

# The Role of the House Motif in the Gospel of Mark

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## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the role of the house motif in Mark's Gospel since in the tradition, Jesus healed, forgave sin, taught and shared meals as well as the Last Supper in the house. It is argued that Mark was composed for a Gentile, Hellenist Christian house group in Rome and written soon after Nero's persecution (64-65 CE) of the Christian house-church communities and prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Though other studies support alternate sites in Galilee, Southern Syria and the Transjordan as the source of the Gospel, the traditional arguments favouring Rome indicate that Mark is a Hellenist Gospel written for the majority Law-free Christian household groups in Rome as Paul's letter attests in 58 CE.

The Gospel offers hope in following the way of the secret of the kingdom. In Mark's terms, the secret is Jesus' servant dedication to his messianic ministry, climaxing in his crucifixion and resurrection. There is no description of Jesus' resurrection in the Gospel; in part unnecessary since, from its opening, the Gospel presumes the power and authority of the crucified, risen Son of Man, the Lord. As Lord, he calls disciples to follow him along the way of eschatological servant dedication in the spatial context of the typical, urban house-church. Consequently, within the house motif, Mark sets out the minor characters' response in faith and hope to the Lord's authoritative call, healing, forgiveness and Eucharistic unity in the house.

In contrast, the narrative synagogue groups first react only with astonishment to Mark's messianic Jesus. But, under the authorities' leadership, the Jewish response hardens into total rejection of Jesus as Mark's gradually enlarges Israel's negative response to Mark's symbolic visitation, judgment and rejection theme of the temple due to the opposition of the Jewish authorities and their abuse of the Law and the temple liturgy. Mark has no pastoral interest in a remote Jerusalem or its temple. From the Gospel's viewpoint, his real aim is the visitation of Rome's house-church groups

through the living Word of the risen Jesus of Nazareth. Israel's negative narrative response acts as a literary backdrop to the faith responses in the house. As a result, through its misused Law and temple traditions, Israel ensures its symbolic visitation and rejection. Concurrently, in house-churches sustained by faith, and the authoritative Word of the risen Son of Man, challenges Christians in Rome to a renewed fidelity in way, covenant service.

Therefore, under the mantle of the house motif, the Gospel offers 'the secret of kingdom of God' - Jesus' life as the selfless servant - as the basis for individual and communal hope. Christians live in the aftermath of severe persecution. These house groups are challenged to live the paradox of faith in life through death, gain through loss, in following a crucified/risen Lord in servant dedication. This appears to be particularly Mark's aim in his close linking of the two motifs, the house and the way, during the journey of Jesus and the disciples on the way to Jerusalem from Galilee. Throughout, he accents eschatological house-churches; their members live the secret of the kingdom in faith, hope and mutual selflessness.

Thus, as Lord of the House, Jesus goes before Rome's Christian groups in his ever-present living and dying in his glorified humanity. By following Jesus of Nazareth in servant discipleship in a house community, Christians blend their existential human becoming with that of the glorified Lord. Hence Mark clearly expects Christians to see the 'things of God' as their Spirit-inspired servant charity. In this way, they daily deepen their Christian unification with Jesus' own dedication as the Beloved Servant/Son in his obedience to his Father's will. This is the gift that Mark points to 'now in this time'.

Mark stresses this sense of the victorious, fruitful presence of the glorified Son of Man, the Lord, from the opening of the Gospel. The superscription and the fact that he addresses Christians, who already know Jesus as the triumphant Lord, allow him

to write from a post resurrection viewpoint. So, within the scope of the house motif, Mark encourages a deeper faith and hope in the efficacy of Christian self-identification with Jesus in his victorious way of the cross.