

Mark 14:58 and the “three days” motif

Elton L. Hollon

Ventura College  <https://ror.org/00pn5nj90>

ehollon@vcccd.edu  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5824-839X>

Some scholars include the “three days” motif in their reconstruction of the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus in Mark 14:58.¹ In support of its historicity, critics apply the criteria of multiple attestation (Mark 14:58 and John 2:19), embarrassment (the prophecy did not come to pass in three days), coherence (the tone coheres with other apocalyptic material in the Jesus traditions), and contextual credibility (the temporal designation is also attested in rabbinic sources). In magnanimity, it should be conceded that the case looks more plausible than many critics recognize. Nonetheless, a stronger case can be made against its authenticity.

Recent work on the “three days” motif identifies some redactional clues.²

1 J. Jeremias, *Die Drei-Tage-Worte der Evangelien*, [in:] *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt. Festgabe für Karl Georg Kuhn*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1971, pp. 221–229; J. B. Bauer, *Drei Tage*, „*Biblica*” 39 (1958) no. 3, pp. 354–358; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Fortress Press 1985, p. 73; R. E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, vol. 1, New York: Doubleday 1994, pp. 443–450; B. F. Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master-BUILDER & The House of God*, Allison Park: Pickwick Publications 1992, p. 265 (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 29); B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications 2002, pp. 181–182 (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 48); J. Ádna, *Jesu Stellung zum Tempel*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000, pp. 119–121, 128, 151 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe, 119).

2 E. L. Hollon, S. M. Frost, *Jesus’s Temple Prophecy in Mark 14:58*, “*Bibliotheca Sacra*” 180 (2023) no. 718, pp. 202–227. Greek bible citations from NA28. Unless otherwise stated, English citations from NRSV.

Mark 14:58

ἐγὼ καταλύσω τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον τὸν χειροποίητον καὶ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἄλλον ἀχειροποίητον οἰκοδομήσω

First, it plays a central role in Mark's *chiastic* structuring of the saying and parallels the same structure in Mark 15:37–39. Since *chiasm* is Mark's preferred structure,³ the placement of the central unit is likely a product of Markan redaction. The temporal formula plays a significant literary role in Mark's use of irony as well.⁴ Furthermore, grammatical clues likewise suggest inauthenticity, e.g., the designation follows after καί, interrupts a balanced antithetical parallel, has limited scope, etc.⁵

Additional structural considerations also argue against historicity. Redaction is suggested by the triplication of conflicting “testimony” (μαρτυρία) at Mark 14:55, 56, 59. The triplicate begins with the linking word μαρτυρία at vv. 55–56. The phrase διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν is inserted in-between at v. 58, and the triplicate sequence closes at v. 59 with μαρτυρία.

	1	2	3
1		⁵⁵ μαρτυρίαν	
2		⁵⁶ μαρτυρία	
		⁵⁸ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν	
3		⁵⁹ μαρτυρία	

The resulting combination of the μαρτυρία triplication and “three days” time designation creates a numerical diagrammatic image of the cross. The construction must be intentional, so the placement of the designation is probably redactional.

Our hypothesis is that the early Christians perceived some embarrassment with the prophecy behind Mark 14:58 because the

3 J. Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*, 2nd ed., Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 2008.

4 T. Shepherd, *The Irony of Power in the Trial of Jesus and the Denial by Peter – Mark:14:53–72*, [in:] *The Trial and Death of Jesus: Essays on the Passion Narrative in Mark*, eds. G. van Oyen, T. Shepherd, Leuven–Dudley: Peeters 2006, pp. 229–245.

5 G. Biguzzi, “*Io Distruggerò Questo Tempio*”: *Il tempio e il giudaismo nel vangelo di Marco*, seconda edizione, Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University Press 2008; J. R. Donahue, *Are You The Christ?*, New York: Society of Biblical Literature 1973 (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 10).

destruction-rebuilding of the temple did not materialize as expected. To resolve this problem, Christians reinterpreted Jesus’s prophecy and applied it to the emerging Christian community and the resurrection.⁶ Eventually, this strategy allowed Christians to incorporate the “third day” formula from the proclamation of the resurrection as well. Following this strategy, 14:58 uses the “third day” motif to show how a literal understanding misrepresents Jesus’s actual teaching and thus can be false. However, it also shows how the saying is symbolically true through irony. In addition to the previous arguments, a plausible reconstruction of the motif’s tradition history across three *Sitz im Leben* supports its secondary nature: 1. Life of Jesus (27–30 CE); 2. Life of the church (30–70 CE); and 3. Life of the Evangelists (70–90s CE).⁷

Resurrection, the “Third Day/Three Days” Motif, and the Temple Prophecy

At this point, a survey of the form history of the “third day/three days” motif in the early Christian proclamation of the resurrection, temple prophecy, and passion predictions is informative. Landes, Paesler, and Novakovic provide details supplemented and organized in Table 1.⁸ “The third day” (τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ) formulation is the earliest and is attested in the pre-Pauline creedal hymn of Jesus’s resurrection in 1 Cor 15:4.

Table 1 – Form History for “Third Day/Three Days” Motif

6 G. Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, T&T Clark 1999, pp. 194, 259; B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: Study Edition*, London: SCM Press 1973, p. 67.

7 On three life-settings, see W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, transl. by J. Boyce, D. Juel, W. Poehlmann with R. A. Harrisville, New York: Abingdon Press 1969, pp. 15–29.

8 G. M. Landes, “The Three Days and Three Nights” Motif in *Jonah 2.1*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 86 (1967) no. 4, p. 447; K. Paesler, *Das Tempelwort Jesu: Die Traditionen von Tempelzerstörung und Tempelerneuerung im Neuen Testament*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1999, pp. 172–174 (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 184); L. Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture: The Role of Israel’s Scripture in the Early Christian Interpretation of Jesus’ Resurrection*, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2014, pp. 116–119 (Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies, 12).

Sources and dates "Three Days" Theme	pre-Paul, Paul 30s–60s CE	Mark 70s CE	Matthew 80s CE	Luke, Acts 80s–90s CE	John 90s CE
τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς τρίτης	1 Cor 15:4				
ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις		15:29	27:40		2:19
διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν		14:58	26:61		
μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας		8:31 (1 st) 9:31 (2 nd) 10:34 (3 rd)	[27:63]		
τῆς τρίτης ἡμέρας			16:21 (1 st) 17:23 (2 nd) 20:19 (3 rd) [27:64]	18:33 (3 rd) 9:22 (1 st) [2 nd omitted 9:44] 24:7, 46 Acts 10:40	2:1
τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας			12:40		
μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας and τῆς τρίτης ἡμέρας			27:63–64		

Next, the motif was likely combined with the temple prophecy behind Mark 14:58; 15:29 because its inclusion in this prophecy is multiply attested by John 2:19. The motif permitted a resurrection reinterpretation of the prophecy, muting any perceived embarrassment. It probably found its way into the passion predictions at Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 *par.* afterward, because the numerical motif is missing from their Johannine parallels at John 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32–34.⁹ However, it is also possible that the omission is a Johannine redaction on the pre-gospel tradition.¹⁰

⁹ For a discussion of the parallels, see P. Létourneau, *Le quatrième évangile et les prédictions de la passion dans les évangiles synoptiques*, [in:] *John and the Synoptics*, A. Denaux, Leuven: Leuven University Press 1992, pp. 579–586 (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium, 101).

¹⁰ As Létourneau explains, John's focus is soteriological. Létourneau, *Le quatrième évangile et les prédictions de la passion dans les évangiles synoptiques*, p. 581. Hence, he may have omitted the motif in order to focus on the salvific effects of Christ's accomplishment on the cross rather than resurrection, even though he knows of the three-day resurrection tradition, viz. John 20. Still, it is just as plausible that his theology developed out of passion prediction traditions in which the motif was absent. In any case, John's parallels suggest that the motifs role is theological and the same is probably true for the Synoptics.

Proclamation of Jesus’ Resurrection and the Numerical Motif

The earliest instance of the motif occurs in 1 Cor 15:4, life-setting 2. The wording is pre-Pauline and is based on the Greek Septuagint (LXX)¹¹ of Hos 6:2 (LXX).¹²

Hos 6:2 (LXX)	1 Cor 15:4
ἔγινάσει ἡμᾶς	⁴ καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη
μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας,	καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται
ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ	τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ
ἀναστήσομεθα	κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς

Hosea is significant because it uses the idea of resurrection metaphorically to express hope for God’s redemption of Israel, and analysts detect ancient beliefs about resurrection in early Canaanite mythology or West Semitic vegetation cults behind the imagery. By the first century CE, viz. 1 Corinthians 15:4, it was interpreted as the “resurrection of the dead” in the Old Testament (OT).¹³

¹¹ All LXX citations are from Rahlfs-Hanhart Revised Edition 2020.

¹² See the extensive listing of supporting scholars in Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to the Scripture*, 126–127 cf. 43. Novakovic contends that the grammatical similarity is too slim to posit dependence on Hosea 6:2 and that other Jewish texts in which the phrase occurs provide equally plausible explanations. For a list of dissenting scholars who find no text behind the tradition in 1 Cor 15:4, see Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to the Scripture*, 125 cf. 35. The dissenting position is surely mistaken, however, since Hos 6:2 is the only OT text mentioning both “on the third day” and resurrection, “raising up”, even if only metaphorically. The two phrases are not combined in Ezek 37, Isa 24–27, or Dan 12. M. Proctor, “*After Three Days He Will Rise*”: *The (Dis) Appropriation of Hosea 6.2 in the Markan Passion Predictions*, [in:] *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels, Volume 1: The Gospel of Mark*, ed. by T. R. Hatina, New York: T&T Clark 2006, p. 134.

¹³ Most analysts agree that the language is intended metaphorically in Hosea, but they disagree about whether it was understood literally at a prior stage. For a discussion of Hos 6:2 in relation to the development of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in the OT (Isa 24–27; Dan 12:2–3; Hos 6:2; 13:14; Ezek 37:1–14), targums (TgJon), and rabbinic texts (GnR 56:1; 91:7; EstR 9:2; midrPs 22:5), see R. Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament*, transl. by J. P. Smith, Oliver & Boyd 1960, pp. 74–86; F. Nötscher, *Altorientalischer und alttestamentlicher Auferstehungsglauben*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1970, pp. 138–146; H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life After Death: Paul’s Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Cor 15 Part I: An Enquiry into the Jewish Background*, Lund: CWK

Historians are unsure about the precise way in which the “third day” motif was introduced into the *kerygma* and historical record. Was it introduced as part of the appearance tradition?¹⁴ Was it introduced as part of the separate empty tomb tradition?¹⁵ Did the historical Jesus use Hos 6:2 as part of his own prediction?¹⁶ Was it initially a theological claim derived by the early Christians from scripture independent of the empty tomb and appearance traditions?¹⁷ Was it the result of coincidence based on both theological expression and the empty tomb/appearance traditions?¹⁸ Despite the different explanations, there is

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- Gleerup 1974, pp. 189–190, 192 (Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series, 7:1); J. Day, *Resurrection Imagery from Baal to the Book of Daniel*, [in:] *Congress Volume Cambridge 1995*, Leiden: Brill 1997, pp. 125–133 (Vetus Testamentum Supplements, 66), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004275904_007; N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3: *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2003, pp. 118–119; 121–128; 146–150; C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism 200 BCE–CE 200*, Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 44–45, 54.
- 14 B. Gerhardsson, *Evidence for Christ's Resurrection according to Paul: 1 Cor 15:1–11*, [in:] *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. by D. E. Aune, T. Seland, and J. H. Ulrichsen, Leiden–Boston: Brill 2003, p. 83 (Novum Testamentum Supplements, 106), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004268241_004.
- 15 H. von Campenhausen, *The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb*, [in:] *Tradition and Life in the Church. Essay and Lectures in Church History*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1968, p. 76. For further listing, see Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to the Scripture*, 120 cf. 14.
- 16 For listing, see Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, 122 cf. 23.
- 17 H. Conzelmann, *Auferstehung Christi I. Im NT*, [in:] *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 1: A–C, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1957, pp. 699–700. This explanation is unsatisfactory because it renders the parallel between the three days spanning Jesus's burial and the discovery of the empty tomb on the one hand and the OT “third day” designation on the other hand coincidental. See conflict with Hanz Conzelmann, *Jesus*, with an Introduction by John Reumann, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1988, p. 23. Since coincidences are inherently unlikely, *to wit*, it is more likely that the historical period of three days led early Christians to apply specific OT texts. The three days between Jesus's burial and the discovery of the empty tomb best explains the application of OT theology. The lack of greater linguistic similarity between the empty tomb and appearance traditions and the OT texts does not attest to a coincident and originally independent development of a third day theology because it does not explain the coincidence.
- 18 Novakovic holds that the same designation originated independently in both theology and history. These were eventually combined. Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According*

general agreement that it entered the tradition early—within months of the crucifixion.¹⁹

Numerical Motif in Mark’s The Temple Prophecy: Irony and Polyvalent Reinterpretations

How did the designation change from “on the third day” to “within three days” in Mark 14:58 and “in three days” in 15:29? Mark apparently connects the charge of “false prophecy” in his trial narrative with the passion predictions. In Mark, Jesus did not predict that he would destroy/rebuild the temple “in three days” in his prophecy about the temple in 13:2. Rather, he used the motif in his passion predictions to refer to the resurrection. The connection is a Markan literary thread and presupposes Mark’s use of irony. This suggests a secondary stage for the motif’s placement and probably some phrasing in the temple prophecies and passion predictions, because redaction is needed to weave these together.

Mark’s phrasing of the motif in the temple prophecies permits polyvalent reinterpretations. While literally false, Mark shows how the temple prophecy is ironically fulfilled by the birth of the Christian church and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’s dual use of temple language likely facilitated these reinterpretations at an earlier stage, and their polyvalence requires careful placement and redaction.

Beginning with Mark 14:58 and 15:29, word statistics support Mark’s redactional use of the preposition *διὰ* but not *ἐν*.²⁰ This explanation is

to Scripture, 120–133. This position is similarly unsatisfactory because of the coincidence it makes out of the three-day parallel between history and theology.

¹⁹ J. D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making*, vol. 1: *Jesus Remembered*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003, p. 855; G. Theißen, A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1998, pp. 487–490. For a critical discussion of the various explanations, see W. L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers 2023, pp. 69–84.

²⁰ L. Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae. Word Statistics of the Synoptic Gospels*, New York: Society of Biblical Literature 1973, pp. 71–72 (Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study, 3). Gaston’s categories, word counts, and percentages are as

supported by linguistic analysis, e.g., Gaston’s word statistics and the method of binomial distribution.

	Total	MK	Q	QMT	QLK	M	L	MTADD	LKADD
διὰ	99	31	5	2	1	23	18	11	8
ἐν	642	136	44	22	15	109	224	60	32

The characteristic use of διὰ is visually discernible, but statistics do not confirm the redactional nature of the preposition in 15:29.

The form in Mark 15:29 is multiply attested in John 2:19, and this raises problems for a purely Markan redactional explanation of the phrasing in the temple prophecy. There are three common explanations. First, John may have known Mark by popular oral tradition. Second, both Mark and John may have used a common formulation in the pre-Gospel tradition. On this explanation, Mark may have worked it into his account at 15:29 after developing his charge of “false prophecy” and constructing the two-tier scheme of ironic interpretation. Third, it is also possible that both Mark and John incorporated the “in three days” formulation independently of each other using the popular form of 1 Cor 15:4. In our estimation, the second explanation appears most likely. There is strong evidence for redactional and literary influence in the motif’s use in the temple prophecy, διὰ and word placement, but ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις is closer to Hos 6:2’s “the third day” formula in 1 Cor 15:4 τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ. The *terminus ante quem* for both formulations in Mark 15:29 (John 2:19) and Hos 6:2 are based on the same numerical designation: the count concludes with a date in “three days” or on “the third day.” These details suggest an older origin for the wording “in three days” in 15:29 over “within three days” in 14:58. Therefore,

follows. Mark – word in Mark and 0, 1, or 2 other gospels in parallel sentence (9,582); Q – same word in Matthew and Luke parallel with no parallel in Mark (1,789); QMT – word only in Matthew with parallel to Luke when no word is present and Mark has no parallel (1,014); QLK – word only in Luke with parallel to Matthew when no word is present and Mark has no parallel (949); M – word only in Matthew with no parallel (5,926); L – word only in Luke with no parallel (9,491); MTADD – word only in Matthew, sentence parallel to Mark (2,368); and LKADD – word only in Luke, sentence parallel to Mark (1,877). Total words detected by all sources = 32,996. Mark’s total = 29%; Q = 5%; QMT = 3%; QLK = 3%; M = 18%; L = 29%; MTADD = 7%; LKADD = 6%. Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae*, p. 10.

1 Cor 15:4 likely influenced the pre-Gospel form of the temple prophecy. Mark probably knew of this form and integrated it into his narrative at 15:29 but redacted it further at 14:58. The connection between the temple prophecy and the resurrection traditions culminates in John 2:19, where the temple prophecy becomes a prophecy of the resurrection.

In addition to their different prepositions, there is another significant difference between Mark 15:29 and 14:58. Whereas the numerical formula occurs in the middle of 14:58, in 15:29 it is placed at the end of the saying. The relocation creates an intentional ambiguity. The numerical designation can range over one or both conjuncts (καταλύων-οικοδομῶν): οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις. In the first case, the time designation encompasses the second conjunct only, οἰκοδομῶν. This reading follows the usage in 14:58 and restricts the numerical designation to the promise of replacement/rebuilding. However, unlike 14:58, the use of ἐν in 15:29 pushes the designation out three days. On this interpretation, the period likely refers to the three days spanning the crucifixion (Friday) and the resurrection (Sunday). The motif’s precision emphasizes the “third day” in the proclamation of the resurrection as the time of eschatological fulfillment/reversal.

In the second case, the time designation ranges over both conjuncts encompassing the promise of destruction and replacement “in three days.” A similar form occurs in 1 Sam 30:12: ὅτι οὐ βεβρώκει ἄρτον καὶ οὐ πεπόκει ὕδωρ τρεῖς ἡμέρας καὶ τρεῖς νύκτας. Here, the period refers to not eating bread or drinking water. By the same interpretation, the designation in Mark 15:29 refers to the three days following Jesus’ prediction of the temple’s destruction in 13:2.

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on a Sunday (11:1), and the Cursing of the Fig Tree and Temple Cleansing event transpire on Monday “the following day” (11:12). On Tuesday, the next “morning” (11:20), Jesus explains the lesson of the withered fig tree to his disciples and encounters opposition from the temple authorities. The section for Tuesday, the “third” day of Jesus’s arrival, includes an exceptional amount of material, and Jesus’s prophecy about the destruction of the temple at 13:2 is dated to this day. Tuesday does not end until 14:9 because 14:1 states explicitly that it was still “two days before the Passover” (Tuesday), and this

verse follows after the Olivet Discourse. Wednesday presumably passes while Judas plans Jesus's betrayal with the chief priests in 14:10–11. Thursday begins at 14:12, "on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed." Jesus is arrested that evening (14:43–50) and brought to trial before the Jewish council (14:53–65). On Friday, the following "morning" (15:1), Jesus is brought before Pilate (15:1–15) and crucified (15:21–32). On the Gentile method of postdating, it is not coincidental that the crucifixion ironically occurs exactly three days following Jesus's prophecy. The destruction/rebuilding seemingly refers to Jesus' death and the beginning of the Christian community.

The first interpretation of the time designation in 15:29, the period from the crucifixion to the resurrection, is probably the oldest of the two. It enjoys wider support from the pre-gospel tradition and follows the Jewish reckoning of counting for "the third day." The second interpretation depends upon the temporal sequencing of the Markan narrative and follows the Gentile method of calculating the length of the Assyro-Babylonian emperors' reigns. In this case, the ascension year is not counted as the first regnal year. On this way of counting, the following Wednesday begins the count and the *terminus ante quem* is Friday... the day of the crucifixion. Since both the temporal and geographical sequencing in Mark is widely regarded as redactional²¹ and the calculation method is a popular Gentile method, the dependent calculation of the counting is also likely to be redactional.

Turning to 14:58, the temporal designation "three days" applies to the period of expected "rebuilding" because it follows after *καί*. The use of a different preposition also signals a different meaning, and in this case *διά* should be translated as "within" or "by", referring to the time in-between the temple's destruction and its replacement. Hence, the whole designation *διά τριῶν ἡμερῶν* should read "within three days." The prepositional form of the motif permits a fulfillment "within three days" and not necessarily one that must occur "on the third day."

21 K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen Der Geschichte Jesu*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1969; Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*; C. H. Dodd, *The Framework of the Gospel Narrative*, "The Expository Times" 43 (1932) no. 9, pp. 396–400, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452463204300903>.

The intended fulfillment of the temple’s destruction in 14:58 follows at 15:37–38 with Jesus’s death. The veil of the Holy of Holies is torn in two at the crucifixion, and both 14:58 and 15:38 are each linked grammatically by *ναός*.²² The expectation of the temple’s replacement is fulfilled immediately or “within three days” when both women (15:40) and men (15:39) observe Jesus’s death and become inaugurators of the Christian faith. The replacement is fulfilled, therefore, by the emerging Christian community. “In all this the prophetic logic of 14,58 seems to find fulfillment...”²³ Alternatively, the emphasis on rebuilding permits a fulfillment if the count follows the traditional Jewish method of antedating. On this reckoning, it may be calculated from Jesus’s death on Friday to his resurrection on Sunday.

Hence, the use of the “three days” motif in the pre-Markan traditions for Mark 14:58 and 15:29 appears to be the result of pre-Markan innovation sometime during life-setting 2 (τῆ ἡμέρᾳ τῆ τρίτῃ / ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις),²⁴ but its final placement and form (διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν) are surely the result of Markan redaction during the first substage of life-setting 3. A pre-Markan redactor added the motif to Jesus’s temple prophecy, removing any perceived embarrassment with the failed prophecy. The use of the motif follows a precedent like 1 Cor 15:4, but Mark presents it with some linguistic variation and connects the “false testimony” of the trial with the passion predications of Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:34 and the temple prophecy of 13:2. The reader knows why the testimony is “false”, e.g., “three days” refers to the resurrection, the prophecy of the temple’s destruction has no time designation, God is the agent of destruction, etc., yet Mark uses ironic polyvalent reinterpretations to show how the “false prophecy” is made true through symbolism.²⁵

22 Biguzzi, “*To Distruggerò Questo Tempio*”, p. 192.

23 Biguzzi, “*To Distruggerò Questo Tempio*”, p. 192.

24 G. Strecker, *Die Passionsgeschichte im Markusevangelium*, [in:] *Bilanz und Perspektiven gegenwärtiger Auslegung des Neuen Testaments. Symposium zum 65. Geburtstag von Georg Strecker*, hrsg. von F. W. Horn, Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter 1995, p. 237 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 75), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110882841-012>; Paesler, *Das Tempelwort Jesu*, pp. 176, 178.

25 D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple. The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, Missoula: Scholars Press 1971, p. 55 (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 31). Polyvalence

Mark follows the traditional reinterpretations of the temple prophecy attested by Paul, e.g., applied to the Christian community in Gal 2:18, 1 Cor 3:16–17, 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16, and the resurrection in 2 Cor 5:1, Rom 9:33. These were likely developed sometime around life-setting 2.

Numerical Motif in Mark's Passion Predictions

How did the “after three days” formulation arise for Mark's passion predictions? While some scholars theorize that Mark's *μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας* is traditional,²⁶ it is more often regarded as redactional (entering the tradition at life-setting 3). The formulation of Matthew's and Luke's *τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ* variation probably antedates Mark's formulation given its closer semantic similarity to 1 Cor 15:4.²⁷ The redactional explanation of *μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας* is also supported by the linguistic analysis.²⁸

	Total	MK	Q	QMT	QLK	M	L	MTADD	LKADD
<i>μετὰ</i>	148	52	6	3	2	22	37	19	7
<i>τρεῖς</i>	23	7	1	4	–	3	8	–	–
<i>ἡμέρας</i>	123	27	5	4	4	14	48	5	7

Once again, this method visually confirms the characteristic usage of *μετὰ*, and Mark is probably returning to Hos 6:2 for the form.

Gaston's method of binomial distribution can help to identify characteristic usage, like in the case of *μετὰ*, but it may not help to identify redactional usage when two or more sources have comparable distribution. This looks to be the case for Mark's and Luke's use of *τρεῖς*

is a common feature of Markan irony. See J. Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext*, Cambridge University Press 2004 (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 72), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520327>.

26 S. V. McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 48 (1929) no. 3–4, p. 136, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3259719>; G. Strecker, *The Passion-and Resurrection Predictions in Mark's Gospel (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34)*, “Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology” 22 (1968), 429 cf. 20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096436802200403>.

27 E. Lichtenstein, *Die älteste christliche Glaubensformel*, “Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte” 63 (1950–1951), pp. 38, 43; Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, pp. 64–65.

28 Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae*, pp. 69, 71.

(ἡμέρας looks more clearly Lukan). Fortunately, the words have a ready explanation in Mark’s use of Jonah 1:17 as an additional intertext. Other lines of linguistic analyses support the assessment: Turner’s account of Mark’s distinctive use of numbers,²⁹ Perrin’s connection with the Transfiguration μετὰ ἡμέρας ἕξ of Mark 9:2,³⁰ Dschulnigg’s study of Markan redaction and vocabulary (characteristic recurring words),³¹ and Friedrich’s study of Markan words/phrases avoided by Matthew and Luke.³² Hence, Mark’s “after three days” looks redactional but is probably drawing from the tradition in 1 Cor 15:4.

There is disagreement about the reason for Mark’s redaction. It may be an apologetic response to the opponents of Christianity who denied the divine nature of the resurrection based on the ancient superstition that the soul lingers around the corpse for three days before departing. If the resurrection occurred “on the third day”, Jesus could have resuscitated apart from the divine miracle. In response, a pre-Markan tradition and Mark may have emphasized “*after* three days” to underscore God’s role in the resurrection.³³ Proponents of this position often theorize that Mark is using traditions with different dates for the discovery of the empty tomb or resurrection appearances, some “on the third day” and others “after three days” meaning on the fourth day.³⁴ This proposal is probably based on confusion, however, because the different phrases need not indicate different numerical values but may be synonymous

29 J. K. Elliot, *The Language & Style of the Gospel of Mark: An Edition of C. H. Turner’s “Notes on Marcan Usage” Together with Other Comparable Studies*, New York: Brill 1993, p. 54 (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 71), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004259997>.

30 N. Perrin, *Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark*, [in:] *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin*, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz, Claremont: New Testament Colloquium 1971, pp. 27–28.

31 P. Dschulnigg, *Sprache, Redaktion und Intention des Markus-Evangeliums: Eigentümlichkeiten der Sprache des Markus-Evangeliums und ihre Bedeutung für die Redaktionskritik*, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk 1984, pp. 77, 96, 765 (Stuttgarter Biblische Beiträge, 11).

32 M. Friedrich, *Exkurs V*, [in:] J. Schreiber, *Der Kreuzigungsbericht des Markusevangeliums Mk 15, 20b–41*, New York: De Gruyter 1986, pp. 395–433 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 48); F. Neiryneck, *Words Characteristic of Mark: A New List*, “Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses” 64 (1987), pp. 367–374.

33 McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, pp. 135–136

34 See listing in Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, 119 cf. 10.

usus loquendi, e.g., Gen 42:17–18; 2 Chr 10:5, 12; Esth 4:16; 5:1; Josephus *Ant.* §§ 7.280–281; 8.214, 218; Matthew 27:63–64.³⁵ This use is suggested by Mark since he clearly implies that the resurrection occurred on Sunday, the third day following the crucifixion, but apparently sees no problem in using “after” in the passion predictions.³⁶ Alternatively, for other theological reasons, Mark may also be using a common Jewish idiom according to which the phrase “after three days” merely means “in a short time.”³⁷ Most likely, as Geddert explains, the grammatical variation is probably due to Mark’s desire to avoid over identifying the fulfillment of the temple prophecy with the passion predictions because he means to suggest more than a resurrection interpretation for the temple prophecy.³⁸ Geddert’s explanation fits best with Mark’s polyvalent reinterpretations of the temple prophecy in contrast to the passion predictions. In summary, the “after three days” form in Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 and the “within three days” form in 14:58 appear to be redactional, and the precise placement of the motif in 14:58 is also redactional. However, these appear to be secondary to the traditional “in three days” form at 15:29 (John 2:19). This traditional form of the motif probably emerged from resurrection hymns like 1 Cor 15:4 after applying the language of the resurrection to the temple prophecy.

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- 35 V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1981, p. 378 (Thornapple Commentaries); E. L. Bode, *The First Easter Morning: The Gospel Accounts of the Women’s Visit to the Tomb of Jesus*, Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1970, pp. 109–110 (Analecta Biblica, 45); H. McArthur, *On the Third Day*, “New Testament Studies” 18 (1971) no. 1, p. 85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002868850002350X>; D. J. Clark, *After Three Days*, “The Bible Translator” 30 (1979) no. 3, pp. 340–343, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026009357903000306>; Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, p. 119 cf. 11.
- 36 C. H. Turner, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: Introduction and Commentary*, London 1900, p. 40.
- 37 M. Proctor, “After Three Days” in Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34: *Subordinating Jesus’ Resurrection in the Second Gospel*, “Perspectives in religious studies” 30 (2003) no. 4, pp. 399–424.
- 38 T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*, JSOT Press 1989, p. 133 (Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series, 26).

Presentation and Evaluation of the Historical Explanations

Rejecting the negative historical critical judgment, some scholars apply the criteria of authenticity to support the historicity of the “three days” motif in Jesus’s temple prophecy at life-setting 1. Perhaps the strongest support is its multiple attestation in both Mark 14:58 and John 2:19. Because it occurs in two independent sources, it is likely authentic. A few different explanations support the motif’s inclusion in the first stage of the saying’s tradition history:³⁹

1. The words could be understood from the rabbinic point of view that on the 3rd day after the end of the world the dead would rise [drawn from Hos 6:2],
2. Refer to the resurrection of Jesus, but then it would have to be μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας or τῆ τρίτη ἡμέρα (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:4; Mt 27:63, or 1 Cor 15:4; Mt 16:21 cf.), or
3. Quit simply “a conceivably short period of time, which illustrates the incomprehensible wonder of this building and this building...”⁴⁰

Each explanation is intractable, and neither of them is strong enough to alter our assessment.

The problem with the first explanation, the view that Jesus cited Hos 6:2 or dependent traditions, is that it cannot be proven. A “third day” specification for the general resurrection is not well attested at the time of the historical Jesus.⁴¹ The explanation simply does not meet its burden of proof.⁴² The rabbinic uses are indeed based on Hos 6:2, but these are dated much later than the 1st century CE. Regarding the sources from the Talmud and Midrash, for example, “...all of them are hundreds of

39 P. Vielhauer, *Oikodome: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, hrsg. von G. Klein, München: Kaiser Verlag 1979, p. 64 (Theologische Bücherei Neues Testament, 65).

40 Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, p. 60.

41 C. R. Bowen, *The Resurrection in the New Testament*, New York–London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons–The Knickerbocker Press 1911, p. 18–19.

42 K. Lehmann, *Auferweckt am dritten Tag nach der Schrift: Früheste Christologie, Bekenntnisbildung und Schriftauslegung im Lichte von 1 Kor. 15,3–5*, Freiburg: Herder 1968, p. 184 (Quaestiones Disputatae, 38); McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, p. 131; Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, 122 cf. 25.

years later than the New Testament period.”⁴³ The earliest source often cited here is the Targum on Hosea associated with Jonathan b. Uzziel in the first century, but the Targum contains both early and late material:⁴⁴

Hos 6:2

² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

TgJon

He will revive us for the days of consolation which are to come; on the day of the resurrection of the dead he will raise us and we shall live in his presence.

Noticeably, “the third day” has become “the day of the resurrection.” The numerical designation has been dropped out, and this displays a clear development in the tradition. Hence, the confluence of content makes it difficult to distinguish between material from the two periods, and this means that the Targum itself cannot tell us precisely when Hos 6:2’s “third day” designation became explicitly used of the eschatological expectation for the resurrection of the dead at the time of Jesus.⁴⁵ For this reason, it remains unclear just how far back the rabbinic sources allow us to date the numerical designation based on Hos 6:2.

⁴³ Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of Jesus*, p. 79. For example, the Midrash Rabbah collection is dated to the fourth to sixth centuries CE. Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer is an eighth century collection. The material in the Midrash on Ps 22 is dated to the third to fifth centuries CE. The Babylonian Talmud and Jerusalem Talmud were collected and redacted in the third century CE. The Mishnah itself does not quote Hos 6:2 or Jonah 1:17.

⁴⁴ Citation of Targum in Cavallin, *Life After Death*, p. 189.

⁴⁵ The late dates for the Jewish sources render Delling’s argument unhelpful. He reasons that the Jews must have intentionally suppressed a traditional “third day” use of Hos 6:2 of the resurrection in this Targum because it is cited in the later Rabbinic exegesis, Sifre Deut. Pisqa 129:II. He finds support for his theory by the patterned use of numbers in multiples of 1000 in the later rabbinic sources. Delling, *ἡμέρα*, [in:] *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, 949. However, the numbers occurring in multiples of 1000 more naturally reflect millennial and messianic speculation rather than the intentional suppression of the Christian usage of Hos 6:2. Even if true, however, his theory would only show a suppression at a late date far removed from Jesus’s time. The appeal to a general belief about God protecting the righteous who persevere for “three

Even in the extra-canonical writings of the early Church, usage of Hos 6:2 is rare. It first occurs in the *Apology of Aristides* (2nd century CE)⁴⁶ and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (155–160 CE).⁴⁷ It does not occur explicitly alongside resurrection until Tertullian’s *Against Marcion* IV, xliii (207–208 CE),⁴⁸ and begins to appear more frequently around this time, e.g., twice in the *Treatises of Cyprian* I.IV.35; II.25 (251 CE)⁴⁹ and Lactantius’s *Divine Institutes* IV.XIX;⁵⁰ *Epitome*, xlvii (260–330 CE).⁵¹

From the scant evidence, McCasland erroneously concludes that Hos 6:2 does not stand behind the numerical designation in the Christian proclamation of the resurrection at all.⁵² However, he overlooks the clear grammatical and thematic connections between Hos 6:2 and 1 Cor 15:4 and a plausible explanation why Hosea is not explicitly cited, so his conclusion is surely mistaken.⁵³ First, he errors in thinking influence

times” does not support his thesis either. If this tradition had influenced the “third day” motif of the resurrection, it would be found in more places throughout the Early and Late Rabbinic Periods. The late attestation of the “third day” motif in the Early Rabbinic Period is best explained as a natural development between competing views regarding the time of the resurrection in the eschatological denouement, e.g., the day of the Lord or the third day, and not by anti-Christian tendencies. The date for the first rabbinic attestation simply disconfirms his thesis, exposing it as an argument from silence. For more discussion of resurrection in rabbinic sources, see A. J. Avery-Peck, *Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources: The Mishnah, Tosefta, and Early Midrash Compilations*, [in:] *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 4: *Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and The World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, ed. by Alan J. Avery-Peck, Jacob Neusner, Leiden: Brill 2000, pp. 243–266, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004294141_012; J. Neusner, *Death and Afterlife in the Later Rabbinic Sources: The Two Talmuds and Associated Midrash Compilations*, [in:] *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 4: *Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and The World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, ed. by Alan J. Avery-Peck, Jacob Neusner, Leiden: Brill 2000, pp. 267–291, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004294141_013.

46 McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, p. 126.

47 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, [in:] Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, 247–248.

48 Tertullian, *Against Maricon*, [in:] Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, 421–422.

49 Cyprian, *The Treatises of Cyprian*, [in:] Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 5, 457, 525.

50 Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, [in:] Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7, 122,

51 Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, [in:] Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 7, 241.

52 McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, 131.

53 McCasland’s theory is that the numerical designation was attached to visionary appearance traditions based on the ancient superstition about the soul lingering around the body for three days. This produced conflicting traditions of the resurrection, one on the third day, one on the fourth day, etc. Eventually, the third day was favored due to its

must be explicit, but it can be implied. Second, as Novakovic argues, once the terminology of “first fruits” entered the tradition, Christians became concerned with the general resurrection, and other texts better served this interest.⁵⁴ Indeed, the scarcity of usage first attested clearly by a pre-Pauline creedal hymn renders the first explanation unlikely, because it shows that Jesus would probably not have known or used such an unfamiliar numerical designation. For this reason, the explanation looks anachronistic because it traces later Christian and rabbinic usage back to Jesus.

Similar problems arise for the second explanation. It is highly unlikely that the numerical motif is the result of historical passion predictions in “three days.”⁵⁵ Our findings show that the motif is better attested in the temple prophecy than in the passion predictions. Also, none of the Jewish sources from Jesus’s time or the rabbinic sources mention the resurrection of a particular individual “three days” ahead of the general resurrection.⁵⁶ One text that may be from the time, the *Gabriel Revelation*,⁵⁷ anticipates an eschatological “sign” following “three days”

harmony with the crucifixion on Friday and Sabbath observance on Sunday. McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, pp. 135–136. On the contrary, had the ancient superstition prompted the combination of numerical designations and the appearance traditions of the resurrection, it would have dated the resurrection on the “fourth” day or sometime thereafter to avoid the suspicion of a natural resuscitation, e.g. the *Apocalypse of Elijah* 4:15: “on the fourth day they will rise up”; and *The Assumption of the Virgin* [Coptic; Homily in Bohairic attributed to Evodius] XV: “and the body [of Mary] was laid in the tomb and watched for three and a half days”; XVII: “At midday on the fourth day all were gathered at the tomb”. No third-day version would have emerged. McCasland also assumes that the designations are logically inconsistent, but our findings show that they are indeed harmonious *usus loquendi*. Finally, redaction criticism had not yet been developed at the time of his writing, so he could not factor in linguistic and stylistic evidence for redaction. Redaction explains variation and renders alternative dates for the resurrection superfluous.

54 Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, 132–133.

55 G. Hölscher, *Der Ursprung der Apokalypse Markus 13*, “Theologische Blätter” 12 (1933), 193–202.

56 McCasland, *The Scripture Basis of “On the Third Day”*, 131–132.

57 Translation from the limestone stele, A. Yardeni, B. Elizur, *A Prophetic Text on Stone from the First Century BCE: First Publication*, “Cathedra” 123 (2007), pp. 155–166. Corrections in A. Yuditsky, E. Qimron, *Notes on the Inscription ‘The Vision of Gabriel’*, “Cathedra” 133 (2009), pp. 133–144.

of conflict after Jerusalem is surrounded by armies. However, the “sign” clearly refers to Jerusalem’s vindication and not the messiah’s resurrection.⁵⁸ Its precise dating is also unclear, ranging from the 1st century BCE to the mid-1st century CE, so its influence on Jesus is uncertain. Some scholars even suspect a forgery: 1. it is the only “Dead Sea Scroll in Stone”; 2. it contains a disproportionate amount of biblical material; 3. it is pseudepigraphic; 4. it was first made available to a scholar who previously advanced a theory supported by initial translations of the finding (Knohl); and 5. its provenance is clouded.⁵⁹ This last point is of special concern because it was purchased from an antique dealer sometime between 2000 and 2001 (who died in 2001) before being made known to the public in 2005. Details about its handling between 2000 and 2005 are vague. Since the evidence for belief in a resurrected messiah in/after “three days” is either non-existent, scant, or spurious for the time of Jesus, his eschatology more likely anticipated a general resurrection on the “day of the Lord”; the numerical designation “can hardly be explained in terms of the resurrection.”⁶⁰

58 Knohl originally theorized that the *Gabriel Revelation* mentioned a messianic resurrection “by three days”. I. Knohl “By Three Days, Live”: *Messiahs, Resurrection, and Ascent to Heaven in Hazon Gabriel*, “The Journal of Religion” 88 (April 2008) no. 2, pp. 147–158, <https://doi.org/10.1086/525562>. He translated line 80 ימין האות as “By three days, live!” and referred it to the resurrection of a Davidic messiah. However, he now follows Hendel’s translation of האות as “sign”, so he translates line 80 as “By three days, the sign”, thus rejecting his original resurrection interpretation. I. Knohl, *The Apocalyptic and Messianic Dimensions of the Gabriel Revelation in Their Historical Context*, [in:] *Hazon Gabriel: New Readings of the Gabriel Revelation*, ed. by M. Henze, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2011, 43 cf. 12 (Early Judaism and its Literature, 29). For a slightly more detailed summary of the developments pertaining to the *Gabriel Revelation*, see Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, 21–122 cf. 22. Though the sign is vague, some interpreters identify it with the revealing of the messiah, see T. Elgvin, *Eschatology and Messianism in the Gabriel Inscription*, „Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting” 2014 no. 1, p. 18.

59 Å. Justnes, *Gabriels åpenbaring (Hazon Gabriel): En modern forfalskning?*, “Teologisk Tidsskrift” 4 (2015) no. 2, pp. 120–133, <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1893-0271-2015-02-02>; “The Qumran Chronicle” 26 (December 2018) no. 3–4, pp. 113–127; J. Klawans, *Deceptive Intentions: Forgeries, Falsehoods and the Study of Ancient Judaism*, “The Jewish Quarterly Review” 108 (Fall 2018) no. 4, pp. 489–501, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.2018.0030>.

60 Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, p. 65.

The third explanation is perhaps the strongest of the three.⁶¹ Jeremias claims that the numerical designation reflects the historical Jesus's expectation of the eschatological temple: "This is the meaning of an ancient *agrapton*, which makes Jesus utter the warning: Save yourself, your life is at stake (cf. Gen. 19.17). Only those who endure the 'three days' before the rebuilding of the temple will be saved."⁶² He theorizes that its usage indicates a different vintage, because it is not used exclusively of the resurrection (Mark 14:58; 15:29 – new temple; Luke 13:32 – consummation, 33 – prophet; John 16:16, 17, 19 – period up to passion).

The Semitic languages do not have a common word for "some", as Bauer explains, "There is hardly a word for 'some' in Hebrew either: only in three places (Gn 27:44; 29:20; Dn 11:20) found *'aḥādīm*. It is easy to understand that 'three' can mean 'some'."⁶³ In these rare occurrences, the Hebrew word אַחַדִּים is translated as "a few" or "some", but this usage is virtually non-existent. By expedience, then, the Hebrew words שלש and שלשה ימים translated as "three" and "three days" are much more commonly used for an unspecified or short period of time (Exod 3:18; 5:3; 23:17; Josh 1:11; 2:16; 1 Sam 20:5; 2 Sam 6:11; 20:4; 2 Kgs 20:8; 2 Chr 20:25; Ezra 8:32; Neh 2:11; Hos 6:2; Jonah 3:3; Isa 20:3, etc.). The induction is that the use of the designation "three days" in the non-resurrection texts reflects this independent OT usage and is therefore likely a feature of the historical Jesus's teaching or pre-Markan tradition.⁶⁴ This explanation can also be combined with the first one.⁶⁵ In the case of Mark 14:58, it anticipates the eschatological temple.

The main problem with the idiomatic interpretation is that the phrases "third day/three days" in 1 Cor 15:4; Mark 14:58, 15:29; Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:29; Luke 9:22; 13:32, 33; 18:33; and John 16:16, 17, 19 are used with an eye to numerical precision. Even though there are nuances in their uses, it is difficult to explain why the precision became a consistent

⁶¹ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 129; Bauer, *Drei Tage*, p. 357; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 566.

⁶² Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 129.

⁶³ Bauer, *Drei Tage*, p. 355.

⁶⁴ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 285.

⁶⁵ N. Perrin, *Jesus The Temple*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2010, p. 106.

concern if the motif never implied such calculation.⁶⁶ According to this explanation, Jesus’s idiomatic use coincidentally became literally true. The explanation is possible but looks unlikely. It runs up against the evidence suggesting a *Sitz im Leben* in the early church and a problem with meaning. First, the use of the idiom in Jesus’s time does not provide any positive or probable support for Jesus’s usage in the temple prophecy, i.e., its existence only establishes a possibility. However, this modality is not of much help in weighing historical judgments. It ignores the formal and redactional evidence identifying a probable origin for the motif in relation to the resurrection.⁶⁷ Second, the motif based on Hos 6:2 and 1 Cor 15:4 most likely emphasizes a literal chronology from the start, μετὰ δύο ἡμέρας = ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς τρίτης.⁶⁸ Applied to Mark 14:58, the motif looks like a redactional formulation whose fulfillments coordinate “within” a literal three days at the Centurion’s confession and Jesus’s resurrection. Mark does not mean “within a short time” (a week?) when each fulfillment occurs “within” a literal three-day

66 Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 73; Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, p. 112; Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead According to Scripture*, p. 125–126. These scholars are looking at the designation in the resurrection traditions, but their comments *mutatis mutandis* apply to the motif in the temple prophecy.

67 Paesler, *Das Tempelwort Jesu*, pp. 174–176. Even Lindars, who thinks that Jesus used the “third day” motif in Hos 6:2 to predict his vindication (resurrection as national/spiritual restoration) recognizes this point and judges the numerical motif’s presence in the temple prophecy as secondary. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, p. 67.

68 Strecker, *The Passion and Resurrection Predictions in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34)*, 429 cf. 19. Lindars and Proctor argue that the “after two days... on the third day” phrase in Hos 6:2 is also idiomatic for “a short time”. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, p. 61; Proctor, “After Three Days He Will Rise”: *The (Dis)Appropriation of Hosea 6:2 in the Markan Passion Predictions*, 138 cf. 18. However, while context determines usage, Roth classifies Hos 6:2 with texts using “the numerical sequence $x/x+1$ distributed over the two halves of a verse exhibiting synonymous or synthetic parallelism” with a “definite numerical value” in contrast to those with “a more or less indefinite numerical value”. Wolfgang M. W. Roth, *The Numerical Sequence $x/x+1$ in the Old Testament*, “Vetus Testamentum” 12 (1962) no. 3, p. 304, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1516656>. Nothing in the context of Hos 6:2 suggests otherwise. Hence, the motif in Hos 6:2 and 1 Cor 15:4 is more likely literal, e.g., “the third day” not “a short time”. The fulfillments of the designations “on the third day” and “after three days” can still coincide *usus loquendi* even if the phrases are not idiomatic for “a short time”.

period. There is no good reason to think that the Hebrew way of reckoning “a short time” or “a while” explains the inclusion of “three days” in 14:58 and 15:29. Critical assessment of the “three days” motif shows that the criterion of multiple attestation is not sacrosanct and must be used in conjunction with other criteria.⁶⁹

The precise stage at which the numerical motif entered the temple prophecy is unclear, whether pre-Markan or Markan, and there are two competing explanations for the Markan and Johannine agreement.⁷⁰ In the first case, John is dependent upon the pre-Markan tradition in which a version of the saying with the temporal locution circulated. This explanation dates the form to life-setting 2. In the second case, John’s version is dependent upon oral reports derived from Mark’s gospel. This explanation dates the form to life-setting 3. The first explanation is more probable because re-interpretive strategies are likely to have been influenced by popular hymnal phrasing of the resurrection, “on the third day”, at earlier than later stages. A third explanation that Mark and John coincidentally developed the same formulation independently of each other in the same prophecy is most unlikely.

Our findings suggest that the motif likely entered the temple prophecy logion at an early but secondary stage of transmission. The “third day” motif became very influential *vis-à-vis* the Christian proclamation of the resurrection. After Jesus’s ignominious execution and burial on a Friday and the subsequent discovery of his empty tomb on “the first day of the week” the following Sunday, Jesus’s disciples began to search the OT scriptures to make sense of everything that had transpired. The matter became pressed considering the appearances and visions of Jesus. Convinced of Jesus’s resurrection, they began to appropriate texts like “on the third day” of Hos 6:2 in their early proclamations of

⁶⁹ As Meier explains, regarding the criterion of multiple attestation, it is not *a priori* impossible that some feature or saying was created early enough to have found its way into multiple sources. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, New York: Doubleday 1991, p. 175.

⁷⁰ Paul does not mention the motif when using the temple language of Christians in Gal 2:18, 1 Cor 3:12–17, 2 Cor 6:16, or the resurrection in 2 Cor 5:1, Rom 9:33. This suggests a date at some time between Paul and Mark.

the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:4–7). Both the communal and resurrection re-interpretations of the temple prophecy became widely known before Mark’s composition, e.g., used by Christians in Gal 2:18, 1 Cor 3:12–17, 2 Cor 6:16, and of the resurrection in 2 Cor 5:1, Rom 9:33. These versions found their way independently into both the pre-Markan and pre-Johannine sources. In Mark, the prophecy refers to both the new community and Jesus’s resurrection. Depending on where the interpreter begins the count, whether from Jesus’s prophecy in Mark 13:2, his trial before the Jewish authorities, or his crucifixion and death in Mark 15:37, the prophecies are ironically and symbolically fulfilled each in their own way “with/in three days.”

The other criteria of authenticity typically cited in support of historicity are also easily handled. Those who appeal to the criterion of embarrassment assume that the designation is necessary to make sense of the embarrassment, but the embarrassment can be accounted for in other ways. For example, if the verb for “destroy” is conjugated as a present active indicative (translating an active participle in the Aramaic), then the saying may express temporal imminence apart from the time designation. Confusion may also have arisen if Jesus had spoken proleptically in this manner. The embarrassment may additionally have entered from outside the context of the utterance, an explanation permitting future tense conjugations with no inherent time limitations. Therefore, the argument from embarrassment to the inclusion of the motif fails to persuade. The criterion of coherence is insufficient to establish authenticity by itself, because the saying would cohere with Jesus’s apocalyptic with/without the motif. This is why other criteria are typically applied before coherence.⁷¹ Finally, the criterion of contextual credibility runs into problems with our assessment of the scant evidence in support of the temporal designation’s usage at the time of Jesus. The general reference to “some” period does not square with the widespread understanding of the designation in the tradition.

71 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1, p. 176.

Conclusion

Summarizing the discussion of the “third day/three days” motif in Mark 14:58, several findings question its inclusion in the original formulation of the prophecy. In addition to recent work suggesting its secondary nature, e.g., it plays a central role in *the chiastic* structuring of the trial narrative, it structurally parallels 15:37–39, it contains secondary grammatical clues, etc., its diagrammatic structuring and location in the motif’s tradition history also suggests inauthenticity. Together, these details suggest that the form and placement of the motif in 14:58 is probably the result of Markan redaction even though the pre-gospel oral tradition began to introduce “third day” terminology into the prophecy following the early Christian proclamation of the resurrection “on the third day.” In this regard, the form of the motif in 15:29 is likely earlier than that in 14:58. Hence, the motif found its way into Jesus’s temple prophecy at an early stage in life-setting 2 as Christians resolved tensions arising from the threat of disconfirmation. Mark uses the designation to show, ironically, how the prophecy of the temple’s destruction/replacement could be literally false yet symbolically true.

Abstract

Mark 14:58 and the “three days” motif

Jeremias and others include the “three days” motif in their reconstruction of Jesus’s prophecy about the temple’s destruction in Mark 14:58. While the arguments in the literature in the presence of a plausible case for authenticity, it is more likely an inauthentic pre-Markan innovation. Even so, its placement and form in 14:58 is surely the result of the Markan redaction. In addition to arguments from redaction, literary, and structural criticism, the hypothetical reconstruction of the motif’s tradition history in early Christianity suggests that the addition follows a pattern of connecting Jesus’s prophecy with the resurrection and growth of the Christian movement. With this designation, Mark shows how the prophecy is literally false because it misrepresents Jesus’s actual teaching but is, ironically, symbolically true.

Keywords: Gospel of Mark, Mark 14:58, three days, temple

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