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## **Mark's Nuance of Wrede's "Messianic Secret": "The Messianic Paradox."**

### **Is Mark fabricating a messianic secret or witnessing to the messianic paradox? An appraisal and critique of Wrede's Messianic Secret.**

Wilhelm Wrede's messianic secret hypothesis was instrumental firstly, in highlighting the theological tendentiousness of the synoptic gospels (particularly mark), and secondly, in addressing the very real problem of interpreting the commands to silence issued by Jesus. In reading Wrede's work, one will see that "The Messianic Secret" sets out to answer the question: Why does Mark, as our earliest source for the historical Jesus, portray Jesus as keeping His messianic identity secret? Wrede's answer to this questions is quite fascinating (provocative). Understanding Wrede can serve as a heuristic for seeing an entire paradigm of historical Jesus methodology. This paper will critique Wrede's thesis, and implicitly this paradigm, by examining the gospel of Mark to intentionally deconstruct Wrede's work on both historical and literary counts.

The outline for this paper is as follows. First, a brief overview of Wrede's place in historical Jesus studies, and thesis, will be provided to frame the discussion; second, a critique of Wrede's thesis will be offered; third, A proposal of how the secrecy theme is historical and stems from the life of Jesus. Fourth the significance of Jesus crucifixion as King of the Jews; finally, literary criticism which has been used to evaluate Mark's narrative strategy will be shown to support the Messianic paradox, and thus argue against the idea that Mark was concocting a messianic secret.

I will begin with an overview of Wrede's, thesis, and place in Historical Jesus studies will

be given to frame the discussion. The Messianic Secret, is the English title<sup>1</sup> of a 1901 German publication by Wilhelm Wrede (Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien). When William Wrede was a professor of New Testament at Breslau, he began speculating how he could make his contribution to the academy in Europe. Wrede's, was a student of Albert Eichorn, one of the founders of the history of religions school. This school sought to understand all religions, including Christianity and Judaism, as socio-cultural phenomena that developed in comparable ways. Wrede's commitment to these various methods are seen in His first published book "the tasks and methods of NT theology" where He attempts to make the Jewish Pharisee Paul a Hellenistic preacher of pagan mythology. Additionally, during his first teaching job at Göttingen, Wrede came under the influence of Julius Wellhausen who taught that Jesus' life was not messianic or eschatological, and that these faith traditions emerged from the early Christian community after the resurrection. So why did Wrede choose to work on the gospel of Mark? In historical Jesus studies, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was nearly universally assumed the gospel of Mark was a digested version of Matthew's account. Markan studies were not pursued, since it seemed that the book did not offer much new information. However, the tides began to turn in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as scholars began exploring the possibility that Mark's gospel was written first. Particularly, Heinrich Holtzmann in his (Die synoptischen Evangelien, ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter) The Synoptic Gospels: Their Origin and Historical Character; Leipzig, 1863) presented a strong case for Markan priority. Following the work of Holtzmann other contemporaries of Wrede attempted to construct a historical Jesus given Markan priority. It was in this milieu when Wrede's thoughts on Historical Jesus studies came to fruition in the Messianic Secret, published in 1901. Not only did Wrede's thesis prove to be a tidal wave of sorts in synoptic formation studies and Christian origins, it showed source critics

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<sup>1</sup> J.C.G. Grieg, *The Messianic Secret*, William Wrede, (Altrincham, England James Clark Publishers, 1971)

that their earliest sources for the historical Jesus were riddled with the theological propaganda of the early church. The thoroughgoing skepticism of Wrede not only precipitated the ‘no quest’ period in Jesus research, but the sentiment of despair in finding a historical Jesus in the theologically corrupted sources.

Wrede believed that this secret motif dominated the whole of Mark’s presentation. Wrede was reading the gospel rightly in this way for the most part. Indeed, in the gospels, Jesus often prohibits ‘messianic evangelism.’ The demons are not allowed to speak, “because they knew he was the Christ,”<sup>2</sup> the disciples are not to tell what they had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration,<sup>3</sup> and Jesus’ response to Peter’s messianic declaration is a demand for silence.<sup>4</sup> Wrede argues, in the *Messianic Secret*, that this secrecy theme was a Markan literary invention to explain why prior to the crucifixion no one, not even Jesus’ disciples, had thought of Jesus in messianic terms. For Wrede, this motif was useful then in justifying the Markan community<sup>5</sup> in her messianic beliefs. As J.C. Grieg, Wrede’s translator, notes, “According to Wrede, because the church came to think of Jesus after the resurrection as Messiah, Mark came to explain lack of explicit declaration of his messiahship by Jesus during his ministry by the suggestion that Jesus had after all secretly [not publicly] revealed his messiahship.”<sup>6</sup>

An analysis of Wrede's thesis reveals three principal strands: first the isolation of a distinct motif in Mark which can be called the 'Messianic secret'; second the argument that certain elements of that motif, noticeably the exorcisms, are non-historical, leading to the conclusion that the whole motif is the construction of Christian or Markan theology; third, and the reason for

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:34, Luke

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9:9-10, Matthew 17:9, Luke 9:36

<sup>4</sup> Mark 8:27-30, Matthew 16:13-20, Luke 9:18-21

<sup>5</sup> Scholars are increasingly critical of the theory that the gospels were written as *Sui Generis* for an isolated community. Instead it is more often thought that the gospels are a form of Ancient Biography written for all Christians (See BurrIDGE “What are the gospels”, Bauckham “The Gospels for All Christians”)

<sup>6</sup> J.C.G. Grieg, *The Messianic Secret*, William Wrede, (Altrincham, England James Clark Publishers, 1971) Translators Introduction P. 8

the secret motif's existence, the argument that belief in Jesus as Messiah was an Easter faith and that the Messianic secret results from an attempt to read back Messiahship into the life of Jesus.

Now I will turn to the first strand of Wrede's thesis. James Blevins in his book "The Messianic Secret in Markan Research" formulates some questions to be asked of the secret hypothesis. Speaking in form critical terms He asks, "can scholars forcefully demonstrate that the messianic secret is an integral part of the tradition (rather than Mark's redaction)?" If so, Blevins says, "then they have a sounder basis for projecting the messianic secret as historical." It seems that scholars can demonstrate that the messianic secret is part of the tradition, rather than Mark's redaction. Heikki Raisanen, the late Professor of NT at University of Helsinki, has shown that some of the secret tradition comes from the hand of mark (1:34, 7:36a) but others of the tradition was already present in the pre-markan tradition (1:44, 5:43, 8:26 Raisanen 1990 145-49, 162-66; Gerd Thiessen, Professor of NT at University of Heidelberg 1991 140-52) and stemmed from the historical Jesus. Another question to ask of Mark's narrative is does Jesus issue commands to silence even when messianic confessions are not made? If it can be shown that there are commands to silence, in spite of messianic confessions, there may be something else at work.

The second strand of Wrede's thesis, and really the impetus, that led him to formulate his theory is that for Wrede elements of the Markan narrative, particularly the exorcisms, are non-historical. Wrede says "Perhaps somewhere in Jesus' ministry a mentally ill person may have called Jesus the messiah, but the regularity and frequency of these cases indicates an editorial scheme." Why? Because for Wrede demons are mythological. Again Wrede writes "Mark does not merely allow the demons to call out to Jesus, he emphasizes twice (1:24, 34) that they recognize him (Jesus). This would have no meaning (it could be in there to show that Jesus is the

Son of God) if He did not have the opposite in mind—generally no one knew him (Jesus). If you do not believe in demons, and you read these narratives as ‘pre-enlightenment’ mythical inventions of an editor, then you will analyze the words that ‘are put in the mouths of the demons’ as complete editorial scheme! If however demons are real, and Jesus encountered unclean spirits then to dismiss the stories a priori is a form of what Greg Boyd calls ‘western ideological imperialism.’ It is what N.T. Wright opines about when He says that historical Jesus studies can devolve into a “historical projection of our undiscussed metaphysic.” This seems to me to be exactly what Wrede was doing in his evaluation of the exorcism stories when he says, “perhaps... a (meaning one) mentally ill person said He was the Messiah”. I enjoy Dominic Crossan’s quote when He says, in my judgment very ironically, “It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.” Though a western enlightenment worldview is biased to exorcism, most every other worldview is not, so historians recognize that metaphysical commitments must not distract them from historical reconstructions. It is clear that the exorcism narratives themselves would not stand out so prominently in Mark’s time as they would to a modern deist. The fact is that in their manner of presentation these exorcism narratives accord by and large with the standard pattern of exorcism stories coming to us from out of antiquity. T. A. Burkill has shown in his, 'The Injunctions to Silence in St. Mark's Gospel' that in the ancient period demons would use the name of the exorcist and the exorcist would command the demon to silence. Josephus, the 1<sup>st</sup> century jewish historian, witnessed an exorcism by one Eleazar who using a ring and a root, drew out a demon from the man’s nostrils and commanded the demon to enter the afflicted no more. Second, the literature of the period The testament of Moses, a Palestinian document that originated sometime around 30 CE, or shortly before mentions that the

Kingdom of God will appear and the power of Satan will be broken. Jesus seems to see His ministry as fulfilling these expectations. (And then His Kingdom shall appear throughout all His creation, and then Satan will have an end (ToM 10:1). The second line “will have an end” is in the future tense and anticipates what Jesus says is happening in His ministry, a ministry in which the rule of God is proclaimed and the demise of the rule of Satan is demonstrated through exorcism. In Mark 1:25, 34 and 3:11 Jesus issues commands for the demons to be silent in standard practice of exorcising demons at the time, however in 7:24-30 and in 9:14-29 He issues no command to the demon for silence. Also in the healing of the Gerasene demoniac not only does Jesus issue no commands to silence but in 5:19, Jesus tells the healed demoniac to go home and tell everyone what Yahweh had done for him. This variety in the gospel of Mark can hardly hold up to Wrede’s claim that there is a distinct motif of secrecy. Additionally, the exorcisms cannot be ruled out a priori as unhistorical since this was standard practice of this period as testified in the wide variety of literature in the period. (Josephus, Philostratus “Life of Apollonius of Tyana”, the Magical Papyri, the Genesis Apocryphon found at Qumran, and the rabbinic material). Finally, even the Pharisees acknowledge Jesus’ power to cast out demons, though they attribute his power to Satan, Jesus attributes it to the finger of God, probably alluding to the statement Pharaoh’s magicians made when they recognized that God’s judgment had fallen on Egypt. The criterion of embarrassment authenticates this tradition, since the disciples would not create this story.

The third strand that holds Wrede’s thesis together, and the reason for the secret motif’s existence is the argument that belief in Jesus as Messiah was an Easter faith and that the Messianic secret results from an attempt to read back Messiahship into the life of Jesus. A belief among the early Jewish community that Jesus was the Messiah requires an adequate cause, a

cause that Wrede's thesis does not provide. The messianic secret fails to account plausibly for the disciples' proclamation of Jesus as the Christ following his resurrection. Understanding resurrection from a Jewish viewpoint most certainly would have aided the German in his hypothesis, but as was often the case prior to World War II and the discoveries at Qumran, Jesus and the gospels were not appreciated as much as they should have been within a Jewish framework. The resurrection of the dead is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures and during the second temple period the doctrine of resurrection became a widespread hope for many in Israel.<sup>7</sup> In Jewish thought the resurrection occurred at the end of the world for all the righteous people. Jews had no conception of an individual, or the messiah, being raised within history prior to the general resurrection at the consummation. Ulrich Wilckens states it clearly: "For nowhere do the Jewish texts speak of the resurrection of an individual which already occurs before the resurrection of the righteous in the end time and is differentiated and separate from it; nowhere does the participation of the righteous in the salvation at the end time depend on their belonging to the Messiah who was raised in advance as 'First of those raised by God' (1 Cor 15:20)."<sup>8</sup>

Since there was no Jewish expectation that messiah would be raised from the dead prior to the general resurrection, it would be embarrassing then for the disciples to proclaim Jesus as Messiah to Judaism solely based on the resurrection of Jesus rather than on the divine vindication of His radical personal claims seen in both deeds and words. Remember that Wrede's thesis is that Jesus made no messianic claims in his ministry, but if it is true that Judaism was not looking for a resurrected messiah and that Jesus made no messianic claims in his ministry, why would the Jewish disciples believe Jesus was the messiah because of his resurrection? How

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12:2

<sup>8</sup> Ulrich Wilckens, *Resurrection: Biblical Testimony to the Resurrection - An Historical Examination and Explanation* Atlanta: Knox, 1978) p.131 as quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 2008). 393.

would this proclamation convince fellow Jews, including Paul and James, of Jesus' messianic status if he had not claimed this status in his life and ministry? The puzzle pieces between the Jewish disciples' proclamation and the messianic beliefs of the early Jewish community only fit together when you have the middle piece joining the two, which is Jesus' own radical claims to be messiah. It seems the chasm from Jesus' non-messianic claims to the disciples' proclamations of him as the Christ cannot be bridged solely by the resurrection, as Wrede thought. For, the disciples could have proclaimed Jesus as Elijah returned, the Prophet, or one of God's end-time messengers. But with Pilate still overseeing Jerusalem, and the temple still under the authority of corrupt priests, are we to suppose that within fifty days of Jesus' death at least ten-thousand Jews<sup>9</sup>, and some leading priests<sup>10</sup>, would have received the kerygma that the Messiah had come, and the eschaton begun, if they had not heard some rumors of Jesus himself confessing to being Messiah before his shameful, humiliating, death on a cross? It is much more probable that the messianic belief of the disciples finds its roots in the self-understanding of Jesus, since it had no place to find it in the Jewish understanding of resurrection. As Pannenberg explains, you must view the resurrection as a divine vindication of Jesus' personal claims: "The resurrection of Jesus acquires such decisive meaning not merely because someone or anyone has been raised from the dead, but because it is Jesus of Nazareth, whose execution was instigated by the ruling priests because he had blasphemed God. If this man was raised from the dead, then that plainly means that the God whom he has supposedly blasphemed has committed himself to him.... The

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<sup>9</sup> estimation from Acts 2:41, 47, 4:4, 5:14, 11:24

<sup>10</sup> Acts 6:7

resurrection can only be understood as the divine vindication of the man who the ruling leaders rejected as a blasphemer.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact early Jewish followers of Jesus connected the title of “Christ” so closely to Jesus that it became practically a proper name: Jesus Christ. The very term Christians, which was used derisively to describe his followers, shows how central their belief was that Jesus was the promised messiah. The question is: Where did they come up with this idea? If Jesus himself never claimed to be the messiah, what would prompt his Jewish followers to call him that? Therefore, as Pannenberg avers, one must consider the religio-historical backdrop of Jesus’ claims. When one studies the emerging Jewish movement that came after Jesus in its religio-historical context then it becomes necessary that if there are to be subsequent messianic proclamations following his resurrection then Jesus must have made messianic claims before his shameful death on a cross. Since it is beyond doubt that the content of the kerygma proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, and since it has been shown that resurrection does not imply messianism in the first century Jewish context, the messianic secret fails to show that post-Easter faith inspired messianic beliefs.

We have seen that all three strands of Wrede’s thesis; the distinctive motif of messianism, the unhistorical nature of the exorcisms, and that belief in Jesus as Messiah was an Easter faith, have failed to plausibly account for Wrede’s thesis that Jesus’ life was originally a non-messianic one.

This paper is arguing that the secrecy theme is historical and stems from the life of the historical Jesus. One of the strongest points to be made against Wrede’s thesis that there is a distinct messianic secret motif is that Jesus silences people even when messianic confessions

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<sup>11</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Jesu Geschichte und unsere Geschichte,” in *Glaube und Wirklichkeit* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), 92-94 as quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 2008) 399.

have not been made and these commands are part of the tradition, not Mark's redaction (as seen in Mark 1:45, and 7:31). Why does Jesus issue these commands, since it is apparent that there is no messianic secret involved? I believe a strong case can be made that Jesus issued these commands to suppress the illegitimate messianic fervor of the mobs of people who wanted to take Jesus by force and make him king.

What were common messianic expectations like in the 1<sup>st</sup> century? Was anyone looking for a Messiah who instead of triumphing over Israel's enemies would be shamefully executed by them? Though there is a variety of messianic expectations in second temple literature Mark's conclusion broke all the paradigms. For example, The Psalms of Solomon, particularly ch. 17, speak of the Son of David who will come and deliver Israel from gentile oppressors it reads ((raise up unto them their king, the son of David, At the time in the which Thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel Thy servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction.... The psalm ends by saying ----May He (the messiah) deliver us from the uncleanness of unholy enemies! (Borg speaks a bit about this in his dissertation calling it 'the politics of holiness')).

In the gospels the crowd was originally drawn to John the Baptist's proclamation (Mark 1:5 all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him), but was subsequently attracted to Jesus throughout his public ministry. Jesus teaching and miracles drew them, especially his healings (Mk 1:32–34 "That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.<sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door.") The crowd continues to look (stalkers) for Jesus (1:37), and by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter Mark seems to portray the healed leper's disobedience to Jesus' command of silence as a hindrance to Jesus'

preaching ministry since it incited the crowds to go after Him(1:38). Because of the leper's testimony Mark "Jesus could no longer openly enter the city (Capernaum), but He was outside in deserted places and they came to Him from every direction" (Mark 1:45). When Jesus returns to Capernaum, after some days, immediately the house is overrun so that the men carrying the paralytic can not get to Jesus 'because of the crowd'. The crowd swells to such a degree near the lake of galilee that getting into the boat is the way Jesus keeps himself from being crushed (Mk 3:9). In one case Jesus performs a healing before a larger crowd can gather (Mark 9:25 'When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit'). Jesus even tried to hide from the crowds (Mark 9:30 "They departed from there and passed through galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it") The crowd was comprised of thousands (Mk 6:44 '5,000 men' Mk 8:9 '4,000 men'), of people who on occasion hindered Jesus and his disciples from even having time to eat (Mark 6:31-33). The people were partially spurred by messianic hopes, from such texts as the Psalms of Solomon, for at the feeding of the five thousand the crowd attempted to take Jesus by force and make him king (Jn 6:15).

The observation of James Charlesworth regarding the crowds is key at this point:

It is clear that Jesus was followed by crowds. Sociologists would point out that to the high priests and roman officials, these crowds are mobs. Such scholars have stressed that the most dangerous and volatile social group is a crowd. A crowd has no tradition and no published agenda. And if the crowd has a clear leader, he or she, is one who is energetically leading a mob and not one who is seated for discussion. The Romans did not need to read the books on the crowd that have been published by sociologists over the past 50 years. They had learned from a century of trying to control an expanding empire how dangerous, unruly, and insurrectionist is a crowd. It can become instantaneously a politically motivated mob.<sup>12</sup>

If we understand the crowds as a mob zealous for a different king or ruling priest, it makes sense that Jesus was in danger of being made a leader of a revolt movement by the common people.

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<sup>12</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus; an essential guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 107.

According to John, Jesus knew the mobs sought to hijack his messianic ministry to accomplish their own political purposes. But was insurrection in Judea and Galilee a part of the ethos of the first century? According to Wright, “If we were to sketch a map of events in first-century Palestine for which we have good evidence (mostly of course known from Josephus), many of those events would involve revolutionary activity.”<sup>13</sup> Richards Horsley’s work “Bandit’s, Prophets, and Messiahs popular movements at the time of Jesus” persuasively argues for a peasantry that was not only resentful about Roman occupation and taxation, but also deeply distrustful of their own political and religious institutions. Indeed, in exchange for personal safety and affluence, the aristocracy of Palestine often collaborated with the occupying roman forces and in so doing, in the mind of the peasant class, aided Israel’s oppressors. This collusion led to class conflict between the rich and the poor. Horsley’s study therefore shows how the first century was one of the most violent epochs of Jewish history, with the cauldron of unrest reaching its boiling point in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> After Herod Archelaus ordered the massacre of innocent pilgrims in Jerusalem Josephus identified several leaders of revolt movements: Judas, the son of Ezekias (Ant. 17.10.5 §§271–72; J.W. 2.4.1 §56); Simon, servant of King Herod (who put the diadem on his head and the crowd around him proclaimed him a new king) (Ant. 17.10.6 §§273–76); and Athronges (Ant. 17.10.7 §§278–85). Josephus clearly indicates that they aspired to be Israel’s king when he says “At this time there were great disturbances in the country, and that in many places; and the opportunity that now offered itself induced a great many to set up kings” (J.W. 2.4.1 §55; Ant. 17.10.8 §285). According to Josephus, all of these messianic figures were of humble origins, and their followers were

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<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 170.

<sup>14</sup> Horsley has traced popular messianic movements in 2<sup>nd</sup> temple history that reflect the continuity of the hope among the populace, especially the peasantry, of a king who should lead them in a movement of liberation from their oppressors. Horsley, R. A. “Popular Messianic Movements around the Time of Jesus.” *CBQ* 46 (1984) 471–95

primarily peasants. It is obvious there was an undercurrent of revolutionary movements in the 1<sup>st</sup> century coming to culmination in the revolt of 66-70. Josephus' mention of Herod Antipas' fear of the crowds that were drawn to John the Baptist provides some contextualization for the crowds around Jesus. Josephus writes "Now, when [many] others came in crowds about him (John the Baptist), for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late."<sup>15</sup> In addition to Josephus, we also have Philo calling the mobs/crowds "the worst of evils"<sup>16</sup> and Tacitus, mentioning the strangeness of calm in the empire under Tiberius.<sup>17</sup> From all this it is clear that the common people, terrorized by the Roman annexation, oppressed by heavy taxation, and led by a corrupt aristocracy, yearned for a new king like David.

In conclusion, the crowds were a volatile social group with the ability to swell, as Herod thought would happen with John the Baptist's movement, into a political insurrection. Jesus was stalked by this mob of people and because of their understandable revolutionary mindset He issued commands to silence, even when messianic confessions were not made (as seen in Mark 1:45, and 7:31). Since Jesus' own understanding of his messiahship was so radically different from that of his audience, it was expedient for Jesus to avoid the use of the title Messiah since it

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<sup>15</sup> *Ant.* 14.158–60, 420–30, 17.149–66, 206–18, 271–2; *War* 1.648–55, 2.1–13, 56, 271–2; *Jos. War* 1.88, he points out that *stasis* (insurrection) is most likely to occur at festivals.

<sup>16</sup> Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo : Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Tacitus. *Hist.* 5.9:

could be so easily misunderstood. Jesus' understanding of his role as king was different from that of the crowds.<sup>18</sup>

Though Jesus does not publicly proclaim Himself messiah because of the crowds, several of Jesus actions and sayings (the reply to John the Baptist, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Jesus' action in the temple) reveal his messianic self-understanding.

Jesus' response to John the Baptist is as follows: "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" Jesus responds, "'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'" Reading this story prior to our knowledge of 4Q521 may have caused scholars to wonder why Jesus does not answer John the Baptist's question directly, though the allusions to Isaiah are clear enough. However, it is clear that John is doubting Jesus' messianic status, and so asks him plainly, "Are you the one?" Jesus response is enigmatic. Or is it? Reading this story in light of Qumran, and Isaiah, scholars recognize what Jewish messianic expectation looked like. To be sure, the community at Qumran (most probably the Essenes referred to by Josephus) does not represent Judaism as a whole, but it does represent a stream of thought in second temple Judaism, which serves as an important interpretive context in understanding Jesus. The very signs Jesus points to in his reply to the Baptist are listed in the text of 4Q521 as signs of the Messiah's coming.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

<sup>19</sup> Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005), 530. (4Q521) For the heavens and the earth shall listen to his *messiah* and all which is in them...For he will honor the pious upon the throne of his eternal kingdom, setting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, raising up those who are bowed down...for he shall heal the critically wounded, he shall revive the dead, he shall send good news to the afflicted, he shall satisfy the poor, he shall guide the uprooted, he shall make the hungry rich.

The second text highlighting Jesus' messianic self understanding is the story of Jesus entry into Jerusalem seated on a donkey. This action not only precipitated his examination before the high priest, but was also a dramatic assertion of his messianic status. Entering the city of Jerusalem in this way deliberately mimicked Solomon, the son of David, who rode the royal mule to inaugurate his rule of the Kingdom of Israel.<sup>20</sup> What was Jesus thinking orchestrating this event? Furthermore, this deliberate act fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, which Jesus was most probably aware of.<sup>21</sup> The shouts of "Hosanna" not only alluded to Psalm 118, but also suggested that the Davidic King of Israel was entering Jerusalem. These acts are crucial for probing Jesus' self-understanding, as McKnight explains:

Jesus performed deeds that got him into trouble and caused controversy.... These deeds are to be understood in the category of "prophetic symbolic acts".... In each of these acts, Jesus knew what he was doing and what others would say and he did them because of what others would do and say. These acts reveal Jesus, at least in his mission and self-understanding of his relation to God, as one who had a mission to Israel.<sup>22</sup>

To see these events as authentic, which is most probable, but maintain Wrede's thesis would suggest that Jesus performed messianic actions naively, which is a hypothesis that is unable to bear the weight of scrutiny.

Jesus actions in the temple displayed opposition against the ruling priests who asked him, "By what authority do you do these things?"<sup>23</sup> Jesus seemed to believe that the God of Israel gave him the authority to act and speak in this way. Jesus quotes Israel's scripture to justify his actions: "Is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you

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<sup>20</sup> Kingship (1 Kings 1:32-40)

<sup>21</sup> Zechariah 9:9

<sup>22</sup> Scot McKnight, *A new vision for Israel: The teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 11:28

have made it a den of robbers!”<sup>24</sup> Jesus believed he was the unique Son, who in service to the God of Israel, was chosen to give Israel her last warning before God’s judgment would fall on the corrupt leadership. His telling of the parable of the vineyard evidences this.<sup>25</sup> Again, the Dead Sea scrolls, texts Wrede was not privy to, provide a lens to understand the Messiah as one called the Son of God who will rebuild the temple.<sup>26</sup> This event coheres with the temple authorities examination of Jesus when they accuse Jesus of claiming to destroy and rebuild the temple. His refusal to answer these charges naturally provokes the high priest to demand, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed one?” This accusation shows that Jesus, contrary to the Wrede’s thesis, was being examined for messianic claims.

Because of this examination Jesus was crucified as King of the Jews. The High Priest is putting Jesus under a levitical oath (lev 5). This passage alone dismantles Wrede’s thesis, whether one posits that it is historical or a Markan invention. If interpreters assume this tradition is fictitious, as Wrede did, then it not only becomes inexplicable historically why Jesus was crucified as ‘king of the Jews’, it begs the question literarily. Why would Mark insert something that would so blatantly contradict his supposed secrecy agenda? If interpreters assume this tradition is historical, it explains why Jesus was crucified ‘king of the Jews’ and contradicts Wrede’s thesis that Jesus never claimed to be messiah, since in the account Jesus answers the messianic question in the affirmative. However, let us suppose momentarily that Wrede’s thesis is correct. Mark would then know that Jesus lived a life with no messianic claims. If Mark is trying to show his first century audience why no one knew that Jesus claimed to be messiah in

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<sup>24</sup> Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7, and alludes to Jer 7:11

<sup>25</sup> Mark 12:1-12

<sup>26</sup> 4Q174 I will raise up your seed after you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom f[orever]. I wi[ll be] a father to me and he *shall be a son to me*. He is the branch of David who will arise with the interpreter of the Law who in Zi[on in the la]st days according as it is written: "I will raise up the tent of David that has falle[n], who will arise to save Israel.

his lifetime, then Mark would be foolish to create a story about Jesus confessing his messianic status before the high priest and his associates. Why would Mark, who knew that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah in his life, invent a story about Jesus in which he confesses publicly to being the Messiah in front of the leaders of the nation? Surely, if this confession did not happen, and Mark knew that, he would be a fool to create such a literary fiction that would be so easily falsifiable by fellow Jews and gentiles living in Palestine in the first century. It would be safer, and simpler, to create a story of Jesus confessing to his disciples, or privately to a woman at a well! But to invent a story of Jesus confessing publicly, to the high priest and his associates, would be to invent a story that was easily falsifiable by the greater Palestinian community (Jews and Gentiles).

If, however, the account is historical, then it is clear that at the end of Mark's gospel Jesus does publicly let the secret out. The account progresses: "the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Jesus affirms the messianic question by plainly stating, "I am." Jesus then goes on to allude to Psalm 110 and Daniel 7, which compelled the high priest to tear his robes and call for Jesus' death.<sup>27</sup> When Jesus finally makes public confession of being messiah, before Caiaphas, then Jesus goes to the cross. This is significant for Mark's narrative strategy, which will be addressed later.

A fourth argument against the theme of the messianic secret is that Jesus was crucified as 'king of the Jews' for his messianic pretensions. This point invokes the criterion of crucifiability.<sup>28</sup> If Jesus did not confess to being Messiah in his life, then why at his death was he crucified as 'king of the Jews'? Surely the roman titulus is bedrock for the title is multiply

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<sup>27</sup> For a lucid exegesis of the confession passage see – Craig Evans, *Jesus and his contemporaries; comparative studies* (Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1995), 407-433.

<sup>28</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Doubleday, 1991. v. 1, pp 174–175, 317

attested, coheres with the title the Romans gave to Herod, and meets the difficult criterion of dissimilarity. The question is begging to be asked if Jesus did not confess to being Messiah in his life why was he crucified at all? For surely Jesus Ben Ananias made the same types of disturbances in the temple some 20 years later, even quoting the same judgment oracle from Jeremiah 7, and he was not crucified by the Romans but released.<sup>29</sup> Is it not historical bedrock that Jesus was crucified “King of the Jews” for his messianic pretensions under Pontius Pilate? Facts are stubborn things. Wrede’s thesis suffocates under the weight of this fact.

The final goal of this paper will be to analyze the narrative structure and theology of Mark’s gospel. It will be argued that the secret fails to grasp the narrative structure and theology of Mark. Wrede viewed the gospel as a source corrupted by theology, rather than a theological source reporting the actions of Israel’s God in history. Wrede’s presuppositions and methods placed him on an inevitable course to miss what Mark was doing in his text, as a text, as a gospel witness to Jesus. Instead, Wrede’s entire project assumed it could find what was behind the text of Mark, a project doomed to distort the message of Mark. The strength of literary criticism is that, “literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text.”<sup>30</sup> The objective of literary-critical analysis is not to discover the process through which a text came into being, employing the methods of source, form or redaction criticism, but to study the text that now exists. Literary criticism emphasizes the unity of the text as a whole with the immediate goal of understanding the narrative. Literary critics are in agreement with Wrede that Mark highlights secrecy, but in disagreement as to why Mark does so. Wrede himself was not privy to literary criticism since it found its way into biblical studies in the late 60’s.

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<sup>29</sup> Craig Evans, *Jesus and his contemporaries; comparative studies* (Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1995), 360.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 7.

Mark uses several literary techniques to drive the narrative forward and frame his theological message, of which six will be mentioned. First, Mark's Greek, though rough and redundant, is fast paced and lively unless He wants to slow down to make a point, in which case readers are drawn in to pay attention. Second, Mark uses irony, which causes readers to feel smarter than the characters. When this happens the author can easily win us over to his way of thinking. Third, the intensity of plot in Mark highlights Jesus' messiahship. Fourth, Mark uses triads, sets of three, like a good preacher to drive his point home. Fifth, Mark's use of intercalation emphasizes the messianic paradox, and finally, his plot structure builds and answers the paradoxical question.

Looking at Mark's narrative plot brings his theology into focus, a theology that Wrede missed. Let us begin by defining narrative: Narratives are stories consisting of plot, characters, and settings. The plot is the movement of the story. The plot consists of an opening, conflict, intensity, climax, resolution, and ending. The conflict builds to intensity where usually more complications arise making things difficult. This intensity leads to a climax, which is the crux of the story, and the resolution shows the task completed. The plot then is a chain of interconnected events designed to influence the reader with truth. The characters in Mark's story are important. Jesus is the protagonist, and as such, Mark is following Him with a spotlight. When Jesus talks, the volume is turned up. The disciples are the antagonists. They misunderstand, fear, rebuke, betray, and ultimately abandon Jesus. The settings are stark. In the first major section of Mark, the pace is fast moving and Jesus is in Galilee. In the second major section of Mark, the pace is slow moving and Jesus is in Jerusalem. This juxtaposes two settings and highlights the slower paced setting.

As readers searching for Mark's theology, we must ask, what is Mark's goal in his narrative? To what end does he frame characters, the setting, and plot? It is proposed that Mark's goal is to convince readers that though Jesus was crucified, he truly was and is the promised messiah to Israel. This was an extremely difficult task in the first century. Wrede was probably convinced, in his anachronistic confusion between messiah and second person of the trinity, that everyone wanted to accept Jesus as messiah, this is not so. Remember a crucified messiah or Son of God figure was a paradox to Jew and Gentile. So how does Mark accomplish the difficult task of showing the crucified one to be the Christ? Through the pace and plot of the gospel, combined with irony, he engenders readers to comprehend the secrecy surrounding this mighty figure Jesus. Through his use of triads and Jesus words, the secrecy is lifted, and Jesus is revealed paradoxically as the crucified Christ.

The pacing of Mark's gospel emphasizes this point that Jesus is the crucified messiah. Mark's use of Greek serves to frame what for him is crucial in understanding Jesus. He uses the historical present 151 times, as compared to Matthew's 93 times and Luke's 11 times. While it is distinctive of a rougher Greek, using present tense verbs to describe past actions gives the narrative a vivid feel, leaving the reader feeling that he is watching real live events. Secondly, Mark is fond of the word εὐθύς, an adverb often translated, "immediately." It appears forty-two times, whereas in Matthew it appears five times, and in Luke, only once. The effect of using this word is to propel the narrative forward like transitions in a film. It is interesting to note that ninety percent of the uses of εὐθύς occur before the final week of Jesus life. If one were to watch Mark's gospel "on screen" Jesus life and ministry would be in fast-forward, and the last week of his life would be in slow motion. Mark's gospel really is a, "passion narrative with an extended introduction." The question is why does Mark frame the gospel in this way? The pacing of

Mark's gospel is a way for Mark to grab his readers' attention. As his pace slows, the readers' gaze should intensify. His whole narrative drives forward to focus on Jesus final week and death.

Mark further emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ through the use of irony. From the very start of Mark's gospel readers know Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, which makes way for much irony throughout the gospel. As if Mark's declaration was not sufficient, God then speaks to reinforce Mark's point. From this background knowledge, the reader is, "in the know" for the rest of the story in regards to Jesus' identity. For example, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of acting by Satan's power, readers know the Pharisees actually are opposing the kingdom of God. Additionally, the actors that are on the stage often have no clue who Jesus is, while the supernatural characters know exactly who Jesus is. This irony enables mark to win readers over to his way of thinking, and accept Jesus status on Mark's terms. The significant moments of the narrative then become the places where the reader is not "in the know." These moments stand out and engage the reader's curiosity. Those significant moments in Mark's gospel are the secrecy moments. It is these mysterious, awkward, prohibitions issued by Jesus that elicit the readers questions. Readers know Jesus is a mighty figure, and they know he is Messiah, so why is Jesus so elusive with everyone about his identity? And when is Jesus going to let the world know about his messianic status? The author uses the secrecy theme to create tension and raise the readers anxiety to a place where the reader is salivating to know what kind of Christ Jesus is.

Intensity of plot in Mark highlights Jesus' messiahship. Peter's confession then serves as a great point of intensity. When tension has been raised to a sufficient level, and readers are wondering when the other characters will understand Jesus identity, Peter finally proclaims Jesus as the Christ. This proclamation relieves tension for a moment, but then intensity is peaked once more when Jesus and Peter have a bizarre disagreement about the nature of Jesus messiahship. In

fact, this mystery about the nature of Jesus' messiahship is revealed three times by Mark who uses an emphatic literary device known as triad.

Mark actually uses a cycle of triads to show that Jesus is Messiah and will suffer. Three times Jesus predicts his death (8:31-32, 9:31-32, 10:32-34). Three times the disciples respond to Jesus prediction with misunderstanding (8:33, 9:33-34, 10:35-41). Three times Jesus teaches the confused disciples about servanthood and cross-bearing discipleship (8:34-38, 9:35-37, 10:42-45). These three triads come to a culmination in Jesus ransom saying, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This textual apex is Mark's way of yelling to his readers, "The Servant of the Lord—remember Isaiah 53?!" Mark's strategy through the triad of triads is to say that Jesus is Messiah but those disciples who seek personal glory through conquest, rather than service, have misunderstood the nature of Jesus messiahship. For Mark, Jesus is not the conquering king some were looking for, rather he is the servant of Isaiah who has come to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark has shown that the disciple who is anti-cross is also anti-Jesus and has failed to understand his messianic mission rooted in the Hebrew scriptures. Through the triad of triads Mark has won his readers over to understand Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah, the King of Israel crying out to Yahweh for deliverance (psalm 20-22).

Mark has convinced readers of Jesus' messianic mission and now he allows Jesus to take center stage as readers watch the drama unfold in Jerusalem. Here, through the use of intercalation, Mark drives home his point that Jesus is the messiah. Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna" as the crowds hail Him as the Son of David. He then enters the temple to look around and leave, which seems rather mysterious. The next morning Jesus curses a fig tree and then comes to the temple to wreak havoc. At the temple he overthrows tables, then preaches

a sermon where he alludes to Isaiah and the temple oracle of Jeremiah. “Jesus’ words ominously allude to the scathing oracle of Jeremiah 7, in which the prophet pronounced doom upon the first temple.”<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus leaves the city and the disciples see the fig tree withered. This is Mark’s most famous use of intercalation. “The intercalation of the fig tree and temple action is surely intended to be mutually illuminating: the fruitless fig tree symbolizes the fruitless temple establishment; both are doomed.”<sup>32</sup> As a response to Jesus’ actions in the temple the ruling priests demand to know by what authority he acts. Rather than answering them directly he tells the parable of the wicked tenants. Surely Jesus is claiming to be the unique Son of Israel’s God sent as last of the prophets. Mark is aware that readers are cheering at this point. He portrays the temple authorities satirically, encouraging readers to ridicule them. The temple authorities seek to trap Jesus by questioning him about taxes, and sarcastically asking about the resurrection. Jesus tells them they have not understood the Hebrew scriptures. Mark again is highlighting Jesus wisdom. Jesus tells a young man, who esteems love and subordinates the temple cultus that he is not far from the kingdom of God. Mark here becomes an anti-temple text.<sup>33</sup> By clustering together controversy stories, and anti-temple sayings within the precincts of Israel’s holy site Mark is alerting readers of the importance of the temple controversy to understanding Jesus final week.

As Mark’s storyline unfolds, it becomes apparent that Jesus’ death is the main theme. Because of temple controversies, the ruling priests, “sought to . . . put him to death.” Meanwhile, Jesus and his followers prepare for the Passover meal. The meal takes a mysterious turn when Jesus predicts his betrayal and impending death as according to scripture. Mark’s readers identify

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Craig A. Evans, vol. 34B, *Word Biblical Commentary : Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), xii.

Craig A. Evans, vol. 34B, *Word Biblical Commentary : Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), xii.

<sup>33</sup> See Nicholas Perrin; *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010)

with the protagonist Jesus, and recall Mark's previous portrayal of Jesus as the servant of Isaiah. The dots are beginning to connect when first Jesus takes the unleavened bread and breaks it saying, "This is my body." Will Jesus body be broken? Secondly, Jesus takes the Passover cup, which commemorated the shed blood of the Passover lamb, and says, "This is my blood of the covenant." Will Jesus blood be shed? This passage serves to significantly build intensity and point forward to his impending death. After the meal the band makes its way to the Mount of Olives where Jesus predicts that all the disciples will fall away.

The paradox continues to be highlighted in the plot, as the disciples misunderstand Jesus' purpose. The disciples again show that they still do not understand Jesus' mission: Peter says, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." Probably thinking Jesus would lead them to fight against the ruling priests and Rome.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the gospel the protagonist Jesus has consistently been courageous, wise, powerful, and holy. But there comes a moment in Mark's narrative when readers are made to deeply empathize with Jesus. This is the garden of Gethsemane. In the Garden, Jesus is sorrowful to the point of death, greatly distressed, and troubled. By vividly placing the protagonist in this position the tension in the narrative rises to a boiling point. The resolution must come quickly.

The theological climax of the gospel comes as Jesus finally speaks this paradoxical truth. The whole last week of Jesus ministry comes to a climax in a single question asked by the greatest ruling leader in Israel. Readers are captivated. Until this point in Mark's gospel Jesus has silenced messianic confessions. What will he say now that the high priest has placed him under levitical oath and asked explicitly, "Are you the Christ?" Jesus answers succinctly and unambiguously, "I am and you will see the Son of Man seated at the Right hand of Power and

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<sup>34</sup> For other verses on the disciples using the Sword. Mark 14:47, Matthew 26:51, 52, Luke 22:38, 49, John 18:10-11

coming with the clouds of heaven.” As readers begin to cheer, the high priest tears his robes! Sympathetic readers weep as the hero Jesus is led away to be crucified.

Paradox reigns in Mark’s portrayal of crucifixion, but it is here where the true reason for the paradox is revealed and Mark answers why this messiah must suffer and die. At the crucifixion everyone present reviles Jesus. The religious leaders belittle him, the criminals heap insults on him, and the disciples are absent to defend him. Jesus only words from the cross are, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus dies alone, in agony and despair. The narrative climaxes in Jesus death and two corresponding events. First, the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom. Second, the Roman centurion cries out, “Surely this man was the Son of God.” The significance of these two points is heightened for readers who recall the beginning of Jesus ministry when heaven was *σχιζομένου* (being torn open) and God declared Jesus his son and now the curtain *ἔσχισθη* (was torn open) and the Centurion declares Jesus God’s son. The whole gospel may be viewed as contained within an *inclusio*. Mark is showing that Jesus, the Servant of Isaiah, has through his ransom death opened the way into the Holiest of all. The temple will no longer be a place of atonement—final sacrifice has been made by Jesus, and the veil has been torn by God himself. This again is Mark’s way of saying the temple is no longer necessary. Through seeking to destroy Jesus’ movement the temple establishment has now lost their relevance.

The resurrection account in Mark is framed so that the death of messiah is emphasized. The resurrection of Jesus is the resolution of the narrative but not in the same way as the other gospels. The angel who appears at the tomb to the women says, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.” The angel highlights the resurrection, but not without reminding the women that Jesus was crucified. Part of Mark’s resolution then is that

“Christ was crucified.” No appearances of Jesus are recorded in the Markan resurrection narrative, nor did appearances need to be recorded since the church knew of these traditions. Mark has intentionally left out these traditions to focus on the paradoxical fact that Christ was crucified. Rather than focus on resurrection narratives, “Mark’s point may well be: Jesus is raised; what will you the reader do with it when the claim confronts you?”<sup>35</sup> Mark wants his readers to focus on the messianic paradox and never forget they serve a crucified messiah.

From a narrative analysis of Mark it becomes clear that Mark was seeking to emphasize Jesus as the suffering messiah. This is truly the messianic paradox—that Messiah would suffer. Mark uses pacing of his narrative to focus in on the week of Jesus’ death. His use of irony allows the themes of secrecy and messiahship to exist together, without one having to negate the other. Additionally, his irony lets the reader in on the truth of Jesus as Messiah. Mark also highlight’s Jesus’ messiahship through the climax of his narrative—the confession of Peter, and then uses triads to show that Jesus is anointed to be Isaiah’s servant of the Lord who will give his life as a ransom. The gospel is also full of intercalation, which helps to highlight this theme as well. Mark’s plot, including Jesus indictment of the temple cult, the leader’s rejection, and the disciples misunderstanding are intentionally contrasted with the God of Israel, tearing open heaven to declare Jesus his Son at baptism, and tearing the curtain open to declare Jesus his anointed Isaianic servant at death.

In conclusion, this summary of literary evidence along with the persuasive historical conclusions do not allow room for anything other than intentional paradox. It has already been demonstrated that the messianic paradox is more historically plausible than the messianic secret—The messianic secret motif is not distinct nor consistent, when Jesus commands demons

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Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 210.

to silence this coheres with exorcism practices of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the resurrection alone cannot account for easter faith as wrede thought, Jesus did indeed intimate his messianic self-understanding (his reply to JB, entry in        to Jerusalem, and demonstration in the temple) Jesus was crucified not inexplicably but as king of the jews for His messianic pretensions and confession before the high priest. Jesus commands to silence make sense in light of the volatile crowd. These historical arguments, along with those literary features, provide ample justification for concluding that Mark has written to underscore the messianic paradox, not to fabricate some “messianic secret.”