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Rel 350: Jesus and the Gospels

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Jesus in the Temple: *John 2:13-22 with Mark 11: 15-19*

Passages from John 2:13-22 and Mark 11:15-29 narrate a prominent scene of the Bible in which Jesus verbally and physically reacts to the public's corruption of the Holy Temple. Both accounts display significant similarities in wording and meaning, from Jesus' aggressive reaction to what he witnesses on the Temple grounds to his verbal attacks against the public crowd. Differences, however, become more pertinent when comparing the texts as we see that the Johannine account exhibits the divine standing of Jesus while the Markan account presents Jesus according to the Messianic Secret. Differences may have resulted from the fact that the Johannine and Markan accounts were written by different authors for different audiences in relatively different time periods, and as such, it becomes almost inherent that we encounter different interpretations of Jesus. The Christian Prophetic Rhetorolect belief system is predominant in both the Markan and Johannine accounts of Jesus in the Temple as seen through argumentative texture; however this line of similarity falls short due to the different intents and purposes of each author. Through the use of inner texture, John argumentatively asserts Jesus' divinity through progression patterns and narrational elaborations including the roles of the disciples in the scene. In contrast, the Jesus of the Markan account enacts the Messianic Secret, interestingly, through progression patterns that lack significant elaboration as a result of their shortness in length.

At first glance, one sees stunning similarities between the Markan and Johannine accounts of Jesus in the Temple. Some brief examples include Jesus publicly rebuking the sellers in the Temple, and in Mark the buyers as well, through references to and recitation of Holy Scripture as seen in John 2:13-17 and Mark 11:15-17 and physically demonstrating his anger such as overturning tables as seen in John 2:14 and Mark 11:15. All in all, it becomes quite apparent that Jesus acts aggressively in both contexts. In addition to these parallels mentioned

above, both John and Mark present a more dominant and overlapping similarity of their interpretation of Jesus as a prophet. Interestingly enough, the inner texture used by the authors that were purposely used to differentiate the texts can possibly be used to bond these passages through a similar rhetorical belief system seen in their respective versions of Jesus: Christian Prophetic Rhetorolect. Vernon K. Robbins in *The Invention of Christian Discourse* defines the main aim of this rhetorolect system as a “confrontation with a purpose of holding people responsible to God’s will” (219).

Through proper dissection of the Scripture, we will be able to see the argumentative devices used by each of the authors in Table 2 listed in the appendix. Vernon K. Robbins, in his earlier and more foundational work for his future studies *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, states that argumentative texture “investigates multiple kinds of inner reasoning in the discourse” (21) and further goes on to identify “assertions, reasons, opposites, analogies, examples and citations of ancient written testimony as the major argumentative devices people use” (21). It is quite evident that Jesus viewed a market place on Temple grounds as a clear violation of God’s will as noted by Jesus’ response in the openings of both accounts. In doing so, we see in the workings of inner texture that Jesus “confronts” the people through physical demonstrations and verbal accusations. In John 2:15 and Mark 11:15-16 we see Jesus depicted as being “authorized by God to confront large groups of people with...actions that communicated God’s will for their present time” (Robbins 2009, 221). Assertions do not have to come by word of mouth but can be equally effective in demonstrations as well. By “making a whip,” “pouring out coins,” “overturning tables” as seen in John 2: 14-15, and “driv[ing] out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple” as cited in Mark 11:15, we see Jesus physically displaying his discontent and frustration with the lack of responsibility maintained at the Temple. Although I agree with Vernon K. Robbins’s essential idea of prophets receiving messages from God through visions and dreams, a particular distinguishing character of these specially appointed beings, I would argue, is that these messages can also be understood to be received from the Scriptures themselves and the fulfillment of those Scriptures as the paper will later show.

In addition to physical demonstrations, Jesus verbally “confronts” the people by directly accusing the people of their negative actions and thinking. Vernon K. Robbins believes that this too is a common characteristic of Christian Prophetic Rhetorolect “by accusing people of not doing what they have been told to do or doing something they know they should not do” (Robbins 2009, 222). As such, “negative assertions” are present especially in Mark 11:17 where Jesus tells the crowd that the Temple should be “a house of prayer for all nations” and not “a den of robbers” in which he directly blames the crowd by using a simple yet threatening word “you”. The major argumentative devices, however, that both John and Mark use throughout are citations of ancient Scripture (refer to Table 2). Dr. Robbins notes that the “Hebrew Bible, therefore is a rich source for stories about prophets and sayings by prophets” (222) and so, in a sense, Jesus is depicted as a prophet taking into account that these messages were used by previous prophets, prophecies from scriptures which are explicitly mentioned in the Markan account and the allusions to the Holy Scripture made by the disciples several times in the Johannine account. While the Jesus in the Markan account explicitly places himself in a prophetic role, the Johannine account can only display this effect through the intervention of the author, by using the disciples to reference Holy Scripture in light of Jesus’ presence and actions in the Temple.

Nevertheless, these previously used messages can be applied again, which in a sense places the character into the position and role of a prophet, and can be just as effective in the context of this situation by perhaps the will of God. For example, John 2:17 presents the verse “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” which is quoted from Psalm 69:9 and in Mark 11:17 “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’” quoted from Isaiah 56:7. In a way, the act of physically removing objects of commerce (e.g., tables, doves, and coins) and verbally confronting the people with these statements from Scripture, as shown in Mark, can be seen as cleansing the Temple of its defilement. Jesus is fulfilling and maintaining the will of the Scripture as he perceives it, a view that the author of this account further propagates through the recitations of Scripture. The elaboration of the text seen in John further supports the idea of Christian Prophetic Rhetorolect. John 2:18 describes a unique segment of the Johannine version and in this account Jesus makes an analogy of the Temple as his body, according to the narrator. This analogy, however, is more

distinctly seen as a sign. The sign is noted as a future message which is later realized and understood by the disciples in John 2:22.

John and Mark, ultimately however, had different interpretations of Jesus which are exhibited by the contrasting progressive as well as argumentative textures and patterns in the texts. John explicitly refers to Jesus as the Messiah and is very eager to make this assertion, while the Jesus of the Markan account lives by the Messianic Secret. Progression, which inevitably blends with the narrational and opening-closing components of John's account, provides a strong case for John's assertion. However, the paper will focus rather on the disruptions of the progression in the text (refer to Table 1), rather than to the more simple consistency exhibited in Mark. The first disruption in progression is seen in John 2:21: "But he was speaking of the temple of his body." In this example the disturbance in progression is linked to narrative texture. Vernon K. Robbins states that "Narrative textures reside in voices through which the words in texts speak" (Robbins 1996, 15). In this case, we see that the narrator feels the need to explain the significance of the Temple, therefore disrupting the flow and natural progression of the story by adding a "side note" at the end. This, however, does become an effective tool in asserting his view of his explicitly divine Messianic Jesus and making it more apparent to the readers.

The next example is present in John 2:22: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." The disruption in progression here is linked with the role of the disciples as well as the opening, middle, and closing of the text to further assert Jesus' divine standing. John 2:22 sets a time context independent of the previous verse. The closing, in a sense, becomes its own individual entity from the beginning and the middle. From the Jew's demanding of a sign from the present alive Jesus, we see that in the next verse we have disciples reflecting on this point after Jesus' resurrection. This, however, purposefully uses the disciples as "rememberers" and becomes a special means the Johannine account uses to exhibit Jesus' divine powers and identity. Interestingly, the disciples did not understand the meaning of the temple until after Jesus' resurrection. It is only after logical connections and deductions that the disciples

remember that the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus. These “reflections” by the disciples, although not progressive internally in the text, do provide an important reminder for the readers.

On the other hand, we see that the consistency of the progression in Mark helps the readers to view Jesus in a similar way as in John. The consistency, seen in Table 1, places a restriction on the text in that the author cannot simply add “side notes” as seen in John. Key words and phrases such as “Then they came...,” “And he entered...” (Mark 11:15), “When the chief priests...” (Mark 11:18), and “And when evening came...” (Mark 11:19) further support the natural flow of progression. We see a progressing narration without any sort of “break ins” to confirm Jesus’ Messianic position. To put it simply, Mark has no intent of presenting a Jesus whom the characters in the scene can identify as the Messiah. The absence of the middle, in this context, now is understandable when realizing that the middle would simply be redundant if the author had no use for it, unlike John who utilizes the middle to further assert his interpretation of Jesus. Lastly, instead of a definite closing as in John, the closing present in Mark in actuality presents a “new beginning” for another story without any final conclusions to Jesus’ identity (see Robbins 1996, 19-20). At the end of the Markan passage, we are left with no distinct impression of Jesus as a Messiah but rather a set up for the next story coming in Mark 11:19: “And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.”

John also uses argumentative texture not only to support but also to have us conform to his view of Jesus. Through reasoning, as mentioned to be a common argumentative device, John intends to explicitly display Jesus’ divine identity to both the characters and to the readers as well. The narrational elaboration present only in the Johannine account serves this purpose. The “side notes” added in by John present more than the purposes mentioned in previous arguments. It seems that John is attempting to obtain enough credibility to be believed by the readers of the text itself. Without a doubt, the Jews in the scene as well as the audience reading the scene would most likely not have guessed that the Temple actually refers to Jesus’ body without the help of John himself. John purposefully explains and actually has us slowly yet unknowingly conform to his interpretations by having the narrator translate the text for us as in John 2:21: “But he was

speaking of the temple of his body.” Through reasoning, we can imagine that John knows and understands the Scripture better than the readers, and as such we place our trust in him and his beliefs. In the last verse John 2:22, John writes how the disciples came to realize Jesus’ Messianic identity by understanding that the Temple was metaphorically the body only when Jesus had been resurrected. We must remember that this segment of the passage is not part of Jesus’ scene in the temple but rather an additional statement of reflection added in by John. However, just like the disciples “believed” in Jesus and the words he had spoken, we too unknowingly consider it reasonable to believe in John’s interpretation of Jesus as we see this “side note” to be just as valid as the rest of the story in the passage.

When looking at the differences between Mark’s and John’s presentation of this scene, we can note that each gospel presents the author’s interpretation of Jesus himself. As Daniel J. Scholz of *Jesus in the Gospels and Acts* confirms: “Each Gospel has its own slant on Jesus: Mark sees Jesus as the suffering Messiah, Matthew portrays him as the new Moses, Luke presents Jesus as the universal savior, and John speaks of Jesus as the word made flesh” (158). The gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as the suffering Messiah and in that context we can see why Mark presents Jesus in a different light than the Johannine account. Jesus in Mark is seen as a character in the confines of the Messianic Secret with intentions to uphold God’s will but who is horribly victimized by the chief priests as implied by John 2:22; we are able to see a prophetic Jesus from the beginning to the end. In other words, the Markan Jesus paints himself as a character who fought for what was right but was shunned and destroyed by the characters of evil, illustrating a clear prophetic element to the text. On the other hand, John portrays Jesus as “the divine word made flesh” and, as such, we can see why John uses inner texture present in many of his textual elaborations to assert his view of Jesus on his own. Although the Precreation Rhetorolect belief system is present in John as noted by Vernon K. Robbins, the paper shows that in fact Christian Prophetic Rhetorolect expresses itself equally if not predominantly in the Johannine account, as well by the clear usage of argumentative devices used profusely in the text.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Comparing the Texts in Relation to the Messianic Secret

| | |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">John 2:13-22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OPENING</p> <p>OPENING: 13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.</p> <p>MIDDLE: 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my father’s house a market-place!’</p> <p>CLOSING: 17 <u>HIS DISCIPLES REMEMBERED THAT IT WAS WRITTEN, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’.</u></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Mark 11:15-19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OPENING</p> <p>OPENING: 15 THEN THEY CAME TO JERUSALEM.</p> <p>MIDDLE: AND HE ENTERED the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.</p> <p>CLOSING: 17 He was teaching and saying, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”?’ But you have made it a den of robbers.’</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">MIDDLE</p> <p>18 The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ 19 Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ 20 The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ 21 BUT HE WAS SPEAKING OF THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">MIDDLE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*NO MIDDLE PRESENT IN TEXT*</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSING</p> <p>22 <u>AFTER HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, HIS DISCIPLES REMEMBERED THAT HE HAD SAID THIS; AND THEY BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURE AND THE WORD that Jesus had spoken.</u></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSING</p> <p>18 AND WHEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. 19 AND WHEN EVENING CAME, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.</p> |

Legend

All Caps: Progressive Elements in Text (including both consistencies and inconsistencies)

Underline: Roles of the Disciples

Bold: Notable Differences between John and Mark

Table 2: Case for Prophetic Rhetorolect in both Mark and John

| | |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">John 2:13-22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OPENING</p> <p>OPENING: 13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.</p> <p>MIDDLE: 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. 15 <u>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.</u> 16 <u>He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my father’s house a market-place!’</u></p> <p>CLOSING: 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Mark 11:15-19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OPENING</p> <p>OPENING: 15 Then they came to Jerusalem.</p> <p>MIDDLE: <u>And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.</u></p> <p>CLOSING: 17 He was teaching and saying, ‘Is it not written, “MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS”?’ But you have made it a den of robbers.’</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">MIDDLE</p> <p>18 The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ 19 <i>Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’</i> 20 The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ 21 <i>But he was speaking of the temple of his body.</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">MIDDLE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">No middle present in text.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSING</p> <p>22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSING</p> <p>18 And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.</p> |

Argumentative Devices

Underline: Assertions

Italicized: Analogy

Bold: Reasons

Font in Red: Opposites

All Caps: Citations of Ancient Written Testimony

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