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A PRAYER FRAMEWORK IN MARK 11

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Introduction

Mark, the shortest of the four gospels, has the shortest instruction on prayer. It has only four verses (11.22-25) on the subject and yet this unit presents difficulties for understanding. The reasons for this difficulty can be easily identified. First, the context in which it occurs is problematical. Second, there is no apparent coherence within the unit. For this reason modern form criticism sometimes maintains that this prayer unit belongs to a different pericope, and that within the unit there may be more than one tradition. However, our purpose here is not to seek the tradition and formation of this unit, but rather to see the place and function of this pericope in the light of redaction criticism. In other words, our purpose is to examine the way in which Mark has structured his materials in order to discover how the teaching on prayer functions in its specific context and in the overall structure of his gospel.

A. *The Jerusalem Temple.*

Mark 11-13 constitutes a literary unit which is constructed around the theme of the Jerusalem Temple. The literary marker of this whole section is not in the form of words or phrases, but rather in the pattern of literary structure. At the beginning of the section Jesus leaves the Mount of Olives and enters Jerusalem and the Temple (11.1-11); at the end of the section Jesus leaves the Temple (13.1), predicts its destruction (13.2), returns to the Mount of Olives (13.3). Seated "opposite the Temple" (13.3) he delivers a series of apocalyptic warnings known as "the little apocalpyse" (chapter 13). The materials within these bracketing references contain significant elements both in terms of Jesus' behaviour, such as his cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the Temple (11.11-25), and his teaching, in the parable of the evil tenants (12.1-11), and in the questions about his authority (11.27-33), on taxes (12.13-17), on divorce and resurrection (12.18-27), on the greatest commandment (12.28-34), on whether Jesus is David's son or his Lord (12.35-37), and the story of the widow's two copper coins (12.41-44). All these activities evidently took place in the Temple (11.15,27; 12.35). Only the cursing of the fig tree occurred while on his way to the Temple (11.20-25). This underscores the fact that in our understanding of this chapter, we have to bear in mind the context of the whole theme, namely the Temple. We have to remind ourselves that Mark mentions the "Temple" seven times in this unit alone, out of nine in his whole gospel. These are the "Temple" chapters.

B. *Marcan Intercalation.*

It has been noted, we believe rightly, that Mark has a distinct literacy technique known as intercalation. The best example of this technique is in Mark 5.21-43, where the story of "a woman who had a flow of blood" (vv 25-34) is inserted in the middle of the healing of Jairus' daughter.

Before we look into the possible meaning of this technique it is well to analyze the structure of chapter 11. Within the chapter itself, the material is arranged as follows:

(1) 11.1-10	Triumphal entry
(2) 11.11a	Visit to the Temple
(3) 11.11b	Return to Bethany
(4) 11.12-14	Cursing the fig tree
(5) 11.15a	Entry into Jerusalem
(6) 11.15b-18	Cleansing the Temple
(7) 11.19	Return to Bethany
(8) 11.20-21	Observation that the fig tree has withered
(9) 11.22-25	Teaching on prayer
(10) 11.27a	Entry into Jerusalem
(11) 11.27b-33	Reaction to the cleansing of the Temple — questioning of Jesus' authority to do "these things".

From this arrangement we can see that Mark structured his materials in parallels: not only that there is a parallel in where Jesus went — (5) and (10) *Entering into Jerusalem,* and (3) and (7) *Returning to Bethany,* there is also a pattern in his actions — there is the *Cursing of the fig tree* (4) and the *Observation that the fig tree has withered* (8) paralleled with the *Cleansing of the Temple* (6) and the *Reaction to the Temple cleansing* (11). However these parallels are not structured in a consecutive fashion: they are intercalated; and primarily there are two intercalations, or double intercalations. The first intercalation is centered on the *Cleansing of the Temple.* This episode is sandwiched between the cursing of the fig tree and the observation that it has withered; that is, (6) is intercalated between (4) and (8). The second intercalation, which the NT scholars have often neglected, is centered on the prayer section. This pericope is sandwiched between the Temple cleansing (6) and the reaction to this act (11). Here it is presupposed that "you doing these things" in 11.28, and "I do these things" of 11.33, refer to the same thing, i.e., Jesus' actions during the incident of the cleansing of the Temple. This means that the Temple cleansing and people's reaction to it are closely related, as integral parts of the one story — which is natural and understandable. It is in this one story that the prayer section is intercalated. The question is — why?

C. *Interpreting Marcan Intercalation.*

It has been recognized by NT scholars that the Fig tree — Temple cleansing — Prayer section is a difficult complex unit in Mark's gospel. Professor Nineham thinks that "This story is one of the most difficult in the Gospels".[1] Thus some interpreters have tended to interpret these incidents and teachings individually, each in isolation.[2] Treated in this way, the sharp edges of the incidents remain as sharp as ever. For example, Professor Moule noted the dilemma by saying that:

[1] D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark,* The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Harmondsworth, England and Baltimore: Penguin Books 1963), 298.

[2] Philip Carrington, *According to Mark* (Cambridge University Press 1965), 90.

> on any showing it is very odd that Jesus should be described as blasting a tree, and that the narrator should go out of his way to 'excuse' the tree on the ground that figs were not in season.[3]

Still more difficult is the use of this destructive miracle as an example of splendid faith.[4] However, our purpose in his study is not primarily to blunt these sharp edges[5], but rather to understand what Mark (or the final redector) is trying to achieve in presenting these intercalations in the way he did.

In the past, it was generally believed that the Marcan intercalation technique was a literary device which Mark used in order to increase the suspense or the narrative, or to create the illusion of passing time.[6] However, it is now believed that stories thus sandwiched together stand in a relationship of mutual interpretation.[7] This seems now to be the crucial principle that lies behind the Marcan intercalation. NT scholars usually interpreted the Temple cleansing in terms of the cursing of the fig tree. In other words, what is intercalated (the center of intercalation) is understood in terms of its framework. This appears to be the hermeneutical rule in Mark. Linguistically also it appears to be the case that meaning (semantics) resides in relationships. The resultant meaning, then, is that in framing the Temple cleansing incident by the destruction of the unfruitful tree Mark indicates to the readers that the Temple (or Judaism for which it stands) is destined for the same fate as the tree. This is in line with the earliest commentator on Mark's gospel, Victor of Antioch, who asserted that Jesus "used the fig tree to set forth the judgment that was about to fall on Jerusalem".[8] Recently Donahue has shown that Mark does not portray Jesus as merely cleansing the Temple: rather, Mark has told the story in such a way that the "function" of the Temple is effectively eliminated by Jesus' actions.[9] Thus the focus is on the Temple and its fateful function. Jesus' strong words "you have made *it* a den of robbers" (11.17) indicates this tendency.

What is not adequately treated, if not totally ignored, is the second intercalation which occurs between verses 15 and 33. Introduced by Peter's reaction to the withering of the fig tree, it is sandwiched between the Temple cleansing and the Jewish leaders' reaction to it. If the interpretation of the first intercalation is correct, then we will have to understand the prayer section, which is the center of the second intercalation, in terms of the Temple cleansing which serves as its framework. It is to be noted here that what was the center of the intercalation in the first now becomes the framework in the second intercalation. This means that not only is the withering of the fig tree understood to mean the destruction of

[3] C. F. D. Moule, *The Gospel According to Mark (Cambridge University Press 1965)*, 90.

[4] Moule, ibid., 91.

[5] Moule, loc. cit.

[6] John R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Scholars Press 1973), 42.

[7] William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and The Withered Tree* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press 1980), 48.

[8] Quoted by C. E. B. Cranfield *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1959), 356. Victor of Antioch was a 5th century presbyter who wrote a Greek commentary on Mark.

[9] William R. Telford, *op. cit.*, 161-163, 193-5, 206, 238.

the Temple, but also the prayer pericope will have to be interpreted in terms of the destruction of the Temple.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the relationships of the two intercalations are not similar. In the first the relationship is in the form of a *negative-negative* relationship, i.e., the destruction of the fig tree *parallels* the destruction of the Temple. However in the second intercalation their relation is in the form of a *negative-positive* relationship, i.e., the destruction of the Temple *versus* the promise to be able to move a mountain by means of prayer. The latter relationship should be viewed in the clause "in spite of", that is, in spite of the destruction of the Temple.

The next question is: what has the destruction of the Temple to do with prayers? Is there a relationship between the two at all? Our thesis is that there is.

D. *The Efficacy of Prayer.*

NT scholars have demonstrated that there is a traditional symbolic connection between the fig tree, the Temple and the eschatological expectations of the Jews and Christians alike in the OT, the rabbinic literature and the NT. However, the conflict of interpretations of Mark 11 has not been solved. Some have focussed on the prayer section and regarded it as a simple teaching on *dunamis* and promises of similar power to those who have faith! Others connected it with the destruction of the Temple, without leaving any part for the prayer pericope to play. Our thesis is that it is precisely the theme of the destruction of the Temple that makes the prayer section relevant in its present context. Because a well-established tradition connected the efficacy of prayer with the Temple, Mark intends to show that even if the Temple is destroyed, prayer is still efficacious in the new Christian community which is, so to speak, the new eschatological "Temple".

In the OT, particularly in post-exilic Judaism, the Temple was regarded as the place where prayer was especially efficacious. When Mark indicated that Jesus pronounced the destruction of the Temple, it was necessary for him to point out also that prayer is nevertheless possible and effective. The following evidence supports this thesis.

(1) The OT has numerous instances indicating that the Temple was the place where prayer was particularly effective. Hannah prayed in the Temple and her prayer was answered (1 Sam. 1.1-28). King Hezekiah prayed in the Temple and the army of Sennacherib was dispersed (2 Kgs 19.14-37). Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish, and even his prayer was said to come "into thy holy temple" (Jon 2.7). The Deuteronomistic historian linked the efficacy of prayer with the Temple even at the time of the dedication of the Temple, as seen in the prayer of King Solomon:

> And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray towards this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive (1 Kgs 8.30, RSV).

Solomon goes on to list seven situations in which prayer is offered: in individual disputes involving a curse (31-32); defeat of the nation by an enemy (33-34); drought (35-36); famine, pestilence and siege (37-40); prayer by a non-Israelite

(41-43); defeat in battle (44-45); and exile (46-51). In each case, prayer is to be offered "in" or "toward" the Temple.

The importance of the Temple for the efficacy of prayer did not cease when the first Temple was destroyed. Ezekiel recognized that distance from Zion did not necessarily mean absence from Yahweh, but the language he used to express the presence of Yahweh was still Temple language. As Samuel Terrien observed, the Temple is still the locus of prayer, even if it is only a metaphorical Temple.[10]

(2) In the literature from the second Temple period the same emphases appear.[11] In Jdt 4.9-15, the people prostrate themselves in front of the sanctuary when they pray for protection from Holophernes,[12] the Assyrian commander-in-chief; he is accordingly killed. In 3 Maccabees, the priests and the people rush to the Temple to pray in the face of the threat to the Holy of Holies by Ptolemy Philopator (3 Macc 1.20-24). The high priest prays, "thou didst promise that if . . . we should come to this place and make our supplication thou wouldst hear our prayer"; the enemy is struck down (2.1-22). In 2 Maccabees 3.15-40, the priests prostrate themselves in prayer before the altar as Heliodorus prepares to sack the Temple treasury; Heliodorus is flattened by a divine apparition, and subsequently converted.

Given this background, it is not hard to see why the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 would cause concern and perplexity among Jews and Christians alike. Some Rabbis seriously questioned whether prayer was possible any longer.

> R. Eleazer said: From the day the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer were locked; as it is said, "Yea, when I cry and call for help, he shutteth out my prayer" (Lam 3.8) . . . R. Eleazer also said: From the day the Temple was destroyed, a wall of iron divides between Israel and their Father in heaven; as it is said: "And take thou unto thee an iron griddle and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city," (Ezek 4.3).[13]

The theological basis for this anxiety was the idea that the Shekhina[14] had departed from Israel when the Temple was destroyed. Both Jews and Christians wrestled with this problem, offering various solutions. One is that prayer can be offered on the side of the Temple (thus the Western Wall). Another is that the Shekhina still dwells among the people in the synagogues and the houses of study.

E. *The Marcan Solution.*

Mark, too, as an evangelist felt acutely the effect of the destruction of the Temple; there is for him a theological problem of prayer. Unlike the Jewish solution which emphasized the site of the Temple, the synagogue and the houses

[10] Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (New York, London: Harper & Row 1978), 209.

[11] Norman B. Johnson, *Prayer in Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature 1948), 45.

[12] Holophernes was the general of Nebuchadnezzar's Assyrian army, killed by Judith to save her people.

[13] Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1977), 19-21.

[14] The word *Shekhina* is not found in the Bible. The Rabbis in post-biblical times used it to describe the presence of the Lord in the world, a presence which had been absent from the Second Temple; a linguistic echo of the desert memories when Yehweh "sojourned" *(shaken)* in a nomadic *tent.* See J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London 1912).

of study, Mark directed his attention to the believing community. This praying community for Mark is "another" Temple, so to speak, "not made with hands" (Mark 14.58).

In Mark's Gospel there are two foci of the presence of God: Jesus and the Temple. Both are destroyed at the same time (15.33-39). The community (Mark's church) established by the risen Lord needs to know on what basis they can expect their prayers to be heard and answered while they wait for his return. With Peter the community exclaims, "Master, look! The fig tree has withered! The Temple is condemned to destruction". Mark responds, through the figure of Jesus, "Have faith in God". Mark 11.22-25 is the evangelist's answer to the question, "If the efficacy of prayer does not depend on the Temple, on what then does it depend?"[15]

Conclusion.

The framework on prayer in Mark 11 is fundamentally determined by the motif of the destruction of the Temple and by Mark's theological transitional evaluation of the problem of the efficacy of prayer. Mark is saying in effect that the effectiveness of prayer does not depend on the Temple but on faith in the God for whom all things are possible and to whom the praying community offers petitions according to his will; and that in the praying community forgiveness for one another should be operative.

Therefore in the translation of Mark 11.22-25 (perhaps better 11.20-25), the subtitle of this section should be "Faith and Prayer" or "The Effectiveness of Prayer" instead of "The Lesson of the Fig-Tree".

[15] Abraham Kon, *Prayer* (London: Soncino Press 1971), 100.

KENNETH NEWPORT

SEMITIC INFLUENCE ON THE USE OF SOME PREPOSITIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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Introduction.

It has long been recognized that the Greek of the book of Revelation has its own peculiar flavour and diverges frequently from the norms of Classical grammar and syntax. As far back as the third century, Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, put the problem succinctly when he wrote: "I observe that his (John's) language and style are not really Greek".[1] The present study seeks to explain the reasons for some of these divergencies with respect to the use of prepositions.

1. *Apo prosōpou*

The phrase *apo prosōpou* appears seven times in the NT; 2 Thes 1.9 (which is probably a quotation of Isa. 2.10, 21, LXX), Acts 3.20, 5.41, 7.45, where it clearly means "From the presence of", and Rev 6.16, 12.14, 20.11. In Rev 6.16,

[1] Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1965), 313.