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The Devil in the Details: Beelzebul and Social Identity Complexity in Mark 3:20–35

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Abstract: While the origin and etymology of the name Beelzebul have received some scholarly attention, very little attention has been given to the more basic question of why the scribes would choose this particular name for their accusations, or why Jesus would shift discussion to speak of Satan. This study examines Mark 3:20–35 through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Identity Complexity Theory (SIC) to reveal the underlying values and motivations behind the use of the two different names in the challenge and riposte between Jesus and the scribes. The scribes speak of “Beelzebul” as part of their attempt to discredit and even prosecute Jesus according to Deut 13, whereas Jesus’s reference to “Satan” reframes the discussion in light of the cosmic battle between those who do God’s will and the one who opposes it. In so reframing the discussion, he redraws the lines of ingroup and outgroup identity for his hearers and for Mark’s audience.

Keywords: Beelzebul; Satan; Social Identity Theory; Social Identity Complexity Theory; challenge-riposte



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1. Introduction

The name “Beelzebul”, well known in later Jewish and Christian writing as a name for an archdemon, is unattested in this form before the NT, and thus has its first extant appearance in Mark 3:22. Numerous scholarly articles have debated the name’s origins and etymology (Guelich 1989, pp. 174–75; Stein 2008, p. 182; Marcus 2000, p. 273), but few commentators ask the more basic question of *why* this name should appear in this passage at all. Clearly a prominent demonic figure of some sort is intended, since it occurs in parallel with “the prince of demons” (v. 22) and “an unclean spirit” (v. 30), and Jesus replaces it, apparently without confusion, with the name “Satan”. It may be tempting to dismiss the name “Beelzebul” as merely another instance of Mark’s penchant for Aramaisms—a bit of local color with the ready-made Greek explanation, “prince of demons” (v. 22; cf. “Boanerges” as “sons of thunder” in v. 17). Yet even Mark’s Aramaisms can at times have deeper significance within the narrative (cf. “Eloi” apparently mistaken for “Elijah” in 15:34–35), making a closer look worthwhile. Why do the scribes opt for this particular name, and, equally intriguingly, why does Jesus shift to talk of “Satan”? This study will argue that the use of “Beelzebul” and “Satan” by the scribes and Jesus, respectively, is deliberate in both cases, and that the nuance attached to each gives insight into the motivations and underlying values behind the competing claims for legitimacy between Jesus and his opponents.¹ After briefly addressing the origin and meaning of the name “Beelzebul” as well as the significance of Satan in the Markan narrative, I will examine the conflict in Mark 3:20–35 as it unfolds from the perspective of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Identity Complexity Theory (SIC). Finally, I will make some concluding observations on the likely impact of this powerful episode on Mark’s readers in terms of their own complex identities.

2. What's in a Name? Beelzebul and Satan

As shall be seen, Mark 3:20–35 depicts numerous complex and overlapping identities. Jesus's disciples, his opponents, the crowds, and even his family are all present in the same place, each with their own claim on him. Yet perhaps the most complex, in terms of most difficult to explain, of the identities named is the obscure name “Beelzebul” (Βεελζεβούλ).² The discussions surrounding the possible origin, meaning, and evolution of the name are dizzying, a maze of conjectured Hebrew and Aramaic etymologies. Proposed explanations can be categorized into three main groups: the name was always that of a demon; the name was created by Jesus's opponents specifically for him; the name was derived from that of a pagan deity. The first proposal sees “Beelzebul” as having emerged from a gradual corruption of בעל דבב (*B'eldebābā*), meaning “adversary” (Schlatter 1957, p. 343; Day 1988, pp. 151–60). Despite a recent attempt (Cielontko 2021, pp. 68–77) to revive this thesis, pointing to similar processes involved in the names “Satan”, “Belial”, and “Mastema”, this line of explanation has never been widely accepted, perhaps largely due to the several stages of corruption or change that must be assumed and have not yet been adequately explained by its proponents. The second line of explanation understands the name as deriving from בעל זבול (*Baal Zebûl*) meaning “Lord of the Dwelling”, in reference to the temple (see further below) (Gaston 1962, pp. 247–55; Pesch 1977, p. 213; Guelich 1989, pp. 174–75). Gaston, this view's main proponent, suggests that Jesus's opponents created this name for Jesus (Matt 10:25) in mimicry of a name for a pagan deity/demon and in derision of his apparent claim to be superior to the temple (Matt 12:6). “The Pharisees, in accusing him of being possessed by Satan = Baalshamaim = Beelzebul, are at the same time throwing in his face his claim to have authority over the temple, his stretching out his hands against the Zebûl” (Gaston 1962, p. 255). While this provides a plausible explanation for why Beelzebul is unattested before the NT, it fails to account satisfactorily for the present passage and its parallels (Mark 3:22; Matt 12:24, 27; Luke 11:18, 19), in which Beelzebul is the name of the demon allegedly empowering Jesus, not a name for Jesus himself (cf. Matt 10:25). Nor is there indication in the immediate context of Matt 12:24 that Jesus's claims regarding the temple are in view—Gaston (1962, p. 254) points to Matt 12:6, but this is quite removed, nor is there any reason in the text to connect these two episodes. However, what is significant for our argument at present is that Gaston argues for pagan origins to the name—that is, that it was coined in mimicry of the names of idols.

The third, and most broadly accepted line of thinking, is that “Beelzebul” had its origins in the name of a pagan deity, either ancient or contemporary, but quickly came to be used among Jews as a name for a demon, given the tradition found already in the OT of identifying pagan gods with demons (Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37; cf. 1 Cor 10:20). The most obvious and most frequently cited god is the “Beelzebub” (בעל זבוב) or “Baal/Lord of the Flies” named in 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16. Recent scholarship has largely moved beyond the once-popular theory that the god was in fact named “Beelzebub” and was associated with or had power over flies (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 9.2.1). Instead, this OT name is commonly understood to be a derisive form of Baal-Zabul, meaning “Baal the Prince” (Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 229–30; Edwards 2002, p. 120), or more likely Baal-Zebul, meaning “Lord of the Dwelling”, perhaps implying heaven, as god's dwelling (cf. Ps 49:15; Isa 63:15) (Guelich 1989, pp. 174–75; Stein 2008, p. 182; Marcus 2000, p. 273; Gaston 1962, pp. 247–55). The latter is preferred, not only for being closer in form to “Beelzebul”, but also for the word-play with “dwelling/house” in Mark 3:25, 27 and parallels, as well as in Matt 10:25 (Lewis 1992, p. 639; Aitken 1912, p. 51; cf. Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 230). In either case, various derisive forms were likely used, possibly also making use of the similar-sounding Hebrew *zebel*, meaning “dung”, which may have given rise by association to “Lord of the Flies” (cf. Gaston 1962, pp. 251–52). Yarbro Collins (2007, pp. 228–30) notes that the name found in the Gospels more closely resembles the original pagan name than any of the derisive forms of it, suggesting that this may be an indication “that the deity was still known in Palestine in the first century CE”, though considered a demon by the Jews. This may help explain why a name otherwise unattested except for in one obscure OT passage should be

evoked at this point. To this we may add the observation, originally suggested by Aitken and developed by Gaston (1962, p. 252), that “the chief rival of the Yahweh faith in the Hellenistic age was the cult of the heavenly *Baal*, called in Greek Ζεὺς Ὀλύμπιος and in Aramaic בעעל־שמיין [*Baal-Shamayin*; ‘Baal/Lord of the Heavens’]”. Gaston (1962, pp. 253–54) rightly observes that a pious Jew would have found it inappropriate to refer to any god but Yahweh as “Lord of Heaven”, making the circumlocution “Lord of the [Heavenly] Dwelling” an attractive alternative.³ It is a plausible suggestion, then, that, even if no god were known as Beelzebul in Jesus’s day, that name may have been selected from out of the OT as a more acceptable form of the blasphemous names given to Zeus or one of the other gods in the region.

We may thus make the following conclusions: The name “Beelzebul” is derived from the name of a pagan deity or deities, likely the Philistine god referenced in 2 Kgs 1 (Baal-Zebub/l), whose name likely meant “Lord of the Heavenly Dwelling”. The ancient name, familiar from the OT, was likely revived by Jews in Jesus’s day as a pious circumlocution for Zeus and his Semitic counterparts, to avoid blasphemously referring to them as “Lord of Heaven”. Given the Jewish practice of identifying pagan deities with demons, it was natural to think of this supreme god as the prince of demons. The scribes, then, were accusing Jesus of pagan magic, calling on an idolatrous name—one too blasphemous for them even to utter outright—and the demonic powers behind it, to accomplish his exorcisms (Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 228–29).

The development of thought concerning Satan, while easily as interesting as that surrounding Beelzebul, falls sadly outside the scope of this paper (see Hamilton 1992; Bell 2013; Forester and van Rad 1964; Marcus 2000, pp. 72–73). For our present purposes, it is sufficient to note that Satan has been presented at the very beginning of the Markan narrative (1:12–13) and again in the present passage as the chief antagonist against the kingdom of God in Mark. In his two other mentions by name, he is the opponent first of fruitful discipleship (4:15) and then of the cross itself (8:33). In other words, Satan is the one who *opposes the will of God*. For while Jesus does not explicitly define the will of God in this passage, the narrative will define it clearly in terms of the cross (14:36), just as true discipleship is defined by the cross (8:34).

3. Mark 3:20–35 through the Lens of SIT/SIC

Social Identity Theory (SIT) “focuses on the way group members understand themselves as part of the group and differentiate their group from other groups in order to achieve a positive social identity” (Baker 2014, p. 106). This social-psychological approach has been used as a heuristic tool for study of the NT, bringing fruitful insight, for example, on the inter- and intra-group dynamics at play within the early Christian movement vis-à-vis the Jewish and pagan societies around it (Tucker and Kuecker 2020). This approach has recently been augmented with Social Identity Complexity Theory (SIC), which seeks to account for the complexity of identities that necessarily emerge as a result of people having multiple, at times conflicting, group affiliations and identities (Kok 2014). Even someone holding the social categorization “first-century Jew”—a categorization often treated as a homogenous entity by contemporary scholars—would have a host of nested and overlapping group identities determined by geography (Palestinian/Diaspora; Galilean/Judean), religio-political affiliation (Pharisee/Sadducee/Essene/etc.), socio-economic level, kinship ties, trade, and more (Malina and Neyrey 1991b; Esler 2009, pp. 73–92; Esler 2003).⁴ The present passage is rich with the complex interrelationships of multiple and competing social identities, as multiple groups emerge on the scene, each with their own claim of shared identity with Jesus. The newly-formed group of disciples is present (v. 34), with their calling to “be with Jesus” and to share in his mission as their defining norms (v. 14).⁵ The crowds, being representative of the common people in Israel, share with Jesus a common socio-economic identity as working class, and many of them (though not all, cf. vv. 7–8) share a geographically-defined identity as being from Galilee, or more specifically Capernaum. This identity becomes salient in v. 22, when we are told of the presence of the

Jerusalem scribes. This geographic distinction makes the scribes in one sense outsiders while at the same time, as we shall see, giving them a higher status claim, being closer to the temple. Jesus's family, while not from Capernaum (though they are Galilean) have, of course, the stronger claim of kinship.⁶ Finally, while the scribes share neither kinship nor geographically-determined social identity with Jesus, having come down from Jerusalem (v. 22), they do share an implicit social identity as "pious Jews", and perhaps also as "teachers of the people". Moreover, the fact that they are not Galileans but have "come down from Jerusalem" (v. 22) is best understood as a status claim—they are an official delegation from Sanhedrin and/or the temple cult, sent to evaluate Jesus's growing movement (Marcus 2000, p. 271).⁷

The narrator demonstrates awareness of these complexities through his structuring of the episode. Discussion of Jesus's family frames the encounter (vv. 20–21, 31–34), and the dramatic visual depiction of them "standing outside" the house (v. 31; cf. v. 32) while his followers are "inside the house" (v. 20), "sitting around him" (v. 34), presents them, contrary to expectations, as "outsiders" for their failure to recognize the significance of Jesus's ministry (Pesch 1977, p. 22; Beavis 2011, pp. 69, 79). Embedded within this frame is the account of the scribes (vv. 22, 30), a second group of "outsiders", who do not merely fail to recognize Jesus but are actively hostile towards him. Finally, at the center, comes Jesus's comments on Satan, who, as the opposer of God's will, serves as the prototypical "outsider". These three parties are weighed against "the first explicit definition of the in-group of Jesus's followers" within the Markan narrative, namely, "whoever does the will of God" (v. 35) (Rodriguez 2020, p. 77). This phrase will require further comment, but at present we note that, though the defining characteristic or norm for the prototype of the group of Jesus's followers, this would also be an ideal shared by his opponents.⁸ In other words, the scribes would also claim to be doing the will of God, and the critical question becomes how this characteristic is to be defined.⁹ In many ways, this is the heart of the conflict, with Jesus and the scribes presented as competing exemplars.

The conflict between Jesus and the scribes is best approached as an instance of "Challenge–Riposte", a process by which individuals seek to gain or defend honor through public competition according to established rules, with the crowds as the adjudicators (Moxnes 1993, pp. 20–21; Malina and Neyrey 1991c, pp. 28–31). Malina and Neyrey (1991c, pp. 30–31) list four typical elements of a challenge–riposte exchange: (1) a *claim* to enter the social space of another (often an action or gesture), which occurs with (2) a *challenge* to that person's honor, to which the person challenged may choose to respond with (3) a *riposte*, or public response in defense of their honor, which is then followed by (4) a *public verdict* or evaluation by the crowds. We will trace out Jesus's interactions with the scribes according to these elements, paying particular attention to the significance of "Beelzebul" within the conflict.

The interactions begin with a "claim", which involves "entering the social space of another" (Malina and Neyrey 1991c, pp. 30–31). This is done literally, with the scribes "coming down" from Jerusalem (v. 22). Commentators agree that in "coming down from Jerusalem" (v. 22), the scribes were most likely an official delegation from the Jerusalem cult, sent to determine the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of Jesus's teaching and miracles. This was likely carried out with an eye to Deut 13, which called for a "thorough investigation" of any rumors that a particular city had been led astray by "sons of Belial" to worship foreign gods (Deut 13:13–14).¹⁰ The scribes would thus have been sent to determine whether Capernaum had been seduced to false worship and whether Jesus in particular was a "son of Belial".¹¹ This act of entering Capernaum in this official capacity is an implicit yet clear claim to authority and is thus in itself the first part of the "challenge". It must be noted that Deut 13 prescribes a particular hierarchy for multiple social identities, within which faithful Yahwism is the dominant identity that is elevated above all others including, in these verses, ethno-geographic identity (Christensen 2001, p. 276). This is made particularly clear in v. 12 ("If you hear said about one of *your* towns that the LORD your God is giving *you* to inhabit", emphasis added), in which the wording emphasizes the shared

identity of all Israelites by virtue of their inhabitation of the land. Yet a proven charge of worshipping other gods was to result in the total destruction of *herem* (vv. 15–17), for the worship of foreign gods is the antithetical, or prototypically “outgroup”, behavior (vv. 2, 7, 13). In the two sections preceding these instructions, similar commands are given concerning prophets who teach false worship, even if their signs and omens come true (vv. 1–5), and then concerning family members and close friends who do so (vv. 6–11). In both cases, the one advocating worship of other gods was to be executed without mercy (vv. 5, 8–10). Thus, socio-religious identity and identity based on kinship were likewise recategorized under fidelity to Yahweh, with “keeping all his commandments” and “doing what is right in his sight” (v. 18, cf. v. 4) as the defining norms. These norms bear striking similarities to the characteristic norm Jesus gives of “doing the will of God” (v. 35). Indeed, Jesus appears to be operating from the same “Dominance” model of social identity complexity that is prescribed in Deut 13, with faithful obedience to God as the “dominant” identity, under which all other and potentially competing identities—including identity based on kinship—are made subordinate (Kok 2014, pp. 1–9).

The explicit “challenge” that the scribes throw down is that he “has [i.e., is possessed by] Beelzebul” and that he colludes with demons to accomplish his exorcisms (v. 22). Several observations can be made about this charge. First, it involves implicit acceptance of the exorcisms as fact. Presumably, the scribes could not deny the reality of the spiritual power manifested, yet rather than attribute this power to God, they use it as grounds to label Jesus as a deviant.¹² Second, no specific justification is given for their verdict—we have only the label “demoniac/demon colluder”. Here Malina and Neyrey’s (1991a, p. 100) comments on labelling prove particularly helpful: “A key element in labelling someone a deviant is the understanding of the labellers themselves. Who does this labelling and why? In social science theory, deviance refers to those behaviors and conditions assessed to *jeopardize the interests and social standing of persons who negatively label the behavior or condition*. Whose interests, then, are threatened?” This question is answered for us plainly in the Markan narrative. Jesus’s very first recorded public act (1:21–28)—interestingly, also an exorcism—left the crowds amazed at his authority that surpassed even that of the scribes (1:22, 27). This comparison, and its resultant conflict, builds in 2:1–3:6, a series of five confrontations in which Jesus clashes with the scribes and the Pharisees particularly on their interpretation of the law—the very source of their authority and social status (Culpepper 2007, pp. 74–75). Unable to accept a legitimate spiritual power that bypasses their own socio-religious authority, the only explanation left to them is demonic power.¹³ Finally, however, it is significant that the deviancy of which Jesus is accused is not merely or abstractly collusion with demons. In wording the accusation in terms of “Beelzebul”, they have also framed it not just in demonic terms but also pagan. This detail raises the stakes of the challenge considerably. It brings Deut 13 into direct relevance, possibly even offering the specific grounds they had been seeking to put him to death (cf. 3:6). Yet even more expediently, the scribal accusation seeks to discredit Jesus publicly as a “black sheep”.¹⁴ Jesus is accused of deviancy from the very core tenet or prototype of Jewish identity as laid out in Deut 13 and even in the Shema (Deut 6:4) itself—faithful adherence to Yahweh alone (Christensen 2001, p. 281).

Jesus’s response (vv. 23–30) reveals his brilliance at “riposte” on many levels, but for our purposes, the critical detail is his shift to speaking of “Satan”, in place of Beelzebul. As noted above, “Beelzebul” and “Satan” would likely have been taken as more or less interchangeable; certainly, they are presented that way in the narrative. Yet while “Beelzebul” implies pagan association and is thus more amenable to the scribes’ aims, to speak of “Satan” reframes the context in spiritual terms, with Jesus’s power explained in the context of his cosmic battle against God’s enemy (cf. 1:12–13) (Marcus 2000, pp. 167–70; Rhoads et al. 2012, pp. 82–84). This shift reveals several ironies in the narrative by which Jesus essentially reverses the scribes’ accusations on them, thus neutralizing their attempts at labelling him.¹⁵ First of all, in invoking a pagan name, even an archaic and possibly derisive form of one, the scribes are implicitly attributing real spiritual power to a pagan god. It is they, not

Jesus, who are appealing to a pagan deity and ascribing power to it. By contrast, in speaking of “Satan”, Jesus is more theologically precise than his opponents, stating clearly and explicitly the spiritual reality with which they would also have agreed (v. 30), but from which they had deviated for the sake of their argument, namely, that all spiritual power outside of the God of Israel is demonic.¹⁶ Second, in stating the argument with this greater level of theological precision, Jesus reveals the absurdity of their accusation—Satan driving out himself or his own demons (v. 23).¹⁷ While Beelzebul may be many things, all of them bad, Satan’s role as “adversary”, especially in the Markan narrative, but also more broadly, is to oppose the will of God (Bell 2013, p. 195; Forester and van Rad 1964, 2:72–81). Jesus thus presents the story in terms of two battling kingdoms, each diametrically opposed to the aims of the other, with no middle ground possible.¹⁸ Thus, any act of opposition to demons is an act for the kingdom of God (cf. 9:40), and any other explanation is absurd. Finally, and most ironically, if Jesus’s power is attributable neither to pagan gods (who are nonexistent) nor to demons (for this is logically absurd), it must be attributable to the Holy Spirit, in which case the scribes are guilty of the very blasphemy they seek to avoid. Whether “Beelzebul” was a derisive form of a pagan name (“Lord of Dung”) or a pious circumlocution for one (“Lord of the Heavenly Dwelling”) the scribes were using it to avoid blasphemously uttering the name of a false god, and yet, by their faulty assumptions, they have ended up speaking falsely against the true God.

While Mark frequently includes mention of the crowds’ reaction, generally their amazement (e.g., 1:22), this final element of the challenge–riposte sequence is missing in this scene. Perhaps this is because Jesus’s response is so overwhelming that he is clearly recognized as the winner. More likely, it is because Mark’s arrangement quickly returns the focus on the disciples (vv. 31–35) (Pesch 1977, p. 220). In Mark’s narrative purposes, the mercurial opinions of the crowd are far less important than the reactions of the disciples, and by extension, the readers, who must themselves determine whether or not they will follow in discipleship (Rhoads et al. 2012, pp. 129–30, 134–35).

While Jesus’s family are not technically part of the challenge–riposte, the parallels between them and the scribes—drawn out by Mark’s use of intercalation—are striking.¹⁹ Like the scribes, they make a claim on Jesus by coming into physical proximity (v. 21)—presumably from Nazareth—and by identifying themselves as family (v. 31).²⁰ The “challenge” that he is “out of his mind” (v. 21) was more likely internal dialogue rather than a publicly stated challenge like that of the scribes, yet given the parallelism between the two, as well as the common association between demon possession and some types of insanity (John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20), they are clearly meant to be read in light of each other (Gundry 1993, p. 172; Lane 1974, p. 137). Jesus’s riposte, however, is public (vv. 31–34), drawing stark—if not harsh—boundary lines between “insider” and “outsider”.²¹ The only true insiders—his true family—are those who do the will of God, whereas all who oppose or obstruct him in doing God’s will are outsiders—even his own family. It is this final observation that would have been particularly significant to Mark’s audience.

4. Conclusions: Mark’s Socially Complex Readers

Whatever else can be known about Mark’s readers, they would have shared the dyadic, or “group-oriented”, worldview presupposed in the Gospel (Malina and Neyrey 1991b, pp. 67–96). Foremost in such a culture were one’s obligations to and dependence upon one’s extended family. “In antiquity, the extended family meant everything. It not only was the source of one’s status in the community but also functioned as the primary economic, religious, educational, and social network” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992, p. 201). Yet throughout his Gospel, Mark highlights the points at which this and other identities conflict with one’s identity as a disciple, thereby guiding his audience through the process of recognizing and appreciating the boundaries of that identity and its relationship to all others. In the very next verses, Jesus will tell a parable concerning the social, economic, and spiritual pressures that choke out fruitful discipleship (4:1–20). We have already read of the first disciples leaving fathers and family business to follow Jesus (2:16–20), a fact that is

brought up again by Peter (10:28–30). More directly applicable to the readers, Jesus warns in 13:9–13 of a coming time in which one’s identity as disciple will come in conflict with and be opposed by socio-religious (“councils” and “synagogues”), political (“governors and kings”), and familial (“brother”, “father”, “child”) ties. In the face of such costly obedience, Jesus creates and offers the fictive kinship of his circle of disciples: whoever does the will of God, defined preeminently by the cross and the gospel, is truly his brother, sister, and mother (3:35) (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992, p. 201; Vearncombe 2020, pp. 34–35). The thought of such a “surrogate” family would surely have provided comfort and support for Mark’s readers—all the more so as they see Jesus experiencing the same struggles himself. At the same time, we may detect an implicit challenge in Jesus’s words, for if those who “do the will of God” can hope for the comfort and support of their spiritual brothers, they must also expect the same material and social obligations towards their fellow disciples as they would have for their own family.²²

What is true in the sphere of kinship also applies to ethnicity. In its present context, Jesus’s statement that *whoever* does the will of God is his brother is still only addressed to Jews, yet it surely anticipates the broader multi-ethnic church that will arise within a single generation and is already hinted at in v. 8. Both Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus would come to be viewed as apostate or unpatriotic by their respective ethnic groups—the Jews for following a “false” messiah and for keeping fellowship with gentiles, and the non-Jews for failing to worship ancestral gods or sacrifice at political altars (Strauss 2014, p. 172). To have their social identities thus redrawn across ethnic lines would have brought both comfort in their sacrifice and an implicit challenge to both groups to accept the other without reservation.

At the same time, this episode reveals to Mark’s more careful readers that, ultimately, they are called to nothing new or unexpected. For those attuned to the legal and conceptual framework behind the scribes’ accusation of Beelzebul possession, the key to resisting the charges lay in the charges themselves. The true people of God, both in God’s covenant with Israel and no less among the followers of Jesus, are those who “do what is right in the sight of the Lord [their] God” (Deut 13:18)—or, as Jesus put it, “do the will of God” (Mark 3:35)—even at the cost of familial, societal, and even religious ties. There is comfort for Mark’s readers, both ancient and modern, as we navigate our complex identity obligations, in knowing that we are called to nothing new, knowing that God has always demanded whole-hearted commitment, and most of all, knowing that Jesus has already navigated both the joys and the sacrifices to which he calls his brothers and sisters.

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Notes

- ¹ While this study will necessarily touch on issues related both to the historical Jesus as well as to Mark’s original readers, I will confine myself as much as possible to the world of the narrative. I will approach, for example, the names “Beelzebul” and “Satan” and the shift from one to the other as features of the text that thus have a narrative significance, and not (or not merely) the vestigial indicators of differing sources.
- ² The majority of mss. have Βεελζεβούλ, which is the preferred reading, though some sources (esp. the Vulgate) have “Beelzebub”, likely due to assimilation with 2 Kgs 1:2, and B has Βεελζεβούλ, likely reflecting the common elision of the λ when occurring before a sibilant (France 2002, p. 170n.40; Foerster 1964, p. 1:605–6).
- ³ Nevertheless, we depart from Gaston in his suggestion, discussed above, that the name was adapted by Jesus’s opponents in specific reference to his claims about the temple. While this is certainly possible, it is by no means necessary, and it is far more likely that the pagan name was drawn out of the OT as a pious circumlocution.

- 4 While appreciating Esler's (2009) arguments for "Judean" as the preferable translation for Ἰουδαίος, this terminology adds an unfortunate layer of complication to the present discussion, in which the "Judean" Jews (i.e., those living in the province of Judea, and especially Jerusalem) are distinguished from Galilean (as well as Trans-Jordanian and Diaspora) Jews. For this reason, I will consistently use the term "Jew" and "Jewish" to refer to the ethnic group, along with the socio-religious identity characteristics associated with it. I will reserve "Judean" for the subgroup of that nation located in the province of Judea and characterized in particular by close connection with the Jerusalem cult.
- 5 The phrase τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν (v. 34) may refer literally to the crowds who are surrounding him, but especially in light of v. 14, we may assume that the disciples are preeminently in view.
- 6 Though other possibilities exist, most commentators understand οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ (v. 21) in light of v. 31 as referring to Jesus's family (France 2002, p. 166; Pesch 1977, p. 212).
- 7 Marcus (2000, p. 271) rightly notes that while the phrase "coming down" is the standard expression for anyone descending the hills of Jerusalem, one cannot rule out an implicit note of condescension in the phrase here.
- 8 "Norms" are understood as particular attitudes and behaviors that characterize a particular group and distinguish it from other groups. "Prototype" refers to the abstract conceptualization of these behaviors, while an "exemplar" is a concrete example of one who manifests them (Esler 2014, pp. 32–33).
- 9 Since social identity by definition deals with one's identity as a member of one group vis-à-vis another, it is always comparative, and in that respect, competitive. One significant way in which this competition is navigated is the redefinition of characteristics in a way that favors one's own group (see Esler 2014, p. 21).
- 10 On the allusion to Deut 13:13–14, see Stauffer (1974, pp. 85, 207); Lane (1974, 141n.86); Brown (2013, 719). This chapter is likely in view also in Mark 8:11–13, thus increasing the likelihood of an allusion here. Marcus (2000, p. 281) cites Deut 18:19–20, which similarly speaks of a false prophet speaking in the name of other gods. Yarbro Collins (2007, 228, 229n.116) points also to Lev 19:31; 20:27, though she also cites rabbinic tradition stating that Jesus was executed as an "enticer" based on Deut 13.
- 11 The phrase "son of Belial" (or on one occasion, "daughter of Belial") occurs 12 times in the OT and is generally translated as "worthless fellow" or "scoundrel" (Deut 13:14; Judg 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 30:22; 2 Sam 20:1; 1 Kgs 21:10, 13; 1 Chr 13:7). Although there is no clear demonic association in these passages, it is worth noting in the context of our present study that "Belial", probably meaning "worthlessness", came to refer to an archdemon similar to Beelzebul, especially in the Qumran documents. See Lewis 1992, 1:655; Cielontko 2021, pp. 74–75.
- 12 Malina and Neyrey (1991a, p. 100) define "deviance" in terms of violations of the "shared social system of meaning and order", and negative labelling as a specific accusation of deviance.
- 13 It could be that the scribes are in fact functioning from an "Intersection" model of identity complexity rather than the "Dominance" model to which they appear to appeal as prescribed in Deut 13. In this case, they identify their ingroup not solely by fidelity to God, but where this faithfulness intersects with adherence to the Jerusalem cult and their own religious authority. See further Kok (2014, p. 2).
- 14 The so-called "black sheep effect" is the phenomenon in which judgments regarding the behavior of ingroup members are more extreme than the evaluation of those same behaviors when done by outgroup members. Thus, pagans would already be despised by Jews for idolatry, but this was expected behavior. For Jesus, a respectable Jew, to be accused of pagan magic would be inexcusable. See Marques et al. (1988, p. 4).
- 15 Malina and Neyrey (1991a, pp. 108–9) term this "condemning the condemners", and list it among several other forms of "neutralization", by which one can interrupt the process of being labelled a deviant.
- 16 Though the scribes would have conceded the theological point, their accusation against Jesus bore more legal weight if it included charges of pagan collusion, and it bore more rhetorical force if they avoided phrasing it in the logically absurd way that Jesus does of demons casting out demons or Satan fighting Satan.
- 17 Guelich (1989, pp. 175–76) notes the use of *reductio ad absurdum*. He rightly notes that the argument is not airtight, logically speaking, for deceptive miracles done by evil powers cannot be ruled out, nor can rival demonic factions. As in the entire Markan narrative, the question is not whether or not Jesus's account is more logical, though it often is, but whether or not one will accept Jesus's authority and thus his account of the way things are.
- 18 While we may speak of a "dualism" here as well as in the DSS (e.g., 1QS 3:13–26), this is not a true or "cosmological" dualism in the sense of two equal opposites, for while Satan is diametrically opposed to God, he is still under the power and authority of God.
- 19 In the dyadic culture of the NT, within which one's own honor is tied up in that of one's family, "challenge–riposte" would technically be an inappropriate category to refer to public interactions with one's own family. That the Markan narrative presents this interaction in parallel with the challenge–riposte with the scribes is thus all the more striking, illustrating the extent to which the "family" of discipleship is to surpass even the natural family. See Helleman (2000, p. 218n.17); Malina and Neyrey (1991b, pp. 74–75); Malina and Neyrey (1991c, pp. 29–30); Moxnes (1993, pp. 20–21).

- ²⁰ Moxnes (1993, p. 19) helpfully notes that “it is possible to fathom the Mediterranean kinship system only if one understands that family honor is on the line in every public interaction”. Their motivations in coming to Jesus, then, would have been to preserve the family’s honor by preventing him from making a fool of himself.
- ²¹ In addition to the repeated vocabulary related to in/outside, Culpepper (2007, p. 118) notes ironic wordplay with the family’s statement that he is insane (ἐξέστη, v. 21, lit. “he stands outside [himself]”) and the fact that it is they who are “standing outside” (ἔξω στήκοντες, v. 31).
- ²² As Vearncombe (2020, pp. 34–35) notes, the language of “fictive” kinship does not mean “fictional” — the mutual obligations involved were perceived to be very real.

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