

The Twelve in Mark

E Bruce Brooks

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

SBL (Atlanta, 21 Nov 2010)

Continuing an analysis which was begun in previous papers,¹ I here consider the Twelve passages in Mark. These were recognized as exiguous by Meyer, who referred them to a Twelve source.² I find that they are an authorial addition to Mark, and reflect a point when the Jesus movement acquired a more formal administrative structure.³ The Twelve story is muddled by the presence of Judas, and I will begin with him.

Judas

Among the anomalies in Mark are the repeated reminders, in the Betrayal scene, that Judas is “one of the Twelve.” Another is the divergence between Mark’s roster of the Twelve (which, with minor changes of order, is the same as that in Matthew) and the one in Luke/Acts. I believe that these two anomalies solve each other.

The Mk 3:16f Twelve list concludes, “and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.” No one else in Mark is introduced with a prediction of his future role in the story.⁴ When Judas becomes the betrayer in Mk 14, we are thrice reminded that he is “one of the Twelve.” Those reminders are grammatically superfluous, and can be removed:

- **Mk 14:10.** And Judas Iscariot = *he that was one of the Twelve*, went away unto the chief priests, that he might deliver him unto them.
- **Mk 14:20.** And he said unto them, [It is] *one of the Twelve* = he that dippeth with me in the dish.
- **Mk 14:43.** And straightway, while he yet spake, cometh Judas = *one of the Twelve*, and with him a multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

The text here insists too much. It may then be that these phrases are later additions, meant to make the betrayal seem yet more heinous as coming from the inner circle.⁵ Then the Mk 3 Twelve list may have been amended, not by *adding* Judas, but by *substituting* him for someone else, the symbolic number “Twelve” being maintained.

¹See Brooks **Resurrection, Divinization** and the companion study Brooks **Five**.

²For the original argument, see Meyer **Ursprung** 1a/264-291.

³For the details, see Brooks **Five**.

⁴That Peter and Andrew will be “fishers of men” (Mk 1:17) is not fulfilled within the story.

⁵For increasing animus against Judas in the Gospels, see Yoder **Judas** 175f. In one later text, the only souls left in Hell after its harrowing are Herod, Cain, and Judas (Elliott 669). In the Acts of Andrew and Paul, Judas’s soul is taken from Hell only to keep Satan from boasting that “after all, we are stronger than Jesus; he has had to leave a soul with us” (Elliott 302).

With this possibility in mind, I now turn to the Synoptic Twelve lists. With original sequence indicated (and with #12 Judas Iscariot eliminated), these are as follows:

Mark 3:16-19	Matthew 10:2-4	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
1 Simon [Peter]	1 Simon [Peter]	1 Simon [Peter]	1 Simon [Peter]
2 James of Zebedee	3 James of Zebedee	3 James of Zebedee	3 James of Zebedee
3 John of Zebedee	4 John of Zebedee	4 John of Zebedee	2 John of Zebedee
4 Andrew	2 Andrew ⁶	2 Andrew	4 Andrew
5 Philip	5 Philip	5 Philip	5 Philip
6 Bartholomew	6 Bartholomew	6 Bartholomew	7 Bartholomew
7 Matthew	8 Matthew	7 Matthew	8 Matthew
8 Thomas	7 Thomas ⁷	8 Thomas	6 Thomas
9 James of Alphaeus	9 James of Alphaeus	9 James of Alphaeus	9 James of Alphaeus
10 Thaddaeus	10 Thaddaeus		
11 Simon the Cananaean	11 Simon the Cananaean	10 Simon the Zealot	10 Simon the Zealot
		11 Judas of Jacob	11 Judas of Jacob

There are two inventories: those of Mark (slightly reordered by Matthew) and Luke (slightly reordered in Acts). Combining them laterally, we get this conjectural original:

- 1 Simon [Peter]
- 2 James of Zebedee
- 3 John of Zebedee
- 4 Andrew
- 5 Philip
- 6 Bartholomew
- 7 Matthew
- 8 Thomas
- 9 James of Alphaeus
- 10 Thaddaeus
- 11 Simon the Cananaean/Zealot⁸
- 12 Judas of Jacob

In Mark, Judas Iscariot replaced Judas of James in last position; a substitution of one Judas for another. Luke instead dropped Thaddaeus and retained Judas of Jacob,⁹ and added Judas Iscariot after him. Both place Judas Iscariot last, perhaps to emphasize his menace; this is in any case the default position for an interpolation. There was then only one Twelve list, which Mark and Luke altered in different ways in adding Judas Iscariot. The *deeds* of Judas in Mark may stand, but his inclusion in the Twelve list, and in the phrases italicized in the above quotations, appear to be later adjustments.

The “Judas” Interpolations in Mark are then: Mk 3:19b (replacive), plus 14:10b, 14:20b, and 14:43b (additive). I will here call them the **J** or Judas layer. As extensions of the primary Twelve roster, they must be later than the Twelve (T) passages proper. To determine *how much* later, we may now consider the Twelve passages themselves.

⁶Matthew and Luke both put Andrew directly after his brother Peter, as in Mk 1:16.

⁷The position of Thomas on these lists steadily rises (from Mark to Luke [A] to Matthew). He first appears as an individual character in John. His legend (the mission to India), or his association with the Gospel of Thomas, may already have been developing during this period.

⁸“Cananaean” and “Zealot” are synonyms (Taylor 234). Given that energetic association, the interpretation of “Iscariot” as “one of the Sicari” (Taylor 234) probably has merit.

⁹Luke follows Matthew in seeing Jerusalem as the center of early Christianity. He may have construed “Judas of Jacob” as a brother of Jacob the Lord’s Brother (and his successor as the head of the Jerusalem church), and for that reason preferred to retain his name on the list.

The Twelve

It is easily seen that the Twelve passages are intrusive in Mark. The unambiguous case is the Sending. The question here is, What is Herod worrying about?

- **Mk 6:6b.** And [Jesus] went round about the villages teaching.

[7] And he calleth unto him the Twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two, and he gave them authority over the unclean spirits . . . [13] And they cast out many demons, and anointed many that were sick, and healed them.

[14] And King Herod heard [thereof], for his name had become known, and he said, John the Baptizer is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him. [15] But others said, It is Elijah. And others said, A prophet . . .

Herod and his courtiers look past a dozen men going all over the country and casting out demons, and they see instead one man: Jesus (6:14, “*his*” name). Herod acts as if the intervening Sending of the Twelve had not taken place. The likely inference is that, when Mk 6:14f was written, Mk 6:7-13 was indeed not yet part of the text.

Associated Passages. The other substantive Twelve passages are:

- **Mk 3:13-19** [The Calling of the Twelve]
- **Mk 6:30-31a** [The Return of the Twelve]

The Calling, the Sending, and the Return stand or fall together. They must then all be regarded as interpolated, even if only one (the Sending) is conspicuously interruptive.

As with the Judas layer, there are a number of places where the phrase “with the Twelve” is added to passages which are grammatically complete without them:

- **Mk 4:10.** And when he was alone, they that were about him *with the Twelve* asked him of the parables.¹⁰

Here, a whole clause is superfluous:

- **Mk 9:33-35.** And they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he asked them, What were ye reasoning on the way? [34] But they held their peace, for they had disputed one with another on the way, who [was] the greatest. [35a] *And he sat down and called the Twelve*, [35b] and he saith unto them, If anyone would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.

When Jesus sits down, he is already in the presence of his followers; there is no need to call anybody together.

Here, “the Twelve” seems to have replaced an earlier “the disciples:”

- **Mk 11:11b.** And he entered into Jerusalem, into the Temple, and when he had looked round about upon all things, he went out unto Bethany *with the Twelve*.

Earlier, at 11:1, those with Jesus are simply called “the disciples.” A similar case is:

- **Mk 14:17.** And when it was evening he cometh with *the Twelve*.

Earlier, at 14:12-13, those with Jesus are simply called “the disciples;” so also 14:14 and 14:32. It is probable that the persons in question are the same throughout, that they were originally referred to as “the disciples,” and that one of the references, 14:17b, but *only* that one, was subsequently altered to read “[with] the Twelve.”

¹⁰So also Guelich 204.

The “**Twelve**” **Interpolations** are then Mk 3:13-19, 4:10, 6:7-13, 6:30-31a, and 9:35a (all additive) and 11:11b and 14:17b (replacive). The point of these passages was to add the Twelve Apostles to the Markan story. I will call them the **T** layer.

Later Passages. Some other passages mentioning the Twelve are more firmly set in context than the preceding, and should be treated separately. Grammatically integrated, as a verb object, is:

- **Mk 10:32-34.** And they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem . . . And he took again the Twelve, and began to tell them the things that were to happen unto him, [33] [saying], Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes . . .

There is also a passage in which the idea of Twelve has been so thoroughly absorbed that it subtracts two from Twelve to get Ten, as the subject of a verb:

- **Mk 10:35-44.** And there come near unto him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying unto him, Teacher, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall ask of thee. [36] And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? [37] And they said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on [thy] left hand, in thy glory. . .[41] And when the Ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John. [42] And Jesus called them to him and saith unto them . . . [43] But it is not so among you, but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister, [44] and whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all.

This looks like a rewrite of the simpler contention story in Mk 9:33-35, above, and so should be later than that passage. For this reason too, Mk 10:35-44 looks very late.

There is also **Mk 9:17-29**, which follows the Transfiguration passage. It does not use “Twelve,” but it does portray the disciples acting as the Twelve were told to do: healing without the presence of Jesus. It is apparently interruptive in context:

- **Mk 9:14.** And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great multitude about them, and scribes questioning with them. [15] And straightway all the multitude, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. [16] And he asked them, what question ye with them?
[17] And one of the multitude answered him, Teacher, I brought unto thee my son, who hath a dumb spirit, [18] and wheresoever it taketh him, it dasheth him down, and he foameth, and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away, and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast it out, and they were not able . . .
[27] But Jesus took him by the hand, and raised him up, and he arose. [28] And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, How is it that we could not cast it out? [29] And he said unto them, This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer.
[30] And they went forth from thence, and passed through Galilee . . .

The middle passage does not follow what precedes; it involves no “scribes” and no “questioning.” Neither does the following passage, beginning with Mk 9:30. The Epileptic Boy passage may then have been substituted for whatever originally occupied that part of the Markan narrative. In substance, Mk 9:17-29 acknowledges the limitations of the disciples once they began to substitute for Jesus after his death, and tells them how to strengthen themselves.

I will call these the **P** or post-Twelve layer, noting that they need not all have the *same* date, nor need any of them form a layer with the post-Twelve Judas additions. All we can say at this point is that each of them is later than the T passages proper.

The P Layer then consists of Mk 9:33-35, 10:32-34, and the adjacent 10:35-44.

The Formation of Mark

We must next consider the relation of the Twelve layer (T), identified along with several Judas (J) and other post-Twelve (P) passages, to the Divinization (D) layer previously noted. There is one place in Mark where the D and T layers come together, and where their relative sequence in Mark may thus be discerned. This is in Mk 3, where the Calling of the Twelve passage, not itself interruptive, adjoins Divinization material at its head, and seemingly original material at its tail:

Mk 3:10. For he had healed many, insomuch that as many as had plagues pressed upon him that they might touch him.

[11] And the unclean spirits, whenever they beheld him, fell down before him and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. [12] And he charged them that they should not make him known.

[13] And he goeth up into the mountain, and calleth unto him . . . [19a] and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

[19b] And he cometh into a house. [20] And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread . . .

The insistent crowds are continuous except for the mountain interlude in 3:13-19a, which is thus best interpreted as the last of these passages to be added to Mark.¹¹ Then the Twelve layer is later than the Divinization layer represented by 3:11-12.

To show the structure of Mark as it appears when viewed from this angle, the whole of Mk 3 is laid out opposite, with these layers separated at successive indents: Divinization (D), Twelve (T), and Judas (J) supplements to the Twelve passages.

It will be seen that the unindented passages tell a consecutive story of Jesus, famed as a healer but causing his friends concern for his sanity. Into this material, several passages were later inserted. And why? Seemingly: (1) to give Jesus divine status, not merely charismatic quality; (2) to give him a group of followers symbolizing by their number an intent to convert all Israel, not merely the villages of Galilee; and finally (3) to underline Judas' betrayal by making him one of the Twelve, not a nobody.

It seems that no post-Twelve (P) material occurs in Mark 3. *For that chapter*, the summary opposite appears to be a complete stratification. The implications, for the way in which Mark grew by absorbing successive new ideas, would seem to be these: (1) the original Mark told the story of Jesus the charismatic healer, to whom (2) divine powers were later ascribed; (3) a posthumous Twelve organization was later written into the text, and still later (4) Judas was inserted into the list of the Twelve.

¹¹Among the most jeered-at aspects of Mark are its sudden changes of scene; its appearing and disappearing crowds. I am here in effect suggesting that at least some of these narrative defects are not due to authorial stupidity, but to insufficiently smoothed later authorial additions to an originally consecutive narrative.

HEALING ON THE SABBATH

- 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.
2 And they watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.
3 and he said to the man who had the withered hand, Come here.
4 And he said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent.
5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.
6 The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

GENERAL HEALING

- 7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed, also from Judea
8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from about Tyre and Sidon, a great
multitude, hearing all that he did, came to him.
9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they should crush him,
10 For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.

[ADDENDUM: DIVINIZATION LAYER]

- 11 And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they all fell down before him and cried out, You
are the **Son of God**.
12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

[CALLING OF THE TWELVE: TWELVE LAYER]

- 13 And he went up into the hills, and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.
14 And he appointed **Twelve** to be with him, and to be sent out to preach
15 And have authority to cast out demons:
16 Simon whom he surnamed Peter,
17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, whom he surnamed Boanerges, that
is, sons of thunder,
18 Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of
Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean,
19a And Judas [”of James,” original wording overwritten by next]

[JUDAS REPLACEMENT: JUDAS LAYER]

- 19b **Isca**riot, who betrayed him [replacing the original identification “of James”].
19c Then he went home.
20 And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DISAPPROVAL

- 21 And when his friends heard it, they went out to seize him, for they said, He is beside himself.

[DIVINE AUTHORITY OF JESUS: LATE DIVINIZATION LAYER]

- 22 And the scribes who came down from **Jerusalem** said, He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the
prince of demons he casts out the demons.
23 And he called them to him, and said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?
24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand,
25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.
26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.
27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong
man; then indeed he may plunder his house.
28 Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter,
29 But whoever blasphemes against the **Holy Spirit** never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.
30 For they had said, He has an unclean spirit.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DISAPPROVAL (Resumed from 3:21)

- 31 And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him.
32 And a crowd was sitting about him, and they said to him, Your mother and your brothers are outside
asking for you.
33 And he replied, Who are my mother and my brothers?
34 And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers.
Whoever does the will of **God** is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Envoi

This and my separate study of the Divinization passages in Mark consistently suggest that Mark is an accretional text; a live witness to the early development of the Jesus movement. This implies a regularly updated authority text rather than a one-time historical essay. The questions with which it deals differ from layer to layer; it seems to keep itself current with new issues arising in the movement, as all authority texts, by their very nature, tend to do. Mark is more than an interpretation of Jesus: it is a continual renewal of the perceived image of Jesus, such as, from time to time, might best encourage the congregations for whom Mark wrote his Gospel in the first place.

Mark is the interpreter of the early church to itself.

The Jesus Five (Peter and Andrew, the Zebedees, Levi), who alone have roles in the story Mark tells, probably represent the actual inner circle of the Historical Jesus. The Twelve, who in Mark are named in a mere list, and are supposedly sent out to preach the wider Gospel but immediately return, have only perfunctory mentions in the rest of the story. They clearly prefigure a period when indeed a wider enterprise existed, which required a larger directing body, whether to carry the Gospel itself to further areas, as the Apostolic literature envisions, or to coordinate the work of the movement from its later center at Jerusalem. The unreal role of the Twelve in Mark, a story narratively set in Jesus' lifetime, does make sense if it is seen as reflecting the reorganization of the Jesus movement after Jesus' death.

One moral of this result is that we may indeed find history in the Gospels, but part of that history is not the history of Jesus, but the history of his posthumous movement, retrojected so as to give it the authority of having originated in the time of the founder, and indeed under his direction.

Works Cited

- Aziz A Atiya. *History of Eastern Christianity*. Gorgias 2010
 Frank W Beare. Notes on Paul's First Two Visits to Jerusalem. *JBL* v63 (1944) 407-409
 Frank W Beare. The Sequence of Events in Acts 9:15 and the Career of Peter. *JBL* v62 (1943) 295-306
 E Bruce Brooks. The Divinization of Jesus in Mark. *Alpha* v2 (2022) 78-89
 E Bruce Brooks. The Jesus Five. *Alpha* v2 (2022) 90-97
 E Bruce Brooks. The Resurrection of Jesus. *Alpha* v1 (2017) 81-88
 Douglas Edwards. The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century; in Levine (ed), *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, Harvard (1992) 53-73
 J K Elliott. *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford 1993
 Robert A Guelich. *Mark 1-8:26*. Word 1989
 Harris Hirschberg. Simon Bariona and the Ebionites. *JBL* v61 #3 (1942) 171-191
 M R James. *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford 1914
 Joseph Klausner. *Jesus of Nazareth*. Macmillan 1926
 John Knox. The Pauline Chronology. *JBL* v58 (1939) 15-29
 Eduard Meyer. *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*. 2v Cotta 1921, 1923
 Vincent Taylor. *The Gospel According to St Mark*. Macmillan 1952
 Keith L Yoder. Judas Armed and Dangerous. *Alpha* v1 (2017) 189-192