

# THE CHARGE OF BEING DELUDED INTERPRETERS OF SCRIPTURE: A REASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CHIASMS IN MARK 11-12

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**Abstract:** Although much attention has been given to the structure and meaning of Mark 11-12, the chiasmic structures in that passage have not been sufficiently observed nor appreciated for their contribution to the Markan message. The grave mistake and failure of the Sadducees in 12:18-27, and of the religious establishment in the larger context of chs. 11-12, was that of being deluded in their interpretation of Scripture. This might not seem clear at first to modern readers, but once the chiasms, *ergasia* chreia elaboration, and contextual evidences are shown and explained, the purposeful use of these rhetorical structures in the text becomes more apparent and prompts a reconsideration of the importance of chiasms in the Second Gospel.

**Keywords:** Mark, chiasm, *ergasia*, *chreia*, Scripture, Sadducees, delusion, interpreters

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Like the exciting scenes of a decisive confrontation between the hero and the villains in an action movie, Mark 11-12 portrays Jesus' final week of ministry before His crucifixion, in which He entered Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, and had a showdown in a series of religious debates with the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees and Herodians, and Sadducees. The dramatic progression and quick change of episodes one after another would have been entertaining for Mark's readers, not unlike an ancient drama.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, this also has the possibility of causing readers of the second Gospel today to overlook an important message embedded in the text, one which Mark has arguably deliberately implanted to characterize the religious establishment. It is a charge leveled against these religious leaders who were expected to be competent in knowing, interpreting, and applying Scriptures correctly. The situation in Mark 11-12, however, showed that these religious gurus of Jesus' day failed this standard of competency in interpreting Scriptures. They quoted, interpreted, and applied Scriptures only to have their flaws exposed. They were, in fact, deluded in their interpretations, thinking that they knew the Scripture but were shown otherwise. This conclusion is derived from 12:18-27, first, and also the surrounding context of Mark 11-12.

This article will demonstrate that Mark made extensive use of multiple chiasmic structures to emphasize that the fundamental error of the Sadducees in Mark 12:18-27, and of the religious leaders as a whole in Mark 11-12, was that of being deluded interpreters of Scriptures. This conclusion emerges also from other evidence, in particular the presence of an *ergasia* (the elaboration of a *chreia*). The article concludes by setting forth certain implications of this exegesis. But, first, it is important to begin with an examination of recent approaches to 12:18-27.

## CURRENT METHODS AND ANALYSES OF MARK 12:18-27

Most scholars who have worked on 12:18-27 have dealt with the validity of the resurrection that was questioned by the Sadducees. These scholars employed a range of methods to interpret the text. For

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1. This paper was originally written as part of the Ph.D. program at Asbury Theological Seminary.

2. An example of treating Mark's Gospel as ancient drama is G. G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

example, Otto Schwankl has produced an impressive volume *The Sadducees' Interrogation (Mark 12:18-27): An Exegetical-Theological study of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* that employs a wide array of methods consisting of historical, sociological, traditional, linguistics, anthropological, socio-cultural, grammatical-syntactical and semantic analyses.<sup>3</sup> J. Gerald Janzen adopts an intertextual way of scrutinizing the hermeneutics of the use of Exod 3:6 in Mark 12:26.<sup>4</sup> John P. Meier argues for the historicity of the event based on the criteria of discontinuity and coherence,<sup>5</sup> while Craig A. Evans rejects its historicity on two bases: (1) that the usage of the question of resurrection to accuse Jesus was odd; and (2) that “the question itself seems out of place.” Evans views it as “a piece of genuine, but reworked and recontextualized, exegesis from Jesus in support of the resurrection,” which “the evangelist—or more likely the tradition before him—has introduced...in the context of Jesus' quarrels with the temple authorities and has specifically credited the Sadducees with asking the question.”<sup>6</sup>

Ben Witherington, examining it under the social-rhetorical lens, identifies that the Sadducees deliberately used the levirate marriage to ridicule the resurrection and that Jesus' reply refuted their falsehood and

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3. Otto Schwankl, *Die Sadduzäerfrage (Mk 12,18-27 parr): Eine exegetisch-theologische Studie zur Auferstehungserwartung* (BBB66; Frankfurt am Main: Althenaum, 1987). Howard Clark Kee, review of Otto Schwankl, “Die Sadduzäerfrage (Mk 12,18-27 parr): Eine exegetisch-theologische Studie zur Auferstehungserwartung,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 144-45. Kee explains, “The impressively detailed analysis of the pericope itself in chapter 4 leads to the conclusion that this passage functions in Mark to demonstrate the growing conflict of Jesus with the religious authorities that led to his passion. Mark has placed it in a context of formal religious debate. Matthew intensifies the formal features, while Luke accommodates them to his Hellenistic readers” (144).

4. J. Gerald Janzen, “Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26,” *JSNT* 23 (1985): 43-58, at 44. He finds that discussions on the use of Exod 3:6 in Mark 12:26 “rests upon a sort of grammatical exegesis,” which “was employed also on other scriptural texts in attempts to establish resurrection or some other kind of immortality.”

5. John P. Meier, “The Debate on the Resurrection of the Dead: An Incident from the Ministry of the Historical Jesus?” *JSNT* 77 (2000): 3-24. He contends, “...when the arguments from discontinuity are joined to the arguments from coherence, the most probable conclusion is that the debate with the Sadducees over the resurrection in Mk 12.18-27 does reflect an actual incident in the ministry of the historical Jesus that took place, naturally enough, in Jerusalem” (22).

6. Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 251-52.

revealed their ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God.<sup>7</sup> He also notes that this pericope is closely linked to the preceding and proceeding ones dealing with “crucial questions with dialogue partners and teaching in the temple courts,” and that all these are united in Mark 11-12 by setting them all in the temple courts.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Bolt researches the literary background of 12:18-23, questioning what the Sadducees had read and how they reached their conclusion.<sup>9</sup> Howard Clark Kee's historical and sociological study of Mark classifies it as one of the many controversy stories in the second Gospel and that together with three other stories in Mark 12 (namely 12:13-17, 12:28-34 and 12:35-37a), “presented the Christian side in debates with Jews over major points in the interpretation of the scriptural and legal tradition.”<sup>10</sup>

R. T. France recognizes the ecclesial influence of this pericope by commenting that Jesus' answer “offers positive theological content which is appropriate not only to the immediate situation of the controversy in the temple but also to the ongoing life of the church. Brief and frustratingly cryptic as it is, it provides a basis for theological teaching.”<sup>11</sup> Bradley R. Trick approaches the pericope from the view of covenant,<sup>12</sup> while James Luther Mays insists it “deals directly with the question of how Scripture is to be interpreted.”<sup>13</sup>

Robert H. Gundry, in his commentary on Mark (1993), entitles this pericope “Jesus' exposé of the Sadducees' ignorance” and argues that Jesus' reply is subdivided into two: (1) a charge that Sadducees are ignorant

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7. Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdsman, 2001), 326-30.

8. Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 326-27.

9. Peter Bolt, “What Were The Sadducees Reading? An Enquiry into the Literary Background of Mark 12:18-23,” *TB* 45 (1994): 369-94.

10. Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 39-40.

11. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 473.

12. Bradley R. Trick, “Death, Covenants, and the Proof of Resurrection in Mark 12:18-27,” *NovT* 49 (2007): 232-56.

13. James Luther Mays, “Is This Not Why You are Wrong?—Exegetical Reflections on Mark 12:18-27,” *Int* 60 (2006): 32-46, at 33. He answers that question by first positing it in its interpretive context in chapters 11 and 12, and then examining Jesus' critique of the Sadducees' method of scripture interpretation and defense of the resurrection, and concludes by making implications for the practice of exegesis.

(12:24-25), and (2) a scriptural proof of resurrection (12:26-27), each consisting of a counter question and a statement.<sup>14</sup> He further notes that “the chiasmic ordering in 12:25-26 of the particulars concerning the two kinds of ignorance with which Jesus charged the Sadducees in 12:24 gives his charge added force.”<sup>15</sup> However, he did not explain what this “chiasmic ordering” is or show how it is formed.

Joel Marcus also takes a structural approach. Like Gundry, he observes that 12:18-27 is divided into two parts, one comprising of the Sadducees’ question (12:18-23) and the other of Jesus’ response (12:24-27), and that these two parts are closely linked in structure by two pairs of parallel ideas: one emphasizing the *fact* of resurrection (12:18 and 12:26-27) and the other the *mode* of resurrection (12:19-23 and 12:24-25).<sup>16</sup> Additionally, he presents a chiasmic structure within Jesus’ answer (in

12:24-27).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, scholars have mostly expounded on Jesus’ statements in replying and counter-challenging the Sadducees in their misleading correlation of the levirate marriage with the resurrection. Furthermore, of all the methodologies employed, few commentators, excepting Marcus and Gundry, have observed the chiasms in the story, particularly in Jesus’ response. Although Marcus and Gundry both describe basic chiasmic structuring, they did not explain what key focus this structural form serves to highlight. This article will give full attention to chiasms in this pericope by considering their import for interpreting Mark 11–12, specifically, 12:18-27.

## MARK’S PURPOSEFUL USE OF RHETORIC

Mark was purposeful in employing rhetoric, specifically chiasmic structures, for the purposes explained above. Kee notes that there are more than fifty-seven OT quotations in Mark 11–16 and that of these, “eight are from the Torah, and all but one of those appear in the context of the

14. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 700-701.

15. Gundry, *Mark*, 703.

16. Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 831. He argues, “Near the beginning of the first part, the Sadducees cite what ‘Moses wrote’ in the Law to provide a context for their skeptical question about the resurrection (12:19); near the end of his response, Jesus refers to what is written ‘in the book of Moses’ as a proof text for the resurrection (12:26). As Meier points out, the introduction to the Sadducees’ question (12:18) concerns the *fact* of the resurrection, whereas their question itself (12:19-23) concerns its *mode*. Jesus then deals with these issues in reverse order: first the mode of resurrection existence (12:24-25), then its reality (12:26-27)” (John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 3: Companions and Competitors* [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 417). Structurally, this may be represented as follows:

12:18	<i>fact</i> of resurrection (introduction to Sadducees’ questions)
12:19-23	<i>mode</i> of resurrection (their question itself)
12:24-25	<i>mode</i> of resurrection existence (Jesus’ answer)
12:26-27	<i>reality</i> of resurrection (conclusion of Jesus’ answer)

17. Marcus shows his chiasm as follows (*Mark 8-16*, 831):

A	Aren’t you deceived, not knowing (12:24a)
B	the scriptures (12:24b)
	C or the power of God (12:24c)
	C’ in heaven people don’t marry (but live an existence transformed by God’s power) (12:25a)
	B’ scriptural citation (12:26)
A’	You are greatly deceived (12:27)

Cf. Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 553-54. Stein also observes an almost identical construction:

A	The Sadducees do not know the scriptures (v. 24c)
B	They do not know the power of God (v. 24d)
B’	The resurrection life is not mere continuation of the present life (v. 25)
A’	Jesus argues from the authority of the book of Moses, the Torah (v. 26-27)

controversy stories in chapter 12.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, he surmizes that in the same context, another one-hundred and sixty allusions are present from the Prophets, Psalms, Torah, and other non-canonical writings.<sup>19</sup> For the first readers of Mark, it seems likely that a high percentage of these allusions would not go unnoticed. The density and repetition of Scriptural quotation and allusion would have impacted the original audiences regarding the importance of Scripture as the narration continued. Kelli S. O’Brien also examines in detail the use of Scripture in the Markan passion narrative, especially with regard to the many allusions in Mark 14–15. She notes, “the complexities of the Gospel of Mark were not missed for eighteen centuries without reason. Mark resists an easy reading. The author does not draw out connections for the reader, as do the other Synoptics, but leaves them for the reader to discover.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, we may posit that Scripture, whether through key themes, specific quotations, or possible allusions, is likely to play a significant role in Mark 11–12 and that Mark would have relied on hearers/readers to interpret Scripture’s significance through contextual indicators and literary structuring. How then might Mark have “embedded” his trails for us to discover them?

## CHIASMS

Chiasms are Mark’s way of structuring his content in chs. 11–12, in particular 12:18–27. The work of numerous scholars as well as the original research behind this article supports this claim. First, Nils W. Lund attests to the use of chiasmic structures in the Gospels:

Often we find upon closer examination that narrative units are stripped of all superfluous details and the story is made to converge at a given point, which is sharpened by a striking saying embodied in the story... A passage, therefore, which shows the presence of chiasmic forms perfectly preserved must be assumed to be more nearly original than a similar parallel passage which is imperfect in form. The basic assumption is that a writer who is at all interested in such forms may be supposed to

18. Kee, *Community*, 45. He elaborates, “Two are from the historical writings, 12 from the Psalms, 12 from Daniel, and the remaining 21 are from the other prophetic writings.”

19. Kee, *Community*, 45. He writes, “An analysis of the allusions to scripture and related sacred writings gives the same general picture: of 160 such allusions, half are from the prophets (excluding Daniel), and about an eighth each from Daniel, the Psalms, the Torah, and from non-canonical writings.”

20. Kellis S. O’Brien, *The Use of Scripture in the Markan Passion Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 2.

use them uniformly.<sup>21</sup>

Lund’s comment indicates that we can expect to find the presence of chiasmic structures in a narrative document, and that such devices are used to emphasize a key point, with the story being told or written in such a way that it only contains the necessary elements geared towards accentuating even more the key point. This would surely enable the narrative to progress without too much extra information, and using words that would produce parallel effects that point to a central idea.

The volume by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, also describes the essential features of chiasms: “...chiasm invites us to consider seriously the relationship between the sets of coordinate elements... In addition, chiasm normally involves an emphasis upon the first and last elements mentioned... Finally, ...chiasm suggests that this middle element is the primary concern around which the other features of the chiasm revolve.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the center of a chiasm stresses the chief thought of a pericope and must be treated seriously. M. Philip Scott has argued for the chiasmic structure as a key to the interpretation of Mark.<sup>23</sup> He is convinced that “...Mark has subordinated history and factual details to his overriding objective: to present across the scheme of his book as both linearly and chiasmically arranged an ongoing and gradual development of implicit meaning that is made fully explicit...”<sup>24</sup> He presents what he believes to be the grand chiasm that Mark had intentionally used to structure his entire Gospel.<sup>25</sup> Scott’s conclusion to his article is as telling

21. Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiasmic Structure* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1942), 229, and 232.

22. David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 120–21.

23. M. Philip Scott, “Chiasmic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark’s Gospel,” *BTB* 15 (1985): 17–26. He argues, “Mark’s gospel is a structure of meanings or of developing meaning. To seek elsewhere for its plan is futile, as a look at the lack of agreement among commentators proves; for no two of them seem to have found quite the same divisions in the text” (25).

24. Scott, “Chiasmic Structure,” 17.

25. Scott, “Chiasmic Structure,” 18–19. This chiasm contains 10 to 17 pairs of verses in parallel relationship hinged at a center at 9:7 (which says “This is my Son: listen to him”). Scott backs it up further by showing that 9:7 can be considered the center of the whole book in that the word counts before and after it are almost balanced. He concludes the chiasm by writing: “Without question and as a simple matter of fact, the foregoing is in Mark’s gospel, but there can

as his impressive chiasm. He claims,

There is much more required to be said about Mark's chiasmus. This must be said here: the chiasmus is an indispensable instrument of interpretation for students of his gospel. And so much so, that an interpretation that stops short of seeking out possible chiastic relations and examining the implications of any that are found must be considered technically unfinished.<sup>26</sup>

However, Scott's challenging claim did not generate much response from other scholars.

Bas van Iersel, in his *Reading Mark* (1989), is convinced that the narrator of Mark had structured the whole book by means of a sandwich construction at both the macro and micro levels. Much less elaborate than Scott's, van Iersel's chiasm of the second Gospel groups larger portions of the book together at three sections and is much easier to understand.<sup>27</sup>

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hardly be any reasonable doubt that the bulk of it is there by intention. And that suggests that it is the key to the understanding of the gospel and in particular to its structure. For the way Mark has structured the chiasmus to span the whole gospel and the way he has related the elements of the chiasmus seem to have settled the plan of the book, even from its basic structure."

26. Scott, "Chiastic Structure," 25-26.

27. Bas van Iersel, *Reading Mark* (trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 20. He explains, "...further investigation shows that the whole book is structured by means of sandwich construction. This can be seen most clearly in the way the device is applied to the different locations in the story. In this way the book can.... be structured at the level of the total text as follows:

Title (1:1)

(A1) In the desert (1:2-13)

(y1) first hinge (1:14-15)

(B1) In Galilee (1:16-8:21)

(z1) blindness → sight (8:22-26)

(C) On the way (8:27-10:45)

(z2) blindness → sight (10:46-52)

(B2) In Jerusalem (11:1-15:39)

(y2) second hinge (15:40-41)

(A2) At the tomb (15:42-16:8)."

In his later work, van Iersel retains the structure and lengths of each section but rephrased the section titles (*Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* [trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 84).

## CHIASM IN MARK 12:18-27

Using these scholars' work as warrants, my research in 12:18-27 will show that this pericope is tightly structured as a chiasm. The pericope begins by introducing the Sadducees' *disbelief* in the resurrection in 12:18. This is in direct contrast with Jesus' *belief* stated in 12:27, which sums up his arguments (12:24-26) that God is God of the living, not the dead. These two verses are the direct opposite ends of the topic being debated and form the outer bracket of our chiasm, the former introducing and the latter concluding the pericope. The Sadducees, in Mark 12:19, *quoted* Moses' law of levirate marriage taken from Deut 25:5-6. This levirate marriage served to enable a dead man's family line to be perpetuated even after his death, by having his brother marry his wife and have children on his behalf. This formed their scriptural basis for their challenge soon to come. In contrast, in Mark 12:26, Jesus *quoted* Exod 3:6 as his scriptural basis to defend and argue for the resurrection. God said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob." This was God's self-revelation to these patriarchs, for which He is to be remembered for generations after generations, and which he spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, a display of God's power. Mark 12:19 and 12:26 thus form the second frame of the chiasm.

The Sadducees then presented their hypothetical case of a man and his six brothers who married the same woman one after another without success in having any children (12:20-22). Jesus, in 12:25, in turn described that those who are resurrected would not marry or be married, but will be like the angels in heaven. These opposing scenarios thus form another parallelism. One can also see that while the Sadducees cited the general sense of Moses' levirate law as the basis of their particularized scenario, Jesus rebutted them in the reverse order, that is with a particularized nature of the resurrection first, before relating it to the broader self-revelation of God.

Moving on, the Sadducees finally lashed out their question as a trap. They were essentially asking in 12:23, "Which man's wife will she be in the resurrection life, since all seven men had been her husband *in this life?*" (italics mine). Their question revealed that they had assumed that life in the resurrection would simply be a continuation of the earthly life such that the laws of marriage and remarriage (according to the levirate marriage) still applied. To this, Jesus assessed that they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God (12:24b). Their question showed their failure in understanding and interpreting the Scriptures correctly. If they had properly interpreted Scripture, they would not be making such

correlations between this earthly life and the resurrection life. Thus, the center of the entire chiasm and pericope is focused on Jesus' opening words in his answer to the Sadducees in 12:24a: "Are you not mistaken?" As will be shown later, this is a rhetorical question, which, in effect, is making a claim. In this center, Jesus made known their delusion. By identifying the words or ideas that are in parallel (as described above), the verses of the pericope are arranged in a concentric manner, with the key words or phrases underlined, and presented below (NASB95).

18 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother.

20 "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children.

21 "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise;

22 and *so* all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also.

23 "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

24a Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken,

24b that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?

25 "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

26 "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *passage* about *the burning* bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'

27 "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

By further summarizing and rephrasing each pair of paralleled words and ideas, the chiasm of the pericope may be depicted as follows:

A	Sadducees' belief that there is no resurrection introduced (12:18)
B	Moses' earthly words for perpetuation of family line quoted (12:19)
C	People in this life marrying and being married (12:20-22)
D	Sadducees assumed resurrection life is simply a continuation of the earthly life (12:23)
E	Jesus assessed that Sadducees were deluded (12:24a)
D'	Jesus assessed that Sadducees failed to understand the Scripture and the power of God (12:24b)
C'	People of resurrection neither marry nor given in marriage (12:25)
B'	God's eternal words of covenantal relationship and faithfulness quoted (12:26)
A'	Jesus' belief summed up: God is God of the living, not the dead (12:27)

We can see that the above chiastic structure contains all the qualities that Lund, and Bauer and Traina, have mentioned are features of chiasms in general and in the Gospels. The story in its final form reads as if it had been stripped of some material or information that would make it more like a narrative. Although representing a debate, this event would not have simply spanned one minute that it presently takes to read it. Moreover, we would expect that in reality, Jesus' answer must be longer and more elaborate than just the four verses in 12:24-27. Clearly then, Mark must have redacted his sources regarding this event and organized them into this chiastic form that we observe now. This chiasm also shows that van Iersel and Scott are right in the following ways: (1) Mark has employed chiastic structures in macro and micro levels of his gospel;<sup>28</sup> and (2) in this pericope, Mark has chosen to demote history and factual details of the event in order to, through chiastic arrangement, make an implicit meaning explicit. The implicit meaning in 12:18-27 made explicit by the center of its chiasm is that the fundamental error of the Sadducees was becoming deluded in their interpretation of Scripture.

28. Marcus' chiasm shown earlier is another evidence of chiasms in the micro level in this pericope alone.

Three more evidences must be mentioned to further substantiate this claim. First, what scholars have rightly identified as “interrogation,” “pronouncement,” “debate,” and the like in this encounter was in essence a game of challenge-riposte, a common phenomenon of the social life in the early Mediterranean world. A challenge in the form of word, question, gesture or action would be made with an attempt to undermine the honor of another. A response would be given in reply to match the challenge and possibly to pose a challenge in return.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Jesus was obligated to answer the Sadducees’ question, or suffer shame as a result. Jerome H. Neyrey explains the implication of such a use of questions: “Questions, then, serve as weapons with lethal intent, for the person asking them does not seek information from Jesus but attempts to embarrass him. Jesus, moreover, generally defends himself by answering a question with a question, thus making his own aggressive thrust at his opponent.”<sup>30</sup> In 12:18-27, the Markan Jesus replied in the form of a rhetorical question: οὐ διὰ τοῦτο πλανᾶσθε “Are you not for this reason mistaken...? (Yes!)” A question begun with a form of οὐ(κ) is rhetorical in that it expects a positive answer. It is a round-about way of making a positive affirmation. The verb πλανᾶω means “to deceive, mislead or lead astray”; in the passive voice, as here, it means “to be misled or be deceived.”<sup>31</sup> The use of the historical present could also be Mark’s way of making Jesus’ assessment of the Sadducees more vivid, such that his listeners and readers might feel as if they were

29. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Honor: Core Value in the Biblical World,” pages 109-25 in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris; London: Routledge, 2010), 113-14. He states, “In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus evidences considerable skill at challenge-riposte and thereby shows himself to be an honorable and authoritative prophet. ... It is also interesting to see how often in the Gospels questions are put to Jesus in public. Public questions are always honor challenges” (114).

30. Jerome H. Neyrey, “Questions, *Chreiai*, and Challenges to Honor: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark’s Gospel,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 657-81, at 658. Neyrey’s article contains further details of how questions are used in ancient literature in forensic rhetoric, philosophical discourse, education, and entertainment; questions and the *chreia*; questions and challenges to honor; and questions in responsive *chreiai* in Mark with regards to challenge and riposte (especially useful for this paper).

31. BDAG classifies its meaning in this account as “be mistaken in one’s judgment, deceive oneself.”

right there in the middle of the interrogation as it happened.<sup>32</sup>

Second, Jesus’ reply was creatively presented by Mark in the form of an *inclusio* by the use of πλανᾶσθε in 12:24 and 27. Bauer and Traina explain the importance of an *inclusio* as follows: “*Inclusio* is the repetition of words or phrases at the beginning and end of a unit, thus creating a bracketing effect. At the boundaries *inclusio* establishes the main thought of the book (or passage), pointing to the essential concern of the book (or passage).”<sup>33</sup> Although this concept of *inclusio* is typically thought to demarcate boundaries for a whole book or a passage or pericope, I think it is reasonable also to consider the effect that an *inclusio* has on a subsection of a pericope. While *inclusios* are often considered “bookends” distinctly marking out the start and end of a large unit, arguably they achieve the same distinct effect in smaller units, as in Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees in 12:24-27. Although only three verses long, the use of πλανᾶσθε in 12:24 and 27 effectively creates a bracketing effect at the start and end of Jesus’ reply. This *inclusio* presents for us the main thought and essential concern of Jesus’ answer, namely that the Sadducees were simply mistaken. This notion is further emphasized by the use of the adverb πολύ to modify πλανᾶσθε climactically at the end of the *inclusio* in 12:27b. Another *inclusio* in this subsection has also been observed,<sup>34</sup> however, the use of πλανᾶσθε is more obvious and central in the episode.

Third, the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke also serve to

32. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 526-27. Wallace explains, “The reason for the use of the historical present is normally to portray an event vividly, as though the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds. Such vividness might be rhetorical (to focus on some aspect of the narrative) or literary (to indicate a change in topic). The present tense may be used to describe a past event, either for the sake of vividness or to highlight some aspect of the narrative. It may be intentional (conscious) or unintentional (subconscious) on the part of the speaker. If intentional, then it is probably used to show the prominence of the events following. If unintentional, then it is probably used for vividness, as if the author were reliving the experience.”

33. Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 117. They also advise, “One should note the relationship between these bracketing statements and the intervening material in order to identify the semantic relationship with which an *inclusio* is used.”

34. Meier, “The Debate on the Resurrection of the Dead,” 7, also points out that in 12:18-27 “... from start to finish, this well-structured pericope uses *inclusio* to bind the various parts of the story together.” He also identifies another *inclusio* in the clauses “there were seven brothers” in 12:20 and “for the seven had her as wife” in 12:23.



accentuate Mark's purposeful use of this *inclusio* in his account. Matthew used the same verb *πλανᾷσθε* only once (22:23-33), while Luke, on the other hand, did not use the verb or an *inclusio* at all (20:27-40). It is quite apparent, then, that Mark was highlighting the mistake that the Sadducees made, in a way which Matthew and Luke did not.

Therefore, Jesus was asserting plainly to his opponents' shame: "You [Sadducees] are, yes you are, therefore mistaken/deceiving yourselves (!)..." This charge, furthermore, aims at the heart of the Sadducees' error (12:24): "because you [Sadducees] do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God" (μη εἰδότες τὰς γραφὰς μηδὲ τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ;).

## CHIASM IN MARK 11-12

Having examined the chiastic structure of 12:18-27, we shall see that a chiastic structure may also be operative in the larger literary unit of Mark 11-12.<sup>35</sup> Joanna Dewey, in support of the concentric arrangement in Mark 11-12, contends that:

...Mark has set off the Jerusalem public debates by the use of framing incidents, the interposition technique, and overlapping rhetorical units larger than the pericope. Within the public ministry a loose symmetrical rhythm is to be recognized in 12:1-40. The rhythm clarifies the structure and helps to illumine the function of the public debate material in the Jerusalem public ministry. In Mark 11-12, Mark has used a variety of rhetorical techniques, some linear, some symmetrical, to structure his material.<sup>36</sup>

She presents a chiasm that neatly showcases the public teachings and debates of Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem in 12:1-40:<sup>37</sup>

A	Public teaching: The parable of the wicked tenants; threat of God's judgment (12:1-9)
B	Public Teaching: Psalm citation; audience reaction (12:10-12)
C	Public Debate: The things of God are to be given to God; audience reaction (12:13-17)
D	Public Debate: The hope in resurrection is real (12:18-27)
C'	Public Debate: The things of God are the commands to love God and neighbor; audience reaction (12:28-34)
B'	Public Teaching: Psalm citation; audience reaction (12:35-37)
A'	Public Teaching: Warning against the scribes; threat of God's judgment (12:38-40)

Dewey explains how she observes the parallelism that exists between the pericopes that made them symmetrical with each other, and thus forming a concentric pattern that works itself into the center.<sup>38</sup> However, to my dismay, she did not explain the significance of 12:18-27 as the center of the chiasm.

35. Mays, "Is This Not Why You are Wrong?" 33. Mays writes, "Mark 12:18-27 is part of a larger literary complex that provides contextual comment on its function and purpose, the section of the Gospel (chs. 11 and 12) that tells about the first three days of Jesus' presence in Jerusalem."

36. Joanna Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1-36* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 152-53.

37. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 162.

38. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 156-61.



Sharyn Dowd revises Dewey's chiasm above, adding more explanations and details but still maintaining its center at 12:18-27.<sup>39</sup> Christopher Bryan also affirms the presence of "both a linear and concentric

39. Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, Georg.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 128. She explains, "Within these bracketing movements are nine small units of materials organized in a chiasmic structure (revised from Dewey 1980, 162 and Donahue 1982):

A 11:27-33	Transition: Question of Jesus' authority Looks backward as response to expulsion incident and forward as first of series of controversies
B 12:1-9	Judgment on religious leaders; parable of the vineyard
C 12:10-12	Psalm citation (118:22) in service of Christology
D 12:13-17	Question about taxes 'Teacher' as address Compliment with reference to truth Question Answer: Caesar/God Response of questioners
E 12:18-27	Question about the resurrection
D' 12:18-34	Question about the greatest commandment Question Answer: God/neighbor Response to questioner 'Teacher' as address Compliment with reference to truth
C' 12:35-37	Psalm citation (110:1/8:7) in service of Christology
B' 12:38-40	Judgment on religious leaders; critique of scribes
A' 12:41-44	Transition: Widow's offering. Looks backward as contrast to religious leaders and forward, forming frame around apocalyptic discourse with story of anointing woman."

Looks backward as contrast to religious leaders and forward, forming frame around apocalyptic discourse with story of anointing woman."

development."<sup>40</sup> After describing how the surrounding pericopes of 12:18-27 pair off to form brackets, he concludes, "viewed concentrically, the debates begin and end with the challenge of the person of Christ, while at their heart is the challenge to trust in God's faithfulness."<sup>41</sup> Although Bryan mentions the center of his concentric arrangement and identifies its meaning, he did not explicate its impact on the unit as a whole. Both Dewey's and Bryan's works confirm that there is a well structured chiasm nested in the larger unit within which 12:18-27 is found. Although they have slightly different views about how 12:1-12 parallels with 12:35-40, they have both located the same center, i.e. 12:18-27. Extending their work, I propose a new chiasm that comports with Timothy C. Gray's view that in 11:27-12:44, "Mark's purpose is to illustrate Jesus' authority" and that "by demonstrating the authoritative power of Jesus' teaching and the threadbare teaching of the religious leaders, Mark advances ... the motif

40. Christopher Bryan, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel and its Literary and Cultural Settings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 108. The linear development is the progression of one interrogation after another, and also of Jesus' triumph over each one. He establishes the concentric arrangement by forming an outer bracket consisting of the parable of the vine-growers "asking what it means to reject God's 'beloved son' (12:1-12)" and "an episode centering upon the question, 'Whose son is the messiah?' (12:35-37)," and an "inner pair of questions on tax to Caesar and the great commandment obviously centers on duty to God (12:13-17, 12:28-34);" and "the central episode concerns God's faithfulness, in death as in life (12:18-27)."

41. Bryan, *Preface to Mark*, 108. Van Iersel also shows a chiasm in this large section but with a different center (*Mark*, 347): "...the episodes of this cluster are arranged on either side of the parable, which forms the turning point in this section. By means of this metaphorical story Jesus gives his opponents to understand both what his own identity and position is and where they stand in the conflict, and what the consequences of their opposition will be for both parties.

preparation of the temple inspection and entering	11:1-11
cleansing of the temple and eradication of the fig tree	11:11-26
in discussion with the temple authorities	11:27-33
parable of the winegrowers	12:1-13
in discussion with other Jewish leaders	12:14-27
various sayings about scribes	12:28-40
conclusion of the inspection, leaving the temple	12:41-44."

of ἔξουσία.”<sup>42</sup>

Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem formally began with his triumphal entry in 11:1-11. Then in 11:12-26, Jesus’ entrance into and cleansing of the temple was intercalated by the cursing of the fig tree.<sup>43</sup> The religious leaders, comprised of the chief priests and the scribes, then began to plan to destroy him. It is the contention of this study that 11:1-11 serves to introduce Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem until his crucifixion and death (11:1-15:39), while 11:12-26 introduces the temple discourse in which he exercised his authority as the teacher and prophet of Scripture (11:12-13:37). These are followed by seven pericopes that portray Jesus in direct challenge-riposte situations with the religious leaders. They are namely: (1) questioning of Jesus’ authority (11:27-33); (2) Jesus’ telling of the parable of the vine-growers against the religious leaders (12:1-12); (3) questioning by the Pharisees and Herodians about paying taxes (12:13-17); (4) questioning by the Sadducees about the resurrection (12:18-27); (5) questioning by a scribe about the greatest commandment (12:28-34); (6) Jesus’ teaching about the Messiah (12:35-37); and (7) Jesus’ warning about the scribes (12:38-40). In and through these passages, Jesus exercised

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42. Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 77. He also maintains, “Jesus’ condemnation of the temple provoked a challenge from the temple establishment concerning proper authority. From 11:27-12:44 this issue of authority is the plot line at the heart of the various stories gathered together here by Mark. Mark’s purpose is to illustrate Jesus’ authority and show how he silences the leaders of Israel in order to reveal their lack of authority.... The issue of ‘teaching’ is closely related to the question of authority.” On 78, he writes, “The material of 12:13-34 is indirectly related to the temple motif.... The question about paying the tax to Caesar is perhaps a response to Jesus’ charge that the temple establishment is a den of robbers, since they are now determined to paint Jesus as the true insurgents against Rome. The question of the resurrection bears upon Jesus’ claim that the son will be vindicated and thereby become the cornerstone for the new temple. And of course the question about the greatest commandment allows Jesus – while teaching in the temple – to declare inconsequential all ceremonial sacrifices of the temple. By setting this conflict within the temple, Mark intensifies the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. In the dispute regarding ultimate authority over the temple, Jesus silences the religious leaders within the temple itself.”

43. See Mark A. Awabdy and Fredrick J. Long, “Mark’s Inclusion of ‘For All Nations’ in 11:17d and the International Vision of Isaiah,” *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 2 (2014): 224-55, who show that there is a chiastic structure in this pericope that centers in 11:17, and another one within 11:17 itself.

his authority specifically in the interpretation of Scriptures in a way that fascinated and amazed the crowd, but confounded, criticized, and even condemned the religious leaders.

The questioning of Jesus’ authority in 11:27-33 with respect to his teaching and performing miracles and healings is paralleled to Jesus’ condemnation of the scribes for the way they abused their authority and position in 12:38-40. These two instances that relate to his exercising of authority form an outer bracket. In 12:1-12, Jesus told the parable of the vine-growers in judgment against the religious leaders’ rejection of God’s prophets leading up to the Messiah as the Son of God, whom they failed to recognize and receive. He quoted Ps 118:22-23 to emphasize that the Messiah will be rejected by the leaders but will be exalted as the chief cornerstone. In Mark 12:35-37, Jesus ridiculed the scribes for saying that the Messiah is the Son of David. He quoted Ps 110:1 to demonstrate that the Messiah will be exalted above David and over his enemies. These two passages parallel with each other in the religious leaders’ failure to recognize the Messiah’s authority and Scripture citations.

In 12:13-17, Jesus faced his first of three consecutive challenge-riposte encounters with the Pharisees and the Herodians. They came with a hypocritical question to trap and test him about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus easily exposed the hypocrisy and emphasized the importance of fulfilling their duty to God compared to Caesar. His answer amazed them. In 12:28-34, the scribe’s amiable question about the greatest commandment received Jesus’ reply, in which he quoted from Deut 6:4-5 with Leviticus 19:18b. These scriptures taught about loving God wholeheartedly and loving others as one would love himself. The situation ended with no one daring to ask him anymore questions. These two units (12:13-17 and 12:28-34), each showing Jesus’ teaching in truth with respect to one’s faithfulness to God (whether in giving to God what belongs to him or in loving him wholeheartedly), form the innermost bracket, identifying, on the one hand, the Pharisees and Herodians’ trap in comparing fulfilling their duty to God with duty to Caesar, and, on the other hand, the scribe’s comparison of loving God wholeheartedly with lifeless burnt offerings and sacrifices. The center of the chiasm is the pericope of 12:18-27, in which Jesus gave his verdict that the Sadducees were deluded and mistaken in their interpretation of Scripture.

A	Jesus' exercise of authority questioned by religious leaders (11:27-33)
B	Religious leaders' failure in recognizing the Messiah's authority with Scripture citation: Psalm 118:22-23 (12:1-12)
C	Jesus' authoritative teaching in truth: Fulfilling one's duty to God versus duty to Caesar (12:13-17)
D	Jesus' verdict concerning religious leaders' Scripture interpretation: Being delusion (12:18-27)
C'	Jesus' authoritative teaching in truth: Loving God wholeheartedly versus with burnt offerings (12:28-34)
B'	Religious leaders' failure in recognizing the Messiah's authority from Scripture citation: Psalm 110:1 (12:35-37)
A'	Religious leaders' abuse of authority condemned (12:38-40)

From this chiasm of 11:27–12:40, we can infer that Jesus' charge against these leaders was that they were deluded, thinking they had interpreted Scripture accurately, but, in fact, they had gotten it totally wrong. In addition to preventing the Sadducees from believing in the resurrection, this delusion also caused the Pharisees and scribes to question Jesus' authority (11:27-33), and the scribes to abuse their God-given authority (12:38-40). This delusion disabled them from recognizing and receiving the Messiah's authority, causing them to not understand how to interpret the Scriptures that testified about him (12:1-12, 35-37). It also led them to think that they can trap Jesus by putting on par one's duty to God with one's duty to Caesar (12:13-17), and that loving God wholeheartedly may be substituted by burnt offerings (12:28-34). It is the fundamental error of the religious leaders as a whole.

At this point, we must acknowledge and reply to two commentators' suspicions of chiasmic structures. Robert M. Fowler, responding to Dewey's work, suspects that chiasms are "set forth only by modern critics" and are more "typical of the discourse of the visual-literate... than of the oral-aural ancient reader or listener" because (1) there are no observable evidence in ancient rhetoric or poetic handbooks that show they were ever discussed, and that (2) "only a modern critic, with all the resources of typography at

her disposal, is able to objectify such a thoroughly spatial, visual pattern."<sup>44</sup> Fowler's suspicions are not without grounds, for Lund also argues, "In all the works which are devoted to penetrating and scholarly observations of Greek rhetorical forms in the New Testament, there is no trace of any attempt to study a literary form commonly known as *chiasmus*, which was used extensively in the Old Testament."<sup>45</sup> Lund's work, however, is helpful to counter Fowler's first doubt. By tracing the development and influence of ancient literary forms, Lund proposes that the chiasmic forms are a result of Semitic influence<sup>46</sup> and precedes his evidences by claiming the following: "The chiasmus seems to be part of Hebrew thought itself, whether expressed in poetry or in prose, and to this factor we may look for the explanation of the readiness with which the extensive application of this literary principle of structure has passed over into the Greek writings

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44. Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1996), 151-52. He mentions Joanna Dewey's work and writes, "Chiastic or concentric structures may be regarded as yet another form of Markan repetition or duality, but we hardly have here the predominant, recurring motif of the figure in Mark's carpet. Chiasm is also often argued to be the predominant organizing principle of virtually every ancient corpus of literature. What are we to make of this current critical zeal for chiasm? Is it as ubiquitous in ancient literature and therefore as important as some claim? Note that these concentric patterns are geometrical in form and are typically explicated by means of a diagram or chart. They are thus set forth only by modern critics and as strikingly visual or architectural patterns.... I suspect that an ancient would not recognize a chiasm if he saw one diagrammed on the wall, but he might recognize it if he heard it performed orally. If so, what would he hear? Chiasms, I suspect, were for the ancient experiences of the ear rather than of the eye. If chiasm, in Mark at least, is yet another narrative strategy of duality, then we may want to inquire as to the pragmatic and rhetorical functions of such repetitive arrangements at the level of discourse and not just at the level of story. Modern critics have tended to define chiasm more in terms of story content and less in terms of narrative strategy or discourse. If attention can be shifted from neat diagrams and architectural symmetry, visually apprehended, to the progressive, temporal encounter that every hearer and reader of the Gospel experiences, then we may better understand not what chiasmic structures are visually but how they function temporally."

45. Lund, *Chiasmus*, 25.

46. Lund, *Chiasmus*, 27. He argues, "There exists, however, when all allowances for Greek influence have been made, a residue of form in the New Testament, which may not under any circumstances be derived from the Greek schools, and which is also of such definite literary character that it may not, as has sometimes been done, be explained as resulting from haphazard attempts of non-literary Christians. This residue of form is Semitic."

of the New Testament.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, van Iersel supplies critical data that address Fowler's first doubt when he argues that chiasms were known in Graeco-Roman times as "*hysteron proteron* ('the latter first'), *prohysteron* and *hysterologia*"<sup>48</sup> ('the before-latter one' and 'latter sayings') and that students "had to learn the alphabet not just forwards and backwards but also in pairs of the first and the last letter."<sup>49</sup> Fowler's second suspicion is a question of how chiasms might be received by the first recipients of Mark's Gospel, being an oral-aural community. Again, van Iersel's response to such doubt is worth quoting. He contends that the concentric pattern of structuring a text "in semi-literate cultures... was natural" and "may have resulted from the need to divide a text into coherent segments;" furthermore, chiasms were "originally a structuring and mnemonic device, which had the function of helping reciters structure the text for their listeners."<sup>50</sup>

R. T. France also footnotes in his commentary his "rooted suspicion of neat, symmetrical patterns (particularly when bolstered with the name of 'chiasmus!') which are 'discovered' in texts which do not on the surface

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47. Lund, *Chiasmus*, 29.

48. Van Iersel cites J. W. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 14, who provides examples like Cicero, *Atticus* 1.16.1, the Roman commentators Servius and Donatus, and the scholiast Aristarchus, *Scholia A on Odyssey* 56, the *Scholia Euripides Orestes* 702, and the *Scholia Euripides Phoenissae* 887 (*Mark*, 70 n. 2).

49. Van Iersel, *Mark*, 70-71. He also footnotes (*Mark*, 70 n. 3) H.I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris: Du Seuil, 6th ed, 1965), 229-34, 251-52, 400-15; and the following resources with reference to chiasmic constructions: Lund, *Chiasmus*; C. H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 23 (1961), 403-35; S. Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure and Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (1980), 154-73; Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*; D. J. Clark, "Criteria for Identifying Chiasm," *LB* 35 (1975), 65-72; A. Di Marco, "Der Chiasmus in der Bibel," *LB* 36 (1975), 21-97; 37 (1976) 49-68; 39 (1976), 37-85; 44 (1979), 3-70; Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 29-39; D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982), 51-55; R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS, 54; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 47-49, 69-71, 164-64; idem, *Let The Reader Understand*, 151-52; J. Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994)..

50. Van Iersel, *Mark*, 71.

present themselves in that form...."<sup>51</sup> France is concerned that chiasms should readily "show" themselves to the reader without much effort on the latter's part. It is likely that interpreters at times have tried too hard to "discover" chiasms and unwittingly have "forced" some texts into saying what they did not, so as to create chiasms. However, we must not dismiss the value and significance of chiasms entirely because of this interpretive mishap. Modern readers are not trained to identify or understand chiasms, much less to draw out the significant messages in them. Many modern English translations will use different English words to translate the same or cognate Greek/Hebrews terms, thereby making it harder to observe *inclusios* and chiasms. They also lose the aural effect of parallel words or ideas of chiasmic structures, which would otherwise sound alike when read in the original languages. Furthermore, in response also to Fowler's second suspicion, I suspect that oral-aural learners tend to think and analyze ideas more globally (i.e. in big ideas) rather than linearly (i.e. in sequential presentation).<sup>52</sup> This would enable them to hear or observe a chiasm that covers a large unit of text, something that not many modern learners today are capable of. All these factors would cause modern readers to need to take more effort to observe chiasms, and also result in suspicions that some proposed chiasms were not present "on the surface" of the text.

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51. France, *Gospel of Mark*, 12 n. 29. He also argues, "I would not, however, wish to follow Van Iersel, and still less his pupil B. Standaert, *Composition*, when they go far beyond the basic three-stage development of the story to find 'concentric' structure ('a composition in lines and circles', Van Iersel) throughout Mark's narrative, in detail as well as in the overall plot. Stock .... adopts Standaert's structure, prefacing it with an account of 'chiasmic awareness' in Graeco-Roman literature which has no immediately obvious bearing on Mark. While Mark's use of 'sandwich' compositions at several points in the gospel is well known and important, to recognize the use of this technique at some points does not require us to discover concentric patterns where they are not obvious in the text" (11 n. 28).

52. This suspicion requires research in the appropriate fields of study to produce the evidence needed.

## ERGASIA

Having discussed at length Mark's extensive use of chiasm we move on now to Mark's use of ἐργασία (*ergasia*), the elaboration of a *chreia* (thesis).<sup>53</sup> To understand an *ergasia*, we need to know what a *chreia* is. Vernon K. Robbins defines *chreia* as "a brief statement or action aptly attributed to a specific person or something analogous to a person."<sup>54</sup> Ben Witherington explains *chreia* as "a concise 'recollection' with a specific focus and source" and that its use in the Gospels "implies some historical claims about what Jesus actually said or did."<sup>55</sup> Robbins also emphasizes that "the roots of analysis of argumentative texture in narrative texts in the New Testament lie in rhetorical analysis of the *chreia*."<sup>56</sup> *Ergasia* then expands and amplifies the *chreia* such that "meanings and meaning-effects of this theme or issue unfold through argumentation as the unit progresses."<sup>57</sup> Robbins describes the elaboration process as "presenting a sequence of units that systematically unfold the system of thought and action presupposed in the topic."<sup>58</sup> In the *progymnasmata*, handbooks used by teachers and students in the rhetorical schools in the first and second centuries developed by Theon and Hermogenes, students would learn to formulate *chreiae* and *ergasiae*.<sup>59</sup> The development of an *ergasia*

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53. One meaning of the term is "elaboration of a topic" (LSJ 682.II.6). Witherington uses this Greek term (*Gospel of Mark*, 13). Vernon K. Robbins uses "exergasia" instead (*Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984; reprint. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 29). Since "exergasia" is presumably formed by adding the prefix "ex" to "ergasia," I will use "ergasia" for the rest of the paper.

54. Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 41.

55. Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 12. He further explains, "R. O. P. Taylor is right to say that these *chreiae*, which always are related to and about real historical persons, 'were not merely a literary form, but essentially a historical statement—So-and-so who was a known historical figure, actually said or did this...' There must be a bit of narrative with a particular person in focus, and then too a *chreia* may focus on a deed rather than a maxim. *Chreia* arise from a particular situation and refer to a particular person."

56. Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 61.

57. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 52.

58. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 29.

59. Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1989), 31-67; see also 1-29 for more definitions and examples of *chreia* from antiquity.

would begin with a *chreia*, followed by "the rationale, argument from the opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative testimony," and ending with a conclusion.<sup>60</sup>

Various verses of Mark 12:18-27 match these headings of an *ergasia* very neatly. For example, 12:18 is the introduction, presenting the opponents and their beliefs first. The *chreia*, or thesis, is in 12:24, in which Jesus pronounced that the Sadducees were deluded in their scriptural interpretation that resulted in wrongful belief about the resurrection. In 12:19-23, a rationale of the *chreia* is given, while in 12:25-26 Jesus' reply gives the various arguments from opposite, analogy, example and ancient testimony. In 12:27, one finds a conclusion given (with asyndeton) with a reported saying of Jesus. Thus, the observed *ergasia* in this pericope is framed in a similar fashion as those found in the *progymnasmata*:

### *Introduction* (12:18)

*Some Sadducees* (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,

### *Chreia/Thesis* (12:24)

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

### *Rationale* (12:19-23)

"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; and *so* all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

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60. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 52. He also writes "An elaboration incorporates such a wide range of resources from textual, social and cultural traditions that ancient rhetoricians considered an elaboration to be a complete argument" (53). Also Robbins argues elsewhere, "Beginning with a *chreia*, they would provide a rationale for the action and speech in the *chreia*, clarify their assertion with a statement of what the opposite would mean, then add an analogy, an example, a citation of written authority and some kind of conclusion" (*Tapestry*, 61). See also Robbins' description of an *ergasia* from 1 Cor 9:1-27 (*Tapestry*, 77-80).

*Argument from contrary* (12:25a)

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage,”

*Argument from analogy* (12:25b)

“but are like angels in heaven.”

*Argument from example and ancient testimony* (12:26)

“But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *passage* about *the burning bush*, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob?’”

*Conclusion* (12:27)

“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.”<sup>61</sup>

A few points need to be made about this *ergasia*. First, as noted before, Jesus’ use of the rhetorical question in 12:24a establishes the force of his *chreia* in turning his riposte into an assertion.<sup>62</sup> Thus, our literal translation “You are therefore deluded ...!” is justified. Second, readers and listeners would no doubt get the “chief impression” that the *chreia* was emphasizing, that is the Sadducees’ delusion in scripture interpretation.<sup>63</sup>

61. This *ergasia* bears similarity to Robbins’ presentation of *ergasiae* from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the *Progymnasmata* of Hermogenes, and of Paul in 1 Cor 15 (Robbins, *Exploring*, 53-58).

62. This is similar to Robbins’ observation regarding the *ergasia* in 1 Cor 9: “the key to the argumentative nature of the opening of the chapter is the rhetorical force of *interrogatio*, asking a question as an emphatic way of making an assertion. In Greek, the form of the negative in the first four verses calls for an affirmative answer” (*Tapestry*, 79).

63. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of the Gospels: New Testament Essays* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2007), 26-27, and 37. In his categories of pronouncement stories in the Gospels, Mark 12:18-27 is considered a “correction story” in which “two attitudes are contrasted” and “because of the dominant and final position of the response, as well as its rhetorical force..., the attitude expressed there will make the chief impression on the reader. Mack and Robbins also conclude, “Our study of the *chreia* in the Hellenistic school sharpens the questions we must address.... The *chreiai* of Jesus bear striking resemblance to the *chreiai* of the Cynics.... Many of the stories end expressly with the announcement that Jesus’ speech silenced or amazed his hearers. Reading more closely we can now see why. They are *chreiai* in which a μητις-like response masters a situation of challenge,

Thirdly, bearing in mind the many Scriptures quoted and alluded to in chs. 11–12 (which the readers would be hearing), the combination of the *chreia*, *ergasia* and the chiasmic structures of 12:18–27 would strongly emphasize the theme that the religious leaders were incompetent and deluded in their understanding of the Scriptures. This *ergasia*, elaborating the *chreia* in 12:24, thus reiterates the same point as the center of the chiasm in 12:18–27. It also supports this proposed chiasm.

## IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

We have covered much ground in examining the evidences of Mark’s use of rhetoric to embed his messages behind this narrative. It is appropriate to consider the implications and applications of this research. Richard L. Rohrbaugh recently affirms that, “honor, understood as one’s reputation in the eyes of the public, was the core value of the ancient Mediterranean world.”<sup>64</sup> One’s honor consisted of ascribed honor inherited from one’s family at birth and acquired honor gained from the amount of one’s virtuous deeds.<sup>65</sup> Rohrbaugh also stresses that “honor is the status one claimed in the community” and that only with public recognition of one’s

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introducing a devastating swerve in the place of expectations that would follow more conventional logic. This is especially true of the so-called controversy stories, and it is also true to some degree of all the pronouncement stories.... We are taking one promising approach in the present set of studies. It is the investigation of the patterns of argument that appear in the pronouncement story as an elaborated *chreia* and in other configurations of the sayings of Jesus found in the synoptic tradition. We have found that the pattern of elaboration is reflected in synoptic compositions. This means that the early Jesus communities had noticed the essential rhetoricity of *chreia*-like material, for without that, elaboration according to the pattern would have been impossible. It also means that, if they ‘received’ the *chreia*, they also made judgments as to its rationale and thesis. If they elaborated received *chreia*, then, we can document a stage in the *chreia*’s cultural history” (*Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels*, 65-66).

64. Rohrbaugh, “Honor,” 109.

65. Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame,” pages 19-40 in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996). Moxnes argues, “Honor is fundamentally the public recognition of one’s social standing.... One’s basic honor level, usually termed ascribed honor, is inherited from the family at birth.... By contrast, honor conferred on the basis of virtuous deeds is called acquired honor. By its very nature acquired honor may be either gained or lost in the perpetual struggle for public recognition” (20).



honor would it be of value and legitimized.<sup>66</sup> The ancient Mediterranean world was one that valued collective identity above the individual. Philo and Josephus both attested to the universal and pervasive culture and influence of honor and shame in the community life of the first century.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, one's identity and honor came from the group that one was closely related to, whether it was the family, kinship, or groups like religious sects. As such, it was highly counter-cultural that Jesus appeared as an individual who went about his ministry, being unrelated to any religious groups, and even verbally disengaged himself from his own family by questioning in Mark 3:33, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" when they were calling for him. In fact, we know that even his home town folks did not favor his family, for they rejected his teaching and miracles in 6:1-6, casting doubts about him because they knew he was a carpenter and insulting him by referring his lineage to his mother instead of his father.

Yet, Jesus was not without honor, for the crowds and multitudes loved him and followed him everywhere, as a result of his authoritative teaching and the great number of miraculous healing and exorcisms he had performed which brought great blessings upon them. Many had also claimed that he was John the Baptist, and others said he was Elijah, and others one of the prophets (8:28). Thus, Jesus' honor could be said to be *completely* acquired honor. We could even say that Jesus was redefining the honorable collective identity of his day, from one that followed religious parties like that of the Pharisees or the scribes, to one that would do the will of God independently of biological familial establishment (3:34-35). Learning to see Jesus and his religious opponents from these angles of honor and shame would help us to better appreciate the dynamics of the challenge-ripostes encounters in Mark 11-12, and the impact of winning or losing them.

In 12:18-27, and throughout chs. 11-12, the religious leaders

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66. Rohrbaugh, "Honor," 111-12. He explains, "Put very simply, honor is the status one claimed in the community, together with the all-important public recognition of that claim. Honor claimed, but with public recognition, was the boast of fools. Honor acknowledged by one's peers was of value beyond measure. It meant access to power and privilege that could be gained no other way" (111).

67. Rohrbaugh, "Honor," 110-13. He argues, "In the Judean world, Philo speaks often of honor, glory, fame, high reputations, being adorned with honors and public offices, noble birth, the desire for glory, honor in the present, and a good name for the future. He believes that 'Wealth, fame, official posts, honors and everything of that sort are that with which the majority of mankind are busy.' 'Fame and honor are a most precarious possession, tossed about on the reckless tempers and flighty words of careless men'" (110).

were repeatedly pictured as being defeated by Jesus.<sup>68</sup> They each came to challenge Jesus but all went away beaten and overpowered. This is the effect of a simple reading of the narrative. Now that we have identified that their fundamental error was being deluded in their scriptural interpretation, we can better understand the great degree of their failure. The impact was one of utter shame, humiliation and embarrassment for these religious leaders, who of all people, should have learned and understood the Scripture well, but instead had been pronounced as deluded.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that all these episodes occurred in the grounds of the Temple, which "was considered a sign of Israel's election from among the peoples of the earth."<sup>69</sup> It was the "home ground" of the religious leaders and where they exerted their full religious powers and authority. The temple was also a place where pilgrims gathered from all over Israel, especially during the Passover festivals. "As the goal of the pilgrim festivals, the seat of the Sanhedrin, and the site of the sacrificial cultus, the temple was the focal point of world Jewry," so notes Everett Ferguson.<sup>70</sup> Thus, as much as this was not the best place to challenge the religious leaders, it was the place to capture the most public attention for a debate. For Jesus, the temple was a place very close to his heart. It was where God's presence dwelt.<sup>71</sup> It was to be called a house of prayer (11:16). This was supposed to be his heavenly Father's house for the blessing of nations. No wonder Jesus was upset over the dishonest merchandizing that was being carried out in the temple court to such an extent that the place reserved for Gentile worshippers was compromised. Thus Jesus' charge was that the temple should have been a place conducive "for all nations" to

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68. A detailed examination of honor and shame in Mark 11:12-26 can be found in Awabdy and Long, "Mark's Inclusion," 250-52.

69. M. O. Wise, "Temple," *DJG* 813.

70. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 562.

71. Wise argues, "Prominently, the Gospels view the Temple as the special place of God's presence (Mt 12:4; Lk 6:4). This dogma underlies the saying about swearing by the Temple (Mt 23:31; cf. Mt 23:16, with a similar rationale). Jesus is depicted as saying that the Temple should be a house of prayer, not of thieves—a strong affirmation of the sanctity connected with God's presence. Matthew also portrays Jesus as paying the Temple tax, if only out of tolerance rather than conviction (Mt 17:24-27)" ("Temple," 816). Ferguson also explains, "The temple, as other Near Eastern sanctuaries, served as a depository for keeping valuables. Hence, Jesus' action in cleansing the temple looked revolutionary. It was an assault on the economic system and a challenge to the position of the temple authorities" (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 565).



pray and receive God's blessing, and ideally a place for Jews to pray for the benefit of all nations, as in Gen 12:1-3, but as Jesus found it in Mark 11, the temple was not this kind of a place. So, prophetically and didactically Jesus confronted the temple establishment's failure on the basis of Isaiah's vision "for all nations."<sup>72</sup>

Witherington also further emphasizes that at this juncture in his Gospel, "Mark seems to be saying that Jesus brought an end to the validity of the temple and its ritual as the means of reconciliation and meeting between God and humanity."<sup>73</sup> In sum, this failure of the religious leaders greatly impacted their social standing and cultural acceptance to such an extent that it also contributed to the pronouncement of the destruction of the temple.

Apart from social and cultural impact, this research could also influence our understanding of the purpose and priority of Mark. Lund concluded his research of chiasmic structures in the Gospels by saying that they could be "both didactic and *liturgical*" and "deliberately designed for the purpose of repeated public reading or recital."<sup>74</sup> According to Lund, then, texts in the Gospels that are arranged chiasmically could have been intentionally structured that way for teaching and worship purposes. In the oral-aural environment of the Mediterranean world, chiasms would surely have aided in the transmission and reception of the content, since these structures arranged parallel pairs of ideas and thoughts in a way that made them easy to remember and recite. Thus, this research supports the understanding that Mark's Gospel was to be read or recited in the congregational life of the early believers.

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72. Awabdy and Long, "Mark's Inclusion," 241.

73. Witherington argues, "L. Hurtado reminds us that in Mark 11-16 Jesus intimates that he himself replaces the temple as the center of the true worship of God, which is to say the place where God truly manifests his presence (Hurtado, *Mark*, 167-68). This is singular, not least because all the narratives right up to the death of Jesus keep revolving around or alluding to the temple, whether they entail prophetic acts or controversy and conflict in the temple, or oracles of destruction about the temple, or the rending of the temple veil. The very heart of Israel is being called into question, and the very presence of God in their midst is at stake" (*Gospel of Mark*, 311).

74. Lund, *Chiasmus*, 239.

## CONCLUSION

We have begun by reviewing what scholars today have said about Mark 12:18-27. While a variety of methods had been employed, few have seriously looked at the presence and significance of chiasmic structures in it. Those who have observed chiasms here and in Mark 11-12 have neither investigated sufficiently the topic of the Sadducean delusion in scriptural interpretation in 12:18-27 nor related its significance to the broader context. Yet, the chiasmic structure in 12:18-27 comports with the research of various scholars and aligns with principles of chiasmus in the New Testament. More importantly, the chiasm reveals the key message regarding the religious leaders that Mark has embedded in chs. 11-12. Additional evidence pertaining to this theme comes from the presence of an *ergasia* that elaborates the *chreia*, which further confirms that deluded scriptural interpretation is Jesus' charge against the Sadducees. All in all, this rhetorical elaboration adds to the strength of our argument and affirms the result of the chiasmic arrangement.

This research also reveals the effect of such argumentation on the social standing of the religious leaders. The charge of Jesus of that the Sadducees were deluded in Scripture relates to the social core value of honor and shame prevalent in the Mediterranean world. The attempts of religious leaders to trap and shame Jesus resulted in their own shame and condemnation instead. The value of this research is also seen in its influence on the purpose of Mark.

In conclusion, we have witnessed a classic scene of the victory of our hero, Jesus, over his challengers, creatively encapsulated in a form that subtly emphasizes the villains' flaws while the audience is absorbed in the excitement of the narration. Let it not be said that Mark is a poor writer, for his use of these rhetorical devices in Mark 11-12 successfully demonstrates Jesus' authority in matters of Scripture against the religious leaders, precisely when his own authority had been challenged by them, thus turning this occasion of public debate in the temple into a seminal exchange of challenge and riposte between Jesus and his opponents.