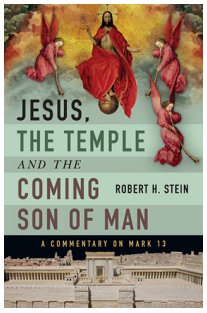
Book Review



Robert H. Stein.
Jesus, The Temple, and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13
Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014, 155 pp. £12.14.

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Robert Stein is a veteran scholar and college professor who has written extensively on the gospel of Mark, including a commentary for the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series (2008). In Jesus, *The Temple, and the Coming Son of Man*, Stein provides background to the hermeneutical studies on the historical Jesus and also form critical studies of the gospel of Mark (chapters one and two). Chapters three-seven are a commentary of Mark chapter 13, detailed in understanding Jesus' answer to His disciples' questions, and concluding each chapter with a summary. Chapter eight is an interpretative translation.

The first two chapters deal with preliminary interpretative issues. In chapter one, 'Determining Our Goal,' Stein provides a history of the historical Jesus research through the three quests. Stein concludes at the end of his survey that the primitive forms of the Jesus tradition are found in earliest gospel tradition of Mark and therefore bring us closer to the *ipissima verba* and *vox* of Jesus (p. 36). Mark 13 is almost all discourse material and is the longest teaching of Jesus in Mark, proving an important speech-act for the gospel. Stein highlights the third quest's influence in reading Jesus in his Jewish and eschatological milieu (p. 29). Even though it is important to understanding Jesus in his *Sitz im Leben*, Stein emphasises that we must keep in mind Mark's Greek audience. In distinguishing between the original hearers of Jesus' words, His Jewish disciples, and the original recipients of the gospel, Stein seeks to determine what was relevant for 70AD and what is relevant for future eschatological purposes. This provides the reader with a partial Preterist reading of the text. Stein concludes in chapter two that his hermeneutical approach to this commentary is to understand the authorial intention of Mark (p. 49).

Stein structures Mark 13 into five sections, which he divides into chapters three-seven. The first section he titles *Jesus' Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple (and Jerusalem)*, which covers the disciples two-part question (Mark 13:1-4). Stein argues that the disciples' questions are key to understanding Mark 13 (p. 61). The reader's view of the relationship between the two questions determines the interpretation that follows. There is a debate between the referents of the two questions regarding whether they both refer to the same event (the destruction of the temple) or two different events (the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of Man). Stein argues with nine points that the two part question have the same referent (destruction of the temple) and the distinction is that the first part concerns when they will take place and the second part concerns the signs preceding the event (p. 69).

The next chapter, *The Coming Destruction of the Temple (and Jerusalem) and the Sign*

Preceding It, is Stein's longest and most revealing chapter. This chapter explores the "non-signs" and the sign before the end. The non-signs are tribulations that will happen but do not necessarily indicate the end is near; however, they are signs to encourage believers to endure. Stein notes that this means there will not be an escape from tribulation via a rapture (p. 81). These none signs are placed into the context of the first century church where believers were arrested in synagogues and there were many messianic claimants. Stein also argues that "nation against nation" and "the gospel preached in every nation" were fulfilled in the first century as it is likely Jesus was referring to the known world of the time (p. 83). Stein makes several polemical statements towards traditional futurist interpretations of Mark 13.

Stein's arguments concerning the first century non-signs are convincing; however placing the sign preceding the destruction of the temple, the "abomination of desolation", with a corresponding historical event matching the criteria, is a difficult task. Stein explores eight possibilities from historical events before the destruction of the Temple that could be the abomination Jesus is referring to (pp. 90-91). Part of the criteria Stein deduces is that the abomination is a person (because of the masculine participle "standing") and that there must be adequate time between the sign and the destruction of the temple for people to escape (p. 91). From this criteria Stein argues that the abomination is the investure of Phanni as High Priest by the Zealots (p. 93). Not only was Phanni not of priestly descent and mentally defective, but he had committed sacrilegious acts within the temple in AD 67. Although Stein stresses that the abomination is a singular sign, rather than the plural term 'signs' (p. 60), his arguments for Phanni fulfilling the abomination is based on the multiple abominations of the Zealots and no singular event of sacrifice by Phanni. Therefore, Stein fails to pin point what the abomination of desolation (a singular event involving a person).

Stein also argues that tradition, rather than Scripture, influences the original readers understanding of the abomination of Desolation (p. 89). In other words, the readers were more familiar with Hanukah than Daniel 9:27. He likens it to the social memory of the Nativity today, where people are more familiar with the Christmas story than the narratives from Matthew and Luke (p. 89). To some degree this may be the case as the plural abominations of Daniel 9:27 are now a singular abomination in Mark 13:14. Considering the use of Scripture in Mark, and other New Testament writings, it is unlikely that the abomination of desolation would not evoke a referent to the Scripture, hence Mark's addition to Jesus' words, "Let the reader understand". This was certainly the case with Matthew, as Matthew mentions the writings of Daniel (Matt 24:15), which Mark felt no need to include. Stein's hermeneutical principle of understanding the text from the original reader's perspective is too wooden as Stein negates to look at Jesus' words in Mark from a biblical theological perspective. It would be beneficial to look at how the words of Jesus in Mark 13 work intertextually with texts from the Jewish Scriptures and the latter writings of the NT.

In chapter five Stein looks at the second part of Jesus' answer regarding the Son of Man. So far Stein has sought to place Jesus' prophecy in the first century context, but in the case of the coming Son of Man, Stein argues there is a gap between the period of the destruction of

the Temple and His appearing on the clouds of heaven. This is in agreement with the traditional view that this prophecy is about the future return of Jesus (p. 118). Interestingly in contrast to the previous chapter, Stein argues this from biblical theology, noting texts from the Jewish Scriptures and related texts in the NT, rather than from the text Mark and His readers own limited understanding.

Chapters six and seven are expositions of the two parables following Jesus' answers and how they relate to the two part prophecy. The first parable is the parable of the Fig tree. Stein highlights how the destruction of the temple is like leaves from a fig tree, which give a sign that summer is near and that fruit will be produced. Jesus follows this parable by saying this generation will not pass away until these things take place. Stein understands "this generation" to mean those living and hearing the words of Jesus during this period (pp. 125-127); however Stein does not give any attention to other interpretations of what the term "generation" could mean.

The second parable is the parable of the Watchman, which relates to the coming of the Son of Man. The Son of Man can come at any hour and is illustrated in the parable where a man returns to his property he has left in the charge of his servants. Stein provides some sound advice in reading parables differently to allegories, reading them as a story that makes a point rather than a set of ambiguous symbols (p. 133). The point is the Son of Man will return when no one is expecting and to be ready.

Stein's final chapter is an interpretive translation of Mark 13. This is riddled with the author's interpretations in brackets within the text and various phrases emphasised with italics to push the readers towards Stein's interpretation of the text that have been viewed in the previous seven chapters.

This book is written at an academic level and is useful to scholars and students. Pastors and preachers may find this book useful in dealing with difficult passages and the eschatological issues of the text. For a short book (155 pages) Stein offers a thorough grounding in the text of Mark 13, as well as addressing various interpretive issues. The hermeneutical approach to Mark 13 is sensible exegesis, which respects authorial intention and the original audience; however, it is at the expense of reading the text from a biblical theological perspective. Although Stein notes the eschatological importance of the text, he does not look at the writings of the Second Temple Period nor the eschatological beliefs we can deduce from these writings to gain any understanding of how the readers would have read Mark. This limits the reading of Mark to the words Mark records from Jesus, through the prism of Stein's eschatological views, rather than the *ipissima verba* and *vox* of Jesus .