

# *Theology* on *the Web.org.uk*

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.  
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit  
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the  
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the  
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the  
links below:



*Buy me a coffee*

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

dependent version of the story (Matt. 9, 9). Levi also remains functionless in the rest of Mark.<sup>1</sup> The amount and character of this mention of individual Apostles and groups of Apostles in Mark suggests slight interest in the body so revered in the Palestinian church, and that interest not untinctured with opposition. It is not easy to imagine such references had the Gospel grown up in the circle where, at the very time the Elders Aristion and John were relating their "traditions," others of the same group could relate "what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples."

The Twelve as a whole, and Jesus' "mother and brethren," the group who are associated with them in the Jerusalem caliphate, fare no better in Mark than Peter and other individual Apostles. Jesus' kindred appear on two occasions only, in both cases in alliance with his opponents, and as typical examples of Jewish unbelief (3, 21; 6, 4, "his own kin"). Jesus disowns them in favor of those who "do the will of God," taking the disciples to be his spiritual kin (3, 34-35). But the Twelve themselves suffer from the same Jewish *πάρωσις*. They too are repeatedly rebuked for being "without understanding." They share in the "hardening" of their less privileged fellow-countrymen (4, 13, 40; 6, 52; 7, 18; 8, 16-21; 9, 18-19, 28, 32; 10, 13-14, 24, 26, 32; 14, 50), so that Peter's rebuke for "minding not the things of God, but the things of men" is only the culminating instance of a condemnation that rests on the Jews in general. But to Mark's doctrine of the "hardening" (*πάρωσις*) of Israel we must devote fuller discussion; for at this point we again find ourselves face to face with a highly significant connection of the Gospel with the Epistle to the Romans.

#### F. MARKAN VERSUS PAULINE DOCTRINE OF THE HARDENING OF ISRAEL

The most distinctive feature of Romans is the Apostle's great survey of human history from the Jewish point of view of the

<sup>1</sup> In Ev. Petri he reappears in the group who return with Peter to their fishing in Galilee after the crucifixion. The fragment breaks off after the mention of his name.

Election of Israel, a theodicy which forms the second part of this Epistle's doctrinal body (Rom. 9–11). It brings forward Paul's well known theory of the "hardening" (*πωρωσις*) of the elect people, perhaps the most strained of any of his distinctive views.

Paul regards the callousness of Israel to the gospel message as divinely ordained for the purpose of securing the dissemination of the gospel among the Gentiles. For he anticipates that Israel itself (the natural olive-branches) will afterwards through jealousy be provoked to reconsider its unbelief, and thus be restored again to the native trunk whereon the Gentiles (the wild olive branches) had meantime been grafted. This theodicy of history and the doctrine of election is based by Paul on a number of Scripture passages, including a secondary form (Deut. 29, 3) of the famous Isaian complaint of the people of deaf ears and unseeing eyes (Isa. 6, 9–10; 29, 10, etc.). By modern interpreters it is generally regarded as an apologetic intended to parry the objection of heathen opponents that Jesus' own people rejected his claim to be their predicted Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

So far as it goes this interpretation is correct. None appreciates better than Red.-Marc. the apologetic value of the Pauline doctrine of the "hardening of Israel." But Paul makes no such application. These famous chapters of Romans are introduced, on the contrary, by the most touching profession of undying love and loyalty to

my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites; whose is the Adoption, and the Glory (Shekinah), and the Covenants, and the Giving of the Law, and the Worship, and the Promises; whose are the Fathers, and of whom is Christ, as concerning the flesh.

The tone of this contrasts as vividly with that of 1 Thess. 2, 15–16 and Galatians as a whole, on the one side, as with that of the Markan story of Jesus' disowning of his "kinsmen according to the flesh" on the other. Paul, the great peacemaker, the true Apostle of Love of the New Testament, appears in a new light in the Epistles which follow Galatians and First and Second Thessalonians. In Romans, as in First Corinthians, he

<sup>1</sup> Urged by Celsus in the second century, who speaks for Jewish predecessors. See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ii. 75–79.

emphasises the other side of his doctrine of freedom. In Rom. 14, 1 ff, he interceded, as we have seen, on behalf of those who in Corinth had professed to be imitators "of Cephas," the needlessly scrupulous Jewish Christians. He entreats the Roman leaders not to exclude the "weak" brother. Previously, in the great chapters on the Election (Rom. 9–11) Paul had made the highest possible use of the obnoxious claim of Jewish prerogative. He argues almost like one of his old-time opponents. But his interpretation of the doctrine is in the interest of peace. His ideal is the ultimate union of Jew and Gentile in the new creation, the "one new man" which is Christ Jesus.

The historical key to Paul's peculiar emphasis upon this central doctrine of Jewish particularism and his large interpretation of it in specially conciliatory tone in just this Epistle to the Romans is not to be found in any special requirement of apologetic, but in the tone of conciliation and peace-making toward those of "Cephas" which becomes increasingly prominent in all the letters after Galatians, beginning with First Corinthians. It is clear from Rom. 15, 31 how deeply Paul had at heart the success of his peace-making mission to Jerusalem. On the other hand we may see from the direct appeal in Rom. 14, 1 ff. that the attitude of at least the controlling element in the church at Rome toward Jewish "distinctions" was such that, but for Paul's intercession, the authorities might have gone so far as to exclude altogether the "weak" brother who feared to disregard Moses. From these considerations we must form our conception of tendencies in the church at Rome in 60 A.D., and of the temper of the dominant party, who here, as in Corinth, probably considered themselves to be imitators "of Paul" because of their opposition to those "of Cephas." Events which followed in the next two decades are not likely to have diminished the "Paulinism" of the Gentile churches, whether in Greece or Italy. From First Peter it would appear that the subsequent drawing together of "strong" and "weak" in all quarters was a compensating outcome of the world-wide persecutions "for the name" of Christian under Domitian.

The fact that the doctrine of the "hardening of Israel" (*πληρωσις*) plays a very conspicuous part in the Gospel of Mark

is undeniable. That the classic proof-text from Isa. 6, 9–10 should be borrowed and developed by all dependent evangelists (Acts 28, 26–27; Matt. 13, 14–15; John 12, 37–43) is far from surprising. But there are two notable facts concerning the Markan employment apart from the generally recognized “Paulinism” of Mark 4, 11–12. One is that the doctrine of *πάρωσις* in Mark is by no means confined to this one passage, but extends throughout the Gospel, forming indeed the very core and kernel of the evangelist’s peculiar theory so effectively exhibited in Wrede’s epoch-making work, “Das Messiasgeheimniss,” of the “hiding of the mystery of the kingdom.” The other notable point is that the Gospel employs this theory of *πάρωσις*, not as Paul does, but in the interest of apologetic (not to say polemic) against Judaism within or without the Church. If there is any trace of Paul’s peace-making climax, his loyal hope and faith that in the end all Israel would also turn again and be saved (Rom. 11, 13–32), it appears only in the form of symbolism. In the present writer’s commentary<sup>1</sup> the judgment is expressed that the episode of the boy possessed of the dumb devil (Mark 9, 14–29) is placed where it is, and developed as it is, by Red.-Marc. with this symbolic application in view. This opinion, still maintained, would support the view that Mark shares the optimism of Paul regarding Israel; but it is an interpretation which has yet to find general acceptance.

The depiction of Jesus’ career characteristic of Mark (and subsequently dominant, though undiscoverable in Paul) is that of the wonder-working “strong Son of God,” to whom yield not only demons and he that hath the power of death, but the very elements and powers of earth and heaven. But this representation involves a psychological difficulty. How then (it would be answered) was there no reaction to these extraordinary phenomena from friend or foe until after the crucifixion? How could such superhuman pretensions be publicly advanced, and yet the question of Jesus’ personality remain in abeyance (as it confessedly did) until the crisis in Jerusalem? The actual employment of arguments of this kind by Celsus<sup>2</sup> in slightly

<sup>1</sup> Beginnings of Gospel Story, ad loc.

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I. ii, *passim*.

varied form shows that in the earlier Jewish polemic it had not been neglected. It is met in Mark by a constant application of the " wisdom " doctrine frequently employed by Paul (1 Cor. 2, 7-11; Rom 16, 25, etc.) of the " hiding of the mystery " from all but the elect. A form of the Q logion to this effect (Matt. 11, 25 = Luke 10, 21) is introduced by Red.-Marc. in 4, 11-12, together with his own proof-text from Isa. 6, 9-10, at a point where it flagrantly interrupts the original connection, transforming Jesus' answer to a request for explanation of the parables into an explanation of why he uses parables. They were riddles, or dark sayings (so Red.-Marc. declares), employed in order to hide the mystery of the kingdom from all save the elect ! Here, then, is the evangelist's explanation of the lack of reaction to Jesus' teaching: Israel's eyes and ears were holden that they should not understand. A Roman Paulinist might well be expected to make some such application of Paul's two doctrines of the " hiding of the mystery " and the "hardening of Israel"; but what shall we say of the supposititious Jew and Oriental who thinks of the *mashal* as a riddling *aīvīyūa*, the illustration as a dark saying?

A similar theory of intentional repression is applied in Mark to the miracles. Jesus withdraws from publicity. He forbids the healed, even the parents of the resuscitated girl, to make the marvel known. He silences the cries of demons " because they knew him." When at last his secret was perforce "openly" spoken of to the Twelve, "he forbade them to make him known" (8, 27-32a). The vision of the Transfiguration, especially, with its unveiling of his true nature and mission, must be kept a secret "until the Son of Man be risen from the dead" (9, 9).

All this is not "pedagogic reserve." It may have a certain background of historic truth in Jesus' wholesome moral reaction from the career of a miracle-mongering *γόης*; but the phenomenon is more literary than historical. Its real explanation lies in the habitual practice of pseudepigraphic and apocalyptic literature. The revelation has always to be "hidden for the time to come," because otherwise the reader will say: How is it that all this marvel transpired so late?

The “wonder-loving Mark” feels the pressure of the oft-raised objection, and meets it by his own adaptation (probably resting on the Second Source<sup>1</sup>) of the Isaian doctrine of the deaf and blind servant. In particular he weaves together, as we have seen, in a typical editorial insertion (Mark 4, 11–12), a combination of Paul’s classic theme of the “hiding of the mystery” with the principal proof-text from Isa. 6, 9–10, and in addition explains the incredible blindness and dumbness of unbelieving Jews, in which even those who later believe are involved, by constant reiteration of the declaration that “their hearts were hardened.” This may perhaps not be due to any direct literary influence from Romans, but the locality above all others in which we should most naturally look for such an adaptation of the theory of *πάρωσις* in antijudaic apologetic would certainly be that to which that epistle was addressed.

#### G. MARKAN CHRISTOLOGY

One more point of contact between Mark and Romans, a feature closely connected with its doctrine of *πάρωσις*, or the “hiding of the mystery of the kingdom,” deserves consideration before we pass to other features which connect this Gospel with practices and institutions otherwise known to have prevailed in very early times among Christians at Rome. We must consider the peculiar Christology of Mark, which on the heretical side led Cerinthus and his adoptionist followers to make it their standard, and on the orthodox led independently in the regions represented respectively by Luke and Matthew to the prefixing of “infancy chapters” which by different methods seek an accommodation between the Hellenistic idea of virgin birth and the primitive Jewish of direct Davidic descent.

Among other features which, under the conception already voiced of conditions at Rome, will seem quite natural to the Epistle to the Romans, will be the Apostle’s reference in two passages (Rom. 1, 4; 9, 5) to the fact that “as concerning the flesh” Jesus himself had been a Jew. In the former passage

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. 11, 2–19; 12, 17–21 with Luke 7, 18–35.