

DISCERNING ‘THE SPIRIT’ IN MK. 2:8; 8:12 AND 14:38

By Larry J. Perkins, PhD

In many English translations of Mark’s Gospel the expression τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ found at 2:8 and 8:12 is rendered as “in his spirit,” an adverbial phrase that modifies an adverbial participle referencing a response that Jesus experiences. Similarly in 14:38 Jesus comments to the three disciples accompanying him in Gethsemane that τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής. The contrast between “spirit” and “flesh” in this text usually results in English translations such as “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (NIV), referencing an element of human psychology, not the Holy Spirit. However, are these renderings correct? Does this writer elsewhere employ πνεῦμα to describe an immaterial part of a human being? If not, what warrant does the reader have in this narrative not to render these occurrences as references to the Holy Spirit? This paper makes the argument that the writer of Mark’s Gospel always references the Holy Spirit or “unclean spirit/s” when he uses the term πνεῦμα. In 2:8 and 8:12 the writer describes the operation of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and similarly in 14:38 πνεῦμα refers to the Holy Spirit. In other words, in the Markan narrative there is no context in which πνεῦμα refers to some segment of human psychology, but it always references a supernatural being, either the Holy Spirit or an “unclean spirit.”¹

The author of the Gospel of Mark uses the noun πνεῦμα twenty-three times. In most cases he distinguishes carefully between references to “the Holy Spirit” (πνεῦμα is modified by ἅγιον four times)² and “unclean spirits” (πνεῦμα is modified by ἀκάθαρτον eleven times)³ or “a spirit that makes a person speechless” (πνεῦμα is modified by ἄλαλον three times).⁴ However, there are three additional uses that

¹ The argument in this article assumes that this Gospel is written first among the canonical Gospels. A working thesis is that a Christian leader wrote it in Rome c. 64-67 CE. He addresses his composition primarily to a non-Jewish audience. His primary purpose is to explain the identity, purpose and significance of “Jesus Messiah, Son of God” (1:1) whose presence is τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, despite his rejection by Jewish leadership and his execution by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, who was acting on behalf of Rome. I presume that this writer is aware of the essential features of the Christian gospel that people such as Paul and Peter proclaimed in the Eastern Roman Empire c. 40-63 CE. These are common assumptions in the scholarly literature that explores Mark’s Gospel. A much earlier article by Schoemaker “The use of πνεῦμα and of πνεῦμα,” *Journal of Biblical Studies* 23(1904), 13-65 discusses the use of πνεῦμα in the Classical Writings, the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament.

² 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11. Context makes clear that πνεῦμα also refers to the Holy Spirit in 1:10, 12.

³ 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:17; 7:25; 9:25. In several contexts an “unclean spirit” also is described as a δαιμόνιον (3:15, 22; 7:26, 30), indicating the writer regards them as essentially synonymous. δαιμόνια also occurs at 16:17.

⁴ 9:17, 25. In between these descriptions the term τὸ πνεῦμα occurs once with reference to this same spirit (9:20). The narrator also describes it as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον in 9:25, indicating the interchangeability of these terms.

have no additional modifier and context has to clarify its meaning. Two of these refer to Jesus (2:8; 8:12) through a third person possessive pronoun and one occurs in a nominal clause expressed by Jesus: τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής (14:38).

The Markan narrator's understanding of the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (13:11; ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ 1:8; εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον 3:29; ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ 12:36) probably reflects that of the early church as expressed in previous writings (e.g., Pauline letters at Rom. 5:5; 14:17; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Thess. 4:8) and the Septuagint.⁵ The narrator refers to a spiritual being, related to God himself and acting to fulfill God's purposes. Apart from 12:36 and 13:11, this Spirit always is associated with Jesus in some way. Either the Spirit acts with Jesus directly, or Jesus proleptically indicates how this Spirit on his behalf will affect his followers after his death. The placement of an adjective in the second attributive position sometimes in Greek expresses emphasis.⁶ The writer's audience probably would hear it as "the Spirit who is holy," or "the Spirit, the holy one."

When the narrator refers to other spirits, the word order invariably is τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον or πνεῦμα ἄλαλον (9:17). The exception is 9:25 which reads τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα. Perhaps the shift to direct speech has influenced the word order. However, in 5:8 Jesus addresses τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον in direct speech and uses the second attributive position for the adjective. In the Markan narrative noun followed by adjective word order is not unusual.⁷ The phrase "unclean spirit" reflects a Jewish perspective. When such spiritual beings affect humans, they make a person ritually unclean, a change that might not be perceived by other humans immediately.⁸ The narrator also describes these spiritual beings as δαιμόνια, a Greek term that normally refers to the 'souls' of dead people who affect living humans, often in deleterious ways.⁹ Jesus is accused by

⁵ Consider Gen. 41:38 ὃς ἔχει πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ; Ex. 31:3 πνεῦμα θεῖου σοφίας; Num. 23:6 ἐγενήθη πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπ' αὐτῷ; 2Κί. 23:2 πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐλάλησεν ἐν ἐμοί; Ps. 50:11 τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιόν σου μὴ ἀντανέλης; Wisd. 9:17 ἔπεμψας τὸ ἅγιόν σου πνεῦμα; Isa. 63:10 τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ; Dan. 5:12; 6:3(4).

⁶ However, in Hebrew the adjective regularly follows its noun without expressing any emphasis. If this narrator is employing a Jewish formulation, then it might reflect a Hebraic word order. Whether people in this narrator's intended audience would be aware of Hebrew word order conventions is debatable.

⁷ For example, in the story of the stilling of the storm (4:35-41), in every case where a noun is modified directly by an adjective, the adjective follows (vv. 37, 39, 41).

⁸ In 1:23 "a person in an unclean spirit" participated in the synagogue worship service in Capernaum in which Jesus teaches. It is plain from the narrative (v.23, 27) that others in the service have no awareness of this person's condition until "the unclean spirit" shouts out a challenge to Jesus.

⁹ Frederick William Danker, reviser and editor. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 210-11 [BDAG]. See entries for δαιμόνιον and δαίμων.

some Jewish religious leaders as “having Beelzeboul” who is identified as ὁ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων (3:22) and this being gives him the authority to exorcise τὰ δαιμόνια. However, Jesus claims his power comes from the Holy Spirit (3:29-30) and his interactions with “unclean spirits” never make him ritually unclean.¹⁰ Therefore, this narrator can use both Jewish and Greek terms to refer to spiritual beings that affect humans in bad ways.

The narrator seems to be purposeful in his choice of terms to describe the Holy Spirit and unclean spirits in his narrative. While they reflect ways in which early Christian leaders described such spiritual agents, his use of these expressions in his narrative serves his primary purpose, i.e., to argue that Jesus of Nazareth is the anticipated Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. The engagement of the Holy Spirit with him and his subsequent, authoritative treatment of unclean spirits provide evidence that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and Son of God. In the mission beyond the cross and resurrection his followers, particularly the Twelve, will continue to have the resources of the Holy Spirit (1:8; 13:11) and be able to deal authoritatively with δαιμόνια (if 16:17 is original to this Gospel narrative).

References to the Holy Spirit occur primarily in Mark 1-3 and 12-13. The prophecy that forms the center of John’s proclamation announces the coming of a figure who βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (1:8). John contrasts this with his focus on βάπτισμα ὕδατι. In some way this distinction serves to show why John asserts that Jesus, the one coming, is ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου [John] (1:7). In the following narrative John does no miracles or exorcisms, whereas Jesus’ mission is replete with them. These miraculous actions along with his new revelations combine to demonstrate that Jesus is “stronger” and become the means by which he “immerses in Holy Spirit.” The contrast between the function of the dative nouns ὕδατι...ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ is marked by the preposition ἐν.¹¹ John immerses “by water,” indicating means or instrument, whereas Jesus immerses “in Holy Spirit,” indicating a spatial or locative sense, i.e., “in the realm of Holy Spirit/of the Holy Spirit.”¹²

¹⁰ Jesus shares this “power” with the Twelve so that they can ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια (3:15).

¹¹ Not all scholars agree that the writer intended to indicate a difference in meaning through the use of the preposition ἐν. For example, R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 72 argues that “if the latter dative [ὕδατι] is to be understood as instrumental, then the ἐν should probably be taken in a similar sense (though what that means in the case of the Holy Spirit is not immediately obvious).” He observes that “the only passages in the NT which use the phrase βάπτισμα ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ...are those which contrast this baptism with water baptism as practiced by John....” (73). This anomaly suggests that the writer intends some meaningful distinction.

¹² This use of ἐν with a supernatural being also occurs in references to “unclean spirits” (Mk. 1:23; 5:2).

πνεῦμα ἅγιον is anarthrous, perhaps suggesting a qualitative sense.¹³ It is also the case that the article can also be omitted with this noun, even when it is definite, after prepositions.¹⁴ Given the explicit parallelism with the anarthrous ὕδατι in the first clause, the qualitative usage is probably intended. However, John’s prophecy is to be understood, the narrator links Jesus, i.e., the coming one, with “Holy Spirit” and presumably this marks Jesus as special. The use of ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ in 12:36 relates to the prophetic inspiration of David as he witnesses to a descendant whom Yahweh will make victorious (quoting Ps. 110:1 (109:1LXX)).

Jesus’ capacity to immerse humans “in Holy Spirit” arises from the descent of this Spirit “into him,”¹⁵ presumably from heaven (1:10) at his own baptism. His experience of John’s baptism “by water” becomes the occasion when Jesus is filled with the Spirit (“into him”) and this enables him in turn to immerse others “in Holy Spirit.” If εἰς αὐτόν is original, then the Markan narrative seems to indicate that the Holy Spirit is integrally linked with Jesus in his period of ministry. This is not a one-time event in Jesus’ ministry, but an endowment for the duration. The subsequent identification of Jesus’ power to cast out demons with the Holy Spirit in 3:29-30 would support such a perspective.

In the next scene this same “Spirit¹⁶ drives him [Jesus] into the wilderness.” This initiates forty days in which Jesus is πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ σατανᾶ. In this short description of the temptation/testing experience the narrator implies that the Spirit is with Jesus and somehow linked with his capacity to resist Satan’s overtures. Through the narrative details in 1:12-13 it becomes clear that “the Holy Spirit” sets himself against Satan, who is linked with “unclean spirits” and δαιμόνια (3:22, 26-27, 29-30). Those who oppose Jesus, claiming his power has its source in Beelzeboul, ὁ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων (v. 22) and a πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (v. 30), demonstrate their association with Satan and they “profane/slander the Holy Spirit” by their actions (3:29-30).

Two other explicit references to the Holy Spirit occur in Mark’s narrative. At the end of the series questions used by various Jewish religious groups to discredit Jesus and his claims, Jesus asks them this question “How do they say that the messiah is David’s son?” when he names him τῷ κυρίῳ μου (my Lord), based on

¹³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: ondervans, 1996), 244. He cites ἐν υἱῷ (Heb. 1:2) as an example.

¹⁴ Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1961), 134 §257(2). Consider the phrases in Rom. 8:9; 14:17; 15:16; 1 Cor. 12:3, 13.

¹⁵ Many Greek witnesses read ἐπ αὐτον, i.e., “upon him.” NA 28 accepts the reading of B D *f*³ as the original, presumably because it is the more difficult reading and has the support of B and D.

¹⁶ The anarthrous ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ in v. 8 is followed by τὸ πνεῦμα in vv. 10, 11. The article in the second and third occurrences may function anaphorically, precluding the need to add the adjective ἅγιον in these instances.

the wording of Ps. 110:1. Jesus claims that David made this statement as he “spoke in/by the Holy Spirit.” Just as the Holy Spirit was active in David centuries earlier, Jesus claims that the Spirit is active in him as his descendant. The other reference occurs in 13:11, as Jesus assures his disciples that God’s Spirit will enable them to counter accusations when they have to defend themselves before human authorities. As Mk. 12:36 indicates, in the Jewish Scriptures when God’s Spirit enables humans to speak it usually results in prophetic oracles.¹⁷ If the Holy Spirit will speak through Jesus’ followers in the context of human tribunals, it means that they represent Yahweh and their accusers become Yahweh’s opponents. Their charges, then, become another instance of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” that Jesus has described previously in the narrative (3:29-30). However, in this instance it is not Jesus who is Yahweh’s agent, but Jesus’ followers. They become Yahweh’s surrogates in his opposition to Satan. This might also be construed as another instance in the narrative by which Jesus “immerses his followers in Holy Spirit” (1:8) and an extension of the authority (ἐξουσία 3:14-15; 6:7) to proclaim and to expel τὰ δαίμονια. In 6:13 they demonstrate this authority (καὶ δαίμονια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλλον).

“Unclean spirits” become part of the narrative in 1:23-28, as Jesus initiates his ministry in the synagogue at Capernaum (1:21-22), teaching ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, in contrast to οἱ γραμματεῖς. In the course of his teaching a person “was in their synagogue in an unclean spirit” (ἦν ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ; v. 23). Although English translations of the adverb εὐθύς that heads this clause imply motion, i.e., that the person suddenly was in the synagogue, it is more likely that the adverb serves to mark the next event that happens as Jesus teaches, i.e., “and then next there was in their synagogue a person in an unclean spirit and he cried out, saying....”¹⁸ εὐθύς marks the loud and unexpected interruption of Jesus’ teaching by a person already in the synagogue crowd.

It is this person who is characterized as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, i.e., existing in the sphere of an unclean spirit’s authority. This is a standard description in Mark’s Gospel of individuals who are under the influence of a δαίμων. Even though this person is “in an unclean *spirit*,” Jesus drives the spirit out of the person (ἐξῆλθεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ; v. 26). These descriptions suggest contrasting ideas. This person is living “in the sphere of” an unclean spirit’s influence, but the spirit exercises influence by being “in” the person. In this case (1:23-26) the unclean spirit compels this person to speak for it and accompanied by loud cries, it convulses the individual when it is

¹⁷ Balaam speaks his prophecies (Num. 23:6) because ἐγενήθη πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτόν.

¹⁸ BDAG, 406.2 indicates that εὐθύς has an “inferential use” meaning “then, so then e.g. in Mk. 1:21, 23, 29....”

commanded by Jesus to leave. Similar descriptions occur in other exorcism accounts in the Markan narrative (e.g., 5:2-5, 7-8, 13). However, the narrator can also describe a person as εἶχεν...πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (7:25-26, 29-30; 9:17, 20, 25), which spirit Jesus commands to “come out” from the person.¹⁹

In every case an unclean spirit has to submit to Jesus’ instruction. In a summary passage (1:32) the narrator describes people who have an unclean spirit as τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους. When others bring them to Jesus, he δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλεν (1:34). Both in this summary passage and the one in 3:11-12 these spirits, in Jesus’ presence, feel compelled to acknowledge publicly who Jesus is (cf. 1:24 and the demonized person’s declaration about Jesus in the synagogue). In 1:34 the narrator says that they ἤδρισαν αὐτόν and in 3:11 they admit σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (cf. 5:7). However, Jesus has no interest in accepting their declarations or permitting them to influence those around him. So he instructs them and silences them (1:25, 34; 3:12). In the Markan narrative the conflict that Jesus has with these “unclean spirits” or “daimonia” continues from 1:14 until 9:32, as he is on his way to Jerusalem. He is always successful in releasing humans from their power. Despite their “ritual uncleanness” Jesus himself remains “ritually clean” in every encounter. Unlike his Jewish contemporaries Jesus employs no herbal remedies or incantations in these episodes. He forcefully censures these spirits and drives them out. These conflicts form one category of conflict that Jesus experiences in the narrative.²⁰

In many ways the purpose of this Gospel narrative is to explain this fresh outburst of supernatural activity that involves Jesus. The narrator connects with Yahweh’s covenant promises to Israel by means of the initial conflated quotation that includes material from Exodus, Malachi and Isaiah. In 1:1-13 he indicates God’s sudden, direct involvement in human affairs by means of John’s appearance and prophecy, the descent of the Spirit into Jesus at his baptism, the heavenly declaration that Jesus is Yahweh’s “beloved son,” and the aggressive confrontation with Satan provoked by the Spirit. As R. Watts argues, the new exodus and redemption for Israel prophesied by Isaiah has begun in Jesus.²¹ Jesus becomes disruptive for Judaism and its leaders, as well as for Satan’s plans, and thus the conflicts arise as described in the narrative.

¹⁹ The description in the narrative of the boy who has a demon in 9:17-18, 25 indicates that the power of a demon over a person sometimes is exercised episodically. The demon at its own discretion can “seize” (καταλάβῃ 9:18) the person and seek to harm him or her.

²⁰ Jesus engages other conflicts with various Jewish groups, as well as with his disciples.

²¹ R. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997). He also suggests that the writer in characterizing Jesus as “the stronger one” and exercising authority over Satan and demons, is defining him as the warrior-messiah who comes to save his people (cf. p. 150ff).

Up to this point in the discussion the use of πνεῦμα in the Markan narrative reflects this conflict generated by Yahweh’s intent to fulfill his covenant promises to Israel in and through Jesus of Nazareth, Yahweh’s eschatological agent. Even the Spirit-directed prophecy (12:36) that David utters in Ps. 110:1 contributes to the conflict as Jesus employs it to support his claims. All the occurrences in the narrative refer either to the “Holy Spirit” or to “unclean spirits” related to Satan. However, as noted earlier, three other uses do not fit easily into one or other of these categories (2:8; 8:12; 14:38).

In two contexts the narrator uses the phrase τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ in reference to Jesus (2:8; 8:12):

καὶ εὐθὺς ἐπιγνοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ...λέγει αὐτοῖς
(2:8)²²

καὶ ἀναστενάξας τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ λέγει (8:12).

These are the only two places in the Markan narrative where πνεῦμα occurs as a dative modifier of a verbal form, as well as itself being modified with a genitive personal pronoun (αὐτοῦ). The phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον in Mark’s narrative never is modified by a genitive personal pronoun.²³ English translations of Mark’s Gospel normally understand it as referring to Jesus’ internal reflection, i.e., “knowing in his spirit” (2:8) or “distressed/deeply sighing in his spirit” (8:12).²⁴

²² The participle ἐπιγνοὺς occurs in 5:30 in the expression ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ in the episode where Jesus heals the woman with the haemorrhage. He realizes that τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξελοῦσαν. It results in the woman’s healing. The use of the reflexive pronoun in the ἐν phrase indicates an internalized recognition that some transaction had occurred between himself and another person. However, the prepositional phrase with this verb is slightly different from the simple dative form that modifies ἐπιγνοὺς in 2:8 and this may signal a different meaning is intended in 2:8. The parallel passage in Lk. 5:22 uses ἐπιγνοὺς but it has no dative or prepositional adverbial modifier.

²³ Contexts in the NT where πνεῦμα is modified by a personal pronoun: Matt.12:18 (= Isa. 42:1 μου); Lk. 1:47 (μου); 8:55 (αὐτῆς); 23:46 (μου); Acts 2:17 (= Joel 3:1 μου); 2:18 (=Joel 3:2 μου); 7:59 (μου); 17:16 (αὐτοῦ);Rom. 1:9 (μου); 8:16 (ἡμῶν); 1 Cor. 14:14 (μου); 16:18 (ὑμῶν); 2 Cor. 2:13 (μου); 7:13 (αὐτοῦ); Gal. 6:18 (ὑμῶν); Eph. 3:16 (αὐτοῦ); Phl. 4:23 (ὑμῶν); 1 Tim. 4:8 (αὐτοῦ); 2 Tim. 4:22 (σου); Phm. 25 (ὑμῶν); 1 Jn. 4:13 (αὐτοῦ). Similar constructions occur in the Septuagint (e.g., Num. 11:29; Deut. 2:30; 1 Sam. 30:12; Isa. 34:16 (a total of 27 occurrences)). Consider John 11:33; 12:27/13:21.

²⁴

Translation	2:8	8:12
NIV (2011)	“knew in his spirit”	“he sighed deeply”
NRSV	“perceived in his spirit”	“he sighed deeply in his spirit”
ESV	“perceiving in his spirit”	“and he sighed deeply in his spirit”
NET	“when Jesus realized in his spirit”	“sighing deeply in his spirit”
CEB	“Jesus immediately recognized”	“with an impatient sigh, Jesus”
MSG	“Jesus knew”	“provoked”

One function of the dative πνεύματι in 2:8 could be to define the means or instrument by which Jesus discerned the cognitive activity of the religious leaders. The lack of any preposition mitigates against a spatial or locative sense, i.e., “in his spirit.” The genitive pronoun αὐτοῦ could have various functions. It could express possession, i.e., “by the spirit that he possesses,” or relationship, i.e., “by the spirit that is identified with him.” In other words the narrator may be clarifying that Jesus is able to exercise this unusual ability by virtue of his relationship with the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:10), rather than an unclean spirit. It is clear from other passages that unclean spirits enable their subjects to know things that other humans do not (e.g., 1:24 οἶδά σε τίς εἶ ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ; 1:34 ὅτι ἤδεισαν αὐτόν²⁵). If the Holy Spirit in Jesus functions in a similar way from time to time, this would fit the narrative world of Mark (cf. 13:11).

In 8:12 the narrator describes how Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus πειράζοντες αὐτόν (8:11). In response to their attack Jesus is ἀναστενάξας τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ. This is the single occurrence of this compound verb ἀναστενάξω in the New Testament (cf. Sir. 25:18; Lam. 1:4; Dan.Th. Su. 22; 2 Macc. 6:30).²⁶ It describes serious emotional upset.²⁷ However, what is the function of the dative τῷ πνεύματι? When this verb occurs previously in Greek literature, it tends to be intransitive and often modified by an adverb. It can also be transitive and in such cases the direct object defines for whom the subject is groaning or mourning (e.g., Euripedes *Hercules*, 249; *Phoenissae* 1640; Nah. 3:7). Various prepositional phrases also can define the reason for the grief (e.g., Philo *Quod*

²⁵ Note the textual variant αὐτον χριστον ειναι B L W Θ^f 28 33^{vid} 565 2542 1 vg^{mss} sy^h sa^{ms} bo; τον χριστον αυτον ειναι C 892 1241; αυτον τον χριστον ειναι κ² f³ 700 1424 l 2211.

²⁶ Sir. 25:18 “involuntarily groaned bitter things” (NETS); Lam. 1:4 “her priests groan” (NETS); Su. 22 “and Sousanna groaned” (NETS); 2 Macc. 6:30 “he groaned aloud” (NETS).

²⁷ The author of Mark’s Gospel uses the simplex form at 7:34 ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ἐστενάξε. Jesus heals a person in the Decapolis region who lacks the ability to speak and hear. The verb στενάξω describes Jesus’ response to this person’s situation as he looks up and issues the command for healing. It is unclear from the narrative what causes this unusual response from Jesus. Paul employs it in Rom. 8:23 (ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν) to describe the inarticulate prayers that God’s people raise, assisted by the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit assists God’s people to pray στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις (Rom. 8:26), perhaps the Spirit similarly works with Jesus in Mk. 7:34. The verb also occurs in 2 Cor. 5:2 (ἐν τούτῳ στενάζομεν), 5 (στενάζομεν), Heb. 13:17 (μὴ στενάζοντες), and Ja. 5:9 μὴ στενάζετε...κατ’ ἀλλήλων). The cognate noun also occurs in Acts 7:34 in a quotation from Exod. 3:7 where Yahweh has heard Israel’s τοῦ στεναγμοῦ that results from their oppression under Pharaoh. Jeffrey B. Gibson, “Mark 8.12a: Why Does Jesus ‘Sigh Deeply’?” *Bible Translator* 38(1987), 122-27 argues that in this context the verb means “be dismayed.” “It is meant to give the impression that Jesus was there suddenly overcome not by exasperation but by dismay.” The action of the Jewish leaders was not trying Jesus’ patience, but his faithfulness, according to Gibson. In his view this verb (with its related forms) is “always employed to convey the idea of distress, particularly the distress of spirit brought about by the discovery that one has been tricked by fate or placed unwittingly by circumstances in a seemingly hopeless situation” (125). If he is correct, then what is the nature of Jesus ‘dismay’? Does he respond to the persistent hostility of these Jewish leaders in this way because he has lost hope that they might be convinced to accept his messianic claims?

deterius 93.3 ἐπὶ τῷ πάθει μᾶλλον ἢ τῇ πληγῇ; 2 Cor. 5:2 ἐν τούτῳ)

Occasionally it is completed by an indirect object defining for whom someone groans (e.g., Euripedes *Hercules* 119 (for your husband) and *Iphigenia Taurica* 656 (for you)). The modification of ἀναστενάζω with a dative phrase that does not seem to function as an indirect object is quite unusual. There is no earlier attestation of πνεῦμα used with either στενάζω or ἀναστενάζω, according to TLG. The specification τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ with this verb, then, is unusual and suggests that the author is communicating something specific through it. If the dative is not marking an indirect object, then it may express means (a kind of agency) or reference. Is the narrator attributing this response to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit who is associated with Jesus?

Those opposing Jesus attribute his miracles and exorcisms to unclean spirits or Beelzeboul and do not recognize them as σημεῖα indicating heaven's support of Jesus' message and mission. So they seek what they regard as σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (8:12), a divine wonder of a special order that will assuage their doubts. If this is how the writer interprets the situation, then he probably perceives this episode as a proof that these Jewish leaders are committing an αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος (3:29). The dismay expressed by Jesus reflects the Holy Spirit's response to this continued opposition and refusal to see Jesus as God's authorized agent, enabled by Yahweh's Spirit. In the very next episode Jesus warns his followers about "the leaven of the Pharisees" (8:15) and criticizes them for their failure to understand the significance of the two feeding miracles. What additional signs will convince ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ of Jesus' authority and thus be willing to take him seriously and with responsive obedience? If his contemporaries persist in this attitude, they will precipitate a divine judgment such as Jesus prophecies will occur in Mark 13.

Both in 2:8 and 8:12 the narrator describes Jesus' response to the way his opponents are evaluating his statements and actions. The narrator in 1:1-13 has shown repeatedly how Yahweh's Spirit is engaged with Jesus, justifying his identity as God's Son. This reality frames the rest of the narrative. In 3:22-30 the narrator defines the spiritual realities that generate opposition to Jesus by Jewish religious leaders. They accuse him of using demonic authority to access special knowledge and to accomplish extraordinary healings and exorcism. Jesus counters by claiming that it is Yahweh's Spirit who is empowering him. If they do not recognize this, they will find themselves opposing Yahweh. In 2:8 and 8:12 Jesus in concert with the Holy Spirit discerns the opposition of these religious leaders in their implicit and

explicit challenges.²⁸ Just as the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to encounter Satan and his testing, so similarly the Spirit is leading Jesus in his responses to humans who show themselves allied with Satan by their opposition. If the narrator elsewhere in his story never employs πνεῦμα to describe the internal elements of a human being and his use of πνεῦμα in 2:8 and 8:12 can be explained in ways that are consistent with his use of this noun elsewhere in his narrative, there is no warrant to interpret these two passages differently.²⁹

The other text that requires careful interpretation is 14:38:

γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν· τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής.

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (NIV)

After the Passover meal with the Twelve, Jesus leads them to a χωρίον...τὸ ὄνομα Γεθσημανί (14:32). He chooses Peter, James and John to accompany him further into the garden for prayer. The coming ordeal presses on him. The narrator says that ἤρξατο ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδημονεῖν (“he began to be deeply distressed and troubled” 14:33) and using language from Psalm 42:6 Jesus affirms *περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή μου ἕως θανάτου*. This language indicates that Jesus is experiencing significant grief related to current and imminent events that will involve death. He submits himself to his “father’s” will, even as he asks whether his father’s purposes might be accomplished in some other way because *πάντα δυνατά σοι* (14:36). After his initial prayer, Jesus returns to these three apostles and urges them to keep vigilant and pray ἵνα μὴ ἔλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν (14:38). The narrator does not state explicitly what their “testing/temptation” might be, but contextually, given the discussion Jesus has with James and John in Mk. 10:35-40 about suffering and the denial of relationship with Jesus that Peter will make shortly, it presumably

²⁸ It may be that references in other NT documents to “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16.6), “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11), and “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19) should be re-examined in the light of this hypothesis.

²⁹ The writer of Mark does not use the term νοῦς to describe human cognitive functions. *διάνοια* only occurs in Jesus’ reference in 12:30 to the second great command quoted from Deut. 6:5. The noun *καρδιά* occurs eleven times, but is never used in reference to Jesus. When it modifies a verb, it is always in a prepositional structure and does not occur as a simple dative (e.g., 2:6, 8; 7:19, 21; 11:23; 12:30, 33). The writer uses *ψυχή* eight times and normally it refers to a person’s life (e.g., 3:4; 8:35, 36, 37; 10:45). Jesus’ statement in 14:34 *περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή μου ἕως θανάτου* suggests a different nuance. BDAG (1099. 2c) indicates that it has the sense of “seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects,” but with reference to “feelings and emotions” in this context. If this language is taken from Ps. 42:6, it would not represent the idiolect of the writer (cf. also Jonah 4:9; Sir. 37:2). The writer does not employ any of these lexemes, apart from the singular use of *ψυχή* in 14:34 to describe the inner life of Jesus as a human being.

references the implications for them of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death. Although Jesus is addressing some of the Twelve, some scholars³⁰ also assume that Jesus is explaining why he is vigilant and praying at this time. His testing is imminent. The narrator through this language may be making an intratextual connection with the initial testing/temptation that Jesus experiences in 1:12-13.

It is in this context that Jesus declares "on the one hand the s(S)pirit is eager/zealous/willing, but on the other hand the flesh is weak" (my translation). Most English translations render πνεῦμα in this context as "spirit," interpreting it anthropomorphically, and do not regard it as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Jesus is commenting on his emotional state and indicates some sentiment such as "my mind knows that I need to fulfil my mission at the cross, but my humanness seeks to avoid such suffering." Boring observes that such a sentiment would be equivalent to a common motif in Hellenistic morality.³¹ This becomes a key text in arguing for the humanity of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. What is the reader to make of such a perspective, given the narrative context of Mark's Gospel and the usual meanings that πνεῦμα has?

First, this is the only context in Mark's Gospel where the contrast between πνεῦμα / σάρξ is explicit.³² However, Paul uses it in Gal. 5:16-25 and in that context πνεῦμα plainly refers to the Holy Spirit who resides in the life of a believer and the moral contest that this Spirit has with the impulses of the sinful human nature (σάρξ) to respond to sin. He offers a similar contrast in Rom. 8:5-17. If Mk. 14:38 is read through the lens of other, earlier Christian documents,³³ then πνεῦμα more likely refers to the Holy Spirit, and not a human spirit. It is God's Spirit, then, that stimulates humans to zealous embrace of God's purposes, even though the consequences may result in suffering. The normal human reaction to such suffering

³⁰ Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 98. "The division that Mark has portrayed between Jesus' spiritual readiness and his state of fleshly desire (14:34), is not itself to be understood as an actual instance of temptation, and certainly not as a failure to persevere in temptation, but rather as a *conflicted state of being* — 'doublemindedness.'" Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark. Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MINN: Fortress Press, 2007), 681. "Jesus in this scene becomes a model of faithful prayer." Gundry, *Mark. A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross*, 872. "Jesus has not taken the three with him to prepare them for their own grueling experience in the future, but to give him help in his own emotional struggle at present." Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah. From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels. Volume One* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 199. "However, Jesus himself is in turmoil, while praying and facing *peirasmos*; he wants their watching and praying to accompany him."

³¹ Boring, *Mark*, 400. If this statement is construed to be a "commonplace comment on human nature....[it] would be an expression of general Hellenistic wisdom:..." It would reflect "commonplace Greek anthropology:..."

³² It might also be noted that such a contrast does not occur in other contexts in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

³³ The motif of "hardness of heart" in the Markan narrative also seems to reflect the terminology that Paul employs in Romans 9-11, which is another indicator that this author/narrator is aware of theological discussion occurring in the early church. However, Markan scholars tend to discount Pauline influence on the author of this Gospel.

is fear and avoidance. It is only God's Spirit within a person who provides the spiritual resources to endure and persevere (something also intimated previously by this narrator in 13:11). There do not seem to be other contexts in the New Testament where "human spirit" is contrasted with "human weakness generated from material being."

Second, in Mk. 1:12-13 the same dynamics between the motions of the Spirit and the weakness produced by human daily needs, i.e., food and water, occur in the context of *πειράζομαι*. The Spirit compels Jesus to go into the wilderness and endure testing. In that context Jesus fasts for forty days. The text implies that the Spirit assists Jesus in resisting Satan's tests, in spite of the food deprivation that presumably compounded the intensity of the testing. If the author expects his audience to remember Jesus' initial testing episode, as they heard the Gethsemane story in 14:38, where the cognate term *πειρασμός* occurs, then he may intend *πνεῦμα* to reference the Holy Spirit, rather than human spirit in this later context also.³⁴

Third, it seems strange in the progression of the narrative for Jesus determinedly to go to Jerusalem, where he has prophesied four times that the Son of Man will die (Mk. 8-10), and then when the event is about to happen suddenly, because of personal fear of suffering, ask God, his father, to find some alternative so that he could avoid such suffering. In fact, in 14:27-28 Jesus, using the words of Zech. 13:7 again prophesies his death at the hand of God, as well as his resurrection. Jesus' followers do not want this to happen (14:29-31) and Jesus prophesies Peter's denial, i.e., his failure in testing made poignant by its juxtaposition with Jesus' trial (14:55-72), during which trial Jesus shows no fear. If on no occasion in the narrative prior to 14:38 Jesus ever expressed fear about what will happen to him in Jerusalem, why would he do so in 14:38? Every indication in Mk. 14 is that Jesus is in charge of events, orchestrating them as he chooses to accomplish his mission.

Fourth, it may be that Jesus has another reason for requesting his "father" to "take this cup from me" (14:36). A few hours previously, according to the time frame of the narrative, Jesus has delivered his final discourse to four apostles - Peter, James, John and Andrew (13:3).³⁵ In this discourse Jesus prophesies the return of the

³⁴ In v. 38 Jesus is addressing the three apostles whom he asked to accompany him. The statement about the 'spirit...flesh' is additional explanation for the two commands *γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε*. While the three are the subject of these commands, Jesus exemplifies in his actions in Gethsemane what he requires from them. He is "watching and praying" as he prepares for God's service, and part of the reason for his actions is the reality of *πειρασμός* that he is experiencing in this period.

³⁵ The first three are also those who accompanied Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration and also are with him by his choice in Gethsemane. Perhaps the narrator by this device intends us to discern some connection among these events in his story.

Son of Man, but also indicates that prior to that event Jerusalem and the Temple will experience terrible destruction (13:1-2). In some way this calamity functions as judgment upon the Jewish religious leaders for their rejection and conspiracy to execute Jesus. In the Markan narrative, their refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah becomes grounds for their destruction (12:9).³⁶ Jesus shows complete awareness of what the future holds for Jerusalem and the Temple because the Jewish leaders oppose him. Perhaps then his appeal to his father, on behalf of his Jewish contemporaries, is that Yahweh will discern another way to fulfill his covenant promises that will not entail this significant destruction. He knows what “drinking this cup” will mean for Israel. Like Moses in Exodus 32-34, Jesus intercedes for Israel before God. However, this time Yahweh does not change his purpose and he “will smite the shepherd,” with consequences for Judaism. The Spirit in Jesus urges him forward to fulfill God’s mission, but his “flesh” quails at the judgment against Jerusalem and the Temple that will result.

The narrative itself points us to an interpretation of 14:38b that references the Holy Spirit, not the human spirit. It is the zealousness of the Spirit that urges Jesus and his followers to embrace suffering in order to advance Yahweh’s mission in this world. Even though the suffering endured brings judgment upon those who implement it, nonetheless the Spirit pursues Yahweh’s mission and will not be deterred from its accomplishment.

If these observations regarding the use of πνεῦμα in 2:8; 8:11; and 14:38 are indeed what the narrator intended and they refer to the Holy Spirit, then the use of πνεῦμα in this narrative is consistent. It refers either to the Holy Spirit or unclean spirits. It serves as another means to reveal the complete opposition between Yahweh’s purposes and Satan’s goals, and humans must discern their loyalty carefully.

If this hypothesis is to be taken seriously, it is also necessary to offer some explanation about the way the Holy Spirit is engaging with Jesus, as Son of God, in the Markan narrative, given the history of Christological debate. First, if Jesus is fully human, then he possesses the attributes of a human being, both material and immaterial. New Testament writers define human persons as body (σῶμα), person (ψυχή) and spirit (πνεῦμα) (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:23) or some variation thereof (e.g., Mk. 12:30). If this is a standard anthropological formulation used in the early church,

³⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, the death of Jesus, from the divine perspective, becomes “the abomination that causes desolation.”

presumably the author was aware of this.³⁷ Theoretically, as a human being, Jesus would have a ‘spirit.’ However, if the argument made in this article regarding usage in 2:8; 8:11 and 14:38 is correct, this writer does not refer to this immaterial component of Jesus’ humanity with the noun πνεῦμα. Yet, he does affirm the humanness of Jesus in other ways.

Second, the narrator clarifies numerous times that Jesus is “the son of God” uniquely (1:1, 11; 9:7; cf. 12:6). Jesus acts in ways that only Yahweh acts in the Jewish Scriptures. This includes forgiving human sins, making declarations about Yahweh’s covenant principles pertaining to Israel (e.g., Sabbath, food laws, etc.), commanding nature (e.g., 4:35-40), raising the dead (5:21-43), accomplishing food miracles (6, 8), exorcisms and subjection of Satan, his capacity to “immerse in Holy Spirit” (1:8), and rising from the dead (his numerous prophecies). Some of these actions can be paralleled in the Jewish Scriptures (e.g., Moses, Elijah, Elisha), but for all them to be concentrated in a single human figure is unprecedented in Jewish history. Jesus also uses the phrase “the Son of Man” as a self-reference, a phrase that he repeatedly connects with the vision of “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7, who occupies the throne of heaven with “the Ancient of Days,” and who returns to judge all humanity (Mk 13). Yet, Jesus himself in the narrative notes limitations that distinguish him from his “father,” particularly his lack of knowledge regarding the time of the Son of Man’s Second Advent (Mk. 13). While he uses his ‘authority’ to command unclean spirits, the elements, death, and disease, he does not use it to coerce human adoption of his claims or to resist humans who oppose him. If, as seems to be the case, the narrator characterizes Jesus as divine in some way, there is nonetheless some self-imposed limitation on his use of his divine prerogatives (cf. Phil. 2:5-11).³⁸

Third, in Mk. 1:10 the narrative says that τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν. εἰς αὐτόν is a minority textual reading, but it is supported by B D *f*³. The majority of witnesses supporting επ αυτον, probably reflect the text found in Matt. 3:16 and Lk. 3:22. This is not a one-time event in Jesus’ ministry, but an endowment for the duration. As argued previously, if εἰς αὐτόν is original, then the Markan narrative considers that the Holy Spirit works with Jesus during the entire period of his ministry. The subsequent identification of Jesus’ power to cast out demons with the Holy Spirit in 3:29-30 would support such a perspective. If the

³⁷ In the narrative (Mk. 12:30) Jesus quotes Deut. 6:5 that distinguishes “body, soul, mind, strength” as elements of a human being. These are probably not to be regarded as technical terms.

³⁸ If Mk. 16:19 is original to the writer of this Gospel, then he affirms the ascension of Jesus and his session at God’s right hand. This is also indicated in Jesus’ response to the high priest in his Jewish trial (14:61-62).

interpretation of 2:8 and 8:11 proposed in this article is correct, this Spirit continues actively to support Jesus in his mission, particularly in contexts of opposition.

In the Jewish Scriptures Yahweh often resources humans whom he selects to act for him by placing his Spirit within them. Further, passages in the Jewish Scriptures that the Christian movement associated with the Messiah (e.g., Isaiah 42:1-4 (quoted in Matt. 12:18-20); 61: 1 (quoted in Lk. 4:18)) describe Yahweh placing his Spirit ἐπ’ αὐτόν, with the result that he speaks and acts for Yahweh. Jesus has a “human spirit” as any other human, but as Son of God, he also has the Holy Spirit resident in him in an unprecedented manner. The Markan narrative identifies Jesus as the unique Son of God who also possesses God’s Spirit. These elements are not contradictory or competing, but fully integrated, enabling Jesus to fulfil his messianic mission. The association of God’s Spirit with Jesus in these unique ways only serves to endorse his identity and role in God’s economy.

Conclusions

1. In the Markan narrative the noun πνεῦμα refers either to the Holy Spirit or an unclean spirit.
2. In the case of πνεῦμα in 2:8 and 8:11 it refers to the “Spirit that Jesus has,” i.e., the Holy Spirit, and by means of which he responds in specific ways to opposition.
3. In 14:38 πνεῦμα also refers to the Holy Spirit, in contrast to “the flesh,” an opposition found in earlier Christian documents.
4. The Holy Spirit engages with Jesus in a complete way at his baptism and this relationship continues through the remainder of his earthly ministry according to the narrative.
5. Opponents refuse to recognize the engagement of the Holy Spirit with Jesus and identify this Spirit as a δαυμόνιον, in fact the “ruler of διαμόνια” and this aligns then with Satan’s opposition in the narrative.
6. Jesus as a human being possesses a human ‘spirit’, but this is distinct from the Holy Spirit, in the same way that believers have a human spirit but also experience the residence of the Holy Spirit, following the resurrection. However, the writer of this Gospel does not use πνεύμα to reference Jesus’ humanity.
7. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus according to the Markan narrative facilitates his exercise of special authority in various ways.

Larry J. Perkins is Professor Emeritus in Biblical Studies and President Emeritus of Northwest Baptist Seminary. He has been teaching for forty years in Greek language, biblical studies, Septuagint Studies, and Leadership at masters and doctoral level. He is the author of *The Pastoral Letters. A Handbook on the*

Greek Text (Waco, TX: Baylor University Text, 2017) and *The Art of Kubernēsis (1 Corinthians 12:28): Leading as the Church Board Chairperson*. He also contributed *Exodus*, in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin Wright (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Author copyright.

Perkins, Larry J. "Discerning 'The Spirit' in Mk. 2:8; 8:12 and 14:38." Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research. www.nimer.ca (retrieved Date Accessed). Peer reviewed.