JESUS,
KING OF ISRAEL

TOWARD A FINAL QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

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Chapter Two

The Non-Apocalyptic Proto-Mark

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THE NON-APOCALYPTIC PROTO MARK

This chapter will illustrate that a wide array of key terms and phrases in the Gospel of Mark were deployed in symbolic frequencies, and that the author had constructed an extensive numerological puzzle which would have been of unique interest to a literate, highly educated Neopythagorean reader. The deciphering of this puzzle establishes as a corollary that the eschatological discourse of Mark 13 was not part of the original composition. It also lends further weight to the inference that the 153 fish in John 21 is a symbol based on the Pythagorean theorem, and was originally a Markan creation.

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In Chapter One we reviewed the six-section compositional structure of Mark and found that the story in John 21 contains numerous features that fulfill the expected literary structure of an original ending of the *Gospel of Mark* beyond 16.8. If the story in John 21 is restored to its apparent original location beyond Mark 16.8, it appears that the author of Mark intended to conclude his gospel with a victorious proclamation that Jesus had been raised, death had been overcome, and that the newly established *kingdom of God* would henceforth continue to flourish under the stewardship of Peter. The disciples were to become fishers of men, and the fellowship of believers, the *kingdom of God* would thrive, taking root in Galilee and spreading throughout the world.

There is one major obstacle to this theory—the dire speech in Mark 13. This eschatological speech, the "Olivet Discourse," claims that the world is about to end in a cataclysmic apocalypse. There is no reference to the kingdom of God in ch. 13. It consists entirely of a warning to believers of violence and tumult that is about to come. There is nothing left for the believer to do but sit on the porch and watch intently for the storm clouds of heaven that

will herald the end of days. Mark 13 presents an ominous vision of the immediate future that is diametrically opposed to the uplifting notion that the newly established kingdom of God would flourish in victory in the wake of Jesus' resurrection. In practical terms, there is reason to question whether these two mutually exclusive visions of the future were penned by the same author and coexisted in the same gospel.

Therefore, since ch.13 severely compromises the notion that Jesus' mission was to unveil and inaugurate a dramatic new kingdom of God, common sense might lead one to wonder whether ch.13 may be a later interpolation that was never intended to be part of the original composition. For all of the violent rhetoric related to the apocalypse in Mark is isolated exclusively to this one discourse in ch. 13. Other than this speech, the author surreptitiously alludes to an impending cataclysmic event in just two other small units, 8.38–9.1 and 14.62. As will be discussed below, there is reason to suspect that all three of these literary units are interpolations. For other than ch. 13 and these two incidental references, the rest of the *Gospel of Mark* reads as if it were written by an author who harbored no anticipation of, or concern for, an impending apocalypse. As Burton Mack observes:

> Were chapter 13 deleted from the gospel, it would be difficult to argue that the gospel was written by an author of apocalyptic mentality. [1]

Now, the notion that there could have been an earlier non-apocalyptic edition of Mark is met with skepticism by NT scholars for understandable reasons. Jesus is routinely presumed to have been an apocalyptic preacher and the *Gospel of Mark* is universally assumed in conventional theory to have been the earliest narrative gospel. Thus, the apocalyptic rhetoric in Mark is thought to be unremarkable and expected. Scholars will also point to the frequent references in Mark to Jesus as the *Son of man* that appear to carry implicit connotations of apocalypticism due to its association with Daniel 7.13. Furthermore, most scholars believe that the double tradition[2] material in Luke and Matthew has been drawn from a lost sayings collection "Q" which is presumed to have been (for the most part) a primitive collection of

[1] Mack, Burton, *A Myth of Innocence*, Fortress Press, 1st paperback edition, 1991, 325

[2] The term "double tradition" refers to material that exists in the same or similar form in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but does not appear in Mark. Many scholars believe that the double tradition material was drawn from a lost sayings collection commonly referred to as "Q," from the German quelle, meaning source.

the sayings of Jesus. Since the double tradition material in Matthew and Luke contains apocalyptic content allegedly drawn from this primitive Q source, this is often seen as independent evidence of apocalypticism in the earliest layers of the Jesus tradition. Thus, NT scholars quite understandably see no reason to question the originality of the explicit apocalyptic material in Mark.

An Essential Clue: Numerology in the Gospel of Mark

An examination of the numerological constructs in Mark will shed significant new light on the presumed originality of Mark 13 and the two associated units. The *Gospel of Mark* was constructed in six sections with twelve primary bracketed signposts designating the opening and closing boundaries of each section. In addition, if John 21 contains a preserved/edited version of Mark's original ending, once this narrative (less its Johannine accommodations) is appended to Mark 16.8, a seventh defining all-inclusive frame encompassing the ministry of Jesus comes into view—the promise to make the disciples fishers of men in 1.17 is fulfilled with the miraculous catch of 153 fish now residing in John 21. Given that the gospel's structure features twelve elements which delineate the six sections, and that an overarching seventh frame may define the whole of Jesus' ministry, it is intriguing that the author of Mark alerts the reader to *twelve* and *seven* as numbers of symbolic significance:

> 8.18 Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, **"Twelve."** 20 "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, **"Seven."**
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> 21 ***And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"***

The numbers *twelve* and *seven* are auspicious numbers in Judeo-Christian tradition as they are arithmetic combinations of three and four (3x4 and 3+4). In biblical numerology, three often represents the divine, God, and the heavenly realm. The star of David is two superimposed equilateral triangles; in Christianity, God becomes a "trinity." The resurrection occurs on the third day, and Jesus says "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2.19). As Jesus is thought to be a deity, Leonardo da Vinci portrays Jesus as a divine equilateral triangle in *The Last Supper*.

Conversely, *four* represents earthly existence and the material world; there are four points of the compass, four phases of the moon, four seasons. From ancient time there were four elements—fire, air, water, and earth. There are four corners of the earth and four winds in Revelation 7.1. So four is a common numerological symbol for the natural world.

Accordingly, *twelve* can often connote unions of heaven and earth, or God's chosen people as with the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. Twelve is also occasionally rendered in four groups of three to emphasize its arithmetic derivation from the symbolic four and three. The baptismal font in Solomon's Temple rested on the backs of twelve oxen, in four groups of three (1 Kings 7.25). The new Jerusalem in Revelation is to have twelve gates, in four groups of three (Rev 21.12–13). Leonardo da Vinci was aware enough of this symbolism that he rendered the apostles in four groups of three in *The Last Supper*. As twelve often symbolizes God's chosen people, the square of twelve, 144, is also used as the key factor in Revelation 7.4's "144,000 sealed," symbolizing the church.

Meanwhile, *seven* carries connotations of completion, spiritual perfection, and totality. God made the world in seven days, and man shall rest on the seventh day of the week. There are seven signs of Jesus in the *Gospel of John*, as well as seven "I AM" statements. The Revelation is addressed to the seven churches, and it refers to the seven spirits before the throne of God (Rev 1.4). In short, symbolic numerology appears throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the numbers *twelve* and *seven* in particular are of momentous significance.

Distinctive Keyword Frequency in Mark

By identifying the *twelve* section-defining primary brackets and the *seventh* interpretive frame in the *Gospel of Mark*, we have just begun to scratch the surface of the structural importance of twelve and seven in the gospel. This becomes apparent as we begin to explore the frequency of keywords as they are deployed in Mark, as they often appear in sets of seven or twelve. This inquiry will ultimately shed light on the interpolated nature of the apocalyptic units, so these data must be developed in some detail.

Several general observations are required. First, the authors of the Synoptic gospels use a wide array of distinctive keywords and phrases to tell the gospel story. Jesus is referred to as *Son of man* 69 times in the Synoptics. The *kingdom of God*, and Matthew's variant the *kingdom of heaven*, collec-

tively occur 82 times. Jesus is frequently addressed as *Lord*, but he is called *Teacher* as well. The apostles are often referred to simply as "*the twelve*." The phrase *"the word"* is often used in reference to the gospel. The formulaic "*Amen, I say to you*" occurs 51 times.

Table 2.1: Keyword Frequency in the Synoptic Gospels

Keyword or phrase	Mark	Matthew	Luke
Group 1:			
Kingdom of God (heaven)	**14**	37	31
Son of man	**14**	30	25
"Amen, I say to you..."	**14**	30	7
Galilee	**12**	16	13
Parable	**13**	17	17
Heaven	**18**	44	37
Teacher	**12**	12	14
Preach/proclaim (*kérussó*)	**12**	9	9
Jesus (Ἰησοῦ)	**13**	25	18
Jesus (Ἰησοῦν)	**11**	16	15
Lord (in reference to Jesus)	**16**	34	42
(the)Twelve (the apostles)	**11**	8	7
"the Word"	**12**	7	8
Sabbath	**11**	11	18
Group 2:			
Pharisee	**12**	29	27
Scribes (grammateis)	**11**	15	11
Chief priests (archiereis)	**11**	12	10
Demons	**11**	11	24
Unclean spirit	**11**	2	5
Jerusalem	**11**	13	31
Group 3:			
Christ	**8**	16	12
Son (of God and variants)	**8 ***	17	12
"As it is Written" (gegraptai)	**7**	9	11
Synagogue	**8**	9	16
Temple (hieron)	**9**	11	14
Gospel	**7**	4	2
(Holy) Spirit	**6**	12	17
David	**7**	17	13
Moses	**8**	7	10
Elijah	**8**	9	14

* 1.1, 1.11, 3.11, 5.7, 9.7, 13.32, 14.61, 15.39

In Table 2.1, **Keyword Frequency in the Synoptic Gospels,** I have listed 30 of the most distinctive terms and phrases in the Synoptics, along with the number of times that they occur in each of the three gospels. At the outset of this exercise, one would expect to find no discernable pattern in the *frequency of use* of these terms. Random composition and the vagaries of redaction, omission, and copying errors over the centuries should result in apparently random frequency of use. And this is indeed the case with Matthew and Luke. But Mark is a different story. In Mark, these 30 keywords and phrases occur with oddly nonrandom frequencies, and they fall into three distinct groups.

In Table 2.1, Group 1 consists of fourteen terms/phrases that carry positive connotations or are used in positive contexts. In Matthew and Luke there is wide variation in the number of times these terms are used, from as little as two to as many as 44. However, in Mark they cluster in a close range of eleven to fourteen uses each, with just two outliers (*heaven,Lord*) modestly exceeding that range. The terms *Teacher*, *Galilee,* and "*the word"* (in reference to the gospel), all occur twelve times. Several other terms occur eleven or thirteen times each. And while there are 86 references to *Jesus* in Mark, 62 are in the nominative Ἰησοῦς (Iēsous). But the remaining 24 are in the Ἰησοῦ and Ἰησοῦν forms, and these appear thirteen and eleven times respectively. As a final curiosity, the prominent phrases *kingdom of God*, *Son of man*, and *"Amen, I say to you"* occur fourteen times each. Though there is no noticeable precision in these numbers, the distinctive similarities in frequency are not what one would expect from simple random composition.

The statistical measurement of **standard deviation** confirms that the frequency of these terms is far more uniform in Mark than in Matthew or Luke. Standard deviation measures the degree to which individual elements in a group tend to diverge in frequency from the average of all elements in the group at large. In Group 1, the standard deviation in Matthew is 11.6, in Luke it is 10.8, but in Mark it is only 1.9. This is wholly unexpected statistical uniformity in Mark if the gospel was composed without any conscious attention to keyword frequency.

As Group 1 consists of terms with positive connotations, Group 2 consists of terms that carry evil or negative connotations—*Pharisees, scribes, demons, unclean spirits, chief priests,* and *Jerusalem*.[3] Here, the uniformity is even more striking. Five of these terms appear in sets of eleven in Mark. *Pharisees* is the only outlier in the negative group, but with twelve uses, it is off by just one. Yet, as will be discussed below, the use of *Pharisees* in Mark 7.3 is a probable interpolation; if it is excluded there would be eleven uses of *Pharisees* as well. This absolute uniformity of the frequency of negative/evil terms in Mark stands in stark contrast to the random deployment of these terms in Matthew and Luke, in which they occur from as little as two to as many as 31 times. In Group 2, the standard deviation in Matthew is 8.0, in Luke it is 9.7, but in Mark it is only 0.4 if the interpolated *Pharisees* is included, and 0.0 once it is removed. This is a bizarre array of coincidences if it is an unintended byproduct of random composition and redaction.

There is an intriguing grammatical accommodation in Group 2 pertaining to *scribes* and *chief priests*. Mark refers to *scribes* a total of 20 times, yet he used three forms of the noun—*grammateis* is used eleven times, *grammateōn* eight times, and *grammateusin* once. The same pattern appears with *chief priests*. He refers to *chief priests* a total of fourteen times, yet he uses the same three declensions in the same way—*archiereis* eleven times, *archiereōn* twice, and *archiereusin* once. Therefore, he has used the most frequent (nominative) form of these nouns eleven times each. Given that the other negative terms *demons, unclean spirits,* and *Jerusalem* each occur eleven times, and it is probable that *Pharisees* was used eleven times as well, the use of the nominative forms of *scribes* and *chief priests* eleven times each is suspicious.

Finally, Group 3 consists of ten essential key terms that occur with lower frequencies in Mark. Yet in Mark they cluster quite noticeably around seven to eight uses each. The actual average frequency in this group is 7.6, but the standard deviation is once again far lower in Mark—only 0.8 in Mark compared to 4.3 in Matthew and 3.9 in Luke. So in all three groups, Mark shows substantially higher statistical uniformity in the frequency of these terms than do Matthew or Luke. The data in Mark must cause one to suspect conscious intent on the author's part to deploy these keywords a specific

[3] Freyne, Sean, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations,* 1988. Freyne illustrates that Galilee and Jerusalem are intended as antithetical good vs. evil symbols in Mark. Galilee is where the kingdom of God flourishes, Jerusalem is the locus of forces aligned against Jesus.

number of times in the original composition, which of course is lost to us today.

Table 2.2: Standard Deviation of 30 Key Terms in the Synoptic Gospels

	Mark	**Matthew**	**Luke**
Group 1	1.9	11.6	10.8
Group 2	0.4	8.0	9.7
Group 3	0.8	4.3	3.9

The standard deviation statistics in Table 2.2 are remarkable in two aspects. Not only are Mark's results radically lower in all three groups than either Matthew or Luke, but Matthew and Luke are quite similar to one another. Matthew and Luke reflect the results one would expect from random composition, as there is clearly no attempt to compose with the frequency of use of these terms as a literary design criterion. On the other hand, Mark shows a tight clustering around the mean in all three groups. If the author of Mark did not intentionally deploy key terms in similar frequencies, this is a startling array of extremely unlikely coincidences.

One must wonder, is it possible that these data can be explained by the relative text length of the Synoptics? It is of course true that a longer text would create opportunities for more uses of high frequency terms. We see this for example with the name *Jesus*, which is used 86 times in Mark and 236 times in Matthew. Yet in terms of word length, Mark contains 11,107 words (through 16.8) compared to Matthew's 18,346 words, so Mark is 60% the length of Matthew. If the frequency of the name *Jesus* was a function of text length, we should expect to see 236 x 60% = 142 uses of *Jesus* in Mark rather than 86. So in this case there is no apparent correlation between word length and the two authors' propensity to use the name *Jesus*. Mark uses the name *Jesus* far less frequently per 1,000 words than does Matthew. Yet Matthew uses *demons* 11 times, precisely the same as Mark despite the fact that Matthew is much longer than Mark. And in sixteen instances the terms in Table 2.1 occur with the *same or less frequency* in Matthew or Luke than they do in Mark, despite the fact that Matthew and Luke are much longer compositions. So there is no correlation between the text length of the gospels and the frequency of these terms either.

Average Usage in Mark

It is also important to note a related phenomenon: The keywords and phrases in Group 1 in Mark occur an average of 13.0 times each, and Group 3 terms occur an average of 7.6 times each. So both groups show an average frequency of just marginally higher than the symbolic *twelve* and *seven* that the author has drawn attention to in 8.17–21. If this were just a random fluke, and key terms were appearing in precise frequencies by accident, they might as easily have clustered around any random numbers. The fact that so many terms cluster around averages just slightly higher than the *twelve* and *seven* cited by the author raises further suspicion that this is not the result of accidental random composition.

Mark's Twelve uses of Pharisee(s)

Now if the author of Mark *was* intentionally deploying terms in particular frequencies, the most glaring anomaly in Table 2.1 is *Pharisees* with twelve uses. Since twelve is a sacred number in biblical numerology, and commonly used to signify God's chosen people, there is no chance that the author would have intentionally used *Pharisees* twelve times as any kind of symbolic reference. However, since forms of *chief priests*, *scribes*, *demons*, *unclean spirits*, and *Jerusalem* all appear in sets of eleven, one must suspect that the author intended to use *Pharisees* eleven times as well. If so, he either miscounted due to editorial fatigue, or one of the twelve uses of *Pharisee*s in canonical Mark might be a later interpolation. And indeed, a probable interpolation occurs in 7.3:

> Mark 7.1 Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, 2 they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled
>
> *(that is, unwashed. 3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.)*
>
> 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?"

There are five indications that the underlined text, 7.3–4, may be a later redactional insertion. First, it represents a suspension of the narrative for the purpose of making a parenthetic clarifying commentary; if it is lifted out, the remaining text of 7.1–2 and 7.5 reads with uninterrupted logical continuity. Thus, 7.3–4 simply looks like a discrete addendum that could have been inserted after the fact. Second, though Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a source, neither Matthew nor Luke reproduces anything in 7.3–4, although they both copy over material similar to Mark 7.1–2 and 5 (Matt 15.1–3, Luke 11.37–39). This indicates that the material in 7.3–4 either did not exist in their copies of Mark or they both elected to omit it for some reason. Third, there is significant manuscript instability in 7.3–4 with several different readings. Aland's Synopsis has parenthetically bracketed 7.3–4 as containing a variety of different readings.[4] Fourth, the phrase *"the Jews"* in 7.3 is rare in Mark. It occurs only in the sarcastic epithet on the lips of Jesus' adversaries that he claims to be "king of the Jews." But other than this, the author of Mark never refers to "the Jews" as a social/religious class as is common in the *Gospel of John*. Finally, the claim that "all the Jews wash their hands" appears to be anachronistic. E.P. Sanders comments:

> Mark says that 'the Jews' washed their hands before eating (7.3), but in Jesus' day it would have been a small number of them. The Rabbis eventually made handwashing 'normative', and it is worth noting that it is one of the very few practices of ritual purity which have continued. But before 70 the common people did not accept the practice. [5]

Accordingly, the editorial side comment that all the Jews wash their hands per tradition is not likely to have been included in an early gospel of Mark. Collectively, these textual red flags suggest that 7.3–4 is a probable interpolation. If so, there would be eleven uses of *Pharisees* in the remaining text of Mark, which is consistent with the eleven uses each of the other five terms carrying negative/evil connotations.

This pattern indicates that the author of Mark was using the number *eleven* as a symbol of evil, in counterpoint to twelve and seven as symbols of good. Why would he have made this association? The notion that eleven connotes evil is not well developed in ancient numerological systems,

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[4] Aland, Kurt, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, In v. 4 some mss read *"baptize*" instead of *"purify."* Some mss insert *"and they do not eat anything from the market unless they purify it"* after "themselves." Some mss contain *"and beds"* after "bronze."

[5] Sanders, E.P., *Jesus and Judaism*, 1985, p. 186

although falling as it does between the perfect ten and the auspicious twelve, it can imply incompletion, instability, or chaos. But the most direct association of eleven with evil occurs in Daniel 7, wherein the "terrible fourth beast" with ten horns sprouts a small, eleventh horn (Dan 7.7–8). This eleventh horn represents pure evil; it is the anti-Christ who is at war with the saints (7.21). That all five of the groups of enemies of Jesus in Mark, as well as Jerusalem, which in Mark is the symbolic locus of forces aligned against Jesus, are rendered in sets of eleven is a compelling parallel with the eleventh horn of the beast in Daniel as the anti-Christ. There is, therefore, a persuasive logical foundation and literary antecedent for the author's use of eleven as symbolic of the forces aligned against Jesus.

Though one might imagine that all evil terms occurring in sets of eleven may be nothing more than a spectacular array of coincidences, it is in fact compelling evidence that the author was deploying key terms in symbolic frequencies for whatever reasons he may have had. For it is highly improbable that the six prominent negative/evil terms in Mark would be used in precise sets of eleven by accident. To illustrate the probability of this occurring by chance, let us assume that the author had no intent to render these terms eleven times each, and that he could as easily have used them either 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13 times each. This, of course, is an artificially limited population of six potential outcomes for illustrative purposes, as in reality these terms could as easily have been used with much greater or lesser frequencies, as they are in Matthew and Luke (e.g., *unclean spirits* occurs only twice in Matthew and five times in Luke, compared to the eleven in Mark). However, if we stipulate that the author had an equally random chance of using each of these terms either 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13 times, the odds of all six terms being used the *same number of times* would be one in 50,000.[6] These odds are trifling enough, but compound this with the fact that the negative terms are each used precisely *eleven* times, recalling the eleventh horn of the beast in Daniel, and we arrive at an incontrovertible observation that the author of Mark was using the number *eleven* as a symbol of evil, and that he was therefore most likely deploying a wide range of positive terms in symbolic frequencies as well.

[6] The odds of each given term being used in six different potential outcomes, are one in six, or 16.667%. The odds of all six terms being used the *same number* of times by random chance are 0.1667 to the sixth power, or 0.00002, or 1/50,000. These are the same odds as rolling a die and getting the same result six times in a row.

Further Evidence of Interpolation

The next question would then be whether there is evidence of further interpolated material that, if removed, would cause the terms in Groups 1 and 3 to conform more precisely to an average frequency of *twelve* and *seven* respectively, rather than the 13.0 and 7.6 in the canonical text? This chapter opened by observing that the apocalyptic material in ch. 13 and the two smaller units 8.38–9.1 and 14.62 might be suspected as interpolated material because they are in disharmony with the apparent original victorious grand finale of the gospel. Accordingly, it is stunning to see the revised frequency data in the *Gospel of Mark* once these three apocalyptic units are lifted out:

Table 2.3: Keyword Frequency in the Synoptic Gospels with the three Apocalyptic Units removed from Mark

Keyword or phrase	Mark	Matthew	Luke
Group 1:			
"Amen, I say to you..."	**12**	30	7
Preach/proclaim (*kérussó*)	**12**	9	9
Galilee	**12**	16	13
Parable	**12**	17	17
Heaven	**12**	44	37
"the Word"	**12**	7	8
Son of man	**11**	30	25
Teacher	**11**	12	14
(the)Twelve (the apostles)	**11**	8	7
Sabbath	**11**	11	18
Jesus (Ἰησοῦν)	**11**	16	15
Jesus (Ἰησοῦ)	**13**	25	18
Kingdom of God (heaven)	**13**	37	31
Lord (in reference to Jesus)	**14**	34	42
Group 2:			
Pharisees	**12**	29	27
Scribes (grammateis)	**11**	15	11
Chief priests (archiereis)	**11**	12	10
Demon(s)	**11**	11	24
Unclean spirit(s)	**11**	2	5
Jerusalem	**11**	13	31

Group 3:			
Christ	**7**	16	12
Son (of God and variants)	**7**	17	12
As it is Written (gegraptai)	**7**	9	11
Synagogue	**7**	9	16
Temple (hieron)	**7**	11	14
David	**7**	17	13
Moses	**8**	7	10
Elijah	**8**	9	14
Gospel	**6**	4	2
(Holy) Spirit	**5**	12	17

As is evident, once ch. 13 and the two small apocalyptic units 8.38–9.1 and 14.62 are excluded, the data show a decisive convergence of key term usage in Groups 1 and 3 toward frequencies of *twelve* and *seven* respectively. The frequency of *heaven* drops from eighteen to twelve. The number of *"Amen, I say"* sayings drops from fourteen to twelve, and *parable* drops from thirteen to twelve. Meanwhile, other terms converge in this direction. *Lord* is reduced from sixteen to fourteen, and *Son of man* drops from fourteen to eleven. As a result, the average frequency in the Group 1 keywords/phrases drops from 13.0 to 11.9, which in practical terms is the twelve we are anticipating. The standard deviation drops from 1.9 to an even more tightly clustered 0.9.

Moreover, the same phenomenon occurs in Group 3. *Christ, "Son" (of God)*, and *synagogue* all drop in frequency from eight to seven uses. *Temple* drops from nine to seven. *Gospel* is now one shy, dropping from seven to six. But overall, the average frequency in Group 3 drops from 7.6 to 6.9 once the apocalyptic units are excluded, which again in practical terms is the seven we are anticipating.

Though there is a decisive statistical convergence on *twelve* uses of each term in Group 1 and *seven* in Group 3, it is equally striking that there is no similar drop in the average of Group 2; the negative/evil terms in sets of eleven remain unchanged at eleven as none of these terms exist in the apocalyptic units. Given the author's candid alert to readers in 8.17–21 that *twelve* and *seven* are to be regarded as key symbolic numbers, it becomes clear that he was composing with an intent to deploy a wide array of keywords carrying positive connotations in these symbolic frequencies.

Table 2.4: Average Keyword Frequency in Mark with and without apocalyptic units

	Canonical Mark	Mark w/o apocalyptic units
Group 1	13.0	11.9
Group 2	11.1	11.1
Group 3	7.6	6.9

I should add an important point of clarification. By observing that the author was intentionally deploying keywords/phrases in sets of sevens, elevens, and twelves, I do not wish to suggest that *all 30 terms* in the table are *necessarily* the result of intentional composition. It is surely possible that the frequency of one or more of these terms might have inadvertently conformed to the pattern through no conscious intent of the author, or through subsequent redactional activity. There may be a commonly used word or phrase that had no intrinsic keyword relevance to the author, but has been used either twelve or seven times by coincidence. (One might suspect *kérussó* to be such a term as it is the only verb in the table.) Nor do I wish to suggest that this list of 30 terms is exhaustive. There may be other terms that I have not yet noticed. On the other hand, there are only two terms that occur in the *Gospel of Mark* other than these 30 that I would identify as important or distinctive keywords or phrases. These would be *spirit* (*pneuma/pneumati)* and *John the Baptist*. However, they are each anomalous and warrant specific discussion.

The occurrences of *pneuma* and *pneumati* are difficult to categorize. They conform to the pattern to a remarkable degree in that *pneuma* occurs twelve times in Mark, and *pneumati* occurs seven times. So the frequencies once again appear to be intentional. The difficulty, however, is that these terms are used in varying contexts that carry no consistent positive or negative connotations. They are both used in positive context with the *Holy Spirit*, they are both used in negative context with *unclean spirits*, and they are both are used in neutral contexts to denote a conscious state of mind (e.g., "the spirit *(pneuma)* is willing but the flesh is weak" (14.38), and "sighing deeply in his spirit" *(pneumati,* 8.12). These "state of mind" uses carry no discernable positive or negative associations. Since the author otherwise appears to be deploying positive terms in sets of sevens and twelves, and negative/evil terms in elevens, it is unclear what interpretive purpose he might have intended by using *pneuma* twelve times and *pneumati* seven times. Accordingly, these *spirit* terms represent an irregularity that does not conform to the

author's evident pattern, so they cannot be easily categorized. And since sixteen of the combined nineteen uses of *pneuma* and *pneumati* have already been accounted for with the entries of *unclean spirits* in Group 2 and *Holy Spirit* in Group 3, they are not included as separate line items in the chart, but rather noted here as an anomaly.

John the Baptist also presents an interpretive challenge. His name is mentioned sixteen times in Mark. However, six of these occur in the one pericope that was a subject of attention in the last chapter, 6.16–29, the beheading of John at Herod's party. In Chapter One, we examined the author's multiple bracketing technique for defining section boundaries in chiastic form. This analysis suggested that 6.16–29 disturbs the pattern of an otherwise precise compositional technique that the author used to define section boundaries. If 16.16–29 is lifted out, the anticipated multi-bracket boundary structure is restored. Since this pericope 6.16–29 does not fit structurally, one may suspect that it may not have been planned as part of the original composition. If it was not, there would be ten references to John in the remaining text. Yet if this were the case, the data are still insufficient to hazard a guess as to how the author might have intended to render John with respect to frequency of usage. Is it possible that there were two additional uses of John now lost to omissions, which would have rendered him twelve times? This might have some speculative appeal given the gospel's rather abrupt and incidental introduction of him, only to have him disappear from the scene immediately in 1.14. On the other hand, is it possible that two additional references to John in the canonical text are interpolations, and the author had intended eight uses, consistent with the frequency of Moses and Elijah? The unit in 2.18–20 which contains two uses of John could conceivably have been inserted after the initial composition had been completed, although there is no reason to suspect that it was. One might also imagine that ten could have been the original plan—Luke 16.16 indicates that *"The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached*." If the author of Mark was harboring a similar sentiment, he may have viewed ten as an appropriate allusion relating John to the law.

Since the author's intent is not easily discerned in the surviving text, and since there is a question whether sixteen or ten uses of John would be the correct starting point for the inquiry, I have chosen to note the anomaly here rather than including John in the keyword frequency table. The observations in this chapter are not affected by how the author may have intended to interpret and resolve either *pneuma/pneumati* or *John the Baptist*.

On a Non-apocalyptic Proto-Mark

The keyword frequency data are compelling indicators that a pre-canonical edition of Mark contained no explicit apocalyptic material, for in practical terms it is difficult to imagine how so many keywords could have accidentally arranged themselves in sets of sevens, elevens, and twelves in the 94% of the text of Mark that carries no explicit apocalyptic rhetoric. These data point rather insistently toward intentional design. Since the three apocalyptic units skew the data beyond the symbolic frequencies cited by the author in 8.17–21, the inference is that these units are later additions to the text, or in the case of 14.62, a modification of the original text.

However, the notion that there may have been a non-apocalyptic proto-Mark is another idea that challenges conventional academic theory. As noted, since it is commonly assumed that Jesus was an apocalyptic figure, the presence of apocalyptic rhetoric in Mark is not unexpected. And Q is often viewed as independent evidence that apocalyptic content was present in the earliest layers of the Jesus tradition.[7] Of course, Matthew and Luke both contain material that parallels Mark 13 as well as 8.38–9.1, so this material was present in early editions of Mark; if they are indeed interpolations, they must have been added at an early stage of the gospel's development. I will argue however, that this is indeed what happened. If the apocalyptic units were later interpolations, they constitute evidence that a non-apocalyptic proto-Mark was composed prior to 70 CE, at a time when the author did not anticipate the outcome of the war. The events of 70 would have made this new gospel appear to be decisively naïve. Apocalyptic material acknowledging awareness of the events of 70 would need to have been added to Mark in the early aftermath of the war to salvage its relevance in the post-70 world. Matthew and Luke would certainly have been expected to have embraced this updated edition of Mark, given their aggressive amplification of eschatological content beyond that which exists in Mark. So a non-apocalyptic proto-Mark composed after the death of Peter in the mid-60s, then subsequently updated in the early 70s, is a scenario that comports well with the known historical data. And it would explain why the three apocalyptic units actually bear the tell-tale marks of interpolations, as will be discussed below.

[7] The theory of the existence of Q is founded on a questionable premise and the theory itself is internally self-contradictory. The non-existence of Q will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

Another argument used to support the notion that apocalyptic material was original to Mark are the author's frequent references to Jesus as *Son of man.* These appear to carry apocalyptic connotations due to their association with Daniel 7.13, and the *Son of man* references are perceived to be in harmony with the more explicit apocalyptic rhetoric in ch. 13, 8.38–9.1, and 14.62. However, it is remarkable that all uses of *the Son of man* in Mark, other than in the three apocalyptic units in question, appear in overtly non-apocalyptic contexts: The *Son of man* has authority to forgive sins (2.10), the *Son of man* is lord of the Sabbath (2.28), the *Son of man* must suffer, be killed and rise again (8.31), the *Son of man* will rise from the dead (9.9), the *Son of man* will suffer and be treated with contempt (9.12), the *Son of man* will be delivered into the hands of men (9.31), the *Son of man* came not to be served but to serve (9.45), woe to him by whom the *Son of man* is betrayed (14.21), the *Son of man* is betrayed into the hands of sinners (14.41). None of these uses of *Son of man,* in context, carry apocalyptic connotations. If the three apocalyptic uses in 8.38, ch. 13, and 14.62 are interpolations, there would be no way to detect in the remaining text of Mark that the author had anticipated an imminent end of the world.

We might wish to consider that the title *Son of man* would likely have been perceived as a politically innocuous title in comparison to other titles attributed to Jesus. It would certainly have been less inflammatory than *Messiah, king of Israel*, or even *Son of God* given the emperor's appropriation of that title. It is not historically credible to imagine that the Romans would have regarded an itinerant moral sage wandering the back roads of Galilee and proclaiming himself to be the *Son of man* as a political threat. So the initial adoption of the title by Mark and its original use in early Jesus traditions may have been related to attempts to render a depoliticized portrait of Jesus. In practical terms, the idea that a historical Jesus had proclaimed himself to be the *Son of man,* and that the Jewish peasantry had been responding enthusiastically to such a claim, is intuitively suspicious. It seems more likely that the title was attributed to him for obvious political reasons.

In general, there is a dramatic difference in the way apocalyptic material is distributed in Mark versus Luke and Matthew. It is found throughout Luke in nine of its 24 chapters.[8] Similarly, apocalyptic content appears

[8] Apocalyptic material is found in Luke 3.7-9, 3.16-17, 10.10-15, 12.35-50, 17.20-37, 18.1-8, 19.11-27, 19.41-44, 20.9-18, 21.5-36, and 23.28-31.

frequently throughout Matthew in eleven of its 28 chapters.[9] Thus, for both Matthew and Luke, apocalypticism was integral to the Jesus tradition as it is woven deeply into the fabric of both gospels. Over 10% of the text of Luke consists of eschatological content, as does 14.5% of the text of Matthew.

Mark is distinctively different on both counts. Only 6% of Mark's text consists of apocalyptic content, so just on this metric alone the author was far less preoccupied with this aspect of the Jesus tradition than either Matthew or Luke. But more importantly, all of the overt apocalyptic content in Mark is isolated to the one discourse in ch. 13, with just the two additional minor allusions in 8.38–9.1 and 14.62. The large majority of Mark appears to have been written by an author who had no awareness of, or concern for, an impending apocalypse.

This should have raised a red flag for Markan commentators, for if the author of Mark had written his gospel anticipating from the outset an imminent world-ending apocalypse, does it not seem that he would have found occasion to mention it more than once (13.31)? If the author believed it was vital to take heed and watch for the violent end of the world, why call such brief attention to it in 13.33–37 without further comment? The fact that the author of Mark does not otherwise write as if the end of the world is even a fleeting concern to him causes ch. 13 and the two ancillary references in 8.38–9.1 and 14.62 to stand out as later interpolations. Further observations supporting this interpretation are as follows:

- Ch. 13 reads like a freestanding, independent composition that has been inserted into a preexisting narrative. It is a discrete discourse. If it is lifted out, the narrative in Mark flows smoothly from chs. 12 to 14 with somewhat improved logical coherence. If ch. 13 were not there, the reader would not be aware that anything was missing.

- John the Baptist is not an apocalyptic figure in Mark as he most certainly is in Matthew and Luke. This is a striking oversight. With the insertion of the three apocalyptic units there has been an attempt to recast Jesus as an apocalyptic figure without bothering to do the same for John.

[9] Apocalyptic material is found in Matthew 3.7-12, 10.14-23, 11.20-24, 12.36-42, 13.24-30, 36-43, 47-50, 16.27-28, 21.33-41, 23.32-36, 24.1-51, 25.1-46, and 26.64.

- The appearance of Andrew along with Peter, James, and John in 13.3 is uncharacteristic of Mark in the middle sections of the gospel. It is typically just "Peter, James, and John" who are cited as the inner group. It is just these three who are allowed to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus (5.37), to witness the Transfiguration (9.2), and to accompany him in Gethsemene (14.33). Why does Andrew suddenly appear in 13.3?

- The apocalyptic vision in ch. 13 contradicts Mark's central premise that Jesus had come to usher in a new kingdom of God in Galilee that would flourish like a mustard seed, which is an independent theme regardless of a potential finale that confirms it. Ch. 13 says in effect, "the world will end soon and within this generation. One must focus all attention on watching for it." Ch. 13 does not mention the kingdom of God, which has been, in effect, rendered irrelevant in ch. 13.

- Ch. 13 appears in the middle of the gospel's Section Five, which is defined by the primary brackets of the arrival and return to the Mount of Olives in 11.1 and 14.26. The reference to Mount of Olives in 13.3 undermines the author's carefully composed bracketing structure. It is doubtful that he would have compromised his own literary design by inserting a third reference to Mount of Olives in this location.

- Ch. 13 contains grammar that appears nowhere else in Mark, including "the Father" for God, "the Son" for Jesus, and "the elect" for believers. These are not subject matter dependent references, so their absence elsewhere in the gospel is suspicious.

- 8.38 contains a high concentration of grammar that is either foreign to Mark, or otherwise occurs only in ch. 13. Terms otherwise absent in Mark include *ashamed (epaischynthē), adulterous (moichalidi),* and the phrase *holy angels.* Grammar in 8.38 that is only found in 13 includes the vision of angels coming with the return of the *Son of man* (13.26–27), Jesus' use of the distinctive phrase *"my words"* (13.31), and the concept of the *Son of man* coming in *glory* (13.26). So there are grammatical parallels between 8.38 and ch. 13 that do not occur anywhere else in Mark.

- In 9.1, the uniqueness of the grammar continues. The phrase *taste death* occurs only here in Mark. The idea that the *Son of man* will come with "power and glory" is found only here and in 13.26. The

notion that the apocalypse will come within the current generation is mentioned only in 9.1 and 13.30. This is an extraordinary claim to ignore throughout the rest of the gospel, had the original author harbored this belief from the outset. Thus, 8.38 and 9.1 both have exclusive grammatical correlations with critical material found only in 13, consistent with the inference that they are related interpolations.

- 8.38 and 9.1 are the last two statements in a monologue, tacked on just before a scene change. This is the most logical location for a redactor to insert new material.

- With respect to 14.62, Jesus' outburst in 14.62 is out of character. The author of Mark otherwise depicts a sullen and quiet Jesus resigned to his fate and unwilling to challenge authority. He is willing to drink the cup that is his destiny (14.36). In context, as Mark develops the story, one would expect Jesus to respond, "You have said so," and otherwise remained quiet, just as he does before Pilate in 15.2.

- Matthew and Luke both omit the "I AM" in 14.62 and replace it with the more circumspect responses of Jesus that one would expect in Mark before adding the apocalyptic element. This suggests either that the more reserved responses of Jesus were in their copies of Mark, or that they were both alarmed at Mark's uncharacteristic depiction of Jesus in this passage.

Thus, the three explicit apocalyptic units in 8.38–9.1, ch.13, and 14.62 each carry numerous indications that they are later interpolations. This is consistent with the theory that an initial edition of Mark was composed in the mid-60s which would have reflected no awareness of the events of 70. Once the disaster of 70 had occurred, the new gospel would have required an update to establish its relevance in the post-70 era. It appears that these apocalyptic units were inserted in the immediate aftermath of the war, in ample time for Matthew and Luke to have been using these revised/updated copies of Mark.

In the end, however, the fact that removing the three apocalyptic units in Mark causes the keyword frequency in the remaining text to converge decisively toward sevens and twelves is incontrovertible confirming evidence. There is no chance that the non-apocalyptic material in Mark would contain a precise and extensive array of keywords/phrases in symbolic frequencies of sevens and twelves simply by accident. The patterns are so well-defined that

the remaining minor anomalies stand out in bold relief—two extra occurrences of *Lord*, one extra use each of *Ἰησοῦ, kingdom of God, Moses*, and *Elijah*, and minor shortfalls in expected usage of two occurrences of *Holy Spirit*, and one each of *Ἰησοῦν, Son of man, Teacher, Sabbath,* and *Gospel*. The minor shortfalls may exist due to error/editorial fatigue, but they may also be due to the omission of passages in the original composition that did not survive into the canonical edition. It is not difficult to imagine that a missing ending of Mark beyond 16.8 may have included final references to the *Holy Spirit, Son of man*, and *gospel*.

Similarly, one might suspect that the one or two extra uses of *Lord, kingdom of God, Moses,* and *Elijah* might be explained either by the author's error/fatigue, or by subsequent interpolations, as with the twelfth use of *Pharisees*. Thus, we might ask, is there any further evidence of possible interpolation with the terms that exceed the counts of twelve or seven?

The Thirteenth use of *Kingdom of God*

With the apocalyptic units excluded there are thirteen remaining uses of *kingdom of God.* Collectively the data suggest that the author would have intended to use this phrase twelve times. Yet a suspicious use of *kingdom of God* is apparent in 10.24:

> 10.23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"
> *24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "**Children**, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!*
> 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

These three verses contain three uses of *kingdom of God*, with the second use in 24b being entirely redundant with the first in 23b. The first sign of interpolation is that, as with the *Pharisees* reference in 7.3–4, Matthew and Luke both reproduce 10.23 and 25 from Mark, but they both omit 24. So either 24 did not exist in their copies of Mark, or they both omitted 24 as an unnecessary redundancy. Notice that if 24 is removed, 23 and 25 read coherently in sequence as a rational author might have composed them, and indeed, this is how Matthew and Luke have rendered them. Furthermore, in 10.24 Jesus refers to the disciples as *children (tekna).* Jesus never addresses his disciples

as *tekna* anywhere else in Mark, or indeed in the entire Synoptic tradition, so its use in 10.24 stands out as a glaring grammatical oddity.

A review of the other twelve uses of *kingdom of God* in Mark causes 10.24 to stand out as the most likely interpolation for the reasons just noted. However, it is not vital to interpret it in this manner; the pattern of twelves is already clear in the other data, and the fact that there are thirteen uses of *kingdom of God* may be an anomaly that exists for some other reason.

Two Extra uses of Lord

Lord is another term that one would suppose that the author would have intended to use twelve times, but it occurs fourteen times in the canonical text. Though one might suspect that this could be accounted for with two separate interpolations, the most obvious potential solution is located in the single verse 12.29, in which *Lord* occurs twice. This is an added preamble to the first commandment:

> **12.28** And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"
>
> 29 Jesus answered, "*The first is, `Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*;
>
> 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

As with Matthew's omission of 10.24 and 7.3, here Matthew also reproduces Mark 12.28 and 30 but omits 29 (Mt 22.36–37). Luke 10.27 also omits the preamble in 29 when quoting the commandment. So once again, as with 10.24 and 7.3-4, there is no evidence that 12.29 existed in the copies of Mark used by Matthew and Luke. And again, similar to the foreign use of *tekna* in 10.24 and the odd use of *"the Jews"* in 7.3, the citation of *Israel* in 12.29 is rare in Mark. It is never used in this context in Mark; in fact, the term *Israel* appears in just one other verse where the chief priests are cynically deriding Jesus on the cross as "*the king of Israel*" (15.32). Another reason to suspect 29 to be an interpolation is that it simply reads intuitively as a formal embellishment that a redactor could understandably have wanted to insert.

Therefore, there is reason to suspect 12.29 as a redactional insertion. If it is, it would be the most direct explanation for the two extra uses of *Lord*

that do not fit the pattern. Since fourteen is close enough to twelve to suspect the variance may be due to interpolation, I will simply submit that 12.29 may account for the variance. Yet as with *kingdom of God* in 10.24, the case does not stand or fall based on one's willingness to consider 12.29 to be an interpolation. The anomalous fourteen uses of *Lord* may exist due to other factors.

The Three Variants of *Jesus*

The three variant spellings of *Jesus* are a fascinating puzzle unto themselves. The name *Jesus* appears 86 times in Mark, but only thirteen times in the typically genitive form Ἰησοῦ (Iēsou) and eleven times in the accusative Ἰησοῦν (Iēsoun). The remaining 62 uses of *Jesus* are in the nominative Ἰησοῦς (Iēsous). The fact that *Iēsou* and *Iēsoun* appear precisely 24 times out of 86 is, in itself, riveting in the context of the present discussion. But why do they occur thirteen and eleven times respectively versus the expected twelve each? The simplest explanation would be that on one occasion an *Iēsoun* was inadvertently replaced by *Iēsou*. This would create the thirteen/eleven split. It is also possible that an additional *Iēsou* was glossed in by a later editor, while an accusative was located in text now omitted. There is no way for analysts to determine the source of the anomaly two thousand years after the fact. However, the fact that the author deployed the nominative forms of *scribes* and *chief priests* eleven times each indicates that he was composing with an awareness of the frequency of particular declensions. Given that he casts negative/evil terms in sets of eleven, there is no chance that he would have intentionally used *Iēsoun* eleven times. In short, from the fact that there are 24 uses of these two forms of Jesus' name out of a total of 86, and they currently exist in a 13/11 split, one may reasonably infer that the author's original intent was to deploy them in two sets of twelve.

The Anomalies in Group 3

Turning attention to Group 3, one obvious variance is the eight uses of *Moses* and *Elijah* instead of the anticipated seven. Is there a passage in which both *Moses* and *Elijah* appear that might be an editorial gloss? Given that they appear together in the Transfiguration, attention is drawn to this passage:

> 9.2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, 3 and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. 4 **And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses;** and they were talking to Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, **one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."** 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

However, unlike *Pharisees* in 7.3, *kingdom of God* in 10.24 and *Lord/Lord* in 12.29, there is no reason to suspect 5b to be an editorial gloss. It functions well in context, and unlike the three prior potential interpolations, Matthew and Luke both reproduce 5b verbatim, so it was in their copies of Mark. Yet both the keyword table as well as the author's explicit declaration in 8.17–21 indicate that the author is mindful of sevens. So if he intended to use seven each of *Moses* and *Elijah*, one must suspect an interpolation somewhere, and a review of the uses of *Moses* and *Elijah* throughout Mark reveals 5b to be the only viable option. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume 5b to be an interpolation other than to force-fit the data to the theory.

There is another possibility however—perhaps the author *intended* to use *Moses* and *Elijah* eight times rather than seven. Since he created a group of negative terms in sets of eleven for symbolic reasons, is it possible that he also deployed *Moses* and *Elijah* in sets of eight to distinguish them from *Christ* and *Son (of God)*, which appear seven times each? For the number *eight* has established symbolic biblical significance. Abraham had eight sons. Circumcision is to be performed on the eighth day of life. The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) climaxes on the eighth day with a sacred assembly of all the people. Aaron is said to have been consecrated for seven days before taking up his priestly duties on the eighth day (Lev 9.1). By tradition, there were eight persons on Noah's ark who repopulated the earth (Gen 7.13–14). Therefore, given this biblical precedent, the author might have seen symbolic significance in arranging *Moses* and *Elijah* in sets of eight. Yet if he had done so, it seems that he would have associated *David* with *Moses* and *Elijah* in a set of eight, rather than including him in the group of sevens with *Christ* and *Son of God*. There is no reason to preclude the possibility that an eighth use of David may have been lost due to omission. If this were the case, there would have been a distinctive group of *Moses*, *Elijah*, and *David* all rendered in sets of eight, thereby distinguishing them from *Christ* and *Son (of God)*.

Of course, this is purely speculative for there are not enough data to support a conclusion. However, *Moses, Elijah*, and *David* symbolize three foundational propositions of Judaism—the *law*, the *prophets*, and the *kingdom of God*, so they fit well together as a conceptual group. Once the possibility that the author had grouped them in sets of eight is considered, a revised and even more intriguing hypothesis comes into view. For once we consider that an eighth use of *David* may have been lost in an omission, there remain *seven key terms* in Group 3 converging on seven uses each. Therefore, another possible feature of Mark's original embedded structure begins to suggest itself. Did the author not only deploy positive key terms in sevens and twelves, but arranged *seven key terms in sets of seven* and *twelve key terms in sets of twelve*? Surely it would have occurred to an author already committed to an elaborate array of sevens and twelves that creating "seven terms in sevens" and "twelve terms in twelves" would have been an ultimate achievement in his symbolic puzzle composition. The creation of a group of six evil terms in sets of eleven would be dramatic counterpoint within such a structure.

Yet until now we have supposed that there were fourteen terms in Group 1 that were arrayed in twelves. Have any of them been included by accident, perhaps due to coincidental but unplanned replication in twelve, or due to subsequent redactional activity? As noted, one stands out as a conspicuous oddity—*kérussó (preach);* this is the only verb in the list that otherwise consists of nouns, proper names, and distinctive phrases. It is an element of common grammar that seems less likely to have been rendered twelve times for any symbolic purpose. If it is excluded, thirteen positive key terms remain that appear to have been arranged in sets of twelve. One might also wonder whether references to the apostles as "the twelve" or the gospel as "the word" could have been accidental. Overall, these data are close enough to infer that the author's original objective may have been to render twelve positive terms in sets of twelve, seven positive terms in sets of seven, and six negative terms in sets of eleven. There is of course no existing autograph to verify that this was the author's intended design. But the possibility that the author was composing to this ultimate objective is intriguing to contemplate.

There will undoubtedly be readers/critics who object to this type of speculative reading of the gospel. To those I would submit that it is precisely this inquisitive process of speculative deciphering of the gospel's elaborate puzzle that the author intended to provoke. He went to breathtaking lengths to embed a hidden complex structure into the text, and he did so to challenge

and entertain a highly educated reader whom he expected would be particularly intrigued with numerological constructs. *"Twelve and seven,"* the author challenges the reader … *do you not yet understand?*

Potential Omissions in Mark

The frequency data show several slight shortfalls from the anticipated sevens and twelves. There are eleven uses of *Son of man*, *Teacher*, *Sabbath*, and the term *the twelve* in reference to the apostles, instead of twelve each. There are six occurrences of *Gospel* and five references to the *Holy Spirit* instead of the anticipated seven. And though there are seven uses of *David*, the author's literary design is suggestive enough to imagine that than an eighth use may be missing. A logical inference is that these shortfalls may be due either to editorial fatigue and error, or to redactional activity that resulted in omissions from the original composition.

Though potential omissions are speculative by definition, there are several abrupt transitions in Mark that are so abbreviated as to raise suspicions. These would include the extreme brevity of the temptation account (1.12–13), which is starkly dramatic but mentioned so briefly in passing that one must wonder if there was once a fuller elaboration of the temptations of Jesus that was subsequently suppressed? Clearly Matthew and Luke were motivated to provide far more detail in the temptation accounts. Similarly, John the Baptist is introduced as a dramatic figure in ch. 1, but is then quickly dismissed from the story in 1.14. Did the original text offer more commentary on John? Another possible omission occurs in 2.12–14, where Jesus is at his home in 12, he is teaching on the beach in 13, and at the tax office in 14. These transitions are suspiciously abrupt and cause one to question whether there may have been more in the original text. Many have wondered what may have transpired while Jesus was in Jericho in 10.46? And of course, our previous discussions indicate that there was concluding material beyond 16.8 in the original composition. So there is no shortage of sparse or truncated passages in Mark that make it appear as if original material may have been deleted or lost. Accordingly, an occasional shortfall in expected keyword frequency is not surprising.

In fact, what is far more striking is that there are not wider variances in the data. It is astounding that the author's keyword deployment has not been more severely compromised due to redactional activity or textual corruption in transmission. A popular allegation among some contemporary

scholars is that the textual transmission of the gospels over the centuries must have involved so much redactional manipulation and/or errors in the "copies of copies of copies" scenario that the original text is, in practical terms, lost to us today—some scholars are happy to pronounce that there is simply no way to know what the original *Gospel of Mark* even looked like. This is an easy claim to make with little risk to one's academic credibility since no one could have imagined there would be a way to refute it. Yet if this imagined level of textual corruption had occurred, there would be no way to detect that over two dozen key terms in Mark fall into distinct arrays of sevens, elevens, and twelves. Wholesale textual corruption should have obliterated any evidence of this. Yet, these statistical arrays remain so starkly visible that even the anomalies stand out as minor deviations from established patterns. This suggests a remarkably accurate textual transmission from extremely early versions of the text to modern critical reconstruction.

Of course, there are countless textual variations between individual manuscripts. But the ultimate technical reconstruction of the critical texts after the laborious sifting and sorting of manuscripts and patristic writings for the most probable original wording appears to reflect evidence of surprising textual stability—the scholars who have been responsible for the modern critical reconstructions appear to have done an exceptional job in recovering accurate approximations of early editions of this material. Scholars who promote the notion that the original NT texts have been effectively lost due to corruption in transmission may want to reconsider their rhetoric.

Is it all a coincidence?

Despite the obvious keyword deployment in symbolic frequencies, and though the author specifically alerts the reader to the symbolic import of sevens and twelves in 8.17–21, it is still hard to believe that the author would have constructed such a magnificent and complex hidden structure. The natural and quite understandable reaction is, "why would the author have done such a thing?" Is it possible that these data are nothing more than an astounding confluence of coincidences? Practically speaking, the answer is no. The odds that these patterns having been produced by accident as flukes of random composition are virtually zero. We may refer again to the data in Matthew and Luke in which the authors made no attempt to render terms in symbolic frequencies. The randomness of the data in Matthew and Luke is apparent, and the difference between the deliberate structure in Mark and

random composition in Matthew and Luke is easily recognized. Once one becomes aware of it, signs of intentional design are visible even in the suspiciously similar frequencies in canonical Mark prior to any consideration of the interpolations that partially blur the data. And if by some remote chance these terms could have arrayed themselves in identical frequencies by accident, they could have clustered around any numbers. The fact that they are in sevens and twelves per the author's alert, and that negative/evil terms are in elevens, is compelling evidence of purposeful editorial design.

Is this all speculative? Some of it is, but surprisingly most of it is not. Since we do not have the original autograph, some speculation is required. What is most remarkable, however, is that so little speculation is needed to bring a coherent picture into focus. No speculation is required to see that the standard deviations in all three groups in canonical Mark are extremely low in comparison to the standard deviations in Matthew and Luke—this is simple objective data. It is also clear that the frequencies in Group 1 converge on twelves, and Group 3 converges on sevens, once the three apocalyptic units are removed. Thus, removing the apocalyptic units is like rotating the focus ring on a camera—it brings an already visible picture into sharp focus. And this picture is in sharp enough focus to recognize as the author's design before any consideration is given to the possible interpolations in 7.3, 10.24, and 12.29, or to possible omissions. But beyond this, the Group 2 collection contains five negative terms in sets of eleven in the received canonical text, and the sixth term *Pharisees* occurring twelve times includes a strongly suspicious interpolation. That the author is using eleven as a symbol of evil is apparent, and the correlation with the eleventh horn of the beast as the anti-Christ in Daniel 7 is almost obvious. These negative terms in sets of eleven require no speculation since they are present in canonical Mark.

Once these structural features are recognized, the amount of speculation required to get from the patterns in the observed data to a fully restored vision of what the autograph would have contained is surprisingly minimal. Recognizing 7.3, 10.24, and 12.29 as probable interpolations simply refines the picture and brings *Pharisees, kingdom of God,* and *Lord,* into conformance with already established statistical patterns. It is certainly more speculative to imagine that the author may have intended to render *David, Moses,* and *Elijah* in three sets of eight, since there are not enough sample data to infer this with any certainty. However, it is fair to suppose that presenting *David, Moses,* and *Elijah* in three sets of eight is an idea that would have appealed to the author had it occurred to him. Finally, it is certainly more

speculative to suppose that the author had taken his elaborate puzzle to the ultimate level of complexity by rendering seven positive terms in sets of seven, twelve positive terms in sets of twelve, and six negative terms in sets of eleven. But since Groups 1 and 3 closely resemble this elaborate structure and Group 2 is in effect already there, the data suggest that this may have been the author's final objective. In the end, one must consider that it would be quite odd indeed if the author had gotten this close to achieving such a perfect and compelling structural array of key terms in symbolic frequencies without any conscious intent to do so.

Yet again, the most natural intuitive reaction to these observations is that the author of Mark would never have done this. Not only does the effort to compose in this manner seem absurd, but to detect the presence of these embedded symbolic structures in Mark, one would have to read the entire gospel with diligent care while inventorying every distinctive term along the way to seek patterns. It is difficult for the modern analyst to imagine that anyone would read Mark in this manner. Furthermore, an audience hearing the gospel recited orally would never have been aware of the hidden symbolism. Therefore, one would reasonably ask, *what could the author have possibly had in mind to create such a complex, but largely invisible symbolic puzzle?* Since it is not obvious why he would have done such a thing, the tendency is to write it all off as a massive array of bizarre coincidences. And practically speaking, it is natural to assume that if there were anything to it, 250 years of enlightenment era NT scholarship would have discovered it by now. Yet it is rather like looking at a map of the world in 1950 before continental drift was recognized—back then, the continents looked plainly obvious as pieces of a puzzle that had broken apart. But of course, everyone *knew* that the continents could not have moved. For the experts, the distinctive shoreline patterns on both sides of the Atlantic were nothing more than an amusing coincidence. Yet as we were eventually to discover, non-random patterns exist for reasons that are not always obvious.

Was this editorial behavior unique to Mark?

As startling as it may seem, there is evidence that this may have been a compositional practice used by other writers as well. In the *Gospel of Luke*, Jesus' mother *Mary* is mentioned by name *twelve* times. Since twelve often signifies God's chosen people, and of all people in Christian tradition, none

was more chosen than Mary, to render her name twelve times carries obvious symbolic import. By comparison, Mary is never mentioned by name in John. She is mentioned once by name in Mark and five times in Matthew. So it would be ironic in the extreme if the author of Luke had used Mary's name precisely twelve times without any awareness that he had done so.

All twelve uses of *Mary* in Luke occur in the infancy narrative, 1.5–2.40. I will argue in Chapter Seven that this infancy narrative was initially composed as an independent literary unit, and that it, along with the preamble Luke 1.1–4 and the separate pericope 2.41–52, were subsequently cobbled together and appended to Luke 3–24 in the form of chs. 1–2.[10] Not only does Luke 1.5–2.40 contain twelve uses of *Mary*, it also features seven references to the (*Holy) Spirit*, and seven uses of *Israel*. The seven references to the *Holy Spirit* are an ideal symbolic counterpoint to the twelve uses of *Mary*. The author of this Lukan infancy narrative also holds the traditions of Israel in high esteem (contrary to the author of Luke 3–24), so the fact that *Israel* is also used seven times contributes further to the impression that the author may have been using terms in deliberate frequencies. So either Luke 1.5–2.40 was composed by an author making the same use of symbolic sevens and twelves that exists in Mark, or it contains a strange array of oddly improbable coincidences.

Meanwhile, though the author of Matthew does not use keyword frequency in the aggressive form that it appears in Mark, it is intriguing that the term *Israel* is used *twelve* times in Matthew. This is noteworthy for the fact that Matthew has an abiding interest in depicting the Jesus story as a fulfillment of Judaism, and there is no more perfect number than twelve to symbolize Israel. Furthermore, Matthew often quotes "prophetic" scriptures as being fulfilled, but in point of fact, he documents *twelve* specific citations of prophetic scriptures fulfilled.[11] Was this by design, or yet another odd coincidence? Is it possible that the author of Matthew did not know that he had used *Israel* twelve times, or that he had cited twelve specific fulfillments of scripture? And if he was intentionally inserting twelve references to Israel and twelve quotations of fulfilled scripture, did he expect readers to realize

[10] The original *Gospel of Luke* appears to have commenced at 3.1. Mary is never mentioned by name in Luke 3–24. She is mentioned as Jesus' mother twice, both dismissively and even derisively (8.19–21, 11.27–28). The author of Luke 3–24 evidently had no awareness of the deeply venerating paean to Mary in Luke 1–2. Nor does the author of Luke 3–24 have any hint of respect for the traditions of Israel and the fathers that is so apparent in Luke 1–2. That Luke 1–2 is a late interpolation is explored in detail in Chapter Seven.

[11] Matthew 1.22, 2.15, 2.17, 2.23, 3.3, 4.14, 8.17, 12.17, 13.14, 13.35, 21.4, 27.9

that there were twelve of each, and appreciate the symbolism? Did he imagine his readers would count them, just as Mark must have imagined readers would count the key terms in his gospel?

One might also note that the *Gospel of John* through the end of ch. 20 contains seven signs performed by Jesus without numbering them all.[12] In order to recognize that there are seven, one needs to read the text while taking an inventory of them. In John, there are also seven "I AM" statements that need to be counted and recognized in the same way.

Though these could all be unintentional flukes, there is enough similarity in form and focus on key terms in sevens and twelves to suspect that they were being used in symbolic frequencies by authors other than Mark. Nevertheless, Mark takes the concept into far more rarified atmosphere by creating a breathtakingly complex puzzle. Only an astute reader accustomed to interpreting texts in this manner would be able to detect and appreciate Mark's intricate construction. On the other hand, engaging with and solving such an obscure puzzle would surely have been an intriguing challenge for such a reader. And, in the end, one may suspect that this was the author's objective. By weaving complex symbolic structures so deeply into the fabric of the text that they are invisible to the common reader/hearer, the author essentially composed a subliminal hidden gospel for a highly educated, philosophically oriented reader. It is a work of magnificent complexity, even mathematical beauty, designed to attract, engage, and to entertain a sophisticated reader.

Who might these elite, educated readers have been? A clue may be found in the author's preoccupation with numerology itself. Pythagoras was the first Greek philosopher to imbue numbers with transcendent, eternal meanings far beyond their arithmetic values. In Pythagorean thought, reality itself is quintessentially mathematical in nature, and philosophy is based on the eternal essence of numbers. Moreover, there are direct parallels between Pythagorean and Judeo-Christian numerology. In Pythagorean thought, the numeral *three* signifies transcendent spirituality, while *four* represents the material world. Accordingly, seven is auspicious as a combination of three and four, a symbol of spiritual completion, just as it is in biblical symbolism. So the parallels between Pythagorean and Judeo-Christian numerology are striking. As the author of Mark develops his elaborate play on numbers, they

[12] The seven signs in John 1–20 include water to wine (2.1–12), the healing of the son (4.46–54), the healing at the pool (5.1–11), the feeding of the 5000 (6.1–15), walking on water (6.16–21), healing of the blind man (9.1–12), and the raising of Lazarus in ch. 11.

would likely have had as much significance to a Pythagorean reader as those within the Jewish and Christian traditions.

What is most significant, however, is that a revitalized Neopythagorean movement was flourishing in the first century intellectual and cultural milieu in which Mark was produced. Clement of Alexandria referred to the Jewish philosopher Philo (c. 15 BCE–45 CE) as "the Pythagorean." Eusebius regarded Philo as a "man of the greatest distinction" who "surpassed all his contemporaries, especially in his study of Plato and Pythagoras."[13] Robert Kraft, in an address to a Society for Biblical Literature (SBL) Philo Group, opened his remarks as follows:

> It is tempting to say that the author of *On Creation* [Philo of Alexandria] was inebriated with thoughts of numbers in various connections and relationships. Whether and to what extent he might have been unusual for his time and training is one aspect of the problem. That he is usually perceived as unusual in this regard from our modern perspectives is obvious in the literature. My own interest in these matters is closely related to the fact that when I was first learning about the ancient Pythagoreans and their interpretations of reality in terms of number, I never could force myself, in scholarly empathy, into their world.[14]

In *On Creation*, Philo waxes rhapsodic on the transcendent virtues of numbers, and of the number *seven* in particular. Kraft cites Horst Moehring:

> In his arithmology, Philo makes heavy use of Greek myths and symbols, which he applies to purely Jewish concepts. ... ***Arithmology allows Philo to stress two points: a. the cosmic and human order described by Moses is of universal validity*** ...; b. this order is represented most clearly and purely in Jewish law, liturgy, and tradition; ***the Jewish religion is, therefore, the most 'natural' religion.*** ... ***The superiority of the Jewish tradition is not esoteric in character: as can be shown through arithmology***, ***it is reasonable and demonstrably so***.[15] (emphasis added)

Thus, in Philo, writing just a few decades prior to Mark, we find the intellectual instinct to merge the Pythagorean universality of numbers with the Mosaic tradition in order to argue the "universal validity" of Jewish

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[13] Eusebius, 2.3.4

[14] SBL Philo Group, New Orleans, 1996.
http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/courses/999/PHILONUM.HTM

[15] SBL Philo Group, New Orleans, 1996.
http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/courses/999/PHILONUM.HTM

tradition. Yet, is this not precisely the same philosophical/rhetorical impulse we find in the *Gospel of Mark*? For it is within this Neopythagorean philosophical milieu that the author of Mark constructed an extensive arithmetic latticework, weaving it deeply into the gospel story. In so doing, he appears to have replicated Philo's essential theoretical concept—he has fused belief in the transcendent symbolism of numbers with the Jesus tradition in order to argue that *the gospel itself is universally valid*. I do not wish to suggest that the author of Mark was writing in response to Philo in particular (although he may have been) but rather to note that Mark was composed within an intellectual/literary culture in which Neopythagorean numerological ideology was in prominent circulation. Seen in this light, a compelling motive for Mark's elaborate play on numbers becomes apparent.

Mark's Challenge to the Neopythagoreans

At the outset, one would understandably recoil at the idea that the author of Mark constructed his gospel by arranging virtually every keyword and phrase in symbolic frequencies. Yet, once one imagines that this was done to engage a sophisticated, literate Neopythagorean reader for whom numbers carried transcendent meaning, a coherent objective becomes clear. In fact, the author of Mark throws down a gauntlet in a none too subtle challenge to his Neopythagorean readers:

> 10.46 And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, **Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus**, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." 50 And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight." 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

Some context is required to justify the inference that Mark's reference to the "son of Timaeus" as a blind man is a reference to Plato's famous dialogue the *Timaeus*, and thus a challenge to Neopythagorean readers. First, the reference

to the Timaeus in this pericope is riveting, for David Runia observes in *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus*:

> Indeed, the Timaeus was the only Greek prose work that up to the third century A.D. every educated man could be presumed to have read.

Accordingly, since the *Timaeus* was well-known among Mark's educated, literate readers, it is difficult to imagine that the reference to the blind "son of Timaeus" would have been an unrelated accident. To the contrary, the author of Mark would surely have expected his use of the name *Timaeus* to bring Plato's dialogue to the mind of his educated readers. And perhaps to no surprise, the *Timaeus* is steeped in Pythagorean ideology:

> This mathematical construction of the cosmic soul and body in the *Timaeus* represents a genuinely Pythagorean blend of number theory, geometry, and musical harmony. Astronomy, the fourth member of the Pythagorean quadrivium, is also included since the world soul is cut into two strips corresponding to the celestial equator and the ecliptic (*Timaeus* 36b). But Plato has reworked these Pythagorean elements … into a new world picture that is at once highly symbolic and mathematically precise. // **The *Timaeus* is the single most important text for the future of the Pythagorean tradition**.[16] (emphasis added)

Moreover, we may note that the *Timaeus* draws specific attention and praise to *eyesight* as the key sense through which mankind comes to understand God and the "intelligence in the heavens:"

> The **sight** in my opinion is the source of the greatest benefit to us, for had we never seen the stars, and the sun, and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered. But now the **sight** of day and night, and the months and the revolutions of the years, **have created number**, and have given us a conception of time, and the power of enquiring about the nature of the universe; **and from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man. This is the greatest boon of sight**: and of the lesser benefits why should I speak? even the ordinary man if he were deprived of them would bewail his loss, but in vain. Thus much let me say however: **God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence** which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of

[16] Kahn, Charles H., *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans,* Hackett Publishing, 2001, 57

> the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries. (Timaeus 47a, emphasis added)

Accordingly, little imagination is required to suppose that Mark's representation of the "son of Timaeus" as a blind man was intended to challenge the praise of eyesight in the Timaeus. The blind man's name *Bar-timaeus* means "son of Timaeus." In the Greek text, the author identifies him first as *"the son of Timaeus,"* then cites his name *Bartimaeus,* then defines him as a *blind beggar*." The implication is obvious; if one is a son of Timaeus (i.e., a follower or believer in the *Timaeus*), one is blind and in need of healing. Thus, in this story the *son of Timaeus* begs of Jesus, "Master, let me receive my sight." Jesus then declares him to be well, and immediately the son of Timaeus receives his sight and follows Jesus. In essence, with the Bartimaeus story the author of Mark appears to issue a direct challenge to his Neopythagorean readers to abandon the cosmology of Plato and embrace the ultimate spiritual reality of the gospel. By constructing the entire gospel on a complex latticework of symbolic numerology that would have intrigued and engaged these same Neopythagorean readers, he created a stunning work of literature that could be read and interpreted on two separate levels by two radically different audiences.

A Return to the 153 Fish

In Chapter One I argued that the miraculous catch of 153 fish in John 21 was initially composed as a Markan construct. But with the study in this chapter, Mark's extensive preoccupation with numerology becomes uniquely relevant to the interpretation of 153. His creative adaptation of the Pythagorean theorem to denote the church becomes more intelligible as part of his grander engagement with a Neopythagorean audience. That 153 is derived from the sum of the squares of *three* (God) and *twelve* (God's elect) becomes a profound symbol in which God in union with all souls saved in the act of redemption is cast in terms of the Pythagorean theorem, which in Pythagorean thought represents transcendent eternal reality. This is a stunning and profound union of two powerful symbols. Yet it is in perfect harmony with the author's two-level construction of the entire gospel—the relatively simple and straightforward gospel narrative is constructed upon a subtle but elaborate, embedded numerological framework which could not fail to have engaged a highly literate Neopythagorean reader. Accordingly, the parallel

between the numerology in Mark and the use of the Pythagorean "153" in John 21 serves to bind the literary relationship between the *Gospel of Mark* and John 21 even more tightly together. For it is difficult to imagine that a Johannine scribe/redactor, had he been composing John 21 from scratch as an addendum to John, would have thought to create "153 fish" as an obscure symbolic nod to the Pythagorean theorem for use in the Johannine community. Conversely, it is evident that the author of Mark possessed both the intellect and motive to have created the symbolic 153 fish. For this author, using the Pythagorean theorem to symbolize the church in his climactic scene beyond 16.8 would have been recognized as the culminating crown jewel in his masterful play on numerology. It was offered as a final puzzle to be deciphered to the delight and intrigue of a Neopythagorean reader. In the end, the author of Mark's proposition to these readers is evident: as with Philo's claim that the superiority of the Jewish tradition can be demonstrated through its embrace of arithmology, the truth of the gospel is certain because it is interwoven to the core with the transcendent reality of numbers.

Conclusion

The author of Mark was, quite evidently, an extraordinary intellect who created a gospel that could be read and interpreted on two levels by two disparate audiences. On its surface, the *Gospel of Mark* is disarming in its apparent simplicity. It is written in a crude, remedial style that one might suspect is far below the true skill set of the author. It appears to have been written in a simplistic vernacular, perhaps to appeal to an illiterate audience for whom it was being performed orally. And at this level the author appears anxious to engage an audience that already knows some form of the Jesus story. He wants to "correct" what he believes to be misinterpretations or mistaken memories of Jesus. In this vein, he wants to assure his readers/hearers that Jesus did *not* publicly promote himself as messiah, and that he actively took steps to prevent a popular uprising. He wants them to know that Jesus had been condemned for blasphemy rather than sedition. He wishes to make it clear that Jesus had not called for a restored sovereign kingdom of Israel, but rather for a spiritual, apolitical kingdom. The notion that he was intending to be King of Israel was a gross misunderstanding. He wants his readers/hearers to know that Jesus' "true" vision of the *kingdom of God* had been misunderstood by everyone, that he had been advocating for a new spiritual kingdom, not a political one. And even his own disciples had not

understood this, so his readers/hearers could be excused for having made the same error. These corrective rhetorical strains in the *Gospel of Mark* indicate that the author was writing for an audience already harboring beliefs about Jesus that he wished to sweep under the rug, evidently for political reasons.

However, given the extraordinary numerological subtext in Mark that would escape the notice of the average reader/hearer, it is clear that the author had an entirely separate audience in view as well. The text is laden with interpretive structures that would be perceived and appreciated only by a literary elite who were accustomed to seeing transcendent philosophical significance in numbers. That so many keywords occur in sets of sevens and twelves is remarkable enough for its subtlety. But to render an additional group of evil/negative terms in sets of eleven elevates the concept to a more astounding level of nuance. As noted, I suspect the author may have intended to complicate the puzzle even further by rendering *Moses*, *Elijah*, and *David* in sets of eight. Though there are not enough data to establish this with certainty, it is another layer of complexity that the author of Mark would likely have relished had it occurred to him.

Few readers in Mark's day would have been able to detect so many statistical arrays woven into the text. This intricate puzzle would have been a challenge to unravel even in the gospel's original form prior to its various obfuscatory interpolations and omissions. But one of the author's apparent primary objectives was to engage literate Neopythagorean readers with this elaborate hidden puzzle. In our modern culture it is difficult to imagine that anyone would have either composed texts or read them with any attention to keyword frequency. And since the apocalyptic interpolations in particular distort the frequency data in the canonical text, it is perhaps no wonder that NT scholars have never been aware of this breathtaking compositional feature of the *Gospel of Mark*.