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The question of Mark 13 as an apocalypse

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Background: Many researchers accept that the Gospel of Mark is apocalyptic, which necessitates the need to determine whether Mark 13's eschatological discourse represents an apocalypse.

Setting: The question of whether the early church utilised an apocalyptic worldview is widely discussed in scholarly circles.

Methods: The article utilises a form-critical and syntactical analysis of the text of Mark 13.

Results: Mark 13 is deliberately written in a mode displaying several apocalyptic features. The text engages the present crisis situation when Roman authorities quelled Roman resistance by destroying parts of Jerusalem, including the Temple, in response to the question of whether the present crisis indicates the end of the present *aeon* and the introduction of a new world.

Conclusion: The Markan Jesus emphasises that the current situation introduces further suffering and persecution for believers but that does not indicate the end in itself. The time of the end is unknown, even to him. The discourse hence serves anti-apocalypse to discourage believers from overheated end-time expectations of an imminent end. Christians do not know when the end is coming, but they know who they expect to return.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The research findings contribute to Old and New Testament studies into apocalypticism.

Keywords: apocalypse; apocalyptic; eschatology; *parousia*; overheated end-time expectations; imminent end.

Introduction

'Apocalypse' is defined as a group of extrabiblical writings with identifiable apocalyptic characteristics and features that purport to be written by a biblical character (Comfort & Elwell 2001:68). The term is derived from the Greek 'revelation', and it is used as such in the New Testament (e.g. in Lk 2:32; Rm 16:25; 1 Cor 14:6) without referring to a literature type. However, scholarship designed the term as a construct to refer to a form of literature that displays a particular pattern of thought determined by an expected future judgement and end of the known world (eschatology). As such, the term is an abstraction, forced upon a specific text as an attempt to order and interpret it in terms of similar texts that seem to show some similarities.

The danger exists that one's definition of the *genre* of apocalyptic might lead to a denigration of the ascription of a *genre* to these texts. For that reason, Horsley (2001:123–124) warns that 'apocalyptic' is a 'highly problematic modern interpretive category' constructed by European scholars about a century ago that serves as a synthetic construct composed of what they deemed typical elements abstracted from a variety of Jewish 'revelatory' literature from different historical situations ranging from the 3rd century BCE to late antiquity. However, his conclusion that it is useless and problematic cannot be accepted. He argues that scholars read these texts as though they come from the same social and historical situation and as though they contain somewhat literal descriptions of symbols and images that may have been used rhetorically. As a result, it might not be true that such texts even predict an imminent 'cosmic catastrophe' that would end the world (Horsley 2001:124). Horsleye criticises scholars who ascribe the texts to apocalyptically minded people who became alienated from history and oriented themselves instead to an otherworldly existence because they lost hope for a world determined by evil cosmic forces.

However, his argument does not hold water because not all scholars read these texts in terms of the same historical and social matrix. They acknowledge their ignorance of the contexts in which the texts originated (think of the exilic context supposed to support the *book of Daniel*). On the contrary, what the texts do reveal is uniform ideas found among several different groups that use the same template in thinking about the future by utilising historical sources' mythological motifs

and symbols to paint an end to the known world order (or disorder). Especially Jewish apocalypses reutilised motifs from the Hebrew prophets, like the combat myth with its themes of *Urzeit/Endzeit* equation, creation and new creation, the monster symbolising evil and divine kingship (Dn 1–12; Is 24–27; 34–35; Ezk 38–39; Jl 3–4; Zch 9; 12–14; Ml 3–4).

In conclusion, the SBL Study Group's definition is sufficient and efficient in terms of available texts and provides a good angle of incidence when working with texts. It defines apocalyptic as a *genre* of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly human being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality that is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world (Collins 1998:32).

It is accepted that the Gospel of Mark utilises an apocalyptic worldview, argued more extensively in Nel (2014:233–264). But, if it is true, does it imply that Mark 13 represents an apocalypse? Such a question requires an abstraction of the discourse on at least two different levels, in the first place, the basic level of the denotative similarity of words and phrases. Mark 13 provides many examples of the reemployment of motifs found in the Hebrew Bible, and especially the prophets, necessitating the conclusion that the narrative is determined by its debt to such motifs that are concerned with cosmic crises and threats and the judgement of human beings. The next level of abstraction asks in a connotative sense what is the view of history, faith, Christ, the end-times and other aspects relevant to Mark 13 as elements of a coherent worldview. This conceptual abstraction of the most essential ideas should underlie the discourse and will show whether the discourse represents an apocalypse.

In connotative terms, Mark 13's eschatology and eschatological worldview represent a greater affinity with the Hebrew Bible than with extrabiblical Jewish apocalyptic texts. For instance, it does not view the future as a radical break with the known world, something (most) apocalypses presuppose. Scholars accept the existence of two types of apocalypses, a historical type that gives an overview of a large sweep of history that is often divided into periods and presented in the guise of a prediction, much of which is prophesied after the fact (*vaticinia ex eventu*) and invariably concludes with a final judgement and a new world and a mystical type that describes the ascent of the visionary through the heavens (Ehrman 2022 contains an extensive discussion). In both cases, what happens in the heavenly world determines what happens on earth, providing the assurance that nations and individuals will be judged and rewarded or punished according to their deeds, leading to a new order radically different from the known. Mark 13 does not meet the characteristic features of either one.

For that reason, it is asserted that Mark 13 is not an apocalypse. Instead, it serves as a continuation of Hebrew thought patterns based on the Old Testament with a clear anti-apocalyptic purpose. As Hebrew prophecy, it reinterprets a new situation in well-known images and motifs based on the theological premise that the transcendent God who promised to become involved in Israel's history and save Israel would do the same today. Mark 13 reinterprets prophetical and apocalyptic passages and reapplies them to the situation surrounding the Jewish rebellion (66–70 CE), for instance, like the Qumran community reinterpreted Habakkuk in their commentary to suit the interpretation of their situation and justify their existence.

Collins (2007:1) presupposes that an older biblical *genre* underlies Mark 13, betrayed by the discourse's view of Israel's history and identity. The sacred history of Israel [*Heilsgeschichte*] consisted of the (re)telling of the biblical story that describes God's activity through Moses to establish a people for the Lord and instruct them in the proper way of living (Collins 2004:47). Israel's history serves as the foundation of (a vital part of) post-exilic Jewish identity, providing the rubric that turned Israel's speech into *testimony* (Brueggemann 1997:119). Mark sees Jesus as the Lord's reforming act to bring believers into the new age that characterises the kingdom of God (Collins' terminology), taking the model of biblical history and transforming it by infusing it with an eschatological and apocalyptic perspective and adapting it to Hellenistic historiographical and biographical traditions. However, Israelite histories do not end with an eschatology (Van Seters 1997:8–9); Mark adds a divine plan in history that unfolds in stages and terminates in the Son of man coming in the clouds (vv. 26–27), presumably to establish his kingdom. Mark foresees no break with the existing order.

Although his notion of an eschatological fulfillment originated in the prophetic, the author's conception of history determined by the idea of a fixed divine plan is because of the apocalyptic tradition's influence. Thus the Gospel of Mark became an eschatological and apocalyptic counterpoint to Israel's foundational histories through the revitalisation movement begun by John the Baptist and continued by Jesus to include the Gentiles (Collins 2007:43).

It is asserted here that although an apocalyptic worldview characterises Mark, Mark 13 is not an apocalypse. Although it displays the typical characteristics found in Jewish apocalypses, it purposefully used these apocalyptic features to realise a non-apocalyptic purpose, to warn its readers against an overheated apocalyptic expectation that might lead to rash behaviour. 'Mark chose realistic narrative over the more highly fabricated fictions of apocalyptic' (Myers 1988:104). Apocalypses contain lengthy descriptions of visions and dreams but little about events in the lives of historical figures. Next follows the discussion of Mark's apocalyptic worldview before presenting arguments why Mark 13 does not represent an apocalypse.

Mark's apocalyptic worldview

Many scholars accept that the Gospel of Mark utilises an apocalyptic worldview, as illustrated by the traits characterising it (Nel 2014:233–264). The issue requires

a study on its own. Several reasons support the conclusion, in short: the Gospel's underlying dualism opposes the new order to the old that will terminate in a new *aeon* that will have overcome the old [*dis*]order dominated by evil forces. It uses a combat myth to explain the struggle between Jesus and Satan. Divine revelation, as a gift of God and a significant element of apocalypticism's epistemology, provides a perspective on the unseen dimension (Kee 1977:45–66), allowing believers to understand how the world functions, what lies behind reality and what will be the outcome of the present order. The narrative is bound spatially from above and temporally from beyond by the climactic eschatological events (Myers 1988:103). Mark also uses the 'Son of man' to indicate Jesus as the suffering, dying, triumphant Lord and future judge, accuser and deliverer. 'In striking contrast to Paul's letters and Matthew's Gospel...Mark contains nothing that could be called the *parousia* of the Son of Man' (Horsley 2001:123). It depicts how the angels would gather the elect without mentioning unbelievers or a judgement, although it might have been implied. The book's abrupt open ending does not emphasise the return of the resurrected Lord but the continuation of Jesus' mission of renewing the elect people (cp. Horsley 2001:17). If the Gospel utilises an apocalyptic worldview, does it imply that its eschatological discourse is apocalyptic in nature?

Is Mark 13 an apocalypse?

If an apocalyptic worldview and mind underlies the Gospel, as argued above, does it imply that Mark 13 represents an apocalypse? The article argues that it is not the case because of the lack of those features usually deemed essential to apocalyptic literature. Additionally, it does not share apocalypses' conceptual framework or connotative perspective while simultaneously, it deemphasises or seriously adapts the ones it does include (Horsley 1993:223–244, 1998:307, 2001:123). Geddert (1989:220) agrees that it does not have apocalyptic provenance although he emphasises that it does contain 'apocalyptic associations'.

Not everybody agrees. For instance, Brandenburger (1984:15) argues that it shares the most essential characteristics of Jewish apocalypses, such as apocalyptic speech patterns and formal structural elements, implying that it is a Markan apocalypse. In Dyer's (1998:191) opinion, the many parallels between Mark 13 and apocalyptic literature that Brandenburger finds help to provide a better balance between the relationship of the two. However, she argues that although Jesus' speech may share some apocalyptic characteristics, it does not share the formal literary features of the *genre.* Instead, it displays characteristics found in other *genres,* including paraenesis, testament (or farewell discourse; Busch 1938; Dahl 1976) and prophecy (Shively 2012:187). It engages multiple *genres* in a multi-layered persuasive discourse (Robbins 1989:42, 1996:44), defying strict *genre* classification (Collins 2007:594 defines it as a 'rhetorically shaped esoteric instruction of a prophetic and apocalyptic nature'). Mark's seemingly apocalyptic discourse serves to offer a solution for the suffering and persecution of his readers (Shively 2012:188), utilising the typical elements of persecution, the involvement of heavenly beings and a final judgement to persuade followers to believe that the present suffering is God's will for the righteous and motivate them to act self-sacrificially for Jesus' sake (Shively 2012:217–218).

Further, Mark 13's end does not imply the ending in terms of space and time that implies deliverance from persecution but refers to the end of Israel's history foreseen by prophetic eschatology, resulting in the extermination of sinners within the holy people and the realisation of the salvation of the faithful (characterised as the kingdom of God). It includes the liberation and renewal of the Temple and the defeat of the Gentiles (Meier 1994:243–251). Mark 13's eschatology, based on allusions to the prophets,[1] unites Jerusalem and its Temple in prophetic eschatology (Gray 2008:97).

What is the theological function of Mark 13? Early believers viewed the events of their time, culminating in notably the Roman–Jewish rebellion and war (66–70 CE) as signs that the world was coming to an end and it led to an overheated apocalyptic expectation. Mark 13's message is that believer's suffering and persecution had been foreseen by Jesus, who would be returning soon. By using traditional apocalyptic sayings, he makes his source material relevant to a new situation, leading to the impression that he is positive towards apocalyptic. However, his aim is to modify or tone down the apocalyptic fervour occasioned by the Roman–Jewish war by disassociating it from the end-time itself in order to urge ethical watchfulness and patience as believers' appropriate response to the crisis (Telford 1995:136–137).

If Mark 13 is an anti-apocalypse, did the evangelist see Jesus as a prophet of apocalyptic eschatology? Scholars disagree, with some interpreting his central message, of the kingdom of God:

> [*A*]s a dramatic, divine intervention that would forever change the nature of human existence, when God would exercise his power to eradicate evil and extend his reign of peace and justice throughout the world. (Fredriksen 1999:273; Meier 1994; Sanders 1977, 1993; Schillebeeckx & J. Allison occur with this view)

Others (e.g. Crossan 1991; Borg 1997 & Kennedy 2006:159) interpret his kingdom message as a this-worldly call for people to shatter social boundaries and establish more egalitarian societies, viewing Jesus as a non-apocalyptic teacher of wisdom. It is submitted that although the Gospel sees Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who expected an

1.Kee (1977:45) finds 57 such quotations in Mark 11–16. Those from the *Torah*, with one exception, occur in Mark 12's controversy stories. Thirty-seven quotations are ascribed to Jesus (Grant 1977:14) containing 21 allusions to the prophetic writings. Dyer's (1998:101–115) list in Mark 13 includes 13:2 – Haggai 2:15; 13:4 – Daniel 12:6–7; 13:6 – Isaiah 45:18; 47:8; 13:7 – Daniel 7:21; 11:44; 2:28–29; 2:45; 11:36; 13:8 – Isaiah 19:2; 2 Chronicles 15:6; 13:9 – Isaiah 26:17; Jeremiah 22:23; Micah 4:9–10; Daniel 7:25; 13:10 – Zechariah 2:15a; 14:16; Daniel 11:33; 12:3; 13:12 – Isaiah 19:2; Micah 7:2, 6; 13:13 – Daniel 12:12–13; 12:1; Micah 7:7; 13:14 – Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 1 Maccabees 1:54; 2:28; 13:15 – 1 Maccabees 2:28; 13:19 – Daniel 12:1; Exodus 9:18; 13:22 – Deuteronomy 13:1–3; Daniel 6:26–28; 11:36; 13:24 – Daniel 10:2; 11:20; 12:1; Judith 8:1; Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7–8; 13:24–27 – Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7–8; Joel 2:10; 3:4; 4:15; Isaiah 34:4; Daniel 7:13–14; 13:25 – Isaiah 34:4; Joel 2:10; 13:26 – Daniel 7:13–14; 13:27 – Zechariah 2:10; Isaiah 43:6; 11:10–12; 13:30 – Daniel 12:7.

imminent ending of the known world, Mark 13's discourse warns readers against an overheated apocalyptic expectation.

Several arguments support the hypothesis that Mark 13 is not an apocalypse but an anti-apocalypse. Some are discussed in more detail.

Compared to other apocalypses

There are clear parallels between Mark 13 and some apocalyptic literature (as Brandenburger 1984:11 and Kee 1977:65–68 illustrate). What is denied is that the discourse is essentially and deliberately apocalyptic in intent and purpose. It is true that no apocalypse contains all the features making it imperative to investigate each apocalypse in its own right. However, there are enough common features among apocalypses that one can refer to an identifiable *genre*, of apocalypses. Does Mark 13 share the essential characteristics found in other apocalypses?

Some assert that Mark 13 shares enough apocalyptic thought forms with other apocalypses, such as the esoteric scene that commences the discourse, the key question of the four disciples that is apocalyptic, the teacher's response in the style of a revelation of eternal secrets, apocalyptic paraenesis used up to and including the final phase of tribulation, the same meaning and function given to 'signs', the use of parables as part of the answer to 'the eschatological question' and traditional secret teaching that is communicated in the discourse (Brandenburger 1984:15–18), to conclude that Mark 16 is apocalyptic in essence.

However, it is equally possible (and in this case, desirable) to relate these features to other groups of literature, such as the Old and New Testament and Graeco-Roman and Hellenistic literature (Dyer 1998:195). The depiction of the events soon after the tribulation predicted in 13:14–21, within a generation of the historical Jesus (13:30), indicates that the beginning of these events was apparent to the evangelist and readers. It represents a sequence of events rather than a climactic event (13:26, 27) and the powers opposing Jesus will experience his vindication and not only the elect (as in 14:62). Prophetic symbolism of heavenly bodies as representing earthly rulers betrays that 13:24–27 is to be interpreted as purely celestial events. Allusions to the judgement of the nations and their gathering to worship YHWH (13:26–27) come from the Old Testament. These events are not necessarily limited to the *eschaton* (Dyer 1998:195–196 provides further arguments).

The conclusion is that, in measuring Mark 13 against the characteristics of various apocalypses, it becomes clear that Mark 13 differs from typical apocalypse for several reasons, among which is that the discourse does not involve an otherworldly mediator and does not contain visions of heaven or otherworldly tours. An unseen world also does not determine present events. Its source is not divine 'revelation' (*apokalypsis*), and it is not necessary for an angel to interpret and explain its mysteries. It does not contain comprehensive descriptions of a new world and a new world order, and its description of what will entail the Son of man's return is vague, providing no further information about the *eschaton*. It does not refer to a last, universal judgement and it does not show the familiar apocalyptic pessimism about the future or historical determinism (Horsley 2001:123). One does not find the usual apocalyptic images and metaphors and it does not set any date for the end (Best 1983:42).

Instead, the Markan Jesus discourages the listeners to set any dates for the end, changing the discourse into 'almost anti-apocalyptic in function' (Horsley 2001:135). Jesus does not answer the four disciples' questions, as he also rejected the Pharisees' request for a sign (8:11–12). Mark's purpose is to caution listeners not to interpret current events as the end (Horsley 2001:135). Instead, he declares that these events are signs of impending judgement or deliverance but not the end itself. He emphasises that the decisive divine action is in the future while the long-awaited renewal of Israel is already occurring in the present (Horsley 2001:126–127).

The discourse is not pseudonymous as a means to attest to its authority, it is not to be kept secret and it is not an encouragement to be eschatologically impatient but rather to warn against false eschatological expectations that might result in impatience. A careful computation of future events does not comprise an essential part of the writings and one does not find any fantastic visions. The symbolism of numbers does not play any role and the role of angels is not very prominent, while demons do not feature at all. Its language is not mythological but both literal and metaphorical with allegorical features and concrete referents, reminding of features found in the Hebrew Bible. It does not represent a crisis phenomenon that threatens a minority group's values and structures and does not alienate this group further. It does not contain a travel guide for the end-time events to indicate the hour and does not use past history made to appear prophetic. It is not concerned with instructions for a few, the initiated, the righteous or the elect but involves the whole church (Anderson 1976:301) and its information is reserved exclusively (Mk 13:14 ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω; 13:37 ὃ δὲ ὑμῖν λέγω πᾶσιν λέγω). These features that characterise apocalypses are absent in Mark 13.

Mark 13 is an account of historical events occurring in the 40 years since Jesus' death; it is not concerned with the destruction of the present order and the birth of a new one and its worldview's dualism is not emphasised (Dyer 1998:140–142, based on Neirynck 1988). These non-apocalyptic accents show that Mark 13's place in the apocalyptic Gospel is not apocalyptic as such.

A last vital observation is that Mark 13's placement before the passion narrative also illustrates that salvation does not originate in the supernatural realm, as many apocalypses assert. The placement subjects the eschatological discourse to what was to happen next on the cross. The next two chapters introduce Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, changing

the meaning of the anticipated end of the world. The cross transformed the *parousia* of the Son of man into 'the miracle of the divine "Yes"' (Barth 1933:417) and empowered believers to participate in the kingdom of God (Beasley-Murray 1986:342).

Form-critical observations

Seen form-critically, the discourse consists of small detached groups of sayings of different origins. Kümmel (1957:61–62) argues that although Jewish apocalyptic ideas underlie 13:7–8, 14–20, 24–27, the speaker is not engaged with apocalyptic speculation but eschatological proclamation. A unitary Jewish apocalyptic source behind Mark 13 does not exist (Beasley-Murray 1993:32). Instead, it consists of a much more fragmentary grouping of diverse traditions; Beasley-Murray concludes that these ideas are eschatological in function and not apocalyptic in nature or intent.

Syntactical arguments

Viewed syntactically, 13:14–21 contains the highest proportion of non-Markan syntax in the whole Gospel. Solid Semitic influences characterise it. An unusually high proportion of the use of δεῖ can be found. In contrast, verses 24–27 form a distinctive unit of Septuagintal language joined together by the use of καὶ; its syntax is typical of the rest of the Gospel (Dyer 1998:91), leading to Dyer's (1998:93–122) conclusion that the discourse in effect utilises the imagery and syntax of the Hebrew Bible rather than those of apocalypses.

Function of Mark 13

As already argued, the Markan discourse does not represent apocalyptic but it addresses listeners' apocalyptic expectations. The author's purpose is 'to inspire faith, endurance and hope in the face of the impending sufferings of the Church and of the Jewish nation' (Beasley-Murray 1993:365–370); the focus is on the present situation and the challenges it presented to Christians' faith. The author wants to warn Christians against false teachings and expectations concerning the supposed end of the world (Beasley-Murray 1993:368) that could easily have led Christians to focus exclusively on the imminent arrival of the new age, denying their present responsibilities (Grundmann 1973:261 agrees; Lohmeyer 1967:285–286). If the end does not realise, as Mark 13 implies, it might eventually have threatened their faith in Christ's faithfulness. In that sense, Mark 13's function qualifies the discourse as an anti-apocalypse.

A significant distinction between apocalyptic as a literary *genre* and as a worldview should be kept in mind. As a literary form, apocalyptic is characterised by some interesting features, among others, its extensive use of symbols needed to depict the unimaginable final, eschatological intervention of God in human history, which culminates in the subsequent judging of nations and the transformation of the world. Because these descriptions fall outside the existing human frame of reference, it requires language that falls back on the strange imagery found in, *inter alia*, apocalypses (Perrin 1983:126). Other literary characteristics of apocalyptic are its pseudonymity and its reliance on the sacred texts of the tradition that it quotes, uses and reuses, interprets and reinterprets extensively. Verheyden (1997:525) states that these quotations are not introduced by a quotation formula but represent 'allusive quotations' found characteristically in texts that want to imitate apocalyptic style.

As stated, while Mark 13 seemingly corresponds to the literary *genre* of apocalyptic, its worldview is anti-apocalyptic. One gets the impression that the author purposefully utilised an apocalyptic text as *Vorlage* as the basis of his discourse but then added a fundamental reinterpretation of it (Pesch 1968:216–218). The result is that 'What was an (apocalyptic) "Mahn- und Lehrrede" has become an (anti- apocalyptic) "Mahnrede"' (Verheyden 1992:1145). Pesch (1978:11) agrees that Mark 'biete "Anti-Apokalyptik", providing a "Korrektur", "Polemik", "Bestreitung" or "Abwehr"' to irresponsible apocalypticism (*contra* Brandenburger 1984:88–91). The author's utilisation of apocalyptic serves only as an affective rhetoric meant to engage readers functioning in the apocalyptic mode, implying that the intended readers were familiar with the *genre.* However, the author's clear intent and purpose is instead to criticise the damage apocalyptic has been causing in the early church. That is why Mark described the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as signs of the end that is not near and with the clear provision that the Markan Jesus emphasises the impossibility of providing any reliable timetable for the end of time (13:32–33). Verheyden (1992:1153) agrees and describes the Temple's destruction as an event with an enormous emotional and eschatological potential. What characterises Mark's remarks is the refusal to view current events as a decisive sign function. He views it as one among several other similar events that jointly introduce the *eschaton*. The other (related) events affect believers in an equally, or even more, dramatic way. The discourse discusses stereotypical apocalyptic signs but then changes their meaning. In contrast to apocalyptic, they do not indicate the end of the end-times but serve as signs that introduce the end-time, suggesting that it will eventually realise. In reply to this observation, Kühschelm (1983:270, 1990:135) also describes Mark 13 as a *Tegenapokalyptik* because the signs oppose the purpose of apocalyptic literature. The author intends them, in Pesch's (1978:264) words, to serve as '*ein Neuorientierung christlicher...Naherwartung, die in der Gemeinde des Markus aus ihren palästinischen Bindungen an die Katastrophe des Jahres 70 n. Chr. gelöst werden muss*'.

Weeden (1995:94–95) argues the evangelist's purpose is to tune down the apocalyptic tone, in this way obstructing his apocalyptic sources' purpose and thrust (in 13:7–8; 14–20; 24–27) by interjecting and appending 13:5–6, 9–13, 21–23 and 28–37 to the narrative. These sections are marked clearly with the use of βλέπετε ('see, watch') in the imperative mood in each of the four key sections of the editorial material (13:5, 9, 23, 33). It emphatically demonstrates the evangelist's intent to clearly focus the reader's attention on

the impossibility to predict a date for the end. Furthermore, it reinforces the conclusion that one can best discover the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark 13 through an analysis of these sections (13:5–6, 9–13, 21–23, 28–37). The author responds to the messianic pretenders in 13:5-6, 21-23 by taking an anti-apocalyptic stance; they are guilty of leading the readers astray about the subject matter. The first reference to them (13:5–6) is placed strategically with the beginning of the historical unfolding of end-time events, and the second reference (13:21–23) occurs fittingly at the conclusion of this history, before the description of the final cosmic events. At the same time, 13:9–13 and 13:28–37 carry the same message that the readers should continue in the perseverance of their faith during the time of the Lord's absence from them (Schweizer 1995:85). In other words, the discourse emphasises not the end-time as such. Still, it refers to the end-time only to focus on the between-time, warning the readers to do the same to ensure they remain faithful to Christ.

Another author who agrees that Mark 13 does not represent an apocalypse is Vorster (1995:282–283). He bases his contention on the characteristic of apocalyptic as a response to a crisis phenomenon. Apocalyptic eschatology then represents a meaning system, a theological perspective. Apocalyptic as a response to the crisis originates when the minority group represented by the apocalypse experiences the loss of values and structures because they feel threatened by the crisis, requiring a replacement with a new symbolic meaning system. He concludes that apocalyptic serves as a specific community's response to a crisis phenomenon, providing an all-embracing approach to life in which the future determines the past. The eschatological conflict or crisis and the promise of the return of the Son of man are two master symbols of such a new symbolic universe that the text offers. It serves as paraenesis (Vorster 1995:283). For that reason, one should not overlook the traces of apocalyptic imagery in Mark 13 but keep in mind that the discourse functions as an encouragement to persist during the crisis. That is why almost everything Jesus says to and about the four disciples who asked the question is in the form of imperatives (Vorster 1995:284). It interprets past, present and future in terms of the expectation of a new future, in order to emphasise correct conduct and ethics in the present situation. Additionally, the discourse does not intend to describe how the enemies will be condemned and annihilated in everlasting punishment but instead focuses on the power and glory of the Son of man as a means to provide hope for readers who find themselves in difficult circumstances that even threatened the lives of some believers.

Arguments extrinsic to Mark 13

There are also reasons why the Markan discourse probably does not represent an apocalypse that is extrinsic to the Gospel. For instance, the Markan audience likely did not experience the destruction of Jerusalem as an existential crisis because they consist of Gentiles, probably resident in Rome or Syria far from Jerusalem. As converts from the Gentile nations, they do not necessarily have any close connection with the Jews, although in some cases, they might be identified with the Jewish people if they still visited the Jewish synagogues for the Sabbath service. Therefore, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish Temple would not have had any apocalyptic meaning for them, leading them to conclude that the end had come.

Another reason can be found in the style of the account that is clearly concerned with some future events although these references are interrupted repeatedly by the Markan Jesus to appeal to believers for Nelal compliance to the kingdom values in the present situation. The discourse keeps on alluding to the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures in order to emphasise his message addressed to the current situation. The prophets referred to future events only to explain why Israel's repentance alone could avoid the otherwise unavoidable crisis that their disobedience to YHWH in the present time would cause (Schweizer 1970:276–277).

Assuming that the Markan audience was Gentiles, the audience must have been versed in the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible. According to existing historical records, the apostles presented the gospel to the heathen in terms of YHWH's revelation to Israel described in the Hebrew Bible, and the early church (including the Gentile believers) used the Septuagint widely in its teaching. The implication is that Gentile believers would have been versed in the Old Testament.

Conclusion

The different arguments presented demonstrated that the Markan eschatological discourse was intended and served as a counter-move against the overheated apocalyptic expectations that originated in the early Christian community during the first 40 years after Jesus' death, as a result of some teachers visiting faith communities and proclaiming that the fall of the Temple introduces the end of the existing order (Donahue & Harrington 2002:381). As a result, researchers can safely hypothesise about apocalyptic expectations influencing the early church on the grounds that Mark 13 represents an early anti-apocalypse. To the question of whether the audience would necessarily have been exposed to apocalyptic writings functioning outside the amber of the Old Testament, the answer is more tentative. It might have been that many Roman citizens were exposed to apocalypticism but no proof of the extent of their exposure exists.

Synthesis

The supposition was accepted that an apocalyptic worldview underlies the Gospel of Mark. It implies that it also functions behind the discourse in Mark 13. The article asked whether that means that Mark 13 is, *per se*, an apocalypse. If the evangelist used an existing apocalyptic pamphlet, as some researchers argue, it is asserted that the Markan Jesus

changed the original intent to inform readers about apocalyptic events in order to provide them with a timetable to instead serve as a warning against overheated eschatological expectations. In the process, the author neutralised the potential apocalyptic characteristics of his source. If the author did not utilise a *Flugblatt,* as seems more probable, the purpose of the discourse is to emphasise to the listeners that the Temple's destruction would not introduce the immediate end of the world. It would instead signify the introduction of a period of suffering and persecution that will eventually terminate when the Son of man appears in the clouds to save his elect, the church. The discourse did not intend to supply listeners with any further information about what the end will consist of or when it will be.

The early church was challenged by Jesus' promise that the kingdom would come within the present generation that had seen and known Jesus (Mk 13:30; Mt 24:34; Lk 21:32). Now several decades had passed and many of the earliest believers had died without seeing the fulfillment of Jesus' return. When disastrous events led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, believers asked what it implied in terms of the unfulfilled eschatological expectations that existed in the church. The Gospel explains that believers who have experienced the breakthrough of the rule of God in their lives and world are always expecting the imminent *parousia* through which the redemptive rule now powerfully present comes to its consummation. For them, the temporal end signifies only the redemption of the essential end, which is Christ, the crucified and risen Lord who is coming back again. For that reason, the *parousia* is always a near event with near expectations resulting in hope. That the expectation had not been fulfilled in their day (and after 2000 years), had not annulled the expectation; the coming of the kingdom of God, the divine sovereign rule over humans and their world, has signified this period. 'The conviction that "Babylon will fall" has always been proved right, eventually, even if the fulfillment is sometimes deferred for hundreds of years' (Collins 2005:60).

Mark 13 suggests that the imminent expectation of the *parousia* should be viewed in terms of life-refreshing hope rather than as apocalyptic dogma and the resultant overheated apocalyptic expectations, that the time of the end is determined at God's pleasure and that no one knows the exact day and hour before the time and that God's children should submit themselves to the Father's will to determine the future of this *aeon* and the next in the same sense as Jesus' surrender to the will of the Father (cp. Beasley-Murray 1986:343). Although Christians do not know what is coming and when it is coming, they know Who they expect to come.

The discourse asserts that the events of the present are no minor matters but signs of the coming of God in the appearance of the Son of man in final triumph. These events represent a world and age in which the church is subjected to trials. The coming of God, however, gives everything its meaning and goal (Schweizer 1970:277–278). What is required from believers is that they courageously and faithfully continue in their faith in Christ.

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