearers what they meant — and the reading set out above is, as nearly as we can now recover it, the thing he told them. The marvel is not that the meaning was hidden. It is that Mark, writing for those who could not have found it, left in the text — in the marked word, the fourfold name, the lamp that comes, the bread the disciples could not read — every clue his interpreter would have needed to give it back to them.

13. Conclusion

This study set out to read canonical Mark as a reserved text — a gospel that says one thing on its surface and discloses another to those prepared to receive it — and to recover the Pauline soteriology it argues Mark placed there in the reserved meaning of the text. The reading is not offered as proof. It is offered as the most economical account of a gospel full of features that a plain reading leaves unexplained: a personified lamp that comes, and beside it a refused right-and-left and a crucified right-and-left that compose, between them, the one scriptural vision joining a lampstand to two flanking anointed ones — the anointing supplied by the gospel's own word for it, which names the woman's act at Bethany "preparing" the body it anoints; a salt that is good after hellfire; the marked form ἅλα set at the hinge

where the salt proverb turns to address, and nowhere else; a threefold refrain of the name, sealed in 'you are Christ's,' that prepares the hidden 'in whom' the next question withholds; three salt-sayings gathered where Mark gathers nothing else; a rival salt mocked as *foolish* by a pun that must therefore come after the salt it ridicules; and an empty tomb whose stone is named by the one verb whose scriptural home, of a stone, is a betrothal at a well, and whose news is never told.

One thing remains to be said, and it is said last deliberately, because it is a conclusion and not another piece of evidence. The connection of Mark to Ezekiel 16 is, taken alone, a thread: one rare verb, ἁλίζω, whose only two homes in the Greek scriptures are the covenant-of-salt command Mark quotes at 9:49 and Ezekiel's allegory of the Lord's marriage. Standing by itself, that could be set aside. But the findings of this study were not assembled from Ezekiel; they were assembled from Mark, each on its own ground — the salt of the covenant at 9:49–50, the bridegroom of 2:19–20, the marriage that God joins at 10:6–9, the blood of the covenant at 14:24, the stone of betrothal rolled from the tomb at 16:1–8, the young man naked at the breach and then clothed at the renewal — and only then did a rare word among them, followed to its one other scriptural address, arrive at the chapter where that whole inventory was already written as a single story: the unsalted one, the blood in which there is life, the covenant-marriage, the naked breach, the clothed renewal and the covenant raised up again, everlasting, by the Lord's act and not the bride's. If the study's readings are wrong, this is a coincidence with many parts: the accident must arrange not only the verb's two homes but the correspondence of one of them, item by item, to a program reconstructed from the other end. If the readings are right, there is no coincidence to explain: Mark built his gospel's two covenants on the one chapter of his scriptures that holds them together, and left the verb as the address. Ezekiel 16 is not further evidence for the reading offered here. It is what the reading, arrived at from Mark's side alone, turns out to have been describing all along — the parts cohering into a single, deliberate thing, because the thing was already written.

What that thing says is Paul's gospel. The salt at the center is justification by participation: the universal fire of judgment becomes, for those who carry the salt of Christ, the fire of an acceptable sacrifice, and the believer is saved not by works and not by Torah and not by standing in the apostolic circle, but by being in Him. The covenant under the salt, followed to Ezekiel, unfolds as adoption and as marriage — the two figures by which Paul himself names union with God: the believer taken as child and joined as bride. The lamp that comes is the light that is Christ, raised at last upon the lampstand of the cross. The measure is the economy of a disclosure apportioned by faith. The seed grows of itself, by a power not the sower's — grace and not achievement — and it grows because it has already been planted: the Spirit

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given now, at the opened tomb, and the harvest, the Kingdom, still to come. What is sown is what is already delivered; what it grows into is what is still awaited. And the gospel that holds all this withholds, on its surface, the very things a gospel exists to proclaim — an open soteriology, a risen Lord — because it was written to disclose them otherwise, in the reading, to those prepared to receive them. The dull disciples are Mark's own warning that his surface does not give up its sense: if the men who saw the loaves broken could not read the feedings, the unlettered hearer could not read the salt, and Mark knew it. He did not expect to be understood cold. He expected to be explained.

If the reading is right, it carries a consequence for the documentary history the earlier studies built. The synoptic gospels are not three independent deposits of tradition but moves in a single, sustained quarrel over Mark's reserved gospel message. Proto-Mark went out first, carrying the reserved Pauline salt. The sayings source answered it — composed, we have argued, by a bilingual hand of the Jerusalem circle who reached for the one Aramaic word that would do double duty, so that the salt which "becomes foolish" is Mark's salt called moronic, a charge that Mark had misheard what Jesus said. Canonical Mark answered in turn, enlarging the gospel with an explicitly pro-Gentile expansion; Matthew answered again, dismantling the salt, the lamp, and the measure across his Sermon and setting a righteousness of works where Mark had set a mystery of grace. And proto-Luke/Luke, the most irenic, dissolved the quarrel by dissolving its object — keeping the hostile salt but lifting it clear of its target and breaking the Markan sequence apart. Each document answers the last.

A reader will hear Baur in this, and should. The Tübingen school read the New Testament as the record of a Petrine–Pauline conflict and its resolution, with the gospels as party documents and Acts as the peace[34][35]. The scheme collapsed, and for reasons that bear remembering: it fixed its dates to fit the dialectic, it made Matthew the Jewish-Christian original and Mark a late, colorless epitome written to offend neither side, and it read whole documents as manifestos, so that the tendency explained everything and could be tested by nothing. What is offered here is not that scheme revived. It differs in starting point and in grain. The starting point is a documentary order established on grounds that have nothing to do with tendency — a statistical model of vocabulary, then formal criteria of omission and seam — and only afterward is the question asked what the documents, so ordered, were doing to one another. The grain is the word. The controversy is located not in the drift of whole books but in particular, checkable moves: a verb lifted from one verse of Leviticus and a marked accusative from the same verse; a translator's choice of μωρανθῇ where ἅναλον lay to hand; a travel narrative whose wedge falls on one block and carries off both its members stripped; a saying relocated to the head of a Sermon; two

notes dropped into a boat scene that has no room for them. Each can be wrong on its own, and each would be wrong in a way a concordance or a synopsis can show. And the order comes out inverted from Baur's: Mark is first and Pauline, not last and neutral; the irenic hand is Luke's and the glossator's, inside identifiable layers, not a late synthesis closing a dialectic; and the settlement that ends the quarrel is not inferred from the shape of the story but documented, in 1 Peter and 1 Clement, from Rome, within a datable generation (§11.1). What survives of Baur is the thing he saw first and saw rightly — that Galatians 2 records a breach, and that the earliest Christian documents took sides on it. What does not survive is the method of reading tendency off a whole book. The method here reads it off the redaction, one move at a time.

A final word on the standing of all this. These three studies have proceeded from firmer ground to softer, and this one stands on the softest. The statistical model could be measured; the source-critical reconstruction could be disciplined by formal criteria; the present reading rests, in the end, on judgment — on whether the convergence of marked words, rare constructions, singular scriptural templates, and answering responses is better explained by design than by accident. We have argued that it is, and at points the argument can be pressed hard: the lamp's Pauline verb, the singular Zechariah template, the manuscripts that carry ἄλα, the telling word μωρανθῇ are not readings imposed but facts to be accounted for. But the frame that gathers them — that Mark wrote a mystery, and that its content is Paul's gospel — remains a hypothesis, offered to the field to be tested and, where it fails, corrected. What we claim is not that the case is closed but that it is real: that there is something here that asks to be explained, and that the explanation we have given accounts for more of it, more economically, than the alternatives. Mark told his readers that he hid in order to show. We have tried to take him at his word, and to show what he hid.

Notes

An older version of the salt portion of this study has lived on the author's website since about 2002. This is a much improved version of that idea.

Statements and Declarations

Use of Generative AI

Claude (Fable 5) 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[8], p. 394

2 A suggestive contrast: in Paul's use the commandment comes and brings death; here the Coming One comes and brings life.

3 The Hebrew calls the two figures bənê hayyitshār, "sons of oil" — the oil of anointing — so that the angel's attendants are anointed ones standing by the Lord of all the earth. The Septuagint flattens this, rendering the phrase υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος, "sons of fatness," and losing the anointing sense the Hebrew idiom carries. The point for the present reading is that the anointing is available in the Hebrew but not on the Greek surface: a reader of the Greek alone would not recover it. The connection therefore lies where the reserved method locates its disclosures — not in the surface text but with the instructed interpreter who knows the tradition behind it.

4 The gospel of John may echo this self-motion: the wind/spirit (πνεῦμα) "blows where it wills (ὅπου θέλει), and you hear its sound but do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so is everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

5 The seed and the Spirit return a number of times below, in different roles. In §9.1 the seed does source-critical work: the secret seed is argued there to belong to canonical Mark's expansion, the subject of the previous study. In §9.2 the Spirit surfaces again as the strongest candidate for what the defilement saying reserved. And in §10 the seed is read as the Spirit given at the opened tomb.

6 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.

[7] "Every neuter word has the same form in the nominative and the accusative"[36]

[8] BDAG[8], 41, s.v. ἅλας. BDAG's derivation is an account of the form within the neuter paradigm, made without reference to the older masculine noun; it explains how a speaker *could* generate ἅλα by analogy, not that Mark did. The alternative parsing — accusative of ἅλς — requires no analogy at all[37][38][39]. Note that ἅλς is not foreign to the textual tradition of this very passage: the dative ἁλί stands in the witnesses that carry the gloss "and every sacrifice will be salted with salt" at 9:49, imported from Lev 2:13.

[9][40] The distribution across the verse's three salt-nouns is instructive. B, D, and 28 read the regular nominative ἅλας at both preceding occurrences (καλὸν τὸ ἅλας; τὸἅλας ἄναλον γένηται) and ἅλα only at the climactic object; ℵ and Ψ extend ἅλα one occurrence back (ἅλας, ἅλα, ἅλα); L, W, and Δ level it across all three (ἅλα, ἅλα, ἅλα). Since every listed witness carries ἅλα at the climactic word while only some extend it backward, the most economical account is that the form stood originally at the climactic occurrence and was progressively generalized to the preceding nominatives by assimilation — locating the marked form, in the earliest recoverable state of the text, precisely at the point where the saying turns from proverb to address.

[10][40]: Mark, at 9:50. ἅλα is read at the climactic occurrence (the object of ἔχετε) by ℵ, B, A, Ψ, D, L, W, Δ, 1, 28, and 565, and is printed there by Westcott–Hort[41] and the UBS/Metzger[42] text (and NA[43]) against the Byzantine majority and Textus Receptus (ἅλας). Notably, the first hands of both ℵ and B read ἅλα at this word, each subsequently corrected to ἅλας (ℵ*/ℵᶜ, B*/Bᶜ) — the correctors performing in ink the same normalization toward the regular declension that the Byzantine tradition performs in transmission, and so confirming both the originality of ἅλα and its felt anomalousness to later readers.

[11] The analogy is to a small class of neuters whose nominative and accusative end in -α while the stem is in -ατ-: γάλα, "milk," genitive γάλακτος; σῶμα, "body," genitive σώματος. The reasoning runs: τὸἅλας has the stem ἁλατ- (genitive ἅλατος), so a speaker with these paradigms in mind might back-form a nominative/accusative ἅλα. This explains how such a form could arise; it does not explain Mark's distribution of it, for a writer for whom the noun genuinely went on the γάλα model would have written ἅλα in the nominative as well, and Mark writes ἅλας there, twice.

[12] The verb ἁλίζω, "to salt," occurs in the Septuagint only at Lev 2:13 (ἁλισθήσεται) and Ezek 16:4 (ἡλίσθης). [22] The second occurrence is treated in §10 and §6.5: it stands in Ezekiel's allegory of the covenant-marriage of YHWH and Jerusalem — the infant not salted at birth (16:4), taken in marriage by covenant (16:8), the covenant renewed after breach (16:60–62) — so that the verb's two scriptural homes are the

sacrifice-covenant and the marriage-covenant, the two covenants Mark sets side by side in 9:49–50 and 10:1–12. In the New Testament the form ἁλισθήσεται appears only at Mark 9:49 and Matt 5:13; on the source model of this study (§7), Matthew's occurrence derives from the saying that answered Mark's.

[13] The preposition varies — ἐπὶ τῷὀνόματί μου at 9:37 and 9:39, ἐν at 9:38 and (in the idiom ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι) 9:41 — and nothing here rests on the preposition. What recurs, and what a hearer's ear retains, is the pattern: the name of Jesus joined to a person, four times, capped by the belonging-formula of 9:41.

[14] The gloss πᾶσα θυσία ἁλὶἁλισθήσεται (or καὶ πᾶσα θυσία ἁλὶ ἁλισθήσεται) is carried, in varying forms, by the Byzantine tradition and others; its dative ἁλί is Lev 2:13's own. Whether read as an independent second clause or as a marginal cross-reference drawn into the text, its effect is the same: readers close to the language identified the verse behind Mark's verb and wrote it in.

[15] The double valence is the Torah's own. The same accusative ἅλα that Lev 2:13 sets in the covenant phrase, Deut 29:22 sets over the land in Sodom's figure — θεῖον καὶ ἅλα κατακεκαυμένον, "brimstone and salt burned" over the land under judgment — so that salt-with-fire as consecration and salt-with-fire as destruction stand together in the Greek Pentateuch before Mark holds them together in one clause.

[16] One further resonance is recorded without weight placed on it. Hebrew 'ālāh is the oath that seals a covenant — "the covenant and the 'ālāh," Deut 29:13 MT — and at Ezekiel 16:59, in the second Septuagintal home of Mark's salting verb (n. 12; the chapter is treated at §6.5), it stands at the breach: "who despised the 'ālāh in breaking the covenant" (MT; the Greek of the verse has no equivalent for the word, though the same translator renders it as "my oath" at 17:19). That a bilingual ear could hear the one word in the other is hardly in question — Mark's own transliterations show the two languages living in one writer, and the rival's μωρανθῇ shows the milieu punning bilingually on this very saying (§7). What cannot be shown is that the sound did any work: that Mark chose ἅλα for its Hebrew echo in addition to its Septuagintal home. The echo, if echo it is, need not even be Mark's: the covenant-phrase of his Bible already carried the sound, however it came to be there (on sound-led translation in the Septuagint, see [44][45]), and a bilingual reader of the verse inherited it with the citation. Nothing in this study rests on any of this; it is noted only that, for such a writer, the covenant's oath and the covenant's salt shared a sound — and that the sound came to him inside the verse he was citing.

[17] On the standard model, in which the Matt 5:13 / Luke 14:34 form is primitive, ἐν τίνι would reach Mark from the proverb tradition and the priming argument would reduce to placement. But §7 argues the priority runs the other way: the shorter form is a hostile reduction of Mark's, not its source. On that

model Matt 5:13's ἐν τίνι ἁλισθήσεται is itself a splice of Mark's two clauses, the phrase of 9:50 joined to the verb of 9:49, which is what one expects if Mark's fuller sequence came first.

Separately, "in whom will it be seasoned" translates the verb; "covenant renewed" interprets the metaphor. ἀρτύω means to season, not to renew: the disclosed rendering keeps the verb — in whom will the salt be made salty again — and the renewal of the covenant is what re-seasoned salt is, on the Levitical sense of saltness established above, not what ἀρτύσετε says.

[18] See n. 12 (§6.2). The Hebrew of Ezek 16:4 uses a different root for salting (המלח) than the noun of Lev 2:13's covenant phrase; the collocation ἁλὶ + ἁλίζω that binds the two verses is a fact of the Greek Bible specifically — which is where this study has argued Mark's salt lives.

[19] The declaration of 16:6 carries a legal charge the English hides. "In your blood, live" reflects an adoption formula for foundlings attested in Mesopotamian law[46][47]: the newborn abandoned unwashed and unsalted is in the recognized state of exposure — the unperformed acts of 16:4, salting among them, are what a claiming parent performs, so the unsalted child is the unclaimed child — and the passer-by who declares "live" over her thereby takes her as his own, the blood naming the state in which the declaration finds her. Ezekiel's opening movement is thus an adoption before it is a betrothal: the Lord takes the unclaimed foundling first as daughter (16:6–7), then, grown, as bride by covenant (16:8) — which is also why one figure both finds and marries her. The chapter thereby holds, in sequence, the two figures by which the Pauline mission would speak of union with God — adoption (υἱοθεσία, Rom 8:15–17; Gal 4:4–7) and marriage (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31–32) — both conferred on one who had no claim to either.

[20] The parallel is verbal, not cited: ἐγένου μοι is a genitive-of-belonging construction only in sense (dative of possession in form). What it shares with Χριστοῦἐστε (9:41) and with Paul's Χριστοῦ-formulas (1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29) is the covenant-logic: the covenant's effect is stated as belonging to a person.

[21] Whether Ephesians is by Paul or by his school does not affect the point, which is milieu rather than authorship: within the Pauline mission's literature, the one-flesh text of Gen 2:24 was read as the mystery of Christ and his people. The undisputed letters carry the same reading in 1 Cor 6:16–17 and the betrothal of 2 Cor 11:2.

[22] Luke 16:18 is attested for Marcion's Evangelion[24], which on the model of the previous studies places the short form in the proto-Lukan layer and so before canonical Luke's use of Matthew — the same

layering argued for the salt of 14:34–35. Attestation in the Evangelion is stronger evidence than absence there, since Marcion worked by omission.

[23] Or at least three of its sayings must date to this period, since they answer proto-Mark — the sayings on salt, light, and divorce. The rest of the sayings source can be older."

[24] A fourth aside may belong with these, of the readmitting rather than the narrowing kind. At 9:28–29, alone in a house, the disciples ask why they could not cast out the spirit, and are told that "this kind" comes out only by prayer — an answer that locates the failure in the demon rather than in them. Luke, who compresses the whole pericope, has no such scene. Matthew has the private question (17:19) but not the answer: he supplies his own, "because of your little faith," the verdict he regularly substitutes for Mark's harsher ones (cf. Matt 16:8–12 with Mark 8:17–21). Luke's compression makes the attestation weak, and the case is offered as congruent rather than established.

[25] See Bazzana[48] on Jesus understood as host to a possessing spirit, and as himself becoming one; and Wahlen[49] on the holy/unclean antithesis built into the vocabulary. These bear on the baptism, the temptation, the Beelzebul controversy, the unclean spirits, and the spirit's departure at the death. For possible Old Testament templates see Zechariah 12:10 and 13:2, Isaiah 63:10–11, and 1 Samuel 16:14, 23.

[26] See §11 below for how the polemical tone may have evolved.

[27] The argument is anchored at 16:3, where ἀποκυλίω is read without variation. At 16:4 the tradition divides: the first hands of ℵ and B (with L) read ἀνακεκύλισται, "rolled back/up," printed by[41], against ἀποκεκύλισται in the mass of witnesses. Nothing here rests on 16:4: the women's question at 16:3 carries the compound undisputed, in the very slot Genesis gives it (the question of the rolling, 29:8), and the reception confirms which verb the tradition heard — Matthew writes ἀπεκύλισεν of the angel (28:2) and Luke ἀποκεκυλισμένον of the stone as found (24:2). If ἀνακεκύλισται is original at 16:4, Mark's report varies the compound his question introduced; the scriptural signature stands at 16:3 either way.

[28] The wider κυλίω family occurs elsewhere in the Septuagint[22]; the away-rolling compound does not.

[29] That the empty-tomb writers after Mark all reach for the same compound (Matt 28:2; Luke 24:2) marks it as his own, and shows how the tradition heard him. Hanhart[10] noted the link to Genesis 29, though to other ends than are drawn here.

[30] The seed-as-life metaphor is common; explicit identification of the seed with the Spirit is not, though it lies near at hand. 1 John speaks of God's σπέρμα abiding in the one born of God (3:9), 1 Peter of rebirth "of

imperishable seed" (1:23); and in the Stoic physics that gave the period its vocabulary for πνεῦμα, pneuma is itself the generative principle, the λόγος σπερματικός — a background now argued to stand behind Paul's own usage[50] (cf. [51]). The Fourth Gospel makes the comparison plainer than Mark does, and sets it where Mark's tomb points: at Jacob's well, the well of the betrothal, Jesus offers "living water" that becomes in the one who drinks it "a spring welling up to eternal life" (4:10, 14), and the evangelist later says what the water is — "this he said about the Spirit" (7:38–39). Luke, likewise, has the Holy Spirit "come upon" Mary and effect her conception (1:35). Mark does none of this. He gives no living water and no nativity, and his own signal that he intends an analogy rather than an equation is the parable's frame, which asks what "the kingdom of God is like" (4:26, 30).

[31] One resonance in Ezekiel's wording is recorded here without weight placed on it: the covenant is renewed with the verb ἀνίστημι, "I will raise up" (ἀναστήσω σοι διαθήκην αἰώνιον, 16:60; ἀναστήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου, 16:62), the verb of Mark's own passion predictions (ἀναστῆναι, 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). ἀνίστημι is common vocabulary and the coincidence proves nothing alone; within a convergence already established on ἁλίζω and the stone, the fact that Ezekiel 16 renews the marriage-covenant with Mark's own resurrection verb is worth noting.

[32] A parallel case may be made for the covenant declaration at 14:24, though it is offered as speculation and nothing here depends on it. On this suggestion proto-Mark carried the covenant only in reserve, in the salt, and the open declaration over the cup belongs with the expansion — the same movement from encoded to stated that the ἐγώ εἰμι shows. The supper tradition is textually unstable at just this point. Luke gives first a cup with the vow, "I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (22:17–18), and then, after the bread, a second cup with the full formula (22:20); the doubling has the look of a seam. And Codex Bezae, with several Old Latin witnesses, omits 22:19b–20 altogether, so that its supper has the cup and the vow, then the bread, and no covenant declaration at all — which is the shape proposed here for proto-Mark. Three cautions. Luke's covenant formula is not Mark's: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" is Paul's wording at 1 Corinthians 11:25, not the Markan "my blood of the covenant," so the two are independent forms and Luke's is no witness to what stood in proto-Mark. The Pauline form is attested in Marcion, which places it in the proto-Lukan line and tells against Bezae's shorter text. And the modern critical editions print the longer text, treating the omission as secondary, though Westcott and Hort judged otherwise and classed it among the Western non-interpolations. The witnesses thus disagree, and the suggestion rests mostly on the analogy with ἐγώ εἰμι and on the seam

visible in Luke even in the texts that carry both cups, rather than on the textual evidence, which points both ways. It is held loosely.

[33] The three are separated from the base by Luke — the service saying without the ransom at 22:27, the night trial absent from his line[29], and the supper evidence in the preceding note — and from the third hand by their content, which is Pauline where that hand's is practical. Matthew's attestation cannot help, since his copy carried both layers; where his wording differs, as at 14:62 (σὺ εἶπας for Mark's ἐγώ εἰμι), the contamination model of the supplement accounts for it[29]. The confession is assigned to the enlargement on that argument and graded accordingly, below the other two.

[34] The rebuke that follows, "Get behind me, Satan" (8:32–33), is assigned above to proto-Mark. It should be noted that Luke lacks it (9:18–22 passes from the passion prediction to 8:34), so that by the previous study's first two criteria it is a candidate for the enlargement, though it is only a fragment of text and no clear seam marks it and that study did not assign it. If it is the enlargement's, the gradient drawn below is sharper still: the base's Peter confesses and is silenced; the enlargement's Peter is called Satan.

[35] While this is a thin thread to pull, we might speculate the pillars made the first exclusionary move by saying Mark's salt should be "thrown out" as unfit for even the dung heap.

[36] The third hand is a significantly less secure claim than the expansion, which is the topic of the entire second study in this series.

[37] A full reconstruction of the proposed proto-Mark — drawing on this study together with its companion pieces — is available at https://www.davegentile.com/synoptics/protomark.html. It is offered as illustration rather than as part of a 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 these studies establish.

[38] Nothing in this prevents the sayings tradition from having begun with a follower of Jesus named Matthew, and if it did, a symmetry appears. Each proto-document in the model was absorbed by a canonical successor and survives only through it — proto-Mark through the expanded and canonical Mark, proto-Luke through canonical Luke, though proto-Luke, we have argued, is also partly preserved in the Evangelion. If the sayings collection was remembered as Matthew's, the Gospel of Matthew is its successor in the same way, and part of the reason it did not survive on its own — the name followed the lineage. For the record, the only two documents these studies positively assign to one author are proto-Mark and the expanded Mark. We do not claim the Gospel of Matthew for a disciple, only that it may

stand at the end of a chain that began with one; and whether proto-Luke and canonical Luke share an author we leave undecided (§8.2).

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