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Steffen Jöris

The Use and Function of genea in the Gospel of Mark: New Light on Mk 13:30

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Preface

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I. Introduction

Mark 13 has long fascinated readers of the gospel, since it presents one of the most puzzling chapters, prophesying the doom of the Jerusalem temple, various other horrific events, and even depicting cosmic upheavals and the coming of the son of man. This imagery is bewildering to the modern reader and many studies have attempted to interpret this enigmatic chapter. By now the scholarly literature has become a swamp that is difficult to navigate. Instead of adding to this vast amount of literature, the purpose of the present study is to investigate one key aspect of Mark 13, which has largely been misunderstood hitherto. This aspect is to uncover the correct meaning of the term γενεά in Mk 13:30 and to understand its function within the Gospel of Mark, which will have larger implications for a proper understanding of Mark 13 and the gospel as a whole. Before discussing this task and the particular aims of the present study further, the scholarship on Mark 13 needs to be outlined to demonstrate where the present work fits in and to better demonstrate which gap it intends to fill within the larger body of research on Mark 13. However, it is by no means possible to engage with all the previous works on this chapter. What follows is a selected overview of some particularly influential scholarly studies which provide different approaches to the text.

1.1 Scholarly views on Mark 13

Many studies on the Gospel of Mark refer to Mark 13 because this chapter appears crucial to fundamental questions, such as the place or dating of the gospel text. An exegesis of this chapter is found in almost every general study on Mark. However, the text of Mark 13 has been interpreted in many different ways with varying outcomes. Thus, in terms of dating the gospel, scholars have used Mark 13 to argue that it was written shortly before¹ or in the aftermath² of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, which happened during the Jewish Revolt against Rome (66-73 CE). This already reflects the scholarly differences one can observe in the secondary literature on this chapter.

Most scholars agree that the prophesied doom of the temple in Mk 13:2 somehow refers to the events surrounding its destruction in 70 CE. Thus many locate the historical context within the Jewish war. Hengel has produced a notable historical

¹ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 34A, Dallas, Word Books, 1989, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

² H.N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 114, Leiden, Brill, 2004, pp. 84-94. See especially the extensive list of scholars referenced for either side of the argument on p. 82.

study that situates Mark 13 (and the whole of Mark) somewhere in the year 69 CE by relating the textual evidence to historical events and thus situating the creation of the chapter before the destruction of the temple.³ In contrast to Hengel, Incigneri and Such opt for identifying Titus as the ‘abomination of desolation’ (Mk 13:14); Incigneri argues for a date after the destruction of the temple, more precisely “in the latter months of 71 [CE]”.⁴ This view that Mark 13 is related to the first Jewish-Roman War is echoed by several scholars, who interpret Mark 13 in the light of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that happened in 70 CE.⁵ Thus Evans comments that Mark’s readers were aware “that General Titus had besieged the city of Jerusalem and that therefore Jesus’ doleful prophecy of the doom of the city of Jerusalem and its famous temple were on the verge of literal fulfillment”.⁶ This view is subsequently adopted by Balabanski, who points out that there are heightened expectations in the Markan community “fuelled by the destruction of the temple”.⁷ Likewise Moore’s postcolonial investigation describes Rome as “merely God’s instrument, his scourge, which he employs to punish the indigenous Judean elites” with the destruction of the temple.⁸ Yet another interesting theory is Kloppenborg’s reading of Mark 13:1-2 “as a historiographic effort to provide a retrospective account of the dual fates of Jesus and the temple”.⁹ He assumes a post-70 CE date by demonstrating how the Roman ritual of *evocatio* is alluded to in the Markan text.¹⁰ Some studies have even tried to reduce the whole of Mark 13 to simply refer to the

³ Martin Hengel, ‘Entstehungszeit und Situation des Markusevangeliums’, in H. Cancik (ed.), *Markus-Philologie: Historische, literargeschichtliche und stilistische Untersuchungen zum zweiten Evangelium*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 33, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1984, pp. 1-46.

⁴ Brian J. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, pp. 116-155 and W.A. Such, *The Abomination of Desolation in the Gospel of Mark: Its Historical Reference in Mark 13:14 and its Impact in the Gospel*, Oxford, University Press of America, 1999, pp. 92-101.

⁵ Regarding the creation of Mark 13, Müller argues that its basis was written in the disturbances of the Jewish War, while Mark uses this *Vorlage* and composes the chapter after the war, see U.B. Müller, ‘Apokalyptische Stroemungen’, in U.B. Müller (ed.), *Christologie und Apokalyptik*, Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig, 2003, p. 245 and U.B. Müller, ‘Apokalyptik im Neuen Testament’, in U.B. Müller (ed.), *Christologie und Apokalyptik*, Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig, 2003, p. 277-279.

⁶ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 34B, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001, p. 337.

⁷ V. Balabanski, *Eschatology in the making, Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, R. Bauckham (ed.), Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 97, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 100.

⁸ S.D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse, Postcolonialism and the New Testament*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006, p. 35.

⁹ John S. Kloppenborg, ‘Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 124, no. 3, (2005), pp. 419-450, p. 450.

¹⁰ Kloppenborg, ‘Evocatio Deorum and the Date of Mark’, pp. 419-450.

destruction of the temple and the subsequent doom of the city.¹¹ Adams has opposed this view, analysing how the use of OT passages in Mk 13:24-25 points to the eschaton.¹² Apart from these attempts to connect Mark 13 with the Jewish-Roman War, Theissen has developed another impressive attempt at placing Mark 13 into a historical context. He believes in a substantial *Vorlage* for Mark 13 that existed for decades before Mark edited his thirteenth chapter and identifies the ‘beginning of birth pangs’ (Mk 13:8) as related to the years 36-37 CE, while the ‘abomination of desolation’ (Mk 13:14) and the description of the impending doom of the temple (Mk 13:2) refer to the events of the years 39-40 CE. These years are associated with the ‘Caligula Crisis’, when the emperor Caligula intended to deify himself in the Jerusalem Temple by erecting a statue.¹³

Needless to say, there is a whole gamut of further secondary literature dealing with the question of dating the gospel by using some form of the historical-critical method. Different interpretations of Mark 13 are then regularly used to uphold different answers along the lines outlined above.¹⁴ Most of the studies that have traditionally dealt with the issue of understanding Mark 13 in the last few decades follow a redaction-critical approach. They try to discern the original author’s contributions as distinct from older traditions incorporated into the chapter. Two famous German studies that use a redaction-critical approach on Mark 13 stem from Lambrecht¹⁵ and Pesch¹⁶. The former comes to the conclusion that “*der redaktionelle Gehalt von Mk 13 ... sehr gross [ist]*”.¹⁷ He acknowledges that there are pieces of older tradi-

¹¹ For example the view that Mk 13:24-27 solely refers to the destruction of the temple is taken by R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, p. 533. Also see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2, London, SPCK, 1996, pp. 339-368.

¹² Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven, Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World*, M. Goodrace (ed.), Library of New Testament Studies 347, London, T&T Clark, 2007, pp. 153-157.

¹³ Gerd Theissen, ‘The Great Eschatological Discourse and the Threat to the Jerusalem Temple in 40 C.E.’, in G. Theissen (ed.), L.M. Maloney (tr.), *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991, pp. 125-165. On this approach, also see N.H. Taylor, ‘Palestinian Christianity and the Caligula Crisis. Part II. The Markan Eschatological Discourse’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 18, no. 62, (1996), pp. 13-40.

¹⁴ An interesting approach is Müller’s analysis of the temporal markers in Mark 13, see Peter Müller, ‘Zeitvorstellungen in Markus 13’, *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 40, no. 2, (1998), pp. 209-230. For a good overview of past scholarly interpretations of Mark 13 until the end of the 20th century, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse*, Peabody, Hendrickson, 1993.

¹⁵ Jan Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse: Literarische Analyse und Strukturuntersuchung*, Rom, Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1967.

¹⁶ Rudolf Pesch, *Naherwartungen: Tradition und Redaktion in Mk 13*, Düsseldorf, Patmos-Verlag, 1968.

¹⁷ Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse*, p. 256

tions woven into the Markan redaction, but states that Mark follows his own composition and adjusts the speech according to his desires.¹⁸ Pesch agrees Mark heavily edited a pre-Markan source, but Pesch further argues this must have been an *apokalyptisches Flugblatt* (apocalyptic pamphlet) the evangelist redacted.¹⁹ These redaction-critical studies are still quite popular amongst scholars who tackle issues surrounding this chapter.²⁰ In contrast to these redaction-critical studies, however, there has been a recent attempt by Pitre to identify material in Mark 13 that goes back to the historical Jesus. He finds good grounds for three parts of the discourse (Mk 13:5-8; 9-13; 14-27) to be traced back to the historical Jesus.²¹

Despite these purely redaction (or source) critical approaches, there are several studies investigating the influence of the OT and other intertestamental texts on Mark 13. Two of the most influential representatives are Hartman²² and Brandenburger²³. Hartman analyses the OT references in Mark 13 and concludes that the chapter is based on a “midrash” of the Book of Daniel.²⁴ Brandenburger concentrates more on the individual themes in the Markan chapter and their origins and use of OT or intertestamental texts. For example, he shows how Mk 13:24-27 is no simple reference to Daniel, but also reflects the motif of a theophany, as taken from several OT and intertestamental sources.²⁵ Whether one agrees with the details and outcomes of such studies, they have demonstrated the impact of these older texts on Mark 13 and brought them to the forefront again. Most of these studies use a diachronic approach to the text, since they are concerned with uncovering the original form, its original *Sitz im Leben* or at least the *Vorlage* that has been used in creating the current, redactional text of Mark 13.

Recently, there have been attempts to use a synchronic approach. One notable way is the application of narrative theory to the text. Gray’s work stands out in this

¹⁸ Lambrecht, *Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse*, pp. 256-257. Pesch (*Naherwartungen*, pp. 43-44) criticises Lambrecht for missing the motives behind the Markan redaction and thus states that a literary and structural analysis, such as performed by Lambrecht, can become arbitrary.

¹⁹ Pesch, *Naherwartungen*, pp. 203-244.

²⁰ As such Roskam (*The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context*, pp. 55-72), in a more recent study, attempts to show that Mk 13:9-13 is based on traditional material from Q and that Mark’s redacted material is intended to emphasise the persecution of the Markan community by Jewish and non-Jewish authorities.

²¹ Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005, pp. 219-377.

²² Lars Hartman, *Prophecy interpreted: The Formation of some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts and of the Eschatological Discourse Mark 13 Par.*, Lund, CWK Gleerup, 1966.

²³ Egon Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984.

²⁴ Hartman, *Prophecy interpreted*, pp. 145-177, 206-247.

²⁵ Brandenburger, *Markus 13 und die Apokalyptik*, pp. 54-65.

regard not only for its application of narrative theory, but for recognising the important intertextual elements that are incorporated. He asserts Mark portrays Jesus as the new temple and with the demise of the old temple in Jerusalem signals the beginning of the end.²⁶ Gray points out continuously the many deeply intertwined intertextual references²⁷ in the individual parts of Mark 13 and lets his interpretations be guided by these references.²⁸ Gray's fine study reflects not only a certain reading of the narrative structure of Mark 13, but also emphasises the importance of OT and other Jewish references. Regardless of whether one agrees with Gray, these references are deeply intertwined into the Markan text. Just consider, for instance, the Danielic references to the 'abomination of desolation' (Mk 13:14) or 'the coming of the Son of Man' (Mk 13:26).²⁹ Therefore, it is prudent to understand Mark 13 against the backdrop of older Jewish literature.

1.2 The Aim of this study

While all these previous studies furthered the discussion and contributed to a better understanding of Mark 13, the scholarly debate is now in a state of stagnation. In order to try to move the discussion forward, this study attempts a different approach. It does not intend to pose the grand (synchronic and diachronic) questions some of these previous studies have attempted upfront (such as: What is the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark 13? How does Mark 13 fit into the rest of the gospel narrative? What *Vorlage* did Mark use? What has been redacted by Mark and why? *etc.*). Instead it tries a different approach of investigating a small puzzle in Mark 13. This new line of enquiry in turn provides new questions and answers.

The small puzzle is the enigmatic verse of Mk 13:30, which has proven to be a stumbling block for many scholars. Towards the end of Jesus' long speech, after the extensive descriptions of the tribulations (Mk 13:5b-23), the coming of the Son of

²⁶ Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Its Narrative Role*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008, pp. 94-155.

²⁷ Gray shows at great length how certain terminology in Mark 13 is borrowed from OT sources. For example he demonstrates that 'birth pangs' are common in OT imagery and point to the 'day of the Lord', see Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 117-120.

²⁸ A complex example is the short phrase 'let the reader understand' in Mk 13:14, where he opts for an understanding that takes into account "the intertextual echoes from Daniel and Isaiah, along with the intratextual echoes of the disciples' failure to understand", see Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 130-133.

²⁹ On the topic also see David S. du Toit, 'Die Danielrezeption in Markus 13', in K. Bracht and D.S. du Toit (eds.), *Die Geschichte der Daniel-Auslegung in Judentum, Christentum und Islam: Studien zur Kommentierung des Danielbuches in Literatur und Kunst*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2007, pp. 55-76.