



*Reading Mark's Christology Under Caesar: Jesus the Messiah and Roman Imperial Ideology*  
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*"Adam Winn has composed a careful and thoughtful study of Mark's story of Jesus with a view demonstrating the Markan Jesus' superlative honor and power over and against the Roman empire with its propaganda about its own 'Lord' and 'Son of God.' By reading Mark's Gospel in the context of the Roman world, Winn opens up new vistas of understanding that will truly excite and engage all readers."*

Michael F. Bird, lecturer in theology at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia

## Why did Mark write his Gospel?

*The Gospel of Mark has been studied from multiple angles using many methods. But often there remains a sense that something is wanting, that the full picture of Mark's Gospel lacks some background circuitry that would light up the whole. Adam Winn finds a clue in the cataclysmic destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. For Jews and Christians it was an apocalyptic moment. The gods of Rome seemed to have conquered the God of the Jews. Could it be that Mark wrote his Gospel in response to Roman imperial propaganda surrounding this event? Could a messiah crucified by Rome really be God's Son appointed to rule the world? Winn considers how Mark might have been read by Christians in Rome in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. He introduces us to the propaganda of the Flavian emperors and excavates the Markan text for themes that address the Roman imperial setting. We discover an intriguing first-century response to the question: Christ or Caesar?*

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In the last century, few issues have vexed Markan interpreters more than the nature of Mark's Christology. Interpretations have run the gamut from a Gospel that primarily presents Jesus as the all-powerful "divine man" to a Gospel that primarily presents Jesus as the suffering and dying Messiah, one who shuns power and embraces weakness. For some Mark clearly presents Jesus as God's messianic king, while others reject any such royal or messianic associations. Such diversity of scholarly opinion might lead casual observers to question whether these interpreters were in fact reading the same text. But these diverse interpretations do find their origins in the Markan text, a text full of diverse and at times apparently contradictory christological material. Explaining such diverse material with a single comprehensive theory is notoriously difficult and thus has led to interpretations that are as divergent and contradictory as the material itself. Some interpreters have thrown up their hands, claiming irresolvable tension in Mark's christological material and that such was the intention of the Evangelist.

The question of how to assemble the disparate pieces of Mark's Christology is the very question this study intends to pursue. What are these disparate pieces? Is any particular set of pieces primary? Is Mark's Christology intentionally locked in irresolvable tension? And where might we look for answers? Should we limit ourselves to the text itself? Or might a reconstruction of Mark's setting provide a way forward? The present introduction will address these questions by outlining the christological pieces of Mark's Gospel, considering the various ways these pieces have been assembled in the field of Markan interpretation, and proposing a new way forward.

– Taken from the introduction

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