

## HISTORY'S DAWNING LIGHT: “MORNING” AND “EVENING” IN MARK’S GOSPEL AND THEIR ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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**Abstract:** *This paper reflects on the use of the language of “morning” (πρωί) and especially “evening” (ὄψις/ὄψε) throughout Mark. It suggests that Mark deliberately uses and carefully places language of “morning” and “evening” throughout his Gospel as a way of quietly presenting Jesus as the bringer of the new creational age, which the OT often spoke of as the dawn of a new day and the arrival of morning. Between the sunset of Mark 1:32 and the sunrise of Mark 16:2, this Gospel keeps the presence of evening and nighttime before the reader, underscoring the darkness that Jesus has come to engage and overcome. Mark uses the language of “night” and “darkness” to reinforce the pervasive presence of evening time throughout Mark, but it is especially the use of ὄψις/ὄψε that undergirds our observations. When the sun rises at Jesus’s resurrection, history’s new day has dawned. The essay considers OT antecedents as well as seven lines of argument within Mark to argue this thesis.*

**Key words:** ὄψις, evening, morning, night, darkness, eschatology, resurrection, new creation

... Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who is the true Sun of our souls,  
shining day and night,  
eternally and without end.  
—Calvin<sup>1</sup>

Has Mark carefully sprinkled references to the “evening” and to the “night” throughout his Gospel with a quiet deliberateness not yet recognized? Are there fewer but equally carefully placed references to the “morning”? Why is the resurrection account so brief and cryptic in Mark’s Gospel, and why the emphasis on the risen sun on that resurrection morning? I suggest that Mark quietly sprinkles language of the “evening,” “night,” and “darkness” throughout his Gospel to build momentum toward the morning light of the resurrection of Jesus and the dawning of the eschatological day. I further argue that Mark’s five references to the “morning” ironically reinforce the darkness theme, since these all occur in a context either of continued darkness or of judgment—all except the final resurrection instance in 16:2.

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<sup>1</sup> From a prayer appended to catechetical teaching, in Elsie McKee, ed. and trans., *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist, 2001), 218.

In this typically veiled way Mark is presenting Jesus as arriving on the world scene in the evening of human history. Darkness threatens to prevail. Evening looms. The one time in Mark we are told that the sun has set is at the outset of Jesus's ministry (1:32). Darkness, anticipated by the prophets, has descended. The one time we are told that the sun has risen is at the end of Mark, as Jesus himself rises. In between this sunset and sunrise is the pervasive "evening" throughout Mark, at the fullness of time as the Son of God (1:1) arrives and carries out his earthly ministry. While lauded and admired, he is also misunderstood and reviled. It is the evening of the world, the dark night before the morning. All this culminates in his death on a cross and the three-hour midday darkness that accompanies it. At his resurrection, however, darkness has given way to light. The latter days have been launched. The morning of human history has dawned.

After getting the relevant data out before us, we will consider the OT backgrounds to my thesis and then turn to consider the Gospel of Mark itself.

### I. RELEVANT WORD OCCURRENCES

There are four different word clusters that we will particularly give attention to: *ὀψία/ὀψέ*, *νύξ/ἔννυχος*, *σκότος/σκοτίζομαι*, and *πρωί*. The first three of these all have to do with darkness, and the latter alone with morning light. We will also note other associated terms throughout Mark such as *ἥλιος*, though these will not receive the same level of structured attention.

There are six instances of *ὀψία* and two instances of *ὀψέ* in Mark. These are given below in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> The only other occurrences of *ὀψία* in the NT are in Matthew (8:16; 14:15; 14:23; 16:2; 20:8; 26:20; 27:57) and John (6:16; 20:19). There is just one other occurrence of *ὀψέ* beyond the two in Mark (Matt 28:1).

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<sup>2</sup> In the tables and throughout this essay Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

Table 1. Instances of ὄψια/ὄψέ in Mark

	Greek Text (NA28)	Translation (ESV)	Context
1:32	Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε ἔδου ὁ ἥλιος, ἔφερον πρὸς αὐτὸν πάντας τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας καὶ τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους.	That <u>evening</u> at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.	General healing of various sickness and demon-possession
4:35	Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὄψιας γενομένης· διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πέραν.	On that day, when <u>evening</u> had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”	Calming of a storm
6:47	καὶ ὄψιας γενομένης ἦν τὸ πλοῖον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ αὐτὸς μόνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.	And when <u>evening</u> came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.	Calming of a storm, walking on water
11:11	Καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα εἰς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ περιβλεψάμενος πάντα, ὄψιας ἤδη οὕσης τῆς ὥρας, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.	And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already <u>late</u> , he went out to Bethany with the twelve.	Has just entered Jerusalem and looked around at temple
11:19	Καὶ ὅταν ὄψε ἐγένετο, ἐξεπορεύοντο ἔξω τῆς πόλεως.	And when <u>evening</u> came they went out of the city.	Has just cleansed the temple
13:35	γρηγορεῖτε οὖν· οὐκ οἴδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας ἔρχεται, ἢ ὄψε ἢ μεσονύκτιον ἢ ἀλεκτοροφωνίας ἢ πρωΐ,	Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the <u>evening</u> , or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—	Conclusion to Jesus’s eschatological discourse
14:17	Καὶ ὄψιας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.	And when it was <u>evening</u> , he came with the twelve.	Passover meal just before arrest
15:42	Καὶ ἤδη ὄψιας γενομένης, ἐπεὶ ἦν παρασκευὴ ὅ ἐστιν προσάββατον,	And when <u>evening</u> had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,	Burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea

We note the frequent use of *γενομένης* in the genitive absolute position in every *ὁψία* text except Mark 11:11.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, the emphasis is on *evening having come*. The stress is not simply on the presence of evening passingly but on its arrival and the events that then follow during the evening.

We turn next to the instances of “night” as reflected in the two Greek terms *νύξ* and *ἔνυχος*, as shown in Table 2. *Νύξ* is a common word in the NT, occurring 61 times, 26 of these in the Gospels (9 in Matthew, 4 in Mark, 7 in Luke, and 6 in John); *ἔνυχος* is a *hapax legomenon*.

Table 2. Instances of *νύξ/ἔνυχος* in Mark

	Greek Text (NA28)	Translation (ESV)	Context
1:35	Καὶ πρωτὶ ἔνυχου λίαν ἀναστὰς ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον κάκει προσηύχετο.	And rising very early in the morning, <u>while it was still dark</u> , he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.	Early ministry to the crowd
4:27	καὶ καθεύδῃ καὶ ἐγείρεται <u>νύκτα</u> καὶ ἡμέραν, καὶ ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ καὶ μηκύνεται ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός.	He sleeps and rises <u>night</u> and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.	Parable of growth of kingdom of God
5:5	καὶ διὰ παντός <u>νυκτός</u> καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἦν κράζων καὶ κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις.	<u>Night</u> and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.	Man with demons healed; demons sent into pigs
6:48	καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους ἐν τῷ ἐλαύνειν, ἦν γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος ἐναντίος αὐτοῖς, περιτετάρτην φυλακὴν τῆς <u>νυκτός</u> ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς.	And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the <u>night</u> he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them,	Jesus walks on the sea
14:30	καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν λέγω σοι ὅτι σὺ σήμερον ταύτῃ τῇ <u>νυκτὶ</u> πρὶν ἢ δις ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι τρίς με ἀπαρνήσῃ.	And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very <u>night</u> , before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."	Jesus predicts Peter's denial

<sup>3</sup> Noted by Simon Légasse, *L'évangile de Marc* (LD 5; Paris: Cerf, 1997) 139 n. 3; Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 94–95.

The ESV rightly translates ἔνυκχος using the word “dark” in Mark 1:35 rather than “night” but this should not cause us to miss the shared root with the four instances of νύξ in Mark, ἔνυκχος simply meaning “in the night” or “at night.”<sup>4</sup>

“Darkness” language (σκότ-) occurs less frequently in Mark, although the two occurrences both come in passages loaded with eschatological significance. These are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Instances of σκότος/σκοτίζομαι in Mark

	Greek Text (NA28)	Translation (ESV)	Context
13:24	Ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς,	“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be <u>darkened</u> , and the moon will not give its light,	Signs of the coming of the Son of Man in Jesus’s eschatological discourse
15:33	Καὶ γενομένης ὥρας ἕκτης σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἐνάτης.	And when the sixth hour had come, there was <u>darkness</u> over the whole land until the ninth hour.	Death of Jesus

Finally, we come to the opposite of the terms reproduced thus far and consider references to the “morning.” Of the 11 instances of πρωῒ in the NT, five occur in Mark, more than in any other book (three in Matthew [16:3; 20:1; 21:18], two in John [18:28; 20:1], and one in Acts [28:23]).<sup>5</sup> The five Markan instances are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Instances of πρωῒ in Mark

	Greek Text (NA28)	Translation (ESV)	Context
1:35	Καὶ πρωῒ ἔνυκχα λίαν ἀναστὰς ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον κάκεϊ προσηύχετο.	And rising very early in the <u>morning</u> , while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.	General healing of various sickness and demon-possession
11:20	Καὶ παραπορευόμενοι πρωῒ εἶδον τὴν συκῆν ἐξηραμμένην ἐκ ριζῶν.	As they passed by in the <u>morning</u> , they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.	Cursing of fig tree/cleansing of temple
13:35	γρηγορεῖτε οὖν· οὐκ οἴδατε γὰρ πότε ὁ κύριος τῆς οἰκίας ἔρχεται, ἢ ὄψε	Therefore stay awake— for you do not know when the master of the	Conclusion to Jesus’s eschatological discourse

<sup>4</sup> This is similar to the etymological and lexical relationship between νόμος and ἔννομος, the latter meaning “in the law” or “under the law” (1 Cor 9:21).

<sup>5</sup> I exclude an instance in Mark 16:9.

	ἡ μεσονύκτιον ἢ ἀλεκτοροφωνίας ἢ <u>πρωῖ</u> ,	house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the <u>morn- ing</u> —	
15:1	Καὶ εὐθὺς <u>πρωῖ</u> συμβούλιον ποιήσαντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς μετὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ὄλον τὸ συνέδριον, δῆσαντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπήνεγκαν καὶ παρέδωκαν Πιλάτῳ.	And as soon as it was <u>morning</u> , the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.	Jesus has just been betrayed; about to stand before Pilate
16:2	καὶ λίαν <u>πρωῖ</u> τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου.	And very <u>early</u> on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.	Resurrection of Jesus

## II. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO MARK'S USE OF MORNING AND EVENING LANGUAGE

Supporting evidence for seeing subsurface significance to Mark's references to darkness and light will fall into two broad categories: we will first consider OT antecedents, and then turn to Mark itself.

### 1. *The OT.*

a. *Creation and Fall.* The first passage in the OT to consider is the first passage of the OT. Conspicuously resounding throughout Genesis 1 are references to "morning" and "evening." The word the LXX translators used to translate עֶרֶב, "evening," was ἑσπέρα (not used by Mark, though Luke utilized it at times [Luke 24:29; Acts 4:3; 20:15]). It should perhaps not surprise us that ὄψια is not used in Genesis 1, as it occurs just one time in the LXX, in the deuterocanonical book Judith (13:1). The companion term ὄψέ occurs four times in the LXX (Gen 24:11; Exod 30:8; Isa 5:11; Jer 2:23). But the word for morning in Genesis 1, translating the Hebrew בֹּקֶר, is πρωῖ, precisely the term we have seen above that Mark uses throughout his Gospel.

We are not at this point drawing any hard and fast association between the uses of morning and evening in Genesis 1 with those in Mark. We are simply observing that the Scripture opens by framing the creation with repeated reference to morning and evening. At the conclusion of each of the six days of creation, we are told that there was evening, and that there was morning (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

We note further that in all six texts evening is mentioned first, followed by morning, a pattern we will see in Mark.<sup>6</sup>

One other observation from the early chapters of Genesis is worth mentioning, this time with respect to the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Immediately upon eating the fruit Adam and Eve know they are naked and cover themselves with fig leaves.<sup>7</sup> When is it that they hear the Lord walking in the garden and hide from him? The Hebrew text of Gen 3:8 tells us it was **סוּחַ הַיּוֹם**, often translated “in the cool of the day.” But several translations (e.g. ESV note, NASB note) signal that a more literal rendering could be “in the wind of the day” or even “wind of the storm,” since the Hebrew **סוּחַ** at times denotes a storm (cf. Zeph 2:2). Thus the theophany in Gen 3:8 likely depicts fearsome divine judgment, not a calm, cool afternoon.<sup>8</sup> In any case, the LXX uses the word **δειλινός** at this point, which refers to the afternoon and specifically the late afternoon toward evening.<sup>9</sup> This is reflected in rendering by some translations, “at the time of the evening breeze” (CSB, NRSV). The point is that Adam and Eve’s sin is exposed and judged *as evening descends*.<sup>10</sup> This foreboding evening carries through all of world history until its climactic undoing centuries later.

b. *Pentateuch*. The one point to make in considering the rest of the Pentateuch is that evening and sunset held special significance for the Jewish people not only due to their conspicuous presence in the creation narrative but also due to the Passover and the timing of it.

<sup>6</sup> Though it takes us beyond the immediate scope of this essay, it is worth noting in passing that there is likely an allusion to Gen 1:31 LXX in Mark 7:37. Jesus heals a deaf man and the astonished crowd’s reaction is, “He has done all things well [**καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν**].” The three Greek words in this sentence map on both verbally and conceptually to the crowning statement at the end of the sixth day of creation: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good [**καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησεν καὶ ἰδοὺ καλὰ λίαν**].” See J. Héring, “**καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν**: Remarques sur Marc 7,37,” *ConBNT* 11 (1947): 91–96. Markan commentators (e.g. Stein, *Mark*, 362; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 227) tend to connect Mark 7:37 to Gen 1:31 but see this of christological significance (showing that Jesus, like God, does all things well) rather than of eschatological significance (showing that Jesus is recapitulating the well-doing of creation in his well-doing of healing and restoration and thus signaling the dawning of a new creation in terms of Isaiah 35).

<sup>7</sup> Though we will not pursue it here, it is intriguing that the fall language in Genesis 3 of hearing (**ἀκούω**), not eating fruit (**καρπός**), leaves (**φύλλα**), and fig tree (**συκῆ**) all recur together as Jesus curses the fig tree in Mark 11:13–14 in symbolic judgment of the temple, the recapitulation of Eden as the first temple (G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], *passim*). According to the language of both the LXX and Mark: Adam and Eve ate the **καρπός** and **ἤκουσαν** the Lord and so covered themselves with the **φύλλα** of a **συκῆ**, despite the prohibition to not eat this **καρπός**. Jesus saw a **συκῆ**, with **φύλλα** but no **καρπός**, and cursed it so that no one would ever eat its **καρπός** again—and his disciples **ἤκουον** him.

<sup>8</sup> Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 97–131; idem, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 128–29; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Studies in OT Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 155–59.

<sup>9</sup> BDAG 215.

<sup>10</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 24; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 254.

When God gives instructions to Moses and Aaron regarding the Passover on the verge of the exodus from Egypt, they are told that each household's lamb should be kept alive "until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight" (Exod 12:5–6). The final phrase is the striking one. The exact language is that the lamb should be killed "between the evenings," translating the Hebrew בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם, brought into Greek as πρὸς ἑσπέραν. The lamb was to be killed at evening time.<sup>11</sup> In considering the relevance of Exod 12:5–6 we might bear in mind that the near context in Exodus is quoted in Mark 15 at Jesus's death. We are told that when Jesus was on the cross "there was darkness over the whole land" for three hours, echoing very similar language in Exod 10:21–22 regarding the ninth plague of darkness that there was "darkness in all the land of Egypt three days" (Exod 10:22).

That Exod 12:6 (the Passover lamb being killed "between the evenings") is not a passingly insignificant detail is confirmed by the recounting of this element of the exodus in Deuteronomy. There the people are told that they were to offer the sacrifice for Passover "in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt [ἑσπέρας πρὸς δυσμὰς ἡλίου ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ᾧ ἐξῆλθες ἐξ Αἰγύπτου]" (Deut 16:6).<sup>12</sup> In other words, evening and sunset represented the deliverance of the people from Egypt. The significance of the evening Passover in Exodus is especially striking in light of Watts's argument that Mark presents Jesus as the bringer of the Isaianic new exodus.<sup>13</sup>

c. *Psalms and Proverbs*. We should also note the poetic hope of a new day using language that paves the way for Mark's careful use of morning and evening language. The primary thing to note is a general association in the poetry of the OT between the morning as the time of newness and flourishing and the evening as the time of finality and ending. Thus Psalm 90 speaks of creation and the way the Lord brought forth the mountains and formed the earth (Ps 89:2 LXX) and goes on to speak of people like the grass of the field which "is renewed in the morning [τὸ πρωί]: in the morning [τὸ πρωί] it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening [τὸ ἑσπέρας] it fades and withers" (vv. 5–6). The evening in particular is associated throughout the OT as the time of expiration, weariness, and the coming of an end. "My days are like an evening shadow [ὥσει σκιά ἐκλίθησαν]; I wither away like grass" (Ps 102:11/101:12 LXX).<sup>14</sup> "I am gone like a shadow at evening [ὥσει σκιά ἐν τῷ ἐκκλιῖναι αὐτήν]; I am shaken off like a locust" (Ps 109:23/108:23 LXX).

Evening is also the time of darkness and folly. In Proverbs, and this time using more of the precise wording in Mark, we read of the young man lacking wisdom who passes close to the house of the adulterous woman "in the twilight, in the

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 390–92.

<sup>12</sup> See the comments of Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 243–44; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9* (rev. ed.; WBC 6A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 335–39.

<sup>13</sup> Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), passim (esp. 53–90).

<sup>14</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3: *Psalms 90–150* (Baker Commentary on the OT Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 153–54.



evening, at the time of night and darkness [ἐν σκότει ἑσπερινῷ ἡνίκα ἂν ἡσυχία νυκτερινῇ ἦ καὶ γνοφώδης]” (Prov 7:9; cf. Isa 5:11).<sup>15</sup>

d. *Prophets*. In turning to the prophets we come to the most important OT background to Mark, although we should remember that the prophets themselves draw on the creation account and the Pentateuch. It is especially important for the purposes of this essay to bear in mind that in general terms God’s promise of restoration to his people is at times expressed in terms of light shining on his people. This is the case, for example, in Isa 60:1–3. Notice the repeated light/darkness imagery in this eschatologically rich prophetic passage:

Arise, shine, [φωτίζου φωτίζου] for your light [σου τὸ φῶς] has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness [σκότος] shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness [γυρόφος] the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

<sup>3</sup> And nations shall come to your light [τῷ φωτί σου],  
and kings to the brightness of your rising [τῇ λαμπρότητί σου].<sup>16</sup>

The imagery of light and darkness and the sun and moon recurs throughout Isaiah, in fact, in eschatologically charged passages. In Isaiah 30 we read, “The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow” (Isa 30:26).<sup>17</sup> In Isaiah 59, similarly: “So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun [ἀπ’ ἀνατολῶν ἡλίου]; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives. And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,’ declares the LORD” (Isa 59:19–20). And in chapter 60: “The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended” (Isa 60:19–20).<sup>18</sup>

At times in the NT, Jesus’s coming is explicitly tied to OT expectations of light overcoming darkness, such as when Matthew quotes Isa 9:1–2:

<sup>15</sup> Waltke offers penetrating reflections on the moral significance of darkness in proverbs 7 (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 372–73).

<sup>16</sup> Oswalt: “the one who would come to set [Israel] free ... is here, like the moment of sunrise after a long and anxious night” (John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 536).

<sup>17</sup> Note the comments of John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 563.

<sup>18</sup> See the incisive comments of J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 375.

And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,<sup>14</sup> so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:<sup>15</sup> “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—<sup>16</sup> the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned [ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει φῶς εἶδεν μέγα, καὶ τοῖς καθήμενοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου φῶς ἀνέτειλεν αὐτοῖς]” (Matt 4:13–16).

In Matthew’s Gospel, the very next verse speaks of Jesus proclaiming that the kingdom has dawned, as in Mark 1:14–15. We should also note Isa 49:8–9, where the famous eschatological “day” passage that Paul quotes in 2 Cor 6:2 is followed by darkness language: “Thus says the LORD: ‘In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness [τοῖς ἐν τῷ σκότει], ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture” (Isa 49:8–9). Again the “spiritual blindness, desolation, disinheritance, and imprisonment” of God’s people is put in terms of darkness.<sup>19</sup>

One final passage should be mentioned. The very last chapter in the Protestant canon is Malachi 4—which, while not last in the Hebrew canon, should not be unduly sidelined on that account, as the earliest assemblers of the Christian canon clearly viewed Malachi as the fitting closing of the OT and bridging into the NT. This passage is especially rich in considering backgrounds to Mark in the way it speaks of both Moses and Elijah, as Mark’s Gospel at times does (e.g. Mark 9:2–13). But at present we note simply the language of the eschatological “day” of the Lord in verses 1 and 5 and the promise of the rising of the “sun of righteousness” that is associated with it in verse 4.

“For behold, the day is coming [ἰδοὺ ἡμέρα κυρίου ἔρχεται], burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming [ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἐρχομένη] shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.<sup>2</sup> But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness [καὶ ἀνατελεῖ ὑμῖν τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά μου ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης] shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.<sup>3</sup> And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.<sup>4</sup> “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.<sup>5</sup> “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes [πρὶν ἔλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ].<sup>6</sup> And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (Mal 4:1–6)

<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, 298.

The latter-day eschaton is here portrayed as the dawning of a new day, with the rising of the sun (cf. Ps 37:6).<sup>20</sup> “On the Day of the Lord righteousness will become apparent just like the shining sun in all its brightness and blessedness.”<sup>21</sup> While the sun is of course used here metaphorically as a matter of literary richness, it should be borne in mind in reading Mark and his carefully placed sunset and sunrise. We should also note in passing that the near context here in Malachi is quoted at the very outset of Mark’s Gospel. Malachi 3:1 (“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me”), which itself draws on Exod 23:20 to describe God’s angel going before Israel into Canaan, is cited in Mark 1:2 to open Mark’s Gospel.

e. *Summary.* In short, the OT hope was for the dawning of a new day, when night and darkness had passed and morning light had dawned, as God dwelt among his people once more.<sup>22</sup>

2. *The Gospel of Mark.* The OT hope is rich in the language and the categories of darkness and light, morning and evening. And these are not merely temporal and narrational realities. They are moral and ethical categories, and even promissory and eschatological categories. Perhaps this is also the case in Mark. Perhaps the references to darkness and light, morning and evening carry significance that runs deeper than merely markers of time as Mark’s narrative moves along. Several factors, as we turn to Mark, incline us in this direction.

a. *Introduction.* Mark’s Gospel as a whole is terse and crisp and, like Hebrew narrative, tells us no more than precisely what he means to. There is no literary floweriness. This Gospel is tightly packed and crisply moving. The literary quality of the Gospel therefore alerts us to subsurface significance of narrational details such as time markers.

b. *Mark 1:14–15.* Turning to specific passages, the notion that Mark uses the language of “evening” and “morning” with beneath-the-surface significance is immediately plausible in a general way when we remember that Mark introduces the gospel not in the first instance as answering a “what” or a “who” question but a “when” question. The first words out of Jesus’s mouth in this Gospel account are: “The *time* is fulfilled” (Mark 1:15).<sup>23</sup> This essay is considering just what Christ meant by these words by considering Mark’s use of darkness and light language, and especially the specifically temporal themes of the morning and the evening. We

<sup>20</sup> Contra Baldwin, the “sun of righteousness” is not a picture of God as judge but as restorer (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* [TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972], 250).

<sup>21</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 328.

<sup>22</sup> The eschatological significance of markers such as the sun, the evening, and the morning comes through particularly clearly in 2 Esdr 7:39–42, which speaks of “the day of judgment” as “a day that has no sun or moon or stars, or cloud or thunder or lightning, or wind or water or air, or darkness or evening or morning, or summer or spring or heat or winter or frost or cold, or hail or rain or dew, or noon or night, or dawn or shining or brightness or light, but only the splendor of the glory of the Most High, by which all shall see what has been destined” (NRSV).

<sup>23</sup> On the significance of the temporal aspect of this statement see Klaus Scholtissek, “Der Sohn Gottes für das Reich Gottes,” in *Der Evangelist als Theologe: Studien zum Markusevangelium* (ed. Thomas Söding; SBS 163; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995), 72–73.

therefore note that the introductory proclamation of the gospel is put by Jesus in temporal terms. This is in complementary distinction from the approach of Bosenius, who explores the spatial aspect of Mark's Gospel.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, if Mark's whole Gospel is framed by asking a question of what time in history has arrived in a macro way, we should be accordingly prepared for Mark to underscore his answer to this question by using time markers such as morning and evening in a micro way.

c. *Mark 1:34; 16:2*. There is only one sunset in Mark and one sunrise. The one sunset occurs in chapter 1, as Jesus's ministry is launched and Mark gives us a summary overview of this ministry. The passage is worth getting out before us in full:

<sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown [Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε ἔδω ὁ ἥλιος] they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. (1:32–34)

The smoothness with which our English translations are able to capture the opening seven Greek words of verse 32 can cause us to read too quickly over the way Mark sets up this passage. As he sometimes does, Mark repeats himself apparently without necessity, communicating the same thing in two ways: Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε ἔδω ὁ ἥλιος; most literally, “And evening having come, when the sun had set . . .” The darkness that has descended is clearly being emphasized by Mark.<sup>25</sup>

And at the same time he immediately goes on to speak of the general nature of Jesus's ministry; in other words, Mark appears to be stepping back and, having introduced Jesus, is now giving the reader a bird's-eye perspective on what Jesus's ministry is and will be in the chapters to come.<sup>26</sup> Thus when he tells us, Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης, ὅτε ἔδω ὁ ἥλιος, Mark is not simply giving a passing remark about what time of day it happened to be when the crowds were thronging to him, but is setting up Jesus's ministry for the whole Gospel. This is a ministry that takes place under the looming darkness of evening.

This sunset in Mark 1 is likely intentionally paired in a literary way with the sunrise of 16:2. Here, some women have gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body (16:1), having seen where he was laid by Joseph of Arimathea (15:46–47). We read: “And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb [καὶ λίαν πρωτὶ τῆ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων ἔρχονται ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον ἀνατειλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου]” (16:2). And here, for the first time in Mark, dawn comes

<sup>24</sup> Bärbel Bosenius, *Der literarische Raum des Markusevangeliums* (WMANT 140; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 108–109.

<sup>26</sup> This is “die erste summarische Darstellung der Wundertätigkeit Jesu im Markusevangelium” (Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Die Bedeutung der Wundererzählungen für die Christologie des Markusevangeliums* [BZNW 42; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975], 161). Similarly, Elian Cuvillier, *L'évangile de Marc* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2002), 44. Cf. Edwards, *Mark*, 65.

and the morning is truly the morning. Morning has come for good. The sun had set in Mark 1. The sun has risen in Mark 16. Just as in 1:32, Mark used the literary feature of duality to speak of evening having come and the sun having set, so here in 16:2 he uses duality to speak of morning having come and the sun having risen.<sup>27</sup>

	1:32	16:2
Time of day:	Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης,	καὶ λίαν πρῶτ' τῆ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων
Activity of sun:	ὅτε ἔδω ὁ ἥλιος	ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου

Why does Mark tell us that the sun has risen? He need not; he has already told us that it was morning time.<sup>28</sup> Most likely, given what we are seeing elsewhere in Mark, he does this to set up a parallel with 1:32. Evening descended in Mark 1, as Jesus engages with the dark forces of the demonic; the sun set. Morning has dawned in Mark 16, as Jesus has triumphed over the demonic; the sun rises. A deliberate Markan juxtaposition of the early ministry summary of 1:32–35 and the resurrection account of chapter 16 is reinforced when it is noticed that these are the only two texts in Mark that have both *πρῶτ'* and *λίαν* (1:35; 16:2).<sup>29</sup> The “early morning” of Mark 1 is explicitly said to still be dark (1:35); the “early morning” of Mark 16 is explicitly said to enjoy the light of the sun.<sup>30</sup> Though he does not connect 16:2 to 1:35, Cuvillier usefully remarks: “La double mention ‘Tôt le matin’ et ‘le soleil étant levé’ est, d’une certaine manière, contradictoire; elle peut être entendue au sens métaphorique: est-ce l’astre solaire qui brille ou la lumière pascale qui éclaire déjà les femmes?”<sup>31</sup>

d. *Subsequent, evenly distributed occurrences of “evening.”* Table 1 above has given us the eight occurrences of *ὄψια/ὄψέ*. The observation to make at this point is the notable evenness of distribution throughout Mark, as if Mark wants to regularly say to the reader, “Remember—evening looms!” The occurrences are at 1:32; 4:35; 6:47; 11:11, 19; 13:35; 14:17; and 15:42.

One would not want to make the argument that the entire Gospel occurs under cover of night,<sup>32</sup> but in point of fact a curiously large percentage of the Gospel

<sup>27</sup> Étienne Trocmé (*L'évangile selon Saint Marc* [CNT 2; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000], 54) chalks up the duality of a text such as 1:32 as reflecting simply the way someone would have spoken, and not a literarily deliberate matter, but the care with which Mark assembled his Gospel account militates against such a conclusion.

<sup>28</sup> France notes the literary redundancy (*Gospel of Mark*, 677).

<sup>29</sup> The other two uses of *λίαν* are non-temporal (6:51, where the disciples are “utterly” astounded at the calming of the sea, and 9:3, where Jesus’s clothes at the transfiguration become “intensely” white).

<sup>30</sup> Matthew and Luke both describe the intense, dazzling brightness of the angel in Jesus’s tomb, but do not mention the brightness of the sun (Matt. 28:3; Luke 24:4); Mark simply says that the angel had a “white” robe. Thus the brightness of the angels in Matthew and Luke may be paralleled by the brightness of the day itself in Mark.

<sup>31</sup> Cuvillier, *L'évangile de Marc*, 309. Lane notes the apparent contradiction between 1:35 and 16:2 and concludes simply that “the time of the women’s visit was immediately after sunrise on the first day of the week” (William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 586).

<sup>32</sup> As Peter Leithart does (“Dawn After Evening,” *First Things* [August 1, 2016], <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2016/08/dawn-after-evening>).

does indeed take place at night. It is difficult to break this down with precision because we are generally not told when morning has come and thus when the narrative has transitioned once more to daytime.<sup>33</sup> And in any case, at times when we are told that “evening had come,” this need not necessarily mean evening of the day on which the immediately surrounding events transpired.<sup>34</sup> But at the least we can observe the careful sprinkling of “evening” language throughout Mark, preventing this motif from ever straying far from the alert reader’s mind.<sup>35</sup> This would especially be the case for the early receivers of Mark’s Gospel, who would have heard or read Mark’s Gospel in one fell swoop.

e. *Increasing darkness throughout Mark.* Not only are the actual word occurrences of “evening” evenly distributed. When we pay close attention to the flow of the narrative, and when we also add in the language of “night” (νύξ and ἔνυκτος) and “darkness” (σκότος and σκοτίζομαι), we find that more of the Gospel takes place in darkness toward the end. The theme is introduced in 1:32–34 but is then largely subsurface throughout the opening chapters, increasing in frequency as the Gospel unfolds.

*At least* the following pericopes take place in darkness:

- Jesus heals many in a general, broad-stroke way (1:32–34)
- Jesus prays and is sought out by his disciples (1:35–39)
- Jesus calms a storm (4:35–41)
- Jesus walks on the water and calms another storm (6:45–52)
- Jesus enters Jerusalem and looks around the temple (11:11)
- Jesus and the disciples leave Jerusalem (11:19)
- The Passover meal of Jesus and his disciples (14:17–21)
- Institution of the Lord’s Supper (14:22–25)
- Jesus predicts Peter’s failure (14:26–31)
- Jesus prays in Gethsemane while his disciples sleep (14:32–42)
- Jesus is arrested, having been betrayed by Judas (14:43–50)
- A young man flees (14:51–52)
- Jesus is led before the Jewish leadership (14:53–65)
- Peter denies Jesus (14:66–72)
- Jesus is on the cross (15:33)
- Jesus is buried (15:42–47)

We note first the large number of pericopes that take place under cover of night. Beyond this, there are many episodes that may occur at night, but it is difficult to say. For example, when Jesus steps ashore after calming the storm and heals the

<sup>33</sup> France: “Apart from the connected sequence of events through chapters 14–16, Mark generally offers no indication of time when introducing a new pericope” (*Gospel of Mark*, 349).

<sup>34</sup> As Pesch points out, commenting on 1:35 (Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium, 1 Teil: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kap. 1, 1–8, 26* [HTThK II/1; Freiburg: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980], 57). Pesch’s commentary is particularly rich in biblical-theological reflection on Mark.

<sup>35</sup> Eve-Marie Becker (*Das Markus-Evangelium im Rahmen antiker Historiographie* [WUNT 194; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 226) reflects specifically on the time-markers in Mark 1–6 (1:21, 32, 35; 2:1, 23; 4:35; 6:2) and suggests that these clarify the time during which John the Baptist was arrested and killed as compactly summarized in 1:14a but does not go beyond chapter 6 in these remarks.

demoniac (5:1–13), is it still night, as it was in 4:35? It seems likely; after all, if it was evening in 4:35, the disciples and Jesus would presumably have arrived before day-break. But we are largely entering now into the realm of speculation.

What we can note with greater objectivity is the clearly increased darkness as the Gospel moves toward the cross. Consider Mark 14 in particular. Strikingly, almost the entire chapter takes place under cover of darkness. We know it is dark from verse 17 through to verse 72. This is not only because of the marker of “evening” in verse 17 and “morning” in 15:1, but also because of signals throughout this section of Mark, such as Peter warming himself by the fire, suggesting the coldness of night (14:54, 67), or the rooster crowing, suggesting that dawn is drawing near (14:68, 72).<sup>36</sup>

In short, the evening darkness that is pervasive throughout Mark becomes all-encompassing as the narrative hurtles toward its climax in the death of Jesus. The darkness becomes increasingly oppressive; the light of the morning becomes increasingly desired.

f. “Morning” that is often not “morning.” At this point we transition momentarily from the darkness of evening to the light of morning. Just as the darkness of evening slowly builds to the crescendo of the three-hour darkness as Jesus hangs on the cross (15:33), the light of the morning underscores the pervasiveness of this darkness throughout the Gospel. One way to see that the light of the morning is increasingly desired is by taking a close look at the five instances of “morning” (πρωῖ) in Mark. The first four of these are striking in that they fail to provide the hopeful alternative to the darkness of evening and night.

The first instance of πρωῖ is in 1:35, as Mark tells us when Jesus rose to pray after the bird’s-eye view of his ministry in 1:32–34. Yet for some reason Mark explicitly and immediately tells the reader that *even though it was morning, light had not yet come*. “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark [Καὶ πρωῖ ἔννουχα λίαν ἀναστάς]” (1:35). In other words, Mark is flagging for the reader that Jesus’s ministry as it resumes following 1:32–34 *retains an atmosphere of darkness*. The sun would eventually come up that day; but, in some sense, “evening” remains.

We do not hear of morning again until chapter 11, a point that may quietly support the notion that Mark wishes to portray Jesus’s ministry as a ministry transpiring in darkness. The next three uses of πρωῖ (11:20; 13:35; 15:1) all occur in a context, surprisingly, of judgment. The first of these occurs as Jesus passes by the fig tree, representing the barrenness of the people of God and especially the inverting of the true ministry of the temple. We are told that Jesus and his disciples pass by the fig tree “in the morning” (11:20) and see it withered down to its roots.

The next use is toward the end of the discourse of Mark 13. Picking up on the withering of the fig tree (13:28–29), Jesus makes the point that no one knows the time of the coming of the Son of Man (13:32–37). Jesus thus exhorts his fol-

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<sup>36</sup> The increasing darkness here toward the end of Mark coincides with the way Peter drops off from the narrative upon his denial of Jesus. Thereafter, other witnesses such as the centurion at the cross and the women at the tomb are brought forward as the key observers of Mark’s narrative. I am grateful to Richard Bauckham for pointing this out in a live lecture.

lowers to “stay awake” (just what the disciples fail to do in Gethsemane in the next chapter [14:37, 40, 41]). The reason his followers must stay alert is that they do not know the time of the coming of the Son of Man—whether “in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning [ἢ πρωῒ]” (13:35). These are the four standard watches of the night, divided into approximately three hours each.<sup>37</sup> The “morning” therefore represents the final hours of the night, some part of which is doubtless still dark. We see also one of the references to “the evening” (here, ὀψέ) in Mark.<sup>38</sup> And we note again the judgment context, in the warning that immediately follows “in the morning”: “lest he come suddenly and find you asleep” (13:36). Even if this is not judgment in the formal sense (final judgment), it is a severe and sobering threat. The tone once again is foreboding, dark.

The next instance of πρωῒ is in the first verse of Mark 15, after several consecutive pericopes of nighttime darkness, as we have observed above. “And as soon as it was morning [καὶ εὐθὺς πρωῒ], the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council” (15:1). From a literary perspective this is a long-awaited morning, given the long darkness of chapter 14. Yet once more it is a “disappointing” morning light; as this day dawns, we find ourselves reading of the sentencing of Jesus to die (15:1–15). With this penultimate reference to morning in Mark, the morning has come, but once more it is a morning that introduces judgment, this time of Jesus himself.

Finally, one last instance of πρωῒ occurs, this time on the other side of the resurrection, as the sun rises early in the morning in 16:2. And the rest of the passage accords with this hopeful atmosphere of the dawn of a new day. The women look up (16:4). The angel is clothed in white (16:5). Jesus is proclaimed to have risen (16:6). Morning has broken free of all darkness. The darkness that has been clinging to the morning all through Mark has finally melted away. The resurrection of Jesus draws to an end the evening that has pervaded Mark, and especially the darkness of chapter 14. It is the dawn of a new day. The phrase ἀνατείλαντος τοῦ ἡλίου in 16:2, which in Greek concludes the sentence, is especially striking. We are drawn back once more to Malachi 4, the last chapter in the Protestant OT canon, where Yahweh says that “for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings [καὶ ἀνατελεῖ ὑμῖν τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά μου ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἴασις ἐν ταῖς πτέρυξιν αὐτοῦ]” (Mal 4:2/3:20 LXX). Intriguingly, the verb Mark uses only one time to speak of the sun rising in Mark 16:2 (despite using ἐγείρω, ἀνίστημι, and ἐξανίστημι combined 37 times throughout his Gospel) is the very verb in LXX Malachi 4 (ἀνατέλλω). And of course Malachi 4 and Mark 16:2 both speak of the *sun* (ἥλιος) as being that which rises (not a foregone conclusion since at times in both the LXX and the NT ἀνατέλλω is used to

<sup>37</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 546.

<sup>38</sup> Jens Dechow, *Gottessohn und Herrschaft Gottes: Der Theozentrismus des Markusevangeliums* (WMANT 86; Neukirchener-Vluyt: Neukirchener, 2000) links this occurrence of “evening” specifically back to Mark 6:47 (219 n. 232).



speak of something other than the sun rising<sup>39</sup>). It is further intriguing that this is also the verb used in the curse of Gen 3:18 to speak of thorns and thistles “rising” from the ground, perhaps underscoring the notion that the dawn of a new day as Mark concludes his Gospel carries deeply redemptive connotations.

g. “Morning” and “evening” working in tandem. One final observation from Mark remains. From the argument thus far given it may appear that the language of “evening” is sprinkled throughout Mark in a careful way, and the language of “morning” likewise, but that the two appear independently of one another. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it appears that at least on some occasions Mark appears to deliberately speak of evening and then follow it with the morning, as in Genesis 1—yet only in the final instance, of the evening of Mark 14 followed by the morning of Mark 16, does true and decisive morning actually break through.<sup>40</sup>

We have already noted the way Mark describes evening descending in 1:32, followed by morning in 1:35, though that morning remains dark.<sup>41</sup> We could also point to chapter 11. There we find the curious remark that Jesus “entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late [ὄψις ἤδη οὕσης τῆς ὥρας], he went out...” (11:11). Jesus then goes on to curse the fig tree, sandwiching this cursing around his cleansing of the temple, demonstrating that just as the fig tree was found fruitless, so too has the Jewish leadership and their stewarding of the temple been found fruitless.<sup>42</sup> The point for our purposes is the way the three episodes in Mark 11:12–25 (cursing the fig tree, cleansing the temple, and explaining the cursed fig tree) are set up by the comment about evening having come. The temple’s evening has come; it is about to be eclipsed by Jesus’s own recapitulation of the temple in himself. This is reinforced by the repetition of “evening” language in 11:19 (“And when evening came...”) immediately after cleansing the temple. Yet Mark then tells us in 11:20 that they passed by “in the morning” and saw the withered fig tree, and the true morning will come along in 16:2. Mark appears, then, to be juxtaposing evening and morning throughout Mark 11.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps he is quietly indicating that the temple’s evening has arrived and the temple’s true morning is imminent.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Deut 29:22 LXX and Heb 7:14 use ἀνατέλλω to speak of physical descent; Hos 10:2 LXX of judgment rising; Luke 12:54 of a cloud rising.

<sup>40</sup> I bypass for now the three-hour darkness of Mark 15:33, which Greg Beale and I have treated on its own biblical-theological terms in a way that complements and reinforces the present essay (G. K. Beale and Dane C. Ortlund, “Darkness Over the Whole Land: A Biblical-Theological Reflection on Mark 15:33,” *WTJ* 75 [2013]: 221–38).

<sup>41</sup> In commenting on the morning of 1:35 Cuvillier mentions that throughout Mark “Le cycle de al ‘journée type’ se clôt avec la mention du matin” (*L’évangile de Marc*, 44).

<sup>42</sup> Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 182–83, 310.

<sup>43</sup> Strecker calls the contrast between the evening and morning of 11:11 and 11:19–20 “besonders deutlich” (Georg Strecker, “Die Passionsgeschichte im Markusevangelium,” in *Bilanz und Perspektiven gegenwärtiger Auslegung des Neuen Testaments: Symposion zum 65. Geburtstag von Georg Strecker* [ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Horn; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995], 225).

<sup>44</sup> Cuvillier sees the evening in 11:11 as simply Jesus’s strategy to distance himself from the thronging crowds, and the mention of evening as nothing other than a signal that it is time to go to bed

We also see “evening” and “morning” juxtaposed in 13:35 in the very same verse regarding the timing of the master’s arrival (“in the evening ... or in the morning”). And once again—as in Genesis 1—evening comes first, then morning. We have also noted briefly above the way in which chapter 14 is set up with the descent of evening in 14:17, leading into the Passover, events in Gethsemane, and other circumstances culminating in Jesus’s arrest. We now note the arrival of morning in 15:1, bringing to an end the darkness that has been present since 14:17—though, as we noted above, this is a foreboding morning, the day of Jesus’s indictment, and not the final release of the dawning morning of 16:2. Finally, then, we note also the darkness as Jesus hangs on the cross in 15:33 and also the evening of Jesus’s burial in 15:42, followed by the morning of 16:2. Once again evening gives way to morning in a likely literary juxtaposition, though here, finally, true Morning has dawned. Mark does not tell us about the morning sunlight of Easter morning simply to indicate how the women, without any artificial light, would have been able to see inside the tomb.<sup>45</sup> Evening in Mark is not simply “a time for new challenges.”<sup>46</sup> It is a time of eschatological darkness, waiting with OT-fueled longing for the final morning.

### III. CONCLUSION

In light of all this, it appears that Mark deliberately uses and carefully places language of “morning” and especially “evening” throughout his Gospel as a way of quietly presenting Jesus as the bringer of the new creational age, which the OT spoke of as the dawn of a new day and the arrival of latter-day morning. Between the sunset of Mark 1:32 and the sunrise of Mark 16:2, this Gospel keeps the presence of evening and nighttime before the reader, underscoring the darkness that Jesus has come to engage and overcome. Mark uses the language of “night” and “darkness” to reinforce the pervasive and steadily rising presence of evening time throughout Mark, but it is especially the use of *ὄψια/ὄψέ* that undergirds our observations. We are told repeatedly throughout Mark that an evening has come; in short, Mark’s whole Gospel is an “evening” time followed by eschatological morning.

Given that the Sabbath is mentioned in several of the contexts considered above, and that the Jewish sabbath went from one evening to the next,<sup>47</sup> perhaps Mark is making a subtle point about Jesus’s coming being the final “sabbath” throughout Mark after which the latter-day new creation dawns, just as the first creation was brought into being following several evening/mornings and then a

(*L'évangile de Marc*, 229–30)! But the curious terseness of this text, and the rich temple motif that courses through these final chapters of Mark, suggest a deeper Markan purpose.

<sup>45</sup> Contra Légasse (*L'évangile de Marc*, 998–99) who ultimately takes this line after flirting with the idea that Mark is juxtaposing the light of 16:2 with the darkness of 15:42.

<sup>46</sup> Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark, Volume 1: Mark 1–8:21* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 125.

<sup>47</sup> Folkert Fendler, *Studien zum Markusevangelium: Zur Gattung, Chronologie, Messiasgeheimnistheorie und Überlieferung des zweiten Evangeliums* (GTA 49; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 96.

final, seventh-day sabbath. But to pursue this would take us beyond the bounds of what is possible in this short paper.

My thesis merits reflection not least because Mark's biblical-theological and inaugurated eschatological sensitivities have been somewhat neglected in the literature. Matthew, Luke, and John continue to be mined extensively for their contribution in putting the whole Bible together and understanding Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT promises and the bringer of the new age. Mark, I suggest, holds the same profound redemptive-historical convictions as his three Gospel colleagues, but communicates those convictions more quietly and in a "subsurface" way. Where Matthew will say, "This was written to fulfill," Mark will give merely a passing narrational detail, but both communicating Jesus as the launcher of the latter days. John in particular uses the imagery of light and darkness in clearly metaphorical and redemptive-historical ways to communicate who Jesus is. Mark uses the same categories, but quietly slips them in to his narrative in such a way that only those who have "ears to hear" may pick it up (Mark 4:23).

This thesis fits with other ways in which Mark communicates in a subsurface way the significance of Jesus for inaugurated eschatology, such as: the demonic in Mark, which receives more attention than in any other Gospel, especially the emphasis on Satan and his defeat in 1:12–13 and 3:22–30;<sup>48</sup> the emphasis on teaching in Mark, despite this Gospel generally being cast as the Gospel of action, and the way Mark positions Jesus as the final Prophet-Teacher to come;<sup>49</sup> the pervasive use of "rising" language throughout the Gospel that leads into Jesus's own tersely narrated resurrection;<sup>50</sup> and individual texts that, I have argued, draw richly but discreetly on the OT and present Jesus as the bringer of the new age.<sup>51</sup> Mark's Gospel tingles with inaugurated eschatology, though less explicitly than the other Gospels.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the proposal of this paper would fit naturally with broader NT theology, such as Paul's eschatological use of the categories of darkness and light (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 4:4, 6; Eph 3:9; 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5) or Peter's reference to the morning star rising in our hearts (2 Pet 1:19) or John's prophecy of Jesus himself *being* the sun, without need for a sun (Rev 21:23–24).

<sup>48</sup> Dane Ortlund, "The Demonic in Mark and Its Eschatological Significance," *EtQ* (forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> Dane Ortlund, "Mark's Emphasis on Jesus' Teaching, Part 1: Exploring a Neglected Theme," *BSac* (forthcoming); idem, "Mark's Emphasis on Jesus' Teaching, Part 2: Eschatological Significance," *BSac* (forthcoming).

<sup>50</sup> Dane Ortlund, "Rising? Language in Mark and the Dawning New Creation," *CTR* 13 (2016): 27–46.

<sup>51</sup> Dane Ortlund, "The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45–52)," *Neot* 46 (2012): 319–39; Ortlund and Beale, "Darkness Over the Whole Land," 221–38; Dane Ortlund, "What Does it Mean to Cast a Mountain into the Sea? Another Look at Mark 11:23," *BBR* (forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup> Fritzen notes that Mark uses both geographical language such as sea, mountain, and wilderness in particularly theologically rich ways, and also time markers such as evening, night, and morning in theologically rich ways, but he does not reflect on the eschatological significance of these themes in Mark the way this paper and others cited in surrounding footnotes do (Wolfgang Fritzen, *Von Gott verlassen? Das Markusevangelium als Kommunikationsangebot für bedrängte Christen* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008], 28).