

Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark: Fulfillment of God's Promise

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Abstract: In Genesis 3:15, God cursed the serpent and promised that the “woman’s offspring” would crush its head. While a long-standing exegetical debate centers on whether this “offspring” is singular or plural, this study attempts to see beyond that binary choice to offer an alternative perspective. It posits that the promise is uniquely fulfilled within the Gospel tradition, specifically in the Gospel of Mark, and that the process of its fulfillment creatively accommodates both a singular and a collective understanding of the “offspring.” This study argues that through Jesus’ ministry of exorcism, God’s promise to crush the serpent’s head is realized, and Jesus’ authority over impure spirits is clearly demonstrated. Moreover, Jesus delegates this authority to His disciples, and through this divine power, the apostles can cast out demons. In the second Gospel, God’s promise is fulfilled both through one and through many. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Jesus’ ministry of exorcism relates to God’s promise in Genesis 3:15.

To achieve this goal, the study will primarily employ synchronic methods as passages where exorcisms appear will be syntactically examined and their patterns compared. Particular attention will be given to the four exorcism episodes (Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; and 9:14-29) to uncover the pattern of interactions between Jesus and impure spirits, how Jesus performs exorcisms, and the effects of these exorcisms on the malevolent spirits, the possessed individuals, and those around them. Relevant Second Temple Jewish literature may also be used to shed light on the issue of exorcism during this period. Additionally, how these writings understood God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 will be briefly examined and

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compared to Jesus' exorcisms. Lastly, some episodes of exorcism involving the disciples (Mark 3:13-16; 9:14-29) will be briefly explored, and their roles will be clarified.

Keywords: gospel of mark, exorcism, protoevangelium, impure spirits, discipleship, apocalyptic literature, demonology

Introduction

We hope in God's promises because we trust in His faithfulness to fulfill them. This faith is rooted in the fact that He has already kept His promises throughout history. The Scripture stands as the written testament of God's fidelity to His promises. One of the earliest promises God uttered is right after the fall of humanity. In Gen 3:15, God declares to the serpent,

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.¹

Christians, beginning with St. Irenaeus of Lyon (135-202 AD) recognized that this promise was fulfilled in Christ. Irenaeus also referred to God's promise in Genesis as the *πρωτοεναγγέλιον* – *the first Gospel*.² The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms St. Irenaeus' insight, acknowledging God's mysterious promise in Gen 3:15 as God's mysterious pledge of ultimate victory over evil, fulfilled in Christ.³

The definitive fulfillment of this promise arrives through Christ's passion and resurrection, as St. Paul declares, *Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting* (1 Co 15:54-55)? and in another passages, he writes, *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it* (Col 2:15). However, we argue that "crushing of the serpent's head" is not limited to the cross. It is also expressed within his public ministry, particularly his ministry of exorcism, where Jesus directly confronts the "seeds of the serpent."⁴ While all the Synoptic Gospels record these confrontations,

¹ NRSV-CE

² *Adversus Haereses*, 3.23.7 and 4.21.1.

³ CCC 410-412.

⁴ The connection between exorcism and the unfolding mystery of redemption during Christ's public ministry is not totally new concept. For example, CCC affirms that the arrival of God's kingdom signifies the overthrow of Satan's dominion, with Jesus' exorcisms serving as a foretaste of his ultimate triumph over the evil one. It further clarifies that the Church's authority to perform exorcisms flows directly from Christ through the apostles, continuing this spiritual battle against evil (CCC 517,

Mark's Gospel places unique emphasis on exorcism as a battleground of divine triumph.

With this background information, this study attempts to examine various Markan exorcism narratives to find their probable textual and theological patterns, revealing how the promise of Genesis 3:15 unfolds in Jesus' ministry. The findings aim to deepen our understanding of Christ's victory over evil, from his first confrontations with demons to his final conquest of Satan's head.

Proto Evangelium: The Serpent, its offspring and exorcism

Allow us to quote the Hebrew text of Gen 3:15,

ואיבה אשית בינך ובין האשה ובין זרעך ובין זרעה הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב:

The prophetic nature of this verse is expressed through the use of the *yiqtol* form in all its verbs: יִשׁוּפֶךָ (*yšwṗk*), אֲשִׁית (*ʾšt*), תִּשְׁוּפְנוּ (*tšwṗnw*). Since this is a divine utterance, the *yiqtol* form is best understood as a deontic modality, expressing the certainty of future event, rather than mere description of what will happen. This utterance can thus be recognized as a divine promise that will undoubtedly be fulfilled. The question, then, is: How will God bring this promise to fulfillment?

The passage presents several text-critical problems, leading to interpretative divergence regarding how this divine promise will be realized. The first difficulty lies in determining whether “seed (זרע, *zrʿ*)” refers to a single individual (a Messianic figure) or a collective term (a nation or people). The debate arises from the grammatical fact that pronoun הוּא (*hwʾ*) that refers back to the seed, can either be translated as masculine singular pronoun or a neuter singular pronoun as in English “it” and thus representing a collective noun rather than singular entity. C. Westermann insists that the seed has to be understood collectively since it primarily refers to the line of descent of the woman, rather than single individual. He also argues that the protoevangelium interpretation is not found in NT,⁵ but started with the fathers of

550). However, while the Catechism emphasizes the eschatological victory foreshadowed in Jesus' exorcisms, it does not explicitly link them to the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15.

⁵ Although the term protoevangelium is not explicitly found in NT, we find C. Westermann's position difficult to sustain, as allusions to Genesis 3 and the theme of ultimate victory over the serpent are pervasive. This is developed most fully in the Pauline writings. Paul constructs a significant typology from Genesis 3, contrasting Jesus as the New Adam with the first Adam (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45). In Rom 16:20, he strongly echoes the protoevangelium with the promise that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” The allusion is further supported by the phrase “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4), which positions Jesus as the ultimate “seed of the woman” destined to confront the serpent. This identity of Satan as the “ancient serpent” is confirmed in Revelation (12:9; 20:2), and the motif of his primordial deceit is echoed in Jesus' description of the devil as “the father of lies” (Jn 8:44).

the Church at the second half of the second century.⁶ Westermann represents the collective interpretation of the seed, which is pretty common among the 20th century scholarship.⁷

Meanwhile, the Messianic interpretation is not without its supporters, especially coming from the Catholic circle.⁸ Interestingly, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translates the Hebrew pronoun “הוא” in Gen 3:15 with the singular masculine “αὐτός,” a subtle but significant choice that aligns with later Messianic interpretations of the text, yet this has not settled the debate.

The second difficulty arises from the interpretation of the Hebrew verb “שׁוּף” (šwp). The Vulgate translates the first שׁוּף with “conteret” (he will crush) and the second שׁוּף as “insidiaberis” (you will strike). By making this distinction, the Vulgate suggests a definitive victory by the Messiah over the serpent’s offspring (a crushing blow) while sustaining only a curable wound (a mere strike). However, the two occurrences of שׁוּף may carry the same exact meaning, implying an on-going struggle where both parties are equally matched. Additionally, one might consider the direct object of שׁוּף to infer the severity of the conflict. One has “head” and another has the “heel.” Striking the head is far more consequential than striking the heel.⁹

The Christian-Catholic reading readily adopts a Messianic interpretation of Gen 3:5, pointing to Jesus as the seed of the woman who victoriously crushes the serpent’s head, despite enduring the wounds of the cross. However, other traditions and scholars interpret this passage differently. Those who do not accept the New Testament as their inspired Scripture see no reason to regard Jesus as its fulfillment. While others, even among Christians, do not find Irenaeus’ protoevangelium paradigm entirely convincing.

This study does not aim to be an apologetic defense of the Christological-Messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15. Instead it explores how the tension between singular and collective meanings of “seed” unexpectedly finds its unique fulfillment in the Gospel according to Mark. This exploration is based on the understanding that the serpent and its seed are not a human adversary, but spiritual forces opposed to God, seeking nothing less than the destruction of humanity (Wis 2:24; Rev

⁶ Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary. Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 260-261.

⁷ Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 24.

⁸ James Gavigan, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds., *The Pentateuch. The Navarre Bible* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 54.

⁹ The editors of Navarre Bible are convinced that despite the similar word (šûp) being used, the meaning of each occurrence is nuanced. Since the first šûp is done by the Messianic figure, it has stronger and more definitive effect compared to the šûp done by the serpent’s seed.

12:9; 20:2). Thus, the enmity between the woman’s seed and the serpent does not primarily entail physical confrontation, but rather spiritual warfare. The Synoptic Gospels make it clear that this spiritual conflict had already begun even before the Passion narrative through Jesus’ ministry of exorcism.

Though the technical word exorcism¹⁰ itself does not appear in the gospels, the reality of expelling demons from possessed individuals is one of the major highlights in Jesus’ ministry. H. C. Kee examines the word “ἐπιτιμάω (epitimáō)” in Mk 1:25 (also Mk 9:25), comparing it to the Hebrew root גַּעַר (g‘r) in OT and other Jewish apocalyptic literature. He argues that the term is best translated not as “to rebuke,” but as “to subdue” or “to command authoritatively.” Kee concludes that in Mark, ἐπιτιμάω becomes “a technical term for the commanding word, uttered by God or by his spokesman, by which evil powers are brought into submission, and the way is thereby prepared for the establishment of God’s righteous rule in the world.”¹¹

The importance of exorcism in Jesus’ Synoptic ministry is evident in the summary statements such as, *And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him* (Mk 1:34; Par: Mat 8:16-17; Luk 4:40-41).¹² Jesus’ interlocutors were also convinced that Jesus was an powerful exorcist, yet they disputed the source of his authority, attributing it to Beelzebul (Mk 3:22-30; Mt 9:34; Mt 12:24-30; Lk 11:15-23). The Gospels further contain several detailed exorcism narratives, including:

Jesus tested in the desert by the devil	Mk 1:12-13	Mt 4:1-11	Lk 4:1-13
Impure Spirit (demon) in the synagogue at Capernaum	Mk 1:23-28	x	Lk 4:33-37
Jesus casting out a demon that made a man mute	x	Mt 9:32-33 Mt 12:22-23	Lk 11:14
Gerasene/Gadarene demoniac possessed by “Legion”	Mk 5:1-20	Mt 8:28-34	Lk 8:26-39

¹⁰ The word to exorcise is derived from the Greek verb ἐξ-ορκίζειν, meaning “to bind by oath” or “to adjure” (to command someone or something authoritatively). Interestingly, the verb ορκίζειν is used by the evil spirits themselves to command Jesus in Mk 5:7.

¹¹ S. Grindheim, commenting on H.C. Kee, takes a slightly different take. He argues that the use of ἐπιτιμάω pictures Jesus’ as “the divine warrior” who brings God’s subjection of his cosmic enemies. See Sigmund Grindheim, “Exorcism, Forgiveness, and Christological Implications,” in *Healing and Exorcism in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. Mikael Tellbe and Tommy Wasserman, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 61-64.

¹² Similar conclusion is also found in Mk 1:39.

Syrophoenician woman's daughter	Mk 7:24-30	Mt 15:21-28	x
Boy with a violent spirit	Mk 9:14-29	Mt 17:14-21	Lk 9:37-43a

Exorcism in the Gospel of Mark

Why Mark? While exorcism marks an important aspect of Jesus’ public ministry in all three Synoptic Gospels, Mark places a distinctive emphasis on Jesus’ exorcisms compared to the two other evangelists. This emphasis manifests in at least three key features of Markan exorcism narratives. First, Mark provides more detailed accounts. Though Mark is the shortest Gospel, it compensates with more elaborate and refined narratives, including the stories of exorcism. For example, the story of the man possessed by “Legion.” Mark sparingly writes the story in 20 verses (Mk 5:1-20), while Matthew gives 7 verses (Mt 8:28-34) and Luke offers 14 verses (Lk 8:26-39).¹³ Similarly, the account of the boy with a violent spirit occupies 16 verses in Mark (9:14–29), while Matthew and Luke each allocate only about 8 verses (Mt 17:14-21; Lk 9:37-43a).¹⁴

Second, exorcism in Mark is not merely a subset of healing miracles but an essential sign of the dawning apocalyptic age. M. Henning observes that while Matthew and Luke treat exorcism as part of Jesus’ broader healing ministry, Mark presents it as a watershed moment in Jesus’ mission. She argues that Matthew and Luke redacted Mark’s exorcism accounts, diminishing their prominence to align with their respective theological emphases.¹⁵

When it comes to the apocalyptic understanding of Mark’s Gospel, J. Marcus, a prominent Markan scholar, contends that the entire gospel of Mark depicts “a cosmic apocalyptic battle” against the evil forces, enslaving the world and humanity which liberation and transformation arriving only through an “eschatological act of God.”¹⁶ He highlights several deliberate narrative choices in Mark: Jesus’ first conflict right after the baptism is a life-and-death struggle with Satan (1:12-13); Jesus’ first public ministry is an extended and dramatic episode of exorcism in the Capernaum

¹³ One notable exception is the exorcism of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter. In this instance, Matthew’s account (Mt 15:21-28) is slightly longer than Mark’s version (Mk 7:24-30).

¹⁴ R. France even argues that Mark wrote this episode with much “gusto.” See Richard Thomas France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 362.

¹⁵ Meghan Henning, “Healing and Exorcism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Synoptic Gospels*, eds. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 357-359.

¹⁶ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 72.

synagogue (1:21-28); exorcisms remain a recurring theme throughout Jesus' ministry; Jesus' authority over evil forces is delegated to his apostles; ultimately, Jesus' crucifixion serves as the climatic showdown in this spiritual battle, with the darkness at Golgotha possibly signaling the "disturbance of cosmic (demonic?) power."¹⁷ Whether one fully accepts this apocalyptic-eschatological interpretation, J. Marcus convincingly demonstrates that exorcism is fundamentally woven into Mark's portrayal of Jesus' identity and mission.

Third, Mark frequently employs the term "impure spirit" (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον - *pneûma akátharton*). While the term πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον appears to be synonymous with "demon" (δαιμόνιον - *daimónion*) in some passages, such as in the exorcism of Syrophoenician woman's daughter, where both terms are used interchangeably (7:25 and 7:26; also 6:7 and 6:13),¹⁸ Mark's usage of "impure spirit" far exceeds that of the other Synoptics (11 times in Mark, compared to 1 in Matthew and 4 in Luke). Why does Mark favor this term? S. Jöris notes that though Mark used both δαιμόνιον and πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον interchangeably in some cases, there are also instances where they are not synonymous. The demons (δαιμόνιον) and the demoniac (δαιμονιζόμενος - *daimonizómenos*) often appear in general references to demonic activity (Mk 1:32-34, 39; 3:13-19, 22-27; 9:38-41), while "impure spirit" tends to appear in dramatically charged exorcism stories with vivid details (Mk 1:21-28; 3:11; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). Jöris suggests that Mark's preference for this term "impure spirit" reinforces Jesus' Messianic identity.¹⁹

Four Major Exorcism Narratives in Mark

This section delves deeper into the narrative elements of Jesus' exorcisms in the Gospel of Mark. By comparing the major exorcism in Mark (particularly Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29), we can hope to identify recurring patterns or forms within these stories.

The following table provide comparative analysis of these four exorcism stories narrative:

¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 72-74.

¹⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 103.

¹⁹ C. Wassen also agrees with Jöris that the frequent use of "impure spirit" in Mark suggests a theological focus in Mark. See Cecilia Wassen, "The Impurity of the Impure Spirits in the Gospels," in *Healing and Exorcism in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. Mikael Tellbe and Tommy Wasserman, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 35-36.

	Mark 1:21-28	Mark 5:1-20	Mark 7:24-30	Mark 9:14-29
setting	Synagogue in Capernaum during Sabbath service (v.21)	Seashore of Galilee, in Gerasa (gentile territory)	A house in region of Tyre (v. 24)	On the way to Jerusalem (v.14)
Introduction	A man with impure spirit suddenly appears (no details on his health condition, v. 23)	A man with an impure spirit suddenly meets Jesus (his extreme condition described v. 3)	A woman whose daughter with unclean spirit approaches Jesus (the condition of the daughter explained, v. 25)	A man brings his son, possessed by an unclean spirit, after the disciples fail (the condition of the boy explained, v. 17)
Dialogue	Jesus speaks directly to the impure spirit (vv. 24-25)	Jesus converses directly with the impure spirit (vv. 7-11)	Jesus engages in dialogue with the woman (vv. 27-29)	Jesus speaks with the boy's father (vv. 17-19)
The exorcism	Jesus rebukes the spirit; it convulses the man and departs (vv. 25-26)	Jesus commands the spirits to leave; they beg and enter pigs (vv. 8-13)	Jesus grants the request of the woman (long-distance exorcism, v. 29)	Jesus rebukes the spirit; the spirit convulses the boy and leaves him like dead person; Jesus makes him stand. (vv. 25-27)
Aftermath	The crowd marvels at Jesus' "new teaching with authority"; His fame spreads through Galilee (the liberated man's condition unexplained. vv. 27-28)	The locals ask Jesus to leave; the healed man proclaims the miracle; Jesus' fame spreads through Decapolis (v.14-20)	The woman returns home and finds her daughter healed (v. 30)	Jesus teaches the disciples about the necessity of prayer for exorcism (vv. 27-29)

Scholars typically classify the stories of exorcism under the broader category of healing miracles.²⁰ This categorization makes sense because the stories of exorcism generally involve the restoration of individuals suffering from physical or mental afflictions. The primary distinction lies in the source of these “afflictions.” While many ailments stem from diseases or perhaps genetic factors, the conditions described in these accounts result directly from demonic possession. For instance, in Mark 9:14-29, the impure spirit renders the boy mute and drives him to self-harm, while in 5:1-20, the man’s mental health deteriorates under the influence of the impure spirit, to the point of violent, self-destructive behaviors.

However, the element of healing appears less clear in two other accounts. In Mk1:21-28, the text mentions no specific illness accompanying the possession, while in Mk 7:24-30, the Syrophoenician woman simply describes her daughter “has an impure spirit.”²¹ Even in Mk 9:14-29, where the boy’s hearing and speech are restored, the father’s explicit request focuses solely on expelling the demon and not healing physical infirmities. The father appears to know that it is not about ordinary illness or physical disabilities, but serious demonic possession that requires Jesus’ divine authority (v. 17-18). Notably, none of these four accounts employ the word related to healing like *ἰάομαι* (*iáomai*) and *ὑγίης* (*hygiēs*).²²

Regarding narrative patterns, several consistent elements emerge across all four stories, like the presence of the impure spirit (Mk 1:23; 5:2; 7:25; 9:25) and Jesus’ brief but authoritative commands to expel the demons (1:25; 5:8; 7:29; 9:25). As J. Marcus observes, Jesus operates as an exorcist, but radically different from conventional practitioners. Rather than employing a mystical ritual or learned techniques to manipulate spirits, Jesus acts as the definitive sign and agent of God’s eschatological reign, in which there is no room for demonic opposition to God.²³ S. Grindheim compares Jesus’ exorcistic style to his Jewish predecessors, like Tobit, Solomon, and Qumranic exorcism texts, and concludes that Jesus’ confrontations with the demons stands in contrast to these exorcists in much superior way. He adds “in some cases, there is not even a confrontation.”²⁴

²⁰ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist. A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 13.

²¹ “ἦς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον” (Mk 7:25).

²² A. Hauw also challenges the classification of exorcism under miracle healing, proposing instead the straightforward definition of “the expulsion of the evil spirit.” We find ourselves in general agreement with this definition, though our path to this conclusion differs from Hauw’s, which relies on a comparative analysis with first-century AD extra-biblical exorcism accounts. See Andreas Hauw, *The Function of Exorcism Stories in Mark’s Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 1-3.

²³ Marcus, *Mark* 1–8, 192.

²⁴ Grindheim, “Exorcism, Forgiveness, and Christological Implications,” 51-61.

Beyond these broad similarities, each narrative contains distinctive features. The first two accounts feature possessed individuals who directly approach Jesus, with the impure spirit initiating the conversation (1:24; 5:7). By contrast, the latter two involve parents pleading on behalf of their afflicted children (7:26; 9:17). Geographically, the second and third exorcism occurs in the Gentile territories, involving Gentile participants, while the first and the fourth exorcism takes place in the Jewish territories, involving Jewish people. Theologically, the third and fourth accounts emphasize the necessity of faith (implicit in 7:28; 9:24), whereas the first two highlight the demon’s supernatural knowledge of Jesus’ identity (1:24; 5:7).

While the four exorcism stories in Mark’s Gospel display significant differences, careful analysis reveals important thematic relationships between the first and second accounts, as well as between the third and fourth. The initial two exorcisms particularly demonstrate this connection through their parallel structures and contrasting settings:

	Mark 1:21-28	Mark 5:1-20
Setting	Synagogue in Capernaum (Jewish territory) – the first miracle in Jewish land and to Jewish people	Tombs in Gerasene (Gentile territory) – the first miracle in Gentile land and to Gentile people
Possessed man	Unnamed Jewish man possessed by impure spirit who seemed to hide himself	Unnamed Gentile man possessed by impure spirits called “Legion” who tormented the man night and day
Supernatural knowledge	Jesus as the Holy One of God (1:24)	Jesus as the Son of the Most High God (5:7)
People’s reaction	People were amazed (θαμβέω, thambéō; 1:27)	People who immediately affected were afraid (φοβέω, phobeō; 5:15); while people who heard the news were amazed (θαυμάζω, thaumázō; 5:20)
Aftermath	Jesus’ fame spread through the region of Galilee (1:28)	The liberated man announced the news and Jesus’ fame spread through Decapolis

From this table of comparison, the exorcism of Mk 1:21-28 and Mk 5:1-20 reveals a unique relationship centered on Jesus’ act of expelling the impure spirits.

The contrasting settings establish a significant Jewish-Gentile connection. When the impure spirits are linked to this Jewish-Gentile connection, they are able to manifest without restriction, anywhere and anytime, from most unclean place like deserted tombs of Gentile land to a sacred place like an active synagogue in Jewish territory, from common time like night and day at the tombs and the mountains, to a sacred time of prayer service at the synagogue in busy town like Capernaum.²⁵ The universal presence suggests the spirits' cosmic domination over people, transcending the boundaries of time, space, and culture. Simultaneously, the Jewish-Gentile connection highlights Jesus' universal and absolute authority over the malevolent entities. Whether confronting a demon shrewdly hiding in a synagogue or potent evil spirits causing a man to violently harm himself, whether a demon operating solo or a throng of demons working as if Roman legion, all yield to Jesus' command.

These exorcism accounts gain additional significance as they represent the opening salvo of Jesus' public ministry, first in Jewish territory, then in Gentile lands. Moreover, in both instances, the impure spirits reveal Jesus' extraordinary identity which otherwise hidden, the Holy One of God²⁶ and the Son of the highest God.²⁷

²⁵ Capernaum was a bustling fishing town on the northwest shore of sea of Galilee. The choice of Capernaum was likely practical, as it was home to some of his disciples (1:29). Additionally, Capernaum was strategically situated along a major trade route that connected the Mediterranean coast to Damascus. Capernaum was also a border town between the tetrarchies of Herod Antipas of Galilee (4 BC – 39 AD) and Herod Philip of Iturea (4 BC – 34 AD), which explains the presence of a custom office (2:14). Furthermore, the presence of the small Roman garrison indicates town's size and strategic importance (Mt 8:5-13). Capernaum's selection connected Jesus' ministry to broader network of people and wide access to more locations. See "Capernaum," *Archeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, 111-114; also James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 52.

²⁶ The title "The Holy One of God" are often linked to several passages in OT like 2 Ki 4:9 and Ps 106:16. In 2 Ki 4:9, Elisah is addressed as "the holy man of God," meanwhile in Ps 106:16, Aaron is called as "the holy one of the Lord. Without denying Jesus' prophetic roles, we are in the opinion that the title "The Holy One of God" primarily connects Jesus to Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. There are two important passages in which Aaron is related to this title. The first is when Aaron was ordained to be the high priest and receive a golden plate inscribed with "קדש ליהוה" placed at his turban, as a sign of his special holiness (Exo 28:36). Meanwhile, the author of psalm 106 recognized Aaron's unique holiness, calling Aaron as "קדוש יהוה" (Ps 106:16). Though not a kingly figure, Aaron is technically a messianic figure as he was "anointed" into the office of the high priest. See Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, "Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah. Part 1," *JSHJ* 4 (2006): 161.

²⁷ Jesus' title as "the Son of God" is not only a high Christological point but also key element in understanding the Gospel of Mark. The title mention at the very beginning (1:1) and is reaffirmed at the end with the centurion's declaration (15:39). The title is recognized by the malevolent forces (3:11) and twice declared by God himself (1:11; 9:7). Finally, Jesus himself announced this title before Sanhedrin (14:61). It is beyond the ambit of this study to delve deeper into the title, yet it is sufficient to point out that many scholars recognize this epithet as a Messianic title. See France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 80; Marcus, *Mark* 1–8, 162; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2016), 65.

²⁸ Both events provoke strong reactions from witnesses and result in the widespread dissemination of Jesus’ fame. The parallel structure of these accounts emphasizes how Jesus’ authority extends equally over spiritual forces in both Jewish and Gentile contexts, while simultaneously revealing his mission to all people.

Now, we move to compare the third and fourth exorcism account:

	Mark 7:24-30	Mark 9:14-29
Context	Jesus and his disciples at Gentile territory (v. 24)	Jesus walking toward Jerusalem, and receiving report that his disciples unable to exorcise an impure spirit (v. 17-18)
Protagonist	A Syrophoenician woman (a mother)	A Jewish man (a father)
Victim	A girl (daughter)	A boy (son)
Impure spirits’ actions	(Unspecified)	Caused the boy unable to speak (v. 17), seized him, dashed him, made him foam grind his teeth (v. 18; 20; 26); casted him into the fire and water, and tried to kill him (v. 22)
Test of faith	The woman fell upon Jesus’ feet and beg him (v. 25-26); Jesus’ initial refusal and indirectly called her race “dogs – κυνάριον (kynárion)” (v. 27); the woman persisted, recognized Jesus as “κύριος” and wisely answered Jesus, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs (v. 28)	Jesus called the people and his disciples as “faithless generation” (v. 19); Jesus indirectly called the father as one who lack of faith (v. 33); the man responded, “I believe; help my unbelief” (v.24)

²⁸ J. Smith argues that the title “the most high God” is fitting for the gentile context since the title was used for the head god in the pagan pantheon of gods (compare Acts 16:17) and for the God of Israel in the gentile setting (Gen 14:18; Num 24:16; Dan 3:26). See Julie M. Smith, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Provo, UT: BYU Study, 2019), 469. Meanwhile, J. Marcus argues that the title the “Most High God” in OT and Jewish texts is associated not only with Gentiles but also, more particularly, with the sovereignty of the God of Israel over the whole earth, even Gentile realms (Deu 32:8; Dan 4:17). By expelling the legion of demons, the “Son of the Most High God,” the preeminent agent of the God of Israel, is subduing a hostile Gentile territory through a saving act of holy war. The theme of God’s holy war victory is also associated with the “Most High God” title in 2 Sam 22:14. See Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 344.

Jesus’ response	Jesus’ acceptance of the woman’s faith, letting her go, and remote exorcism (v. 29)	Jesus’ acceptance of the man’s faith; confrontational exorcism with the impure spirit (v. 25)
Exorcism’s result	The demon left; the child lying on bed (v. 30)	The demon violently convulsing the boy before leaving him; he appearing to be dead; Jesus raising him to stand (v. 27)

The comparison between the third (Mk 7:24-30) and fourth (Mk 9:14-29) exorcism also reveals another significant Jewish-Gentile connection. This connection emerges through both the settings and protagonists of the stories. The third exorcism takes place in the Gentile territory and features a Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was afflicted by the impure spirit, while the fourth story occurs in Jewish land with a Jewish man whose son has suffered violent torments from the impure spirit since his childhood. Once again, this Jewish-gentile framework demonstrates both the global dominance of impure spirit as well as Jesus’ universal and supreme authority over these malignant entities.

The notable departure from the first two exorcisms appears in the theme of faith. Whereas the initial two stories emphasize direct confrontation between impure spirits and Jesus, including their dramatic revelations of Jesus’ identity, the latter two exorcism focus on faith relationship between Jesus and the human protagonists (the Syrophoenician mother and the Jewish father). In these later accounts, the impure spirits recede into voiceless antagonistic roles. The third exorcism provides a minimal information about the role of the impure spirit beyond stating the daughter had “an impure spirit,” though the mother’s desperation suggests the severity of situation the daughter had to endure. Meanwhile, the fourth exorcism presents a more active and ferocious impure spirit that Jesus himself must specifically name the spirit as to cast it out from the boy. Yet, despite its active presence, the spirit remains conspicuously silent throughout the encounter.

The third and fourth exorcism accounts highlight the universality of Jesus’ mission, showing that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, may approach Jesus in faith and experience deliverance from the potent demonic oppressions. However, we must avoid oversimplifying the role of faith in these accounts. We must not fall into an assumption that an intense faith (or lack of it) dictates the outcome of Jesus’ exorcism. As demonstrated in the first two exorcisms, Jesus expels the impure spirits regardless the faith’s condition of the tormented men. While the faith certainly plays important role in the exorcism and other miracles, Jesus retains complete freedom

to exercise his authority and power as he chooses. The third exorcism is particularly significant as it constitutes a “long-distance exorcism,” performed without Jesus ever encountering the demon-possessed girl. This unique characteristic underscores the totality of Jesus’ divine authority over impure spirits, revealing that spatial separation poses no obstacle to his power to command and expel them. At the same time, this episode serves a lesson that faith in Jesus, without his physical presence, can deliver a potent exorcism against the malevolent entities.

To sum up the interrelation among the four major exorcism stories in Mark, we can see that the exorcism narratives collectively demonstrate not only about Jesus’ absolute authority over the malignant forces, setting Jesus apart from other exorcists, but also Jesus’ “jurisdiction” over both Jews and Gentiles, effectively encompassing all humanity. While the impure spirits may indeed operate universally across time and space, demonstrating their cosmic influence, their power remains ultimately limited. Their reign was decisively challenged and finally was “crushed,” and their subjects were liberated by one who stands above them, whom they themselves recognized as their ultimate nemesis, the Son of God and the Holy One of God. Simultaneously, these exorcism accounts also become an occasion of faith in Jesus among both the Jews and the Gentiles. Through such faith, one is liberated from Satan’s dominance, and enters relationship with Jesus, becoming part of the Messianic people, a kingdom of God.

We would like also to briefly analyze the first exorcism narrative, which seems to offer a deeper understanding the purpose of Jesus’ exorcism. The following is the English text of Mk 1:21-28.²⁹

Then, he went³⁰ to Capernaum. When he entered the synagogue in the sabbath, immediately³¹ he taught. The people were astounded by his teaching for he was teaching them as someone having authority and not as the scribes. Suddenly, a man with an impure spirit was in their synagogue, and shouted, saying, “what is it for us and for you, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But, Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet!³² Come out of him!” But, the impure

²⁹ Personal translation based on the Greek text of NA 28.

³⁰ The participle εἰσπορεύονται is best translated as finite verb.

³¹ The placement of εὐθὺς at the beginning of the sentence presents a challenge for translation. If εὐθὺς qualifies the participle, the sentence would translate as: “as soon as Sabbath (Friday’s evening), Jesus entered the synagogue and then, taught.” If εὐθὺς qualifies the main verb, the translation would be: “in the sabbath he entered the synagogue, and immediately, he taught. We choose the second option to highlight Jesus’ action of teaching in this episode.

³² The verb φιμώθητι can literally be translated as “be muzzled.” The idea is that Jesus has complete control to subjugate the impure spirit.

spirit convulsed him, and he cried³³ out with loud voice, he came out of him. Thus, they all were amazed so that they asked one another, saying, “Who is this? A new teaching with authority,³⁴ even he subjugates the impure spirits, and they obey him. And, immediately, his news spread everywhere, to all surrounding regions of Galilea.

When examining narrative patterns, the first story of exorcism does not establish a fixed template for subsequent stories, apart from a few fundamental elements, like Jesus' authority over the spirit. In fact, the initial story significantly differs from the others there by giving minimal attention to the healed man. While containing some healing elements, one might question whether this should primarily be classified as a healing miracle. The central confrontation occurs between Jesus and the spirit, rather than focusing on the afflicted man. Jesus never directly addresses the man, and the narrative provides no description of his restored condition. In fact, Mark leaves readers uninformed about the man's ultimate fate after the exorcism. The man seems peripheral to the story's main focus, which instead emphasizes the impure spirit, what it does and says. Although Jesus' first exorcism includes healing aspects, its primary concern is not on the interpersonal dynamic between Jesus and the possessed man. Rather, the story underscores Jesus' spiritual warfare against the kingdom of Satan, and the revelation of his identity as the Holy One of God, through the impure spirit's supernatural insight.

This emphasis on the spiritual warfare becomes more apparent when analyzing the narrative structure or flow of Mk 1:21-28. The passage unfolds through a clear sequence: it begins with the setting (v.21), followed by people's astonishment (ἐξεπλήσσαντο; *exeplessonto*) at Jesus' authoritative teaching (v.22). The possessed man then appears (v.23), leading to the central confrontation (vv.24-25) and subsequent exorcism (v.26). The crowd responds with amazement (ἐθαμβήθησαν; *ethambēthēsan*, v.27), and the account concludes with Jesus' fame spreading (v.28). These elements form a chiasmic structure:

³³ The verb φωνήσαν has implied subject which creates ambiguity. Who is shouting? Based on the logical sequence, the subject should be the impure spirit since the spirit is also the subject of verbs σπαράξαν and ἐξήλθεν. Thus, this sentence can be understood as: “The spirit convulsed the man, and the spirit shouted in a loud voice (through the man), and exited the man.” An alternative interpretation is that the subject could be the man himself. In this case, the sentence would read as: “the impure spirit convulsed him, and as a result, the man shouted in loud voice, after which the spirit exited him.” Despite the ambiguity, the sentence does not pose any challenge to the interpretation.

³⁴ Some translations, like the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition and Douay-Rheims Bible, prefer to interpret κατ' ἐξουσίαν as qualifier for the verb ἐπιτάσσει. Thus, this can be translated as: “a new teaching! With authority, he commands the impure spirit.” Yet, the word καὶ after κατ' ἐξουσίαν indicates a break between κατ' ἐξουσίαν and ἐπιτάσσει. “New teaching with authority” also aligns with the same phrase “teaching with authority” in verse 22.

- 1a. Introduction of the setting (v. 21)
 - 2a. People's initial reaction: astonishment – teaching as one having authority (v. 22)
 - 3a. The appearance of the impure spirit (v. 23)
 - 4ab. The confrontation between Jesus and the impure spirit (vv. 24-25)
 - 3b. The disappearance of the impure spirit (v. 26)
 - 2b. People's final reaction: amazed – new teaching with authority (v. 27)
- 1b. Conclusion – Jesus' report spread (v. 28)

This structural analysis reveals the account's thematic climax situated in verses 24-25, where the decisive confrontation between Jesus and the impure spirit occurs. The careful symmetry highlights how Mark prioritizes the spiritual conflict and revelation of Jesus' authority and identity over mere physical-health restoration.

A close examination of the narrative elements reveals that the exorcism occurs within the sacred context of Sabbath prayer service in the synagogue, where Jesus was given the opportunity to teach. This setting demonstrates how the Jewish sacred environment proved ineffective against the unclean spirit, which remained present and concealed within the holy space. Only through Jesus' preaching was the malevolent entity drawn out into the light. Jesus' teaching with authority did not only amaze the human listeners but compelled the unwanted spirit to come out from its hiding. As J. Marcus astutely observes, it would have been better for the impure spirit to remain unnoticed. Yet, the spirit seemed to experience a "fatal attraction to Jesus."³⁵ Jesus' confrontation with the impure spirit stands at the center of the episode, proving Jesus possesses not only greater authority than the scribes to teach men, but also the power over the supernatural entity that dared to infiltrate and mock the Jewish sacred event.

The significance of exorcism in Mark becomes clearer when we examine the placement of Mk 1:21-28 within its broader context. As J. Marcus notes above, the exorcism in Capernaum stands as Jesus' first mighty act in his public ministry, establishing the prominence of spiritual deliverance in his mission. Furthermore, the successful expulsion of the impure spirit immediately results in Jesus' fame spreading throughout the region, announcing his presence to the public. From this moment onward, Jesus openly performs many miracles as people keep flocking to him, seeking a miraculous solution to their problems, including those who were tormented by the demons (Mk 1:29-33). With Jesus' growing reputation, the spiritual battle to crush the serpent's head begins in earnest. Each encounter with Jesus now

³⁵ Marcus, *Mark* 1–8, 192.

represents a humiliating defeat and a forced retreat for the spirits. By positioning this exorcism at the outset of Jesus' ministry, Mark makes clear that battling the reign of Satan which culminates in the cross, stands as Jesus' primary objective.

The Impure Spirit: The Seed of the serpent?

The narratives of Jesus' exorcisms consistently present the impure spirit (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον) as the primary antagonist. This raises several important questions: What exactly constitutes an impure spirit? What is the significance of this designation? What are the scriptural origins of this concept, and why did Mark choose to emphasize it in his Gospel? To properly address these questions, we must first establish a biblical framework for understanding this spiritual entity.

The term spirits refer to the supernatural, non-corporeal beings that interact with and influence the lives of corporal beings (both human and non-human). In opposition to the good spirits, the evil or impure spirits intend on harming humans in particular and cosmos in general. These spirits are reported to possess both men and animals, causing injuries and infirmities to the possessed. In NT, these malevolent beings are typically referred as demons (δαμόνιον).³⁶ The origin of these spirits remain shrouded in mystery, but biblical authors considered them part of creations, albeit invisible. Since these spirits are created beings, they cannot be considered at the level of deity, and their powers are limited and subject to higher authority.³⁷

In OT, the demonic forces are perceived to be active and engaged in the world, and human affairs. The first appearance of this evil entity is in Gen 3:1, where talking serpent seduced (or coerce) our first parents to violate God's commandment. In later traditions, the serpent is identified as the demon in Wis 2:24, even as the devil in Gen 12:9. His presence in the beginning of human life on earth is decisive enough to influence humanity's choice to disobey God. This entity is also referred to as Satan, literally means "the accuser," and continued to cause human misery (Job 1:11; Zec 3:1). In time of Moses, the שְׂדִיִּים (šēḏī'im), commonly translated as demons, are associated with pagan idols (Dt 32:17; Ps 106:37). The prohibition to offer sacrifice to שְׂעִירִים (ś'îrîm; literally the hairy ones), most probably the demons appearing in the goat shape, was also recorded in Lev 17:7. OT also preserved the names of demons, such as Azazel (Lev 16:8), and Beelzebub (2 Kg 1:2), both of

³⁶ Jannes Reiling, "Unclean Spirits," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1999), 882.

³⁷ Scott Hahn, "Demon," in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, ed. Scott Hahn (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2009), 210-211.

which are associated to idol worship.³⁸ OT references highlight the demonic activity as something that indirectly opposes God by leading people away from God and drawing them to worship demons-idols.

The term רוח רעה (rwḥ r'h) occur several times in OT, and often with God being attributed as the sender (Jud 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14; 18:10; 19:9). The passages are challenging to interpret. "God sent the evil spirit" can be understood as God permitting the evil entity to play its roles. Alternatively, the "evil spirit" might not be an evil entity opposes to God, but rather one of God's angels tasked with tormenting Saul (1 Sam 16:14). In this case, the term "evil" does not pertain to its nature, but to negative effect it had on Saul.³⁹ Another interpretation is that the "evil spirit" refers primarily to Saul's deteriorating mental health condition, and thus, "spirit" is understood as inner or mental disposition.⁴⁰

While the term רוח רעה exists in OT, the term "רוח הטמאה" (rwḥ ḥtm'h)" only appears once in Zech 13:2, *On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit.* The passage suggests that the impure spirit is related to the false prophets and the idols, implying that the impure spirit is essentially the same with the demons mentioned in other OT passages. However, due to the rarity of its appearance, the true meaning and origin remain uncertain.

To gain clarity, we need to look to other Second Temple Literature for insight into the possible meaning of the term impure spirit. A. Wright argues that the term impure spirits takes its direct root from the books of Enoch, especially the book of the Watchers.⁴¹ In his survey and analysis of the book of Watchers, he discovers that the evil spirits that roamed over the world are the spirit of the "Nephilim," the giants race mentioned in Gen 6:4.⁴² The author of Enoch understood that "the sons of God"

³⁸ A demon that is not related to idol worship is Asmodeus, who afflicted Sara and exorcised by Tobias by the help of Rafael (Tob 3:8; 8:2-3).

³⁹ Matthias Henze, *Mind the Gap* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 97.

⁴⁰ Peter Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Archie Wright, "Evil Spirits in Second Temple Judaism. The Watcher Tradition as Background to the Demonic Pericopes in the Gospels," *Henoch* 1 (2006), 141-150.

⁴² The Book of Enoch, also known as 1 Enoch, is an ancient religious writing attributed to Enoch, great-grandfather of Noah (Gen 5:21). While considered to be non-canonical and pseudepigraphal by many traditions, the Ethiopian orthodox accepted it as part of their canon. The book of Enoch can be divided into five major sections. 1) The Book of Watcher (chapter 1-36). This section speaks about the group of angels called watchers, who descended to earth and corrupted humanity. 2) The Book of Parables (chapter 37-71). This portion contains Enoch's parables with key theme of the coming of Messianic figure, known as the Son of Man. 3) The Astronomical Book (chapter 72-82). The section offers detailed descriptions of the movements of the heavenly bodies, and their significances. 4) The Book of Dream Vision (chapter 83-90). In this section, Enoch shared his symbolic visions, including

were the angels or spiritual beings called the watchers, while the daughters of man were earthly women. The union between the two produced gigantic creatures that inherited their parents' traits – human in form, but endowed with great strength, large stature, and violent tendencies due to their spiritual heritage. The Book of Watcher does not call the spirits coming from the dead Nephilim as specifically impure spirits but evil spirit or strong spirit. The impurity of their nature stems from the forbidden mixture between spiritual beings and earthly human beings.⁴³

In fact, the story of fallen angels (watchers) and their monstrous, impure offsprings is widespread in Second Temple Literature. The narrative appears also in several Enochic text, such as the Book of Parables, the Book of Dream Vision and the Epistles of Enoch. It is also found in non-Enochic traditions, including the book of Jubilees,⁴⁴ the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,⁴⁵ 2 Baruch,⁴⁶ the Books of Giants,⁴⁷

Israel's history from creation to final judgment. 5) The Epistle of Enoch (chapter 90-108). The final section consists of Enoch's exhortations, urging Israelites to live righteously to avoid evil. See George W. E. Nicklesburg, *1 Enoch 1. A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 1-8.

⁴³ T. Proctor highlights additional reasons for Second Temple Literature's influence on Mark regarding the use of the term unclean spirit. First, the idea of demonic harassments and possession are prevalent in Second Temple Literature, but rarely found in the Graeco-Roman texts. Secondly, in both Enochic traditions and Mark, unclean spirits are conceptualized as an apocalyptic evil army led by a great demon (like Satan, Beelzebul, or Mastema), united in opposition to the divine force of God. See Travis W. Proctor, *Demonic Bodies and the Dark Ecologies of Early Christian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 28.

⁴⁴ The Book of Jubilees, like the Book of Enoch, is considered to be another important apocryphal of STJL. The book is retelling and expansion of the biblical narrative, especially the stories from Genesis and some parts of Exodus, with a distinct theological interpretation. The book seemed to be treasured by the Qumran community but, later rejected by the Jewish Rabbinic tradition. It claimed to have been communicated to Moses on the Mount Sinai after Moses received the Law, by an angel, known as "the angel of the presence." For text, translations, introduction, and commentaries, see James L. Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-26.

⁴⁵ The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs is another Jewish apocryphal writings, containing the testaments (last will) of the twelve sons of Jacob. Naturally, the book is divided into twelve sections according to the number of the patriarchs. In each section, a patriarch would narrate his life, showing his virtues and vices, and exhorting his descendants to follow the good examples and avoid the bad ones. Sometimes, the section ends with prophecies. For translated text, see "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in ANF-CE 8. *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries. The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, eds Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Cleveland A. Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886) 9-38.

⁴⁶ Michael E. Stone and Mattias Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 9-17.

⁴⁷ The Book of Giants is another pseudepigraphal writing, closely associated to the Book of Enoch. In fact, it is an expansion of the story of watchers and their offsprings, Nephilim. For recent studies and translation see, John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmology. Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1992), 62-66.

and Genesis Apocryphon.^{48 49} Among these, 1 Enoch and the Book of Jubilees explicitly mentioned the term “impure spirit” or “impure demon” (1 En 99:7; Jub 10:1). Similar 1 Enoch, the impurity of the spirit in Jubilee may refer to its original hybrid composition of angelic and human elements. The Book of Jubilees marked the important development of Second Temple Literature’s demonology as the terms “impure spirits,” “demons,” and “evil spirits” were used interchangeably to describe the spirits of the dead Nephilim – terminologies frequently found in the gospels. In addition, Jubilees introduced the idea of demons having their “chief,” known as Mastema (Jub 10:8). This concept resonates in the gospels with figures archdemons like Satan and Beelzebul, reflecting a hierarchical order within the demonic realm.⁵⁰

The Enochic literature, while not explicitly mentioning “the seed of the serpent,” present the evil spirits as the direct offsprings of the Watchers or the fallen angels, through the unnatural, even biological union with human women (1 En 10). Similarly, the Book of Jubilees expands the story of Gen 3, without explicitly addressing the enmity between the woman and the serpent, and their respective seeds. However, the book of Jubilees shares the Enochic view regarding the origin of the evil spirits (Jub 4:15; Jub 5:7, 9), depicting them as being under the leadership of prince Mastema. The author of the Jubilees further develops this concept by showing that while Mastema and his angels actively work to corrupt humanity, they will ultimately face divine judgement (Jub 10:8). The text concludes with the assurance that their power will eventually be restrained, leaving them incapable of harming mankind (Jub 23:29).

Beyond the mixed origin of the impure spirit, the very epithet ‘impure’ calls to mind the Jewish purity law. One might naturally assume that the impure spirit functions as an agent of ritual defilement. Yet, how exactly, did this impure spirit make someone unclean? The Mosaic Law does not directly link malevolent spirits to the purity laws, nor does it specify the purity status of a person who is afflicted by an impure spirit. Consequently, it is reasonable to infer that the evil spirits render a person unclean indirectly.⁵¹ They may introduce and sustain certain infirmities and physical ailments in men, women, and children (Mk 7:24-30; 9:14-29). In more severe case, the impure spirits completely possessed individuals, forcibly controlling

⁴⁸ Genesis Apocryphon is an ancient Jewish text that is part of the Dead Sea Scrolls’ collection. It is a rewriting and expansion of certain stories from the book of Genesis, with additional details, interpretations, and legends, not found in the canonical text. For translation see, Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 292-299.

⁴⁹ Proctor, *Demonic Bodies and the Dark Ecologies of Early Christian Culture*, 22.

⁵⁰ Proctor, *Demonic Bodies and the Dark Ecologies of Early Christian Culture*, 23.

⁵¹ The evil spirits may cause people to sin through temptation, and as a result, render him unclean (see Gen 3:13-15). The worship of idols that is perceived as the worship of demons, is also abomination (see Deu 32:17).

them to commit acts of violence to themselves or others, or acts that defile themselves. In case of the possessed man in Gerasa, for example, Mark informed us that the spirit was dwelling among the graves, indicating that these spirits have an affinity for unclean places (Mk 5:1-20).⁵²

The connection between evil spirits and impurity is particularly clear in Dead Sea Scrolls. The Community Rule mentions "the spirit of admirable purity" that detests "unclean idols" (1QS 4), suggesting a direct link between idols and demons, which makes idols unclean. This also could be referencing to Zec 3:2, which speaks of an impure spirit and idol. Furthermore, the Rule also discusses the ways of "the spirit of falsehood," one of which is "ways of lewdness in the service of uncleanness." It implies that for the Qumran community, the moral depravation is closely tied to state of impurity, and evil spirit of falsehood is believed to lead men into immorality and uncleanness.

In apocryphal psalm entitled the Prayer of Deliverance, a line mentioned the רוח טמאה – "Let Satan not dominate me, nor an unclean spirit; let pain and the evil inclination not possess my bones (11QPs^a 19)." H. Lichtenberger interprets this as indicating that the impure spirit is coming from Satan, bringing pain and sufferings. Illness was seen as consequence of sin, which, in turn, is a product of man's evil inclination.⁵³ By comparing these passages on spirit of impurity, we may conclude that an impure spirit originates from Satan, with the goal of inflicting pain and introducing evil inclination into humanity. Therefore, the impure spirit causes impurity through bad morality.

The question remains: can these impure spirits be identified as "the seed of the serpent"? While Second Temple literature's demonology likely influenced the gospel of Mark, the extent of this influence remains uncertain, particularly because the term πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον was already common in the first-century Jewish thought.⁵⁴ We are in the opinion that these impure spirits represent more than just ordinary demons, but ones that particularly more aggressive in harming human beings. We also align with J.R. Donahue and D.J. Harrington's view that the adjective impure in the impure spirit is primarily opposed to the "holy." They suggest that in OT, "holy" like God (Lev 11:14) implies life, wholeness, and completeness, whereas "impure" suggests something that should not be there, or out of place. The impure spirits could

⁵² Though in this case, the man was most probably non-Jewish, and consequently unclean Gentile. The situation still demonstrates how powerful impure spirits could become, and how the same spirits could lead into impurity to the Israelites.

⁵³ Hermann Lichtenberger, "Demonology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament," in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity*, eds. Ruth A. Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz, (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 274.

⁵⁴ Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC 34A; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 56.

make someone “impure” in the sense that the person became “incomplete,” lacking of wellbeing and rational self-control (including evil inclination). The holy realm of the Kingdom of God stands in direct opposition to demonic, “impure” domain.⁵⁵ Therefore, we conclude that the impure spirits do indeed constitute “the seed of the serpent,” not through biological descent from Satan, but as his primary agents of destruction in the world.

The Seed of the Woman

The Gospel of Mark does not only present exorcism as central to Jesus’ ministry but also emphasizes its continuation through his disciples. This handing down of this spiritual authority is most explicitly demonstrated in Mark 3:13-19, where Jesus appoints the twelve apostles and specifically grants them power to cast out demons. The significance of this exorcistic mission in Mark becomes even more apparent when we examine how Mark’s account differs from parallel Synoptic versions.

Mark 3:13-16	Matthew 10:1-2	Luke 6:12-13
¹³ He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out demons. ⁵⁶ ¹⁶ So he appointed the twelve...	¹⁰ Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles...	¹² Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles...

Mark’s account presents three distinct purposes of the calling and appointment of the Twelve: to be with Jesus, to proclaim his message, and to have authority over demons. This account differs notably from the other Synoptics. Matthew preserves the exorcism mandate while adding the responsibility for healing the sick, whereas Luke omits these purposes altogether. Mark’s emphasis on the

⁵⁵ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 80.
⁵⁶ ... ἵνα ὡσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἵνα ἀποστέλλῃ αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν καὶ ἔχειν ἐξουσίαν ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια.

intrinsic unity between preaching ministry and exorcism mirrors Jesus’ first exorcism, where casting out the demons occurs precisely within the context of the synagogue teaching.

Later in the narrative, Jesus formally commissions his disciples to fulfil these original purposes of their calling. Yet, a comparative analysis of the Synoptic accounts on this commissioning reveals Mark’s unique consistency in prioritizing the ministry of exorcism above other miraculous works.

Mark 6:7, 12-13	Matthew 10:5-8	Luke 9:1-2, 6
⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the impure spirits... ⁵⁷ ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.	⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.	Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal... ⁶ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

The Gospel of Mark presents a distinctive emphasis on exorcism in the disciples’ mission. Notably, Markan Jesus provides no instruction to preach neither to cure the sick when sending out the Twelve. He simply pairs them and grants them authority specifically over “impure spirits.” The disciples appear to understand their mission intuitively, proceeding to proclaim repentance. Mark also reports how they casted out “many demons” and cured the sick through anointing of the oil. This contrasts sharply with Matthew’s account, where, Matthean Jesus gives more detailed instructions, including to preach the good news, to cure the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, with exorcism mentioned last. Meanwhile, Lukan Jesus, while mentioning authority over “all demons,” focuses more on proclaiming the kingdom of God and healing, without specifics reports of exorcisms. Through this comparison, Mark’s unique emphasis on exorcism more than Luke and Matthew becomes clear.

What makes Mark’s account particularly significant is that authority over impure spirits constitutes the sole empowerment Jesus gives the disciples for their

⁵⁷ ... καὶ ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων

mission. This suggests that the primary and even the exclusive mission the disciples to carry out is to combat the malignant forces, especially the more powerful demons. As the impure spirits represent Satan’s aggressive agents, “the seed of the serpent,” then the apostles serve Jesus’ specialized squad to combat these spiritual archenemies, Jesus’ first exorcists, the “woman’s seed” destined to crush the serpent’s head.

Mark further reinforces this emphasis by consistently placing the disciples at Jesus’ major exorcisms (Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). Significantly, the first miracle that the (first four) disciples witness after their calling is the exorcism at the synagogue of Capernaum (Mk 1:16-20; 1:21-28); unlike Luke’s account, where the first exorcism precedes the first disciples’ calling (Lk 4.31-37; Lk 5:1-11). We shall compare also Jesus’ last major exorcism in the three synoptic Gospels and we shall focus our attention on Jesus’ interaction with his disciples:

Mark 9:17-19, 28-29	Matthew 17:14–17, 19-20.	Luke 9:37-38, 40-41, 43.
<p>¹⁷Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; ¹⁸ [...] I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.” ¹⁹He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” [...]</p> <p>²⁸When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”</p>	<p>¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, ¹⁵ and said, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic, and he suffers terribly; [...]” ¹⁶ And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure (θεραπεύω) him.” ¹⁷ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me” [...] ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁰ He said to them, “Because of your little faith ...”</p>	<p>³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child [...]” ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” ⁴¹ Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here” [...] ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.</p>

In this episode, the three evangelists agree that the disciples failed to expel the demon afflicting the young boy. However, significant differences emerge in their accounts. While Mark and Luke use the term “cast out” (ἐκβάλλω, ekballō), Matthew

employs the verb “cure” (θεραπεύω, *therapeuō*), suggesting that the father’s primary concern was healing rather than exorcism. Yet, the post-exorcism dialogue reveals even more striking variations. Luke omits the post-exorcism conversation entirely, while Matthean Jesus attributes the disciples’ failure to cast out the demon to disciples’ lack of faith. Mark presents a different perspective as Markan Jesus explains that particular kind of demon requires prayer⁵⁸ (implying a more powerful spiritual adversary needing specialized treatment).⁵⁹ Remarkably, in Mark’s account, the faith deficiency seems to lie not primarily with the disciples, but with the father and people who asked disciples’ help.⁶⁰ This stands in contrast to other Markan passages where Jesus repeatedly rebukes the disciples for their unbelief and hardened hearts (4:40; 6:45; 8:17-18; 8:33). Here, however, Jesus uses their failure not as ground for rebuke, but as teaching moment about confronting more formidable demons. This nuanced approach underscores Mark’s distinctive emphasis on exorcism as a priority ministry and Jesus’ commitment to equipping his disciples for this spiritual warfare.

Conclusion

This study yields several key findings regarding the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15 in Mark’s Gospel.

Jesus fulfils this promise primarily through spiritual warfare, rooted in the tradition that identifies the serpent not merely as a human adversary but as a spiritual entity opposed to God. This fulfilment finds its ultimate accomplishment in Christ’s passion and resurrection, while being particularly manifested through his ministry of exorcism. The synoptic Gospels consistently presents Jesus not merely an exorcist, but stands as the divine agent of God’s kingdom, whose authoritative word binds and expels the demonic forces.

The term “seed” admits both individual (Messiah) and collective (a people or nation) interpretation. Mark’s Gospel indeed does not make explicit identification between the serpent’s seed and the demons, particularly with the impure spirits. However, considering the Jewish tradition and literature of the first century, Mark

⁵⁸ J. Marcus, *Mark 8–16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYD 27A; London 2009) 665.

⁵⁹ R. France infers from the Greek “ἐν προσευχῇ” that the disciples did not spend time in prayer as they faced the demons. He argues that the disciples might have been overconfident and relied on their own power as they gained a lot of success in the previous exorcism. See France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 369.

⁶⁰ The pronounce “αὐτοῖς” and the term “ὧ γενεὰ ἄπιστος” may well be attributed to all Jesus’ listeners, including the disciples. R. France notes that faith and prayer cannot be separated, and thus, lack of faith may be attributed also to the disciples. See France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 367.

probably is familiar with the understanding that the impure spirit is an “seed” resulted from an unnatural union between the fallen angels and the humans. Conversely, the woman’s seed may denote either Jesus as the singular Messiah or his disciples collectively as participants in Jesus’ authority over the evil spirits.

While Mark never explicitly quotes Gen 3:5, the Gospel powerfully illustrates the concept of “crushing the serpent’s head.” The evangelist emphasizes exorcism and spiritual warfare as central to Jesus’ ministry through careful narrative placement, strategic vocabulary choices, and deliberate structural composition. This cosmic conflict officially commences with Jesus’ direct confrontation with Satan in the wilderness (Mk 1:13), enters public view as Jesus expels the impure spirit at the synagogue in Capernaum (1:21-28), and achieves universal scope when Jesus casts out the strong demons from the Gentile man at a Gentile territory (5:1-20). Each victorious encounter progressively erodes Satan’s dominion, thus, offering hope to all, Jew and Gentile alike, who place faith in Jesus as deliverance from Satan’s influence and gateway to God’s kingdom.

Mark also expands this spiritual warfare beyond Jesus himself to include his disciples in battle against Satan and his subordinates, particularly the impure spirits. The Twelve receive specific authorization over “the impure spirits” (3:15; 6:7). Yet, the battles are not always won easily, as the disciples fail to cash out the impure spirit that causes deafness and muteness (9:18). Their failure to exorcise demonstrates how the serpent continues to “strike at their heels,” prolonging demonic oppression and human suffering. Yet, Mark offers no despair. Jesus provides instruction for greater challenges, emphasizing prayer as essential for overcoming more formidable adversaries (9:29), thus empowering his disciples for ongoing spiritual warfare.

Finally, regarding pastoral implications, this study affirms the biblical foundation for the ongoing ministry of exorcism in the Catholic Church. The Gospel of Mark demonstrates that exorcism was a priority in Jesus’ own ministry, and that he deliberately entrusted this same authority to his apostles, the leaders of His Church. This biblical foundation offers two critical assurances for those engaged in this ministry today. First, although the work of an exorcist and a minister of deliverance are uncommon and arduous, this study confirms that it lies at the very heart of Christ’s preaching and mission. Second, Jesus’ definitive triumph over the serpent, and his delegation of authority over demons to his disciples, provides the ultimate assurance that evil does not have the final word for those who believe in Jesus. While demonic attacks remain a real and sometimes terrifying reality, we can be confident that in Jesus, we share in his victory.^{PS}

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