

Jesus as the Isaian Stronger One in Mark 1:7

A Contribution to Markan Divine Identity Christology

John Dennis

Lecturer in New Testament and Greek

London School of Theology

john.dennis@lst.ac.uk

Abstract

The contention of this article is that John the Baptist's declaration of Jesus as 'the stronger one' (ὁ ἰσχυρότερος) in Mark 1:7 echoes Isaiah 40:10a so that Jesus is identified with YHWH both in Mark 1:3 by means of the citation of Isaiah 40:3 and in Mark 1:7 by means of an echo of Isaiah 40:10a. The article will show that an Isaian divine identity interpretation of 'stronger one' is a satisfying reading of Mark 1:7 in light of the allusions to Isaiah and especially Isaiah 40:3–10 within Mark's prologue and in light of the links between Jesus's encounter with Satan in Mark 1:13 and the parable of Mark 3:27.

1. Introduction

Scholarly views on the meaning of 'the stronger one'¹ (ὁ ἰσχυρότερος) in Mark 1:7 tend to focus either on what the historical John the Baptist could have meant by the designation or what it likely means in Mark's prologue. Some have suggested that the historical Baptist would have expected the coming of God himself.² Josef Ernst is somewhat representative here when he argues that what originally was probably a reference to the absolute 'name of God' (ὁ ἰσχυρότερος) was, due to the process of 'Christianisation' (*Verchristlichung*), transformed into a statement about

1. All translations of primary sources are my own.

2. See Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation-Geschichte-Wirkungsgeschichte* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 280, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110868357>; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, THKNT 2 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 28; Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, JSNTSup 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 97; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 15th ed., KEK 1:2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 18.

the humble status of the Baptist relative to Jesus as Messiah.³ Interpretations that focus on the literary context of Mark's prologue normally yield a messianic interpretation of 'stronger one' in 1:7. The Baptist points to Jesus as the one who is 'stronger than I' because Jesus is the one who will baptise in the Holy Spirit (v. 8)⁴ and the one whom God identifies as his messianic Son (1:8,10-11).⁵

Other scholars interpret 'stronger one' in Mark 1:7 within the context of the Isaianic backdrop to Mark's prologue. Eugene Boring argues that for Mark, Jesus is the stronger one 'who will represent the God of Deutero-Isaiah whose eschatological "coming" is marked by power and "strength" (Isa 40:10,26,31; 45:24; 50:2; 52:1; 63:1,15).'⁶ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington more specifically relate Mark 1:7 to Isaiah 40:10: 'the adjective "stronger" [in Mark 1:7] echoes the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah where God will come "in strength" (40:10 LXX, *meta ischyos*).'⁷ However, these scholars do not fully explore the christological implications of the connection between Mark 1:7 and Isaiah 40:10. Richard Hays and Rikki Watts have gestured toward understanding Mark 1:7 as a piece of divine identity Christology in the light of the Isaian influence on Mark's prologue. The identity of the 'more powerful one', according to Hays, 'is strongly suggested by the language of Isaiah that Mark cites ... (1:3b; quoting Isaiah 40.3)'.⁸ Hays does not specifically connect 'stronger one' with the Lord's coming 'with strength'

3. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, 15. See also van Iersel, *Mark*, 97–98. Some have suggested that John may have expected the Son of Man. See Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, HTKNT 2 (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1976), 1:84–85 and M. Eugene Boring, *Mark*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 41.

4. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 157, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261639>; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:83; W. Grundmann, 'ισχυώ, κτλ', *TDNT* 3:397–402, at 399. This interpretation is implied in Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 38.

5. Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, EKKNT 2 (Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 1:48; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 52; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 151–152; Robert Guelich, *The Gospel of Mark 1–8:26*, WBC 34a (Dallas: Word, 1989), 23–25; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 51–52. See also W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 3 vols, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:315, who interpret the Baptist's designation 'the stronger one' in Matthew 3:11 in similar messianic terms.

6. Boring, *Mark*, 42.

7. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 63.

8. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 63.

in Isaiah 40:10a. Watts on the other hand implies such a connection: ‘John’s baptismal proclamation of “the stronger one” is highly suggestive of Yahweh’s INE [Isaiah’s New Exodus] coming “in strength” ... (1:7,14f.).’⁹

The designation ‘stronger one’ in Mark 1:7 indicates more than just that Jesus, as God’s Messiah, is stronger than John the Baptist, or even that Jesus represented the God of Isaiah as the agent of the new exodus. The contention of this article is that the designation ὁ ἰσχυρότερος for Jesus in Mark 1:7 is intended to echo the Lord coming ‘with strength’ (μετὰ ἰσχύος) in Isaiah 40:10a so that Jesus’s appearance in the Judean wilderness corresponds to the script of the Lord’s coming in Isaiah 40:3,9-10. The argument for this contention will unfold as follows. (1) I will review the allusions to Isaiah 40 within Mark’s prologue¹⁰ and (2) explicate the meaning and function of the precursor text, Isaiah 40:10a (‘The Lord is coming with strength and ... with kingly authority,’ κύριος μετὰ ἰσχύος ἔρχεται καὶ ... μετὰ κυριείας), within its context. (3) Next, I will argue that reading ‘stronger one’ in Mark 1:7 as an indicator of Jesus’s Isaian divine identity¹¹ is a satisfying interpretation¹² within the context of Mark’s prologue. (4) Finally, the interpretation of Mark 1:7 suggested in this article will be further confirmed by the connections between the prologue and the Beelzebul controversy in 3:22-27.

9. Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, WUNT 2/88 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 120.

10. The importance of Isaiah for Mark’s prologue has been established elsewhere. See particularly Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 139 and Watts, *New Exodus*, 96–121.

11. My use of ‘divine identity Christology’ follows Richard Bauckham’s articulation of it in his *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998). Bauckham employs ‘divine identity Christology’ because he believes that the earliest Christology is best construed not primarily in ontological terms (‘ontic Christology’, *what* divinity is) but rather in identity terms (*who* the one unique God of Israel is; *God Crucified*, 42). The authors of the New Testament, Bauckham maintains, have included Jesus in the one divine identity (*God Crucified*, 42). Despite the criticisms of James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009) and most recently by J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), I remain persuaded that ‘divine identity Christology’ accurately describes the Christology of key Markan passages.

12. I refer here to Richard Hays’ fourth (‘thematic coherence’) and seventh (‘satisfaction’) tests for hearing an echo of a previous text in a present text; *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989), 30–31. The thematic coherence test asks, ‘How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument ...?’, and ‘Do the images and ideas of the proposed precursor text illuminate Paul’s argument [in our case Mark’s prologue and Gospel]?’ The satisfaction test asks, ‘does the proposed reading make sense? Does it illuminate the surrounding discourse? Does it produce for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation?’

2. The Presence of Isaiah 40:1-10 in Mark's Prologue¹³

The probability of an allusion to Isaiah 40:10a in Mark 1:7 is heightened if the 'volume'¹⁴ of Isaiah 40 in Mark's prologue can be established.¹⁵ At the beginning of his narrative, Mark asserts that the 'good news about'¹⁶ Jesus Messiah' (εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:1) was 'written in Isaiah the prophet' (1:2a).¹⁷ Mark 1:2a then indicates that the author's interest in Isaiah goes beyond his citation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3.¹⁸ Nevertheless, as has been argued elsewhere, Mark seems to have read Isaiah 40:3 within the larger context of chapter 40.¹⁹ The following five

13. The limits of the prologue turn on whether the prologue ends at 1:13 or at 1:14-15. For 1:13 see Guelich, *Mark 1-8*:26, 4; Grundmann, *Markus*, 25; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 13-14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554902>; R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 19. For 1:14-15 see Collins, *Mark*, 156; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:72-73; Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:39; M. Boring, *Mark*, 33; C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 193; Leander E. Keck, 'The Introduction to Mark's Gospel', *NTS* 12 (1966): 352-370, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500018130>. With Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 138), it is probably best to see 1:14-15 more as a transition or perhaps a 'hinge' (van Iersel, *Mark*, 83) between 1:1-13 and 1:16 that points forward to Jesus's Galilean ministry. For the purpose of this article, the prologue consists of 1:1-15.

14. Richard Hays' second criterion for hearing an echo is 'volume'. The test of volume asks 'how distinctive or prominent is the precursor text within Scripture ... and how much rhetorical stress does the echo receive' in the present text (*Echoes of Scripture in Paul's Letters*, 30). Richard Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 13 has argued, probably correctly, that only two of Hays' criteria, availability and volume, are really crucial for hearing echoes or allusions.

15. See particularly Watts, *New Exodus*, 85-90, 96-121; Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 29-47; Klyne Snodgrass, 'Streams of Tradition from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament', *JSNT* 8 (1980): 24-45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X8000200802>.

16. I take Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as an object genitive: 'the good news about Jesus Messiah'. See Gundry, *Mark*, 30 and Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:74-75.

17. With Gundry, *Mark*, 30, the καθὼς clause in Mark 1:2a does not begin a new sentence but is connected to verse 1 so that we have one sentence that extends from vv. 1 to 3.

18. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 139 has convincingly argued that echoes of Isaiah 40-55 are evident throughout Mark's prologue.

19. See Richard Schneek, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark*, I-VIII, BIBAL Dissertation Series 1 (Vallejo, CA: BIBAL Press, 1994), 14; Elizabeth E. Shively, *Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22-30*, BZNW 189 (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 36, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272888>; Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel*, SNTSMS 135 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487989>. One of the important conclusions

thematic connections between Mark's prologue and Isaiah 40:1-10 support this assertion.

(1) The 'wilderness' (ἐρημος) occurs four times in the prologue (1:3,4,12,13). The first occurrence appears in the quotation of LXX Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3: 'A voice of one crying out "in the wilderness" (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ): "prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight."' John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (1:4-8) just as the 'voice' in Isaiah 40:3 calls out ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, and in Mark 1:12, the Spirit casts Jesus εἰς τὴν ἔρημον to be tested by Satan (1:13). It therefore seems clear that with these repeated references, headed by the programmatic citation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3, Mark intends to evoke the wilderness of Isaiah 40, as he does in other places in his Gospel.²⁰

(2) The 'way' (ὁδός) of YHWH in Isaiah 40:3 becomes the way of Jesus in the prologue; the 'way' motif is particularly noticeable in Mark's central section (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:17,32,46,52).²¹

(3) 'Good news' (εὐαγγέλιον) frames Mark's prologue at the beginning (1:1) and at the close of the prologue with a double reference to good news in 1:14b-15. That this is Isaian good news (see εὐαγγελίζω in Isa 40:9; 52:7b)²² is made clear in the assertion of 1:1-2a: 'The beginning of the good news (εὐαγγελίου) about Jesus Messiah as written in Isaiah the prophet.' Mark must be thinking mainly of the proclamation of good news in Isaiah 40:9 because of the quotation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3. In Isaiah 40:9, 'good news' is heralded because YHWH is coming (Isa 40:10a) on his 'way' (40:3), with his divine 'strength' (ἰσχός) and 'kingly rule' (κυριεῖα), to rescue his people from exile (40:9-11).²³ Consistent with Isaiah 40:9,

C. H. Dodd reached in his *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), 126 was that NT authors usually presupposed the 'total context' of their OT citations.

20. See particularly Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and Its Basis in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 103-104. On the evocation of a new exodus deliverance in the feeding stories of Mark 6:31-44 and 8:1-10, see especially Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:259-261; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 419; Boring, *Mark*, 183.

21. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 149.

22. The Isaianic conception of good news is formative particularly for Mark but also for the NT. See Gerhard Friedrich, 'εὐαγγελίζομαι, κτλ', *TDNT* 2:707-737, at 708; Hooker, *St Mark*, 33-34; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 25. Jesus's preaching the 'good news of God' in 1:14b 'depict[s] Jesus's coming in terms of Isaiah ... (e.g., 52:7; 61:1)' (Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 43).

23. O. Schilling ('בשר', *TDOT* 2:313-316, here 316) concludes that 'in Deutero-Isaiah, מְבַשֵּׂר ('herald of good news') always refers to Yahweh's victory and the beginning of salvation'. This is relevant for בְּשַׁר/εὐαγγελίζω in Isa 40:9 but also the other passages in Isaiah where the proclamation of good news (בְּשַׁר/εὐαγγελίζω) is found: Isa 52:7; 60:6; 61:1.

the proclamation of good news is used elsewhere in Isaiah as the announcement of YHWH's new exodus redemption of Israel (41:27;²⁴ 52:7; 60:6-9; 61:1-11).²⁵

(4) Jesus's proclamation of the 'good news' (1:14b) of the 'kingly reign of God' in Mark 1:15 resounds with Isaian overtones (see Isa 40:10a²⁶ and 52:7²⁷).

(5) Finally, in light of the cumulative evidence above, it may well be that the 'forgiveness of sins' in Mark 1:4 echoes the announcement in Isaiah 40:2 that 'Jerusalem has been released from her sin' (LXX λέλυται αὐτῆς ἡ ἁμαρτία). The Baptist's proclamation of the 'forgiveness of sins' in 1:4 is immediately preceded by the citation of Isaiah 40:3 in 1:3 and thus the proclamation is part of the Baptist's preparation of the 'way of the Lord' as the way of Jesus.²⁸ Isaiah, and particularly Isaiah 40, is indeed the symbolic backdrop to Mark's prologue.

Having surveyed the key thematic links between Mark's prologue and Isaiah 40, we now turn to consider Isaiah 40:10a in its context with a focus on its assertion that YHWH's coming will be 'with strength' and 'kingly authority'.

3. YHWH Comes with 'Strength' (ἰσχύς) and 'Kingly Authority' (κυριεία) (Isa 40:10a; Mark 1:7,14b-15)

3.1 LXX Isaiah 40:10a: 'The Lord is Coming with Strength ...' (κύριος μετὰ ἰσχύος ἔρχεται)

Isaiah 40:10a explicates the manner of the Lord's coming on his wilderness way in 40:3: the Lord will come 'with strength' (μετὰ ἰσχύος) and his 'arm'²⁹ will come 'with kingly authority' (βραχίων μετὰ κυριείας) to deliver Israel. Elsewhere in Isaiah, when ἰσχύς and its cognates are used to describe some activity of YHWH,

24. Rather than the Hebrew text's 'I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news', LXX 41:27 reads 'I will comfort Jerusalem on the way' (ἱερουσαλημ παρακαλέσω εἰς ὁδόν), which brings LXX 41:27 closer to Isa 40:1,3 with the language of 'comfort' and 'way'.

25. Clearly influenced by Isa 52:7-8 and probably also Isa 40:9, Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32) promises salvation 'in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem' to those who call on the name of the Lord 'because 'good news is proclaimed' (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) to them. In Ps 95:2 (ET 96:2), the congregation is exhorted to 'proclaim the good news (εὐαγγελίζεσθε) of his salvation day to day'. The *Psalms of Solomon* 11:1, echoing Isa 52:7 and perhaps 40:9, reads: 'Blow trumpet in Zion to signal the saints; proclaim in Jerusalem the voice "of one who brings good news" (εὐαγγελιζομένου), for the God of Israel has shown mercy in his visitation of them.'

26. Donahue and Harrington (*Gospel of Mark*, 68) also detect an allusion to Isa 40:10 in Mark 1:15.

27. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 43 is correct to argue that 'Jesus comes as the herald of Isa 52:7 ... who announces the good news of God's rule'.

28. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 149 includes the forgiveness of sins in Mark 1:4 as an Isaian theme, but he does not specifically cite Isa 40:2.

29. 'Arm' (LXX: βραχίων; MT: זְרוֹעַ) here is a metonym for the Lord's strength.

or YHWH himself, we find a similar picture. In Isaiah 62:8, the Lord swears ‘by his strong arm’ (κατὰ τῆς ἰσχύος τοῦ βραχίονος αὐτοῦ) to establish Jerusalem again as the ‘praise of the earth’ (62:7), which includes YHWH’s protection of his people from their ‘enemies’ (62:8).

In other Isaian passages, YHWH’s ‘strength’ (ἰσχύς) refers to his powerful judgement (Isa 2:10,19,21)³⁰ and to the means (τῇ ἰσχύϊ) by which he overcomes his enemies, such as Assyria (10:13), and ‘plunders’ their ‘strength’ (ἰσχύς, 33:13). Isaiah 40:25-26 maintains that there is no one comparable to YHWH, the one who created the cosmos, for it is only ‘because of [his] abundant glory and by the might of [his] strength’ (ἀπὸ πολλῆς δόξης καὶ ἐν κράτει ἰσχύος) that the stars stay in their appointed place. In Isaiah 42:13 and 62:8,³¹ YHWH wields his ‘strength’ (ἰσχύς) in battle against his enemies in order to secure his people’s deliverance.³² In Isaiah 49:24-26 the Lord ‘who rescued Israel’ (v. 26) is portrayed as the stronger one who saves Israel ‘from the strong one’ (παρὰ ἰσχύοντος, 49:25), Babylon. Isaiah 49:24-26 is a vivid example of YHWH coming μετὰ ἰσχύος to win Israel’s new exodus deliverance (cf. 40:10a) and will be an important text for our consideration of Mark 3:22-27 below.

In Isaiah 27:1 and 28:2, the adjectival cognate of ἰσχύς, ἰσχυρός, refers to God’s warrior-like strength exerted to conquer the serpent Leviathan (Isa 27:1) or to describe God’s strong wrath in judgement against the northern monarchy in the context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis (28:1; cf. Isa 7:7-9; 8:4-8).³³ The destruction

30. Whereas LXX Isa 2:10,19,21 read ‘the glory of his strength’ (ἡ δόξα ἡ ἰσχύς αὐτοῦ), the MT reads ‘the glory of his *majesty*’ (יְהוָה).
 31. There is no Hebrew equivalent to the LXX’s μετὰ ἰσχύος in 42:13.

32. We find a similar picture in Exodus and Deuteronomy, where the virtual synonyms ‘strength’ (ἰσχύς) or ‘powerful’ (κραταιός) and the metonymies (that stand for the Lord’s power) ‘arm’ (βραχίων) or ‘hand’ (χείρ) are very often used closely together to describe YHWH’s unmatched power to save his people from Egypt. For instance, Israel is delivered from Egypt ‘by the strong hand’ (ἐν ... χειρὶ κραταιᾷ) of YHWH (Exod 6:19; 13:3,9,14,16) or ‘with great strength and your uplifted arm’ (ἐν ἰσχύϊ μεγάλῃ καὶ ἐν τῷ βραχίονί σου τῷ ὑψηλῷ) (Exod 32:11; Deut 9:29; 26:8) or simply ‘by a strong hand and outstretched arm’ (Deut 4:34; 11:2; 26:8). See also Deut 7:19; 11:2. Deut 26:8 employs ἰσχύς and κραταιός: ‘The Lord brought us out of Egypt *with great strength* (ἐν ἰσχύϊ μεγάλῃ) and *with a strong hand* (ἐν χειρὶ κραταιᾷ) and *with his uplifted arm*.’ There appears to be no functional difference between the metaphors of the ‘hand’ or ‘arm’ of God in these passages. See P. R. Ackroyd, ‘T’, *TDOT* 5:393–426, at 418.

33. MT Isa 28:2 (‘the Lord has one who is mighty and strong’) suggests that YHWH will use an agent to implement his wrath. In the context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, the agent is probably Assyria. See J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 344, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvg90919>. In LXX Isa 28:2, however, no such agent is mentioned: ‘the wrath of the Lord is strong and harsh’.

of the serpent Leviathan by means of God's holy, great, and 'strong' (ἰσχυρός) sword in Isaiah 27:1 is linked to the eschatological restoration of Jacob and Israel from exile (27:6-8), complete with the forgiveness of sins (27:9) and the Lord's reassembling of a renewed Israel back to Mount Zion (27:12-13).³⁴

A very similar conception of the Lord's 'strength' as the means by which Israel is delivered from bondage is found in Deuteronomy and the Psalms. In LXX Deuteronomy, the common formula 'by his/your great strength' (ἐν τῇ ἰσχύι αὐτοῦ / ἐν τῇ ἰσχύι σου τῇ μεγάλῃ)³⁵ describes God's unique divine 'strength' to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage. In LXX Psalms 28:4 (ET 29:4) and 64:7 (ET 65:6), God's 'strength' (ἰσχύς) refers to his unique power as the sovereign creator and in LXX Psalm 146:5 (ET 147:5) the greatness of the Lord's strength (μεγάλη ἡ ἰσχύς αὐτοῦ) is connected to his ability to rebuild Jerusalem and gather the 'dispersions of Israel' (LXX Ps 146:2 (ET 147:2)).

Lastly, the adjective ἰσχυρός describes YHWH directly in the following texts: the Lord is the 'strong one' who prevails 'by his strength' (Job 36:22),³⁶ 'the strong, the great and the awesome God of heaven' (Neh 1:5),³⁷ the one who is 'strong and merciful and compassionate' (Neh 9:31;³⁸ similarly 2 Macc 1:24), the one who is 'strong in lordship and one who sees everything' (Sir 15:18).³⁹

In conclusion, throughout Isaiah, and consistent with the picture in Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and other Septuagint passages, YHWH is the divine strong/stronger one who wields his strength to defeat Israel's enemies and win Israel's deliverance.

34. God must conquer this primeval enemy 'if "that day" [27:1] is to bring a final turning point in history' (Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, OTL (London: SCM, 1974), 223).

35. LXX Deut 4:37; 9:26 (x2), 29; 26:8; 33:27. See also LXX Deut 3:24 and 33:27.

36. ἰδοὺ ὁ ἰσχυρὸς κραταιώσεται ἐν ἰσχύι αὐτοῦ (Job 36:22).

37. ... ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἰσχυρὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ ὁ φοβερὸς (Neh 1:5).

38. ... ἰσχυρὸς εἶ καὶ ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων (Neh 9:31). See also Neh 9:32: ... ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς ὁ μέγας ὁ κραταῖος καὶ ὁ φοβερὸς.

39. ... ἰσχυρὸς ἐν δυναστείᾳ καὶ βλέπων τὰ πάντα (Sir 15:18).

3.2 LXX Isaiah 40:10a: ‘The Lord is Coming ... with Kingly Authority’ (κύριος ... ἔρχεται ... μετὰ κυριείας)⁴⁰

The Lord’s coming in Isaiah 40:10a is characterised by ‘strength’ but also by ‘kingly authority/rule’.⁴¹ The noun κυριεία is used only once in the LXX – Isaiah 40:10a (the Lord *comes* μετὰ κυριείας) – where it translates the *qal* participle מְשִׁלֵּה (MT 40:10: YHWH’s ‘arm *rules* for him’). Elsewhere in Isaiah and consistent with its use in Isaiah 40:10a, מְשִׁלֵּה (*mashal*, to rule) refers to YHWH’s kingly rule (63:19) or the rule of a sovereign, such as the Judaeen king or some other official ruler (16:1; 28:14; 49:7; 52:5).⁴² This is consistent with the use of this verb in the wider OT.⁴³ Thus, when מְשִׁלֵּה is associated with God, it indicates his rule as king as it does in Isaiah 40:10a.

Outside of LXX Isaiah 40:10a, κυριεύω, a cognate of κυριεία, translates מְשִׁלֵּה when it refers to the rule of princes and kings in Isaiah 3:4,12 and 19:4, and in Isaiah 14:2 κυριεύω translates the verb רָדָה (*radah*, to rule), which has a similar semantic range as מְשִׁלֵּה. The verb κυριεύω in Daniel 11:3, the noun κυριεία in Daniel 11:4, and the verb κατακυριεύω in Daniel 11:39 translate מְשִׁלֵּה. In Daniel 4:22, the noun κυριεία translates the Aramaic noun שְׁלִטָּן (*shaltan* – ‘dominion’). In these instances, κυριεία and its cognates refer to a king’s sovereign authority or an appointed vice regent. We find a similar picture in 1 Maccabees and Sirach where the verb κυριεύω is the specific activity of ‘the king’ (ὁ βασιλεύς, 1 Macc 7:8; 11:8; Sir 44:3; cf. LXX Dan 3:2) and in 1 Maccabees 8:24 κυριεία refers to Roman

40. The Lord’s ‘strength’ and ‘kingly authority’ in Isa 40:10a are distinct concepts, but they are clearly inextricably linked in this verse. Targum Isaiah links YHWH’s kingdom and strength even more explicitly in 40:9–10a, where we find that the ‘revelation’ of God’s ‘kingdom’ (Tg. Isa. 40:9), a phrase not found in the MT, is explicitly related to the ‘revelation’ of the Lord’s ‘strength’ and the ‘rule’ of his arm.

41. The noun κυριεία and its verbal cognate κυριεύω mean ‘authority’, ‘master’, ‘lord’; see T. Muraoka, *A Greek English–English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 419 and Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1195. However, in the context of Isa 40:10, and in light of the Hebrew verb (מְשִׁלֵּה) which κυριεία translates in this verse, the ‘authority’ in question is ‘divine’ authority (Muraoka, *Lexicon*, 419), YHWH’s authority exercised as the divine Master and Lord.

42. The LXX translates מְשִׁלֵּה with ἔρχω in Isa 28:14; 49:7; 63:19.

43. For example, in the Psalms, מְשִׁלֵּה refers to YHWH’s rule over Israel, the nations, creation, and the cosmos (22:29 (ET 22:28), 59:14 (ET 59:13); 66:6–7; 89:5–15; 103:19). It is worth highlighting Ps 22:29, in which God’s ‘kingdom’ is explicitly related to his ‘rule’: the whole earth shall remember turn to the Lord and the nations shall worship him (22:28) ‘because the *kingdom* (מְלִיכָה; LXX βασιλεία) belongs to the Lord and he *rules* (מְשִׁלֵּה) over the nations’ (22:29).

dominion. Lastly, in *Bel and the Dragon* 1:5, κυριεία is used of the ‘living God’s’ ‘dominion’ over all living things.

The evidence above indicates that κυριεία in Isaiah 40:10a, like the verb מָשַׁל it translates, should be understood as a reference to the Lord’s rule as sovereign king. The noun κυριεία in LXX Isaiah 40:10a is thus best translated ‘kingly rule/authority’. Consequently, in LXX Isaiah 40:9-10a, good news is proclaimed to Zion because the Lord ‘is coming ... with [his] “kingly authority” (μετὰ κυριείας)’. Isaiah 40:9-10a is therefore closely related to Isaiah 52:7 in which good news is also announced to Zion ‘because ... “your God will reign as king”’ (βασιλεύσει σου ὁ θεός; MT יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ).

The quotation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3 and the presence of the wider themes of 40:1-10 in the prologue reveal that the volume of Isaiah 40 is turned up high. This makes it plausible that ἰσχυρότερος in Mark 1:7, as well as Jesus’s proclamation of God’s kingly reign (βασίλειά τοῦ θεοῦ) in 1:15, form an intertextual link with YHWH’s coming through the wilderness that is characterised by ‘strength’ (ἰσχύς) and by ‘kingly authority’ (κυριεία) in Isaiah 40:10a. If this is correct, Jesus, who is identified as the Lord of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3, is again identified with the Lord of Isaiah 40 in 1:7 by means of an allusion to Isaiah 40:10a. As the Lord’s way is prepared in the wilderness in Isaiah 40:3 and the manner of his coming on this way is with ‘strength’ in 40:10a, so Jesus comes on his ‘way’ (1:3) to wield his divine strength to save his people.

4. Jesus as the Stronger One: Mark 1:7 in the Context of Mark 1:2-15

The interpretation of ‘stronger one’ in Mark 1:7 suggested in this article must be shown to be a thematically coherent and satisfying reading of the designation within the immediate context of 1:7. In what follows, I will argue that Mark understands the advent, person, and ministry of Jesus primarily in Isaianic terms and thereby an Isaian divine identity Christology is strongly suggested for 1:7.

4.1 Mark 1:7 in the Context of Mark 1:2b-3

It is indeed the case that John the Baptist does *not* identify Jesus as ὁ ἰσχύων or ὁ ἰσχυρός in an absolute sense. This is why Gundry argues that “‘the one stronger than I’ favors a human referent and disfavors a divine one ...”⁴⁴ However, Gundry’s reading of Mark 1:7 does not take seriously enough Mark’s interpretative

44. Gundry, *Mark*, 45. Similarly, commenting on whether the designation ‘stronger one’ for Jesus could be a divine appellation, Donahue and Harrington (*Mark*, 63) state ‘the image of John untying the thongs of God’s sandals is inappropriate’.

introduction to the advent of Jesus in the quotation of Malachi 3:1 in 1:2b and especially of Isaiah 40:3 in 1:3. In 1:2b, Mark identifies the coming of Jesus with the Lord's (κύριος / יְהוָה) 'sudden coming to his temple' in Malachi 3:1.⁴⁵ The Lord's messenger will prepare the 'way' (ὁδός) before me (πρὸ προσώπου μου) in Malachi 3:1, which in Mark becomes 'your way' (τὴν ὁδὸν σου), that is, Jesus's way. In 1:3,⁴⁶ Mark replaces the pronouns referring to the Lord (κύριος) in Isaiah 40:3 with pronouns referring to Jesus: 'the paths of "our God"' (τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν) in Isaiah 40:3 become 'his paths' (τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ) in Mark.⁴⁷ The upshot here is that at the opening of this Gospel, Mark identifies Jesus's advent and 'way' with the advent and 'way' of the Lord in both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. In the Baptist's role as the 'voice ... in the wilderness' who prepares the Lord's way (Mark 3:1; Isa 40:3), he points to Jesus as the 'stronger one' (1:7), the first designation for Jesus in Mark's Gospel apart from Mark 1:1. I contend therefore that Mark has not only used Isaiah 40:3 but also 40:10a to introduce his narrative about Jesus, the former passage by way of an explicit citation in Mark 1:3 and the latter by way of an implicit echo in 1:7. If we take the cue that Mark provides in his reference especially to Isaiah 40:3 in 1:3, then the following contextual reading lends itself: Jesus is the Lord of Isaiah 40:3 who comes on his 'way' (Mark 1:3) as the stronger one (Isa 40:10a; Mark 1:7). This reading also provides a rather obvious answer to why Jesus is 'stronger than' John: he is such ultimately because he is identified with the Lord of Isaiah 40:3 who comes as the strong(er) one. That Jesus is 'stronger *than John*' in this sense best explains why John is not 'worthy' to do for Jesus what even a slave would do for his master (Mark 1:7b).

4.2 The Spirit, God's Son, and the Wilderness Testing (Mark 1:8-13)

Mark 1:8-13 communicates to readers that the stronger one of verse 7 will 'baptise with the Spirit' (v. 8), that the Spirit descends on him (v. 10), and that God authenticates him as his son (v. 11). In 1:12-13, the stronger one is cast into the wilderness by the Spirit, where he is tested by Satan. Consistent with the programmatic quotation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3, the narrative events in 1:8-13

45. Although it is possible that we have a conflation of Exod 23:20 and Mal 3:1 in Mark 1:2 (see particularly Watts, *New Exodus*, 61–76), I think it is more likely that Mal 3:1 alone is cited in Mark 1:2b. On this view, see Richard Bauckham, 'Markan Christology according to Richard Hays: Some Addenda', *JTI* 11.1 (2017): 24, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.11.1.0021> and van Iersel, *Mark*, 93.

46. Without undermining Mark's use of Mal 3:1, Isa 40:3 is the primary citation that sets the agenda for Christology in the prologue.

47. See Bauckham, 'Markan Christology', 21–36 and Hays, *Gospels*, 63–64.

continue to depict the stronger one's identity and mission in Isaian terms and as such further confirm an Isaian reading of 1:7.

4.2.1 *Jesus Baptises with the Spirit (Mark 1:8)*

After the Baptist identifies Jesus as the stronger one, John then makes quite a significant Christological statement: 'I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit' (1:8). As many interpreters insist, this statement indicates why Jesus is stronger than John. But I would like to point out that 1:8 is more in line with Jesus's Isaian divine identity in Mark 1:3 than may be immediately apparent. It is quite telling that the bestowal or outpouring of God's Spirit is a particular aspect of eschatological restoration in Isaiah (32:15; 42:1; 44:3; 63:11)⁴⁸ and an act that 'exclusively belongs to God's domain in the OT'.⁴⁹ Thus, read in light of the good news about Jesus being 'written in Isaiah the prophet' (1:2a) and the quotation of Isaiah 40:3 in 1:3, Jesus's baptising with the Spirit recapitulates the Lord's bestowal of the Spirit in Isaiah.

4.2.2 *The Heavens Ripped Open and the Spirit Descends (Mark 1:10)*

As Jesus comes out of the waters of baptism, the heavens are 'ripped open' and the Spirit descends upon him (1:10). Mark's 'ripped open' (σχίζω) alludes to the Hebrew verb קָרַע (*qara'*, 'to tear open') in MT Isaiah 63:19b (ET 64:1).⁵⁰ Isaiah 63:19a maintains that the Babylonian crisis suggests that YHWH no longer 'rules' his people and this gives rise to the prayer of 63:19b: 'Oh that you (YHWH) would rip open the heavens and come down.' For Mark, then, the Spirit's descent on Jesus signals the time (καίρως, 1:15) of God's return in Jesus (1:3,7) to rule his people once again (1:15).

Scholars have pointed to Isaiah 11:1-2, 42:1, and 61:1-3, or various combinations thereof, as providing the backdrop to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus in Mark 1:10.⁵¹ In these texts, the Spirit of the Lord is said to come 'upon' (ἐπί, Isa 61:1; 42:1) or rest 'upon' (ἐνί) the figure in view (Isa 11:2). However, in the context of Mark's prologue, 1:10 particularly evokes Isaiah 61:1-2⁵² because, in addition to

48. See also Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; Joel 3:1-2 (ET 2:28-29).

49. Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 22.

50. Hays, *Gospels*, 18; Marcus, *Way*, 49-50; Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:52; Lane, *Mark*, 55; C. Maurer, 'σχίζω, σκίσμα, κτλ', *TDNT*, 7: 959-964, at 962. Contra Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:90-91.

51. For instance, Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:52 argues particularly for Isa 42:1, whereas Collins, *Mark*, 149 suggests Isa 61:1-2 and R. T. France, *Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 77, sees Isa 11:2, 42:1 and 61:1 at play in Mark 1:10c.

52. With Collins, *Mark*, 49.

the announcement by the ‘servant-prophet’⁵³ in verse 1 that ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon me’, the servant also states that the Lord ‘has anointed (ἔχρισεν) me’ and ‘has sent me “to proclaim good news” (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) to the captives ...’ (LXX Isa 61:1). For Mark, Jesus is indeed the ‘anointed one’ (χριστός, 1:1) *par excellence* whose appearing is associated with the ‘good news’ that was ‘written in Isaiah the prophet’ (1:1-2a), and in 1:14b, Jesus himself ‘proclaims the good news of God’ (κηρύσσω τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ). So again, with the echo of Isaiah 61:1 in Mark 1:10,⁵⁴ Mark illuminates the significance of Jesus by means of Isaiah. Finally, in Mark 1:11, God’s declaration to Jesus, ‘you are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased’, is likely a combination of LXX Psalm 2:7 (‘you are my son’) and the Hebrew of Isaiah 42:1⁵⁵ (MT רָצָתָהּ נַפְשִׁי, ‘my soul delights’),⁵⁶ which amounts to a combination of the notions of the messianic king and the Spirit-endowed servant of the Lord.

To conclude, in 1:8-11, Mark has associated Jesus, the stronger one, with activities (1:8) and events (1:10-11) that are most likely intended to evoke Isaiah. Thus, in 1:8-11, Mark continues to align Jesus and his messianic ministry with ‘Isaiah the prophet’ (1:2a).

4.2.3 The Testing Narrative (Mark 1:12-13): Jesus and the Isaian New Creation in the Wilderness

After the Spirit descends on Jesus (1:10) and God identifies him as his Son (1:11), the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness (1:12) where he comes face to face as it were with Satan (1:13). This indicates that the Holy Spirit is empowering Jesus in his conflict with Satan and his messianic mission.⁵⁷ Echoes of Isaiah again illuminate Jesus’s identity and mission.

53. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 504.

54. Mark’s echo of Isa 61:1 in Mark 1:10 is consistent with the new exodus context of Isa 40:1-11, e.g. release of captives (61:1), comfort to the mourners in Zion (vv. 2-3), rebuilding of Jerusalem and ruined cities (61:4). With the descent of the Spirit on Jesus, Mark locates him at the centre of such new exodus expectations as we find Isa 61, just as he did with the expectations raised by Isa 40:3 in 1:3.

55. See Collins, *Mark*, 150; Gnlika, *Markus*, 1:52; Guelich, *Mark 1:8-26*, 34.

56. It appears that Mark’s ‘you are my son’ (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου) corresponds to υἱός μου εἶ in LXX Ps 2:7 and Mark’s ‘in whom I am well pleased’ (ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα) appears to render the Hebrew נַפְשִׁי רָצָתָהּ in Isa 42:1.

57. On the function of the Spirit’s empowering of Jesus in Mark, see Cornelis Bennema, ‘The Referent of πνεῦμα in Mark 2:8 and 8:12 in Light of Early Jewish Traditions: A Study in Markan Anthropology’, *Neotestamentica* 52.1 (2018): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1353/neo.2018.0001>, and Shively, *Apocalyptic*, 77.

In Jesus's wilderness testing, Mark states that he was μετὰ τῶν θηρίων and that angels were ministering to him.⁵⁸ Most recently Gregory M. Barnhill has argued that 'given Mark's theme of cosmic apocalyptic eschatological conflict, the term "wild beasts" (θηρίων) likely refers to hostile demonic opposition to Jesus'.⁵⁹ Scholars who hold this view often cite Testament of Issachar 7:7, Testament of Benjamin 5:2, Testament of Naphtali 8:4, and Baruch 4:35 as support for associating the wild animals with demonic opposition to Jesus. However, there are several problems with this interpretation of 'wild animals' in 1:13b. First, appeal to the Testaments to illuminate Mark 1:13 is perilous.⁶⁰ Second, and more importantly, any interpretation of 'with wild animals' in Mark 1:13b must do justice to Mark's clear interpretative backdrop in Isaiah. Since Mark's prologue is anchored in 'Isaiah the prophet' (1:2a), set within the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3 and the new exodus promises in Isaiah 40:1-10, it is most likely that Isaiah 11:6-16; 35:8-10; 43:2-7, 14-17, 20; and 65:9, 17-22 shed the most interpretative light on Mark 1:13b.⁶¹

58. That Jesus was 'served' (διακονέω) by angels suggests that they sustained him in the wilderness.

59. Gregory M. Barnhill, 'Jesus as the Spirit-Filled Warrior and Mark's Functional Pneumatology', *CBQ* 82.4 (2020): 605-627, at 611, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2020.0130>. On this interpretation, see also Shively, *Apocalyptic*, 158; Collins, *Mark*, 151-153; Jeffrey B. Gibson, 'Jesus' Wilderness Temptation according to Mark', *JSNT* 53 (1994): 3-33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9401605301>, at 31; Watts, *New Exodus*, 118; Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion*, 2nd ed., *SNTSMS 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8-9.

60. Richard Bauckham, 'Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age', in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3-21, at 13 has rightly shown that the contexts of T. Iss. 7:7, T. Benj. 5:2, and T. Naph. 8:4 do not demonstrate that the animals are in league with the devil or are demonic. Moreover, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs is now 'widely regarded as a work originally written in a Jewish context from the Second Temple period but [which], in its present form, has been thoroughly reworked by Christians so as to become a Christian text' (Daniel M. Gurtner, *Introducing the Pseudepigrapha of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 209). See also Susan Docherty, *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period* (London: SPCK, 2014), 94. Those who cite Bar 4:35 as evidence that 'wild beasts are associated with demons in Jewish apocalyptic texts' (see Shively, *Apocalyptic*, 158 and Barnhill, 'Spirit-Filled Warrior', 611) must reckon with the fact that there is no indication in Bar 4:15 that the 'demons' (δαίμόνια) that inhabit the desolate cities in which Israel was enslaved are animals of any kind.

61. Shively, *Apocalyptic*, 158, n.9 cites Isa 13:20-22 and 34:13-14 as evidence for the wild animals in Mark 1:13 being hostile. In these passages, dangerous creatures roam the deserted wilderness places. But these uninhabited wilderness places are the result of YHWH's laying waste to Babylon (Isa 13) and Edom (Isa 34) in judgement. Mark's prologue, however, makes use of the wilderness context to evoke expectations of salvation, not

These passages feature Israel's new exodus restoration in combination with the renewal of creation,⁶² which includes animals that are normally associated with danger. Isaiah 35 and 43 offer the most affinities with Mark 1:13 because of their explicit wilderness settings (35:1,2,6; 43:19-20). In Isaiah 35, the 'wilderness' is transformed into a lush paradise as a result of YHWH's coming (35:1-4) on his wilderness 'way' to redeem Israel and bring his people back to the renewed Zion (35:8-10). On this wilderness highway there will be neither dangerous animals 'nor any of the evil wild beasts' (τῶν θηρίων τῶν πονηρῶν) will 'come up on it' (ἐπ' αὐτήν, v. 9). Rather, only 'the redeemed shall walk on it' (v. 9) to the restored Zion (v. 10). Similarly, in Isaiah 43, the 'wild animals of the field' (τὰ θηρία τοῦ ἀγροῦ, v. 20) will praise YHWH in the context of the renewed 'wilderness' that is now a place of lifegiving sustenance for the animals and God's redeemed people (Isa 43:20). With Isaiah as the controlling background in Mark's prologue, it is far more likely that the assertion that Jesus was 'in the wilderness ... with wild animals' (1:13) evokes the aforementioned Isaian new creation texts.⁶³ This suggests that despite the conflict with Satan, Jesus will inaugurate the Isaian new exodus and new creation in his ministry,⁶⁴ a ministry that coheres with the programmatic quotation of Isaiah 40:3 in Mark 1:3.

4.3 The Stronger One, Conflict in the Wilderness, and God's Kingly Reign (Mark 1:14-15)

The conflict between Satan and Jesus in the wilderness communicates more than just that Jesus is the messianic agent of the Isaian new exodus and new creation.

judgement. This suggests that other passages such as Isa 35:1-10, 41:17-20, 43:14-20, and 51:2,9-20, in which the wilderness is renewed as part of God's transformation of creation and Israel's eschatological renewal, provide a better fit with Mark's prologue and Mark 1:13 within it.

62. In Isa 11:6-8, a renewed creation is linked to the promise of Israel's gathering and restoration (11:11-13), understood as a kind of new exodus deliverance 'out of the land of Egypt' (11:16). With regard to the renewed creation in Isa 65:17-25, note the implied allusion to the renewal of Zion and Israel in 65:9,19.

63. Susan Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 259 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 15; Boring, *Mark*, 48; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 168; Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 38-39; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:95-96; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 68. Gnika, *Markus*, 1:57 rightly points to the vision of the new age in 2 Bar 73:6 in which the 'wild beasts' will serve the renewed humanity. 2 Bar 73:6, which may be an echo of Isa 11:6, shows that in the late first-century apocalyptic Jewish tradition, with which Mark has many affinities, the arrival of the new age is accompanied by the transformation of dangerous wild animals into animals that now serve human beings.

64. For instance, the miracles of Jesus in Mark 2:3-12; 7:32-35; 8:22-25; 9:25-26; 10:46-52 are reminiscent of Isa 35:5-6.

In Mark's narrative sequence, Jesus enters into conflict with Satan as the Lord of Isaiah 40:3 (Mark 1:3), the stronger one (1:7), and the Spirit-anointed servant-son of God (1:10-11). Immediately after the conflict in 1:13, Jesus proclaims the 'good news' of God's kingly reign (1:14-15). I argue that this sequence strongly suggests that the 'stronger one' in 1:7 and the reference to God's kingly reign in 1:15 form an intertextual link with the Lord's coming 'with strength' (μετὰ ἰσχύος) and 'kingly authority' (μετὰ κυριείας) in Isaiah 40:10a.⁶⁵ As YHWH moves through his wilderness way to redeem his people by the exertion of his strength and kingly authority (Isa 40:3,10a), so Jesus embarks on his wilderness way (Mark 1:3) as the stronger one (1:7) who announces the kingly reign of God and, as we shall see below, brings this kingly reign to bear to deliver people from the cosmic enemy.

The narrative sequence in the prologue mentioned above (Jesus as the Lord on his way; Jesus as the stronger one; Jesus enters conflict with Satan; Jesus emerges as the proclaimer of God's kingly reign) is not self-interpreting within the prologue. Rather, the explanation of the implied plotline of the sequence, and particularly the conflict part of it (1:13), must await Mark 3:22-27.⁶⁶ Jesus's identity as the Isaian stronger one (1:7), his conflict with Satan (1:13), and God's kingly reign (1:15) return in 3:22-27, where they are further explicated.⁶⁷ Insofar as 3:22-27 functions this way vis-à-vis Mark's prologue, it further justifies the main point of this article that the designation for Jesus in 1:7, 'the stronger one', is intended to echo YHWH's unique 'strength' in Isaiah 40:10 and elsewhere in Isaiah (particularly 49:24-26, as we shall see below).

5. Jesus as the Isaian Stronger One and God's Kingly Reign in Mark 3:22-27

5.1 Jesus as the Strong(er) One of Isaiah 49:24-26 in Mark 3:27

In Mark 3:23-27, Jesus defends himself against the scribes' claim that his exorcisms show that he is controlled by Beelzebul (Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει), the 'ruler

65. Jesus's preaching of the good news of the kingdom (1:14b-15) also recalls the preaching of the good news that God has come to reign as king in Isa 52:7 and recalls the one who is anointed by the Spirit to preach the good news (πνεῦμα κυρίου ... ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι) of the end of Israel's captivity (κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν) in Isa 61:1.

66. Contra Guelich (*Mark 1-8:26*, 177) who judges that 'it is unclear how either the narrator would imply or the reader infer a connection between the controversy narrative here [3:22-27] and the temptation scene'.

67. It is important to point out that the divine Spirit who descends on Jesus and casts him into conflict with Satan in 1:10,12 returns in 3:29-30 and further points to the connections between 1:12-13 and 3:22-30.

of the demons' (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων) (3:22). However, Mark's prologue has already ruled out the claim of 3:30, 'he has an *unclean* spirit' (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει). In 1:12, 'the Spirit' (τὸ πνεῦμα), who is also the *Holy* Spirit (πνεῦμα ἅγιον) in 1:8, empowers Jesus in his encounters with Satan and Satan's kingdom.

Jesus's parabolic saying in 3:27 interprets what is really going on in his exorcisms: when Jesus confronts the 'strong man' (ὁ ἰσχυρός) Satan in his exorcisms, he is entering Satan's house in order to bind (δήσῃ) him so that Satan's 'goods' (σκεύη), human beings⁶⁸ whom he holds in bondage, can be released from his power. It is most likely that 3:27 echoes Isaiah 49:24-26⁶⁹ so that Jesus is portrayed in 3:27 as the stronger one, YHWH who overcomes the 'strong one' (ἰσχύων), Babylon, in Isaiah 49:24-26 (especially v. 25). Contrary to appearances, YHWH has not forsaken his exiled people (Isa 49:14). As he has promised (cf. Isa 40), YHWH will deliver his people from exile (49:16-21) and as Isaiah 49:24-26 makes clear, YHWH will do so by overpowering the strong man Babylon in order to take his 'spoils' (σκῦλα) and rescue the 'captives' (49:24). Only the Lord, 'the strong one of Jacob' (MT 49:26),⁷⁰ could do such a thing. Thus, Mark's echo of Isaiah 49:24-26 in Mark 3:27 suggests that Jesus plays out the script of YHWH, the stronger one in Isaiah 49:24-26.

5.2 Jesus the Stronger One (Mark 1:7; 3:27) and the Clash of Two Kingdoms

In Mark 3:22,24, Satan is said to be the 'ruler' or 'lord' (ὁ ἄρχων) of the demons' (3:22), the one who rules over 'a kingdom' (βασιλεία, 3:24). The appearance of βασιλεία in 3:24 recalls βασιλεία in 1:15, which is the first and only use of the term before 3:24. Furthermore, 3:22-27, as we shall see below, reveals what was only implied in the prologue in terms of the connections between Jesus the stronger one (1:7), the wilderness conflict (1:13), and God's kingly reign (1:14b-15), namely, that 1:13 points to Jesus's exorcisms as the clash of two kingdoms, a clash that results in the overthrow of Satan's kingdom and lordship. Mark 3:27 makes clear that Jesus the stronger one does not merely announces the kingdom reign of God (1:15) but also actively brings God's kingly authority to bear on Satan's dominion over people (3:27). The parable of 3:27 reveals that Jesus's battles with Satan in

68. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc*, 2nd ed. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1966), 74 and Best, *Temptation*, 13.

69. See Watts, *New Exodus*, 146-151; Shively, *Apocalyptic*, 73-75; Gnilka, *Markus*, 1:150; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 283; W. Grundmann, 'ἰσχύω, κτλ', *TDNT* 3:397-402. Lagrange, *Saint Marc*, 74 mentions the connection in passing.

70. MT Isa 49:26 is explicit that YHWH is the 'strong one of Jacob', whereas LXX 49:26 reads 'the Lord ... who aids the strength of Jacob' (ἰσχύος Ἰακωβ). Nevertheless, it is implied in LXX 49:24-26 that the Lord is the strong(er) one who overpowers the strong man.

his exorcisms signal ‘the end of the dominion of Satan ... and the arrival of the dominion of God’.⁷¹ Surely Mark intends his readers to link the first and only other appearance of the adjective ἰσχυρός in 1:7 with Jesus as the stronger one in 3:27⁷² as he did with the appearances of βασιλεία in 1:15 and 3:24.

These verbal and thematic links between 1:7,13,15 and 3:22-27 indicate that Mark intended his readers to connect Jesus’s identity and mission as the stronger one in 1:7,13,15 with his identity and mission as the stronger one in 3:22-27. If this is correct, then Jesus’s *Isaian* divine identity as the stronger Lord of Isaiah 49:24-26 in Mark 3:27 functions as the interpretative counterpart to Jesus’s identity as the Lord of Isaiah 40, who comes on his way (Isa 40:3 in Mark 1:3) ‘with strength and kingly authority’ (the echo of Isa 40:10a in Mark 1:7,15). I maintain therefore that Mark 1:7 in its context (1:3-15) and 3:27 in its context (3:22-27) are mutually interpretative in regard to Jesus’s identity and mission.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that when the Baptist’s identification of Jesus as ‘the one the stronger than I’ (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου) in Mark 1:7 is read within the context of the prologue and the high volume of Isaiah within it, an *Isaian* divine identity Christology suggests itself in 1:7. As the herald in Isaiah 40:9 announces good news to Zion because the Lord ‘is coming’ (ἔρχεται) to save his people ‘with strength’ and ‘kingly authority’ (μετὰ ἰσχύος ... μετὰ κυριείας, Isa 40:10a), so Mark announces ‘the good news about Jesus Messiah’ (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), written in Isaiah (1:1-2a), because Jesus has arrived as the Lord (Mark 1:3; Isa 40:3), the stronger one (Mark 1:7,15; Isa 40:10a), to wield his strength for his people.

The above interpretation of Mark 1:7 coheres with Mark’s Christology as evident both before (1:2b-3) and after (1:8-15) this verse. Before John the Baptist arrives on the scene, Mark provides the interpretative backdrop for his narrative about Jesus. In Mark 1:2b and 1:3, Jesus is aligned with Lord of Malachi 3:1 and more importantly with the Lord of Isaiah 40:3. John, as the voice in the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3, prepares the way of the Lord as the way of Jesus. After John baptises in preparation for the coming of the Lord of Isaiah 40:3, he identifies Jesus as the ‘stronger one’ (1:7). Mark has not only identified Jesus and his mission by means

71. Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 282.

72. Cilliers Breytenbach, ‘Metaphor in Argument: The Beelzebul-Controversy in the Gospel According to Mark’, *ZNW* 110.2 (2019): 142, <https://doi.org/10.1515/znw-2019-0010>, and Marcus, *Mark*, 283 recognise the connection between stronger one in 1:17 and 3:27, but neither draws any Christological conclusions from it.

of the quotation of Isaiah 40:3 but also by means of an allusion to Isaiah 40:10a so that Jesus, as the Lord who comes on his wilderness way (Mark 1:3; Isa 40:3), does so as the strong(er) one (Mark 1:7; Isa 40:10a).

This Isaian interpretation of 'stronger one' in Mark 1:7 is finally confirmed in 3:22-27. It was pointed out that the following themes of Mark's prologue resurface in 3:22-27: Jesus as the Lord of Isaiah (1:3), the stronger one (1:7), conflict with Satan (1:13), and God's kingly reign (1:15). What was implied in the prologue is made clear in 3:22-27: in his confrontations with Satan, Jesus, as the strong Lord of Isaiah 49:24-26, brings the divine strength (3:27; 1:7) and kingdom authority (3:22,24; 1:15) to bear on Satan and his kingdom. These plot connections between 3:27 and Mark 1:7 reveal that both texts are mutually interpretative: in Mark 3:27, Jesus is identified with the stronger Lord of Isaiah 49; in Mark 1:7, he is identified with Lord who comes with divine strength in Isaiah 40:10a.

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