JESUS’ DEFEAT OF DEATH

Persuading Mark’s early readers

Peter Bolt explores the impact of Mark’s Gospel on its early readers in the first-century Graeco-Roman world. His book focuses upon the thirteen characters in Mark who come to Jesus for healing or exorcism and, using analytical tools of narrative and reader-response criticism, explores their crucial role in the communication of the Gospel. Bolt suggests that early readers of Mark would be persuaded that Jesus’ dealings with the suppliants show him casting back the shadow of death and that this in itself is preparatory for Jesus’ final defeat of death in resurrection. Enlisting a variety of ancient literary and non-literary sources in an attempt to illuminate this first-century world, this book gives special attention to illness, magic and the Roman imperial system. This is a new approach to Mark which attempts to break the impasse between narrative and historical studies and will appeal to scholars and students alike.

PETER G. BOLT is Head of New Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney. He has edited (with M.D. Thompson) and contributed to The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul’s Mission (2000).
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JESUS’ DEFEAT OF DEATH
Jesus’ Defeat of Death
Persuading Mark’s early readers

PETER G. BOLT
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To my wife, Barbara, who, for better and for worse, shares my life under the shadow of death, my fellow heir in our Lord’s gracious gift of life; and to our four daughters, Grace, Jana, Sara and Alice, who are kissed each night with the thought that tomorrow they might rise again.
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This book attempts to understand the potential impact of Mark’s Gospel upon its early Graeco-Roman readers.

It focuses upon the role of the healing/exorcism accounts in this communicative process. These scenes forge a link with Mark’s flesh-and-blood readers by:

1. strongly aligning the ‘implied readers’ with the suppliants in the scenes;
2. enabling the ‘flesh-and-blood’ readers to recognise their own world in the circumstances of the suppliants and to ‘become’ the implied readers;
3. thus drawing the flesh-and-blood readers into the story-world which seeks to move them by its message about Jesus and the coming kingdom.

To appreciate the impact of these stories on early readers, the book attempts to recover relevant aspects of the pre-understanding which Graeco-Roman readers could be expected to bring to their reading of Mark. This requires a special focus on ancient perceptions of sickness and death, as well as due attention to magic, which could be either cause or cure of the afflictions.

When read from this reconstructed perspective, the healing/exorcism scenes show Jesus dealing with death.

These scenes are read within Mark’s wider framework of the expectation of the kingdom of God, to be inaugurated by the resurrection of the dead.

Portrayed as a king who brings life to those under the shadow of death, Jesus would be seen as an alternative to the deified rulers familiar to the Roman world. He had no apotheosis which removed him from death, but he truly died. His emptied tomb therefore speaks of a genuine resurrection which inaugurated the kingdom of God, and which provides genuine hope for those who continue to live under the shadow of death.
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Preface

Mark’s Gospel had the potential to make an impact upon the early readers’ sense of mortality. Jesus had defeated death.

I trust that this small offering towards a greater understanding of Mark’s message might help others better appreciate the wonder of this ‘gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God’.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a revision of my PhD thesis, which was accepted by King’s College, London in 1997. I would like to express my gratitude to many who assisted me in various ways during the writing of my thesis: my supervisor, Prof. Graham N. Stanton; Dr Peter Jensen, former Principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney, and his Council; Dr Bruce Winter, Warden of Tyndale House Centre for Biblical Research, Cambridge, and his Council; the Trustees of Rev. and Mrs F.W.A. Roberts Scholarship and the Joan Augusta McKenzie Travelling Scholarship; the British Pro-Vice Chancellors’ Committee for an Overseas Research Scholarship; the Australian College of Theology, for their Faculty Research Scholarship; the Cambridge University Bethune Baker Fund; and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD); and last, but by no means least, the various friends and family members whose support has often been beyond their better interests.

I am also grateful for feedback on parts of my argument, during both the writing of the thesis and the preparation of this book. My thanks go to the participants in the King’s College London New Testament Postgraduate Seminar and in the Tyndale House Study Groups (New Testament and Theology); Prof. David Jordan; Prof. Roy Kotansky; John Hoskin; Darryl Palmer; Bruce Winter; and Prof. Edwin Judge. Comments made by my two examiners, Dr Richard Burridge and Prof. Morna Hooker, the Cambridge University Press reader, and the editor of the Monograph Series, Prof. Richard Bauckham, have also been greatly appreciated. Special thanks must also go to my good friend David Thurston and to Melody Machin for undertaking the gruelling task of compiling the initial indexes for this book.
NOTE ON THE RENDERING OF PAPYROLOGICAL/INSCRIPTIONAL TEXTS

I have rendered texts as they appear in the edited versions. It should be noted that the magical texts often have unusual spelling and the accentuation is not always supplied by the editors. The following guide to the standard sigla, taken from P.W. Pestman, M. David and B.A. van Groningen, *The New Papyrological Primer* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), should be noted, although the practice of some editors varies.

[ ] lacuna
<> omission in the original
( ) resolution of a symbol or abbreviation
[ca. 3] approximately 3 letters are missing
ça. 3 traces of approximately 3 letters survive
. (subscript dot) uncertain letter. (This needs to be distinguished from the subscript dot used in transliterations, which does not indicate uncertainty.)
| edge of text
[?] where, in irregularly spaced material (such as in lead tablets), it is impossible to know whether to assume a lost letter. This sign is introduced by D.R. Jordan, ‘Southwest Corner Agora’, 213.
σ, ȝ, c I have retained the type of sigma used by the editors of the various pieces.

If the symbol | is not used in translations, the beginning of lines is often indicated by capitalisation. I have also followed this fairly standard practice when citing poetic literary texts.
ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations, in both text and bibliography, generally conform to the practice of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, and to either the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* or H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940). The following abbreviations are used in quotations of primary sources. I have referred to text numbers in collections of primary sources in **bold**, and page numbers in normal type. [TLG] following a work indicates that the source was accessed solely through the TLG computer database. I have also occasionally used a preceding ? to indicate that a translation or interpretation is either debated or possible.


**AnonLond**  H. Diels (ed.), *Anonymi Londinensis ex Aristotelis Iatricis Menonis et aliis medicis eclogae* (Supplementum Aristotelicium iii pars i; Berlin: Reimer, 1893) [TLG].
xvi  List of abbreviations


Carlini  A. Carlini et al. (eds), *Papiri letterari greci* (Pisa: Giardini editori e stampatori, 1978).


List of abbreviations

Fox

Gager

GM

GMPT

Grant

IG
A. Kirchhoff et al., Inscriptiones Graecae I–XV (Berlin: Reimer, 1923–).

IKyme

ILS
H. Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (Zurich: Wiedemann, 1974 (1892–1916)).

Isbell

Kock

Kotansky
R. Kotansky, Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994).

L&R.I

L&R.II

Lattimore
R. Lattimore, Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1942).

LKA
E. Ebeling, Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur (Berlin, 1953).

LSCG

LSJ

LSSupp
List of abbreviations


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Most of the tablets can be abbreviated without confusion; however, it is necessary to distinguish the following:
List of abbreviations

1.III Volume 1, tablet III  
am.III Volume 2, tablet III, Ašakki maşûti series  
t.III Volume 2, tablet III, Tī Kill series  
X Volume 1, tablet X  
“X” Volume 2, tablet “X”  
am.IX Volume 2, tablet IX, Ašakki maşûti series  
t.IX Volume 2, tablet IX, Tī Kill series  
t.VIII Volume 2, tablet VIII, Tī Kill series  
lk.VIII Volume 2, tablet VIII, Luḫ-ka series