Literary reflections on Mark 13:5-37: A narrated speech of Jesus

W.S. Vorster

ABSTRACT
Mark 13 is normally interpreted in view of its origin and literary history while little, if any, attention is paid to the literary aspects of the chapter. In this essay Mark 13:5-37 is approached from a literary perspective. The implications of the fact that the material is presented in the form of a narrated speech of Jesus are developed in the first part. The second part deals with the place of the speech in the Gospel of Mark in terms of narrative time. The last major section is concerned with the narrative point of view and the function of apocalyptic and paraenesis in Mark 13. A few summary remarks conclude the essay.

LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF MARK 13:5-37
From the point of view of interpretation, there seems to be hardly any other chapter in the New Testament which offers as many challenges to the interpreter as does Mark 13. On the semantic level there are a few intriguing problems which have puzzled scholars through the ages. Although the meaning of the ἐν ἐρημῷ ἔρημωσίᾳ of verse 14, for instance, is clear, there still remains uncertainty about the reference of the term. Whether the chapter was written from an apocalyptic perspective is a bone of contention between scholars, and about the origin and the literary history of the chapter there will always be difference of opinion. On the Christological level the problem of the imminent parousia has given rise to many and divergent "solutions" for the difficulties of verse 30 and so there are many other detail problems which scholars attempt to solve in view of their understanding of the chapter and its relation to the rest of the Gospel of Mark.

The purpose of this essay is not to give answers to the many "unsolved" problems of Mark 13 (cf. Beasley-Murray 1983; Brandenburger 1984; Wenham 1975). What I have in mind is to approach
this chapter from a different perspective than is usually done by New Testament scholars in order to throw light on aspects of Mark 13 which are normally neglected. It has been the custom to study this chapter from the perspective of its origin and growth. With the exception of a few articles (cf. Hallbäck 1981; Petersen 1980, 1984), even in the latest extensive studies on Mark 13 the focus is on the literary history and the origin of this chapter (cf. Brandenburger 1984) and not on the text as a text or a communication. Important and interesting as this might be, there is no reason why the interpretation of this chapter should be restricted to this very limited perspective (cf. Lambrecht 1967; Pesch 1968).

I will approach the chapter from a literary point of view with the focus on Mark 13:5-37 as a narrated speech and not on the literary history or the extratextual context to which it could possibly refer. It is impossible to give an exhaustive interpretation of the speech in a single essay. Therefore I shall concentrate on a few aspects only. In the first part of the essay attention will be paid to the fact that Mark 13 is presented to the reader as a narrated speech and what this implies for the interpretation of this chapter. The second section deals with the place of Mark 13 in the Gospel of Mark. The problem of time is of special interest here. In the third place narrative point of view and the function of apocalyptic and paraenesis in Mark 13 will be discussed. The essay will be concluded by a few summary remarks.

1 A NARRATED SPEECH

After more than a century of critical scholarship following the hypothesis of T Colani that Mark supposedly used and expanded an existing apocalypse in compiling Mark 13, it is almost impossible to escape the haunting questions concerning the origin and growth of this chapter. This is what scholars have been studying, and not the text in its final redaction as part of the Gospel of Mark. In spite of the paradigm switch which is taking place in New Testament studies - where the emphasis is on the texts of the New testament as communications and not on their origin and growth - it still very often is the literary history of texts and not what they are and how they communicate, which intrigue the minds of New Testament scholars. This should not prevent scholars from testing new hypotheses and applying new methods of interpretation. On the contrary, it should rather invite us to test and
revise basic presuppositions and to develop new answers to old questions.

To say that Mark 13:5-37 is a narrated speech may not seem very important. The term, however, is not as innocent as it may seem. The basic presupposition behind the term is that the Gospel of Mark is a narrative and that the speech in Mark 13 is part of that particular narrative and should be read in the light of these presuppositions. This too may not seem to be of particular interest to those who are used to referring to the gospels or parts of them as narratives. But, as we shall see below, the approach followed in this essay implies a different perspective of Mark 13 than the usual "historical" one. The application of a set of different questions to the text is also implied, since the approach is that of structural semiotics (cf. Genette 1980).

There are not many ways in which material can be organized in a discourse (cf. Brooks & Warren 1970:56f.). Narration is one. The way in which material is organized is important both with regard to the production and the reception of texts. It is important regarding the production of texts because of the conventions which are followed. When a person, for example, produces a narrative, he almost involuntarily uses the codes of the narrative genre. And the same happens to the receiver in the decoding process. He also has to read the text in accordance with its codes in order to produce an adequate reading. Asserting that a particular text is a narrative would, therefore, mean that the text reveals certain characteristics.

In order to tell a story one needs a storyteller, a story and an audience (cf. Scholes & Kellogg 1966:240). A narrative consists of a series of events forming a story which is told by a narrator to a narratee. The events are arranged in terms of space and time, performed by a limited set of "actors" and told from a specific perspective. In this way a narrative world is created. This in short is what a narrative is and how it works. To avoid any misunderstanding a few extra remarks will have to be made.

It is important to note that when an author of flesh and blood writes or tells a narrative he creates (cf. Chatman 1978:19) a narrative message (the contents or 'what' of the narrative) by using certain narrative techniques (the 'how' of the narrative). He selects and arranges the events and existents (e.g. space, time and actors) and uses a narrator and a narrative point of view inside the text as
the means by which he tells the narrative. The important thing to notice here is that by telling or writing a story the author creates an image of events and personages in order to communicate something to his audience. This image is his image. The following diagram visually explains some of the aspects involved in the communication of a narrative:

With this in mind let us now turn to the Gospel of Mark. That Mark's Gospel is a narrative, cannot be doubted. The discourse is organized in narrative style and the story is communicated by means of a narrator. In writing a story Mark created an image of events and personages in the life of Jesus in order to communicate something to his readers. The story he created is Mark's image and the narrative world is his narrative world. He selected and arranged his material in terms of order and space and it is he who decided on what each character will do or say and when. Even if Mark closely followed tradition and "historical events", it was still he who created the image of a not too loquacious Jesus or disciples who lack understanding. When we read Mark's gospel we are guided by his text through pro- and retrospection, gaps and indeterminacy, selection and organization, and the modification of expectations (cf. Iser 1974, 1978) to assign meaning to the image he created. This is how we create our own image of Mark's image. What is done or said in a gospel should therefore be interpreted in
view of the fact that it is narrated. This is of particular interest with regard to Mark 13.

In view of the fact that the sayings material in the gospels have been studied in terms of historical reliability, authenticity and the reconstruction of the teaching of Jesus, it is not surprising that Mark 13:5-37 causes so many problems in this connection. Amongst other things, it was the idea of the imminent parousia in Mark 13 and the resulting problem of the possibility that Jesus might have been mistaken (cf. Hooker 1982:79), which have given rise to the conclusion that Mark 13:5-37 is in its present form a secondary speech based on a Jewish or Christian fly leaf. As Brandenburger (1984:21) remarks: "Als inzwischen fast einhellig vertretenes Ergebnis der kritischen Forschung kann festgehalten werden, dass in Markus 13 keine historische Rede Jesu vorliegt".

From a literary point of view the words "... that in Mark 13 we do not find an historical speech of Jesus", are of particular interest. On what grounds can we expect a narrated speech like Mark 13:5-37 to be "an historical speech of Jesus"? Even if we take into account the fact that in an oral culture people were able to recall the exact words of a speaker far better than those who are exposed to writing and reading, there seems no reason why ancient speeches in narrative form should be historical or even verbatim reports, as some seemingly expect them to be. This does not apply only to the speeches in the New Testament as is clear from the following remarks by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides (Thuc Hist I.22, Loeb translation):

As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, it has been difficult to recall with strict accuracy the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on subjects under consideration, the sentiments most benefitting the occasion, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said.

These words clearly indicate the problems involved in narrating direct speech in ancient times. But it also points to the role and purpose of speeches in narrative texts like the history of the
Peloponnesian war. This is, however, not the main point I wish to make. Narrated speeches have to do with the presentation of material in a discourse - a problem which has puzzled man for many centuries. The perspective from which something is narrated and the way in which it is presented clearly influence the information given.

In his *Republic* (392-395) Plato contrasts two ways of presentation by distinguishing between simple narration (*diegesis*) and imitation (*mimesis*). In connection with the Iliad he writes:

*... the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking. But what follows he delivers as if he were himself Chryses and tries as far as may be to make us feel that not Homer is the speaker, but the priest, an old man ... "But when he delivers a speech as if he were someone else, shall we not say that he then assimilates thereby his own diction as far as possible to that of the person whom he announces as about to speak?" ... "And is it not likening one's self to another in speech or bodily bearing an imitation of him to whom one likens one's self?" "Surely". "In such case then, it appears, he and the other poets effect their narration through imitation"* (Pl Resp 393, Loeb translation).

In order to explain the difference between what he calls *diegesis* and *mimesis*, Plato rewrites the end of the scene between Chryses and the Achaeans as *diegesis*. He indicates the difference in directness between the two modes of presentation. Imitation is much more direct and gives the impression of less distance between the reader and what is told. It is in this connection that Genette (1980:162) correctly observes that, "*the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem ... to keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells*".

The use of the word "seem" is very important since in the end any narrative is a presentation of reality and creates the illusion of *mimesis*. For our purpose two things are very important. Firstly, it is clear that speeches have narrative functions. They create the illusion of directness. Secondly, they are invented as an aid to other narrative means of conveying a narrative message. Both these aspects have to do with the nature of narrative and how they work. Narratives are not descriptions of reality. In a certain sense
they are the remaking of reality. And this holds good even for narratives which pretend to make use of historical persons and events.

Mark 13:5-37 is a speech which should not in the first place be analysed outside its narrative context. As a narrated speech it has a narrative function within the story of Jesus according to Mark. One can compare it to the parables of Jesus which receive their messages in the gospels from their narrated contexts of communication. Mark 13 has meaning within the narrative context of this gospel. In fact, it can be argued that the reader of the Gospel of Mark is educated through the reading of the preceding twelve chapters on how to read the speech (cf. Burnett 1985), as we shall see below. It has to do with the image Mark created of Jesus. This makes it in principle impossible to start any discussion about what Jesus had said, could have said and would have said in connection with either the future of Jerusalem or the return of the Son of man on the grounds of Mark 13:5-37 as it stands. The narrative character of the speech makes it necessary to reconstruct Jesus' words, if one is interested in what the earthly Jesus had to say. That is, however, something different from reading or interpreting the meaning or message of the narrated speech as a narrated speech of a narrated figure. To enjoy and understand a narrative the reader has to suspend his own feelings and beliefs and accept those of the text, argues Booth (1983:137). This is a very important guideline for us, New Testament critics, who were educated to read the gospels not as narratives but as layers of tradition.

If we accept the fact that the author of the gospel presented Mark 13:5-37 as a narrated speech in order to convey a part of his message about Jesus, it will be necessary to consider some of the implications with regard to its place in the Gospel of Mark.

2 NARRATIVE TIME AND CONTEXT

Both the length of the speech and the place in the gospel narrative have been noticed as remarkable by scholars in the past. It is well known that the Jesus of Mark's gospel is not very talkative. Barring the speech on the parables in chapter 4, Mark 13 is the only long speech in Mark. What, if anything, is the significance of this in terms of the narrative? And secondly, is there any significance in the fact that Mark 13 is placed before chapters 14-16 (cf. Grayston 1973-1974)?
The importance of temporal aspects of the Gospel of Mark has in the past been related mostly to the question of the dating of the gospel and the temporal stance of the readers with regard to the narrated material. Interesting as this may be, there are other aspects of time in the gospel which, from a literary point of view, need our attention first.

Time, like space, plays an important role in the communication of a narrative message. In fact, it is part of the narrative message. When studying time in a narrative it is necessary to distinguish between various elements. It is particularly helpful to make a distinction between the story (fabula), that is the basic story material or signifiers; the narrative text or narrative discourse, that is the fabula transformed into an artistic structure of chronology and logic (sujet, the signified); and the act of narration or narration. These are also referred to as histoire, recit and narration (cf. Genette 1980). There is an interdependence between these narrative elements, and authors make use of different devices to manipulate material in terms of these elements, as we shall see below. These distinctions make it possible to differentiate between story time and narrative time and to study the significance of the time aspect of a narrative by comparing story time and narrative time and the effect of arrangement (order), duration and frequency (cf. Genette 1980:33-160; Petersen 1978a:49-80). Let us consider the order of Mark’s narrative first with reference to Mark 13.

The order in which Mark emploted his material becomes remarkable when the chronological sequence of the story is compared to that of the narrative. The events in the narrative leading to chapter 13 have to do with things which occurred in and around Jerusalem (A). Then in chapter 13, when they leave the temple the remark (B) by one of the disciples about the wonderful buildings gives rise to the Olivet speech (C). In narrative time most of the preceding events have to do with the past, the Olivet discourse, however, concerns the future. There is a switch both in narrative content (fall of Jerusalem and parousia (D) which is predicted) and in narrative tense. Until chapter 13 the narrative was, with the exception of predictions and narrative commentary, told in the past tense (imperfect, aorist and historic present) and in the narrative mode (erzählte Welt). In chapter 13:5-37, on the other hand, there is a change in narrative tense (mostly future
tenses) and mode (besprochene Welt). The narrator returns to past events in chapters 14–16 when he relates the events (E) preceding the trial of Jesus, his trial (F), crucifixion (G), death (H), burial (I) and resurrection (J). The chronological order of these events in the story time is: 1, 2, 10, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. In other words, the chronological order of the basic material (story) out of which Mark made his narrative text is different from that of the order in the narrative. In Mark 13 the author introduces another narrator, Jesus who looks forward and narrates events which are still to come. That is what changes the chronological order in the narrative. Whereas the narrator of Mark’s story usually looks backward in time and narrates past events, in the Olivet discourse Jesus looks forward.

If we compare narrative time with story time, the order of Mark’s emplotted narrative is most remarkable and thus also the place of Mark 13 in his narrative. The result of our comparison can be expressed as follows: A(1)B(2)C(3)D(10)E(5)F(6)G(7)H(8) I(9). Is there anything significant in Mark’s ordering of the material in this manner? Is this perhaps a means of foregrounding and accentuating the contents of the speech for the sake of the readers?

The rearrangement of story time in narratives is not unusual. It is in fact quite customary to find all sorts of rearrangements of time, like pro- and retrospection, in narratives. This is the way in which the reader is directed through the narrative. This is how the reader is invited to take part in the narrative, to form expectations and to modify his expectations. And it is also true of Mark’s gospel. It has, for example, been noticed by Petersen (1978a&b, 1980, 1984) that one of the important plot devices of this gospel is prediction and fulfilment, which is a form of rearrangement of story material. The reader is directed through the narrative by this device because predictions as well as their fulfilments are emplotted within the narrative (8:31; 9:31; 10:33ff, and the passion narrative). In the case of Mark 13 it is different. These predictions are not fulfilled (emplotted) inside the narrative. Contrary to the reader’s expectation which is grounded on the way in which he is educated by the text, Mark does not tell what happened with the predictions Jesus makes in Mark 13. Literally, Petersen (1980, 1984) finds this aspect of Mark 13 very significant and offers an interesting interpretation of the chapter on the basis of the “unful-
filled" predictions. I shall return to this below. Fact is that the fulfilment of the predictions of Mark 13 are not emploted in Mark's narrative, which underscores the question whether the placing of Mark 13 in the order of the narrative has any significance.

Another aspect of narrative time which might help us answer the question is that of duration. Duration has to do with the amount of time it takes to narrate an event (or events) in the story. It often happens that a narrator mentions a period (e.g. youth) in the life of a person but spends pages on one single event in the person's life. The amount of time devoted to the passion narrative in Mark, for example, is relatively extensive in comparison with other events. The only way of measuring the time spent in a narrative on an event or events, is to measure the amount of space taken to tell the event. The relative importance of an event is often determined by the space given to it in narrative time. The comparison between story time and text time is therefore based on the basis of space. If an author devotes twenty pages to one day in the life of the protagonist and one line to his birth, he clearly regards the former as more important for his purpose. The events which receive more attention are those which take most narrative space. The effect of longer or shorter narrative space is that of acceleration and deceleration, accentuation or generalization. Let us now turn to Mark 13.

I have already observed that Mark 13:5-37 takes relatively much space in comparison with what Jesus has to say in the rest of the Gospel of Mark. If we compare the length of Mark 13:5-37 to that of the summaries given, for instance, of the miracles which Jesus performed (cf. 1:32-34), or the resurrection narrative (16:1-8), it becomes clear that the speech in Mark 13 is undoubtedly accentuated and focused upon. There is a deceleration in narrative speed. In the material preceding the Olivet discourse the tension builds up through the amount of events that are told. But all of a sudden the narrative speed is decelerated by the introduction of a long speech. There is a pause in the narrative. In view of the fact that it is Jesus that speaks, the narrative becomes more dramatic (cf. 1 above) and a scenic impression is made on the reader. Taken together, there seems to be little reason to doubt the importance of and the accent on the contents of the speech given by the narrative devices of order and duration. This explains the significance
of the order in which Mark narrated Jesus' speech. Before the trial, death, and resurrection the reader is called to a halt. The material is foregrounded for the sake of the reader to reflect upon in order to "understand" what "followed" (in the narrative of Mark), and to instruct the reader about his own conduct.

The question now arises as to what the author wanted to achieve with the speech since he obviously placed a lot of weight on the contents thereof.

3 NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW, APOCALYPTIC AND PARAENESIS

In Mark's gospel, like in any other narrative, the story of Jesus is presented by the narrator from a certain perspective or viewpoint. Narrative point of view signifies the perceptual, conceptual, and ideological way in which the story gets told (cf. Abrams 1971:133; Chatman 1978:151 ff.). It is the means by which the reader is directed to identify with the message of the narrative and to accept the norms of judgement presented in the text. Petersen (1978b) has correctly observed that until chapter 13 the reader is educated to accept the viewpoint presented by Jesus and the unclean spirits and to view Jesus in terms of the things of God (cf. 8:33) and not in terms of man, as the other characters in the narrative, including the disciples, do. The other characters wrongly view Jesus as the worldly messiah and do not understand his mission. The disciples' lack of understanding is woven like a golden thread through the fabric of the text. The reader knows, because he is given the information by the narrator, that Jesus is the Son of God and what his fate as Son of man is (cf. 4-10); that death, resurrection and parousia await Him. The disciples, however, are presented as characters who are unable to comprehend.

... they do not comprehend what the reader is given to comprehend, namely that messiah and kingdom are to be understood in terms of death, resurrection, and parousia of Jesus, the Son of man who is the Son of God (Petersen 1984:47).

In literary terms, it means that Jesus is a reliable character because his perspective is presented by the narrator as trustworthy, while the disciples are unreliable (cf. Petersen 1980:161). With regard to Mark 13 this is rather important. Is Jesus presented as reliable? And what about the disciples? We will return to this.
It is not only through the eyes of the narrator that the events in the text are perceived. It is also possible to present the story from the perspective of a character in the story, in which case such a character is referred to as a "focaliser" (cf. Genette 1980:189ff.). It is the narrator of the Gospel of Mark that presents Jesus in Mark 13 as a narrator. Embedded into Mark's narrative, which is told from a particular perspective, is the speech (the story about the future) of Jesus being told from the perspective of Jesus who is the focaliser in Mark 13:5-37. In the chapters preceding Mark 13 the narrator presented the viewpoint of Jesus as being trustworthy and established the norms of judgement through that point of view. What is the message and the perspective of Mark 13? Let us start with a few remarks about the closure of Mark's story with regard to Mark 13 in order to explain the difficulties of interpretation that are involved.

In two thoughtprovoking articles Petersen (1980, 1984) argued that Mark 13 should be seen as the key to the plot of Mark's story. In view of the fact that Petersen gives a literary interpretation of Mark's gospel, and also because of the importance of his findings, I will rehearse in some detail parts of his argument. He maintains:

Unlike the understanding of all other characters in the story, the twelve disciples' understanding is contrary to the intent and expectations of the reliable character, Jesus. For the plot to be resolved and this theme to be closed, something closural must either happen or be firmly implied (Petersen 1980:161).

He then goes on to show that Mark 13 is Jesus' story about a conflict of eschatological interpretations. On the one hand there is the eschatology of the false messiahs and prophets who proclaim that the messiah has come. They pretend that with his coming the end, that is the kingdom of God, has also set in and as a token they perform signs and wonders. On the other hand, there is the viewpoint of the disciples, who in chapter 13 "... have reversed the position they held before Jesus' death and resurrection" (Petersen 1984:47). When did this reversal take place? Petersen (1984:49) maintains that although the reversal is not described in the text of Mark, and although the predictions of Mark 13 are not fulfilled in the text of Mark, the reversal is addressed in the meeting of Jesus with his disciples in Galilee, which is predicted (but not described) in the section after Mark 13 (cf. 14:28; 16:7).
Because he insists that the disciples, or at least four of them, remained in their false messianist position until the meeting in Galilee, Mark is saying of the later false messianists that their credentials are false because they have not been processed through Galilee (Petersen 1984:49).

According to Petersen the closure of the story is thus, firmly implied, namely in the meeting of the disciples with Jesus in Galilee. The closure of Jesus' story in Mark 13 is implied in the return of the Son of man. Both events take place in the continuum of Mark's narrative world. The intended reader, however, is aware of the change the disciples had undergone through their meeting with Jesus in Galilee because in the continuum of Mark's story the Galilee encounter did happen. The return of the Son of man still has to happen. The Galilee meeting supplies the basis for the reader to believe that the Son of man will return. Jesus thus remains a reliable character throughout the whole narrative and the reader can be convinced that the things of God dominate.

The message of Mark's narrative is therefore not that the disciples were indeed a dull lot, or that they were such until Galilee, but that those proclaiming that Messiah and Kingdom have come are not to be believed because Jesus already disclosed the error of their views to four of his disciples and because these disciples themselves experienced a dramatic realization of that error which had once been their own (Petersen 1984:166).

For Petersen Mark 13 tells the story of Jesus about the reversal the disciples will undergo with respect to their views about Jesus. He has indeed made a number of very important observations about the Gospel of Mark and his views are especially challenging with respect to the interpretation of Mark 13. There are, however, a few things in his interpretation, which, from a literary point of view, are problematic. I fully agree that the closure of Mark's gospel is strongly implied in the Galilee episode and that the reader is invited to read Mark 13 in view of the reliability of the narrator, Jesus. However, it seems to me that Petersen wrongly interprets the story of Mark 13:5-37 as a story which relates the reversal of the viewpoint of the disciples because the reader knows that it had taken place in the Galilee episode. Let us therefore return to the text of Mark 13:5-37.
Unlike most of the information in Mark's narrative, Mark 13:5-37 is a speech about the future. It is a "narrative" about future conflict written from an apocalyptic point of view in paraenetic style. The cast of characters includes, on the one side, the false messiahs and prophets (cf. 13:5,22), the unidentified "they" of 13:9 and 11, and persecutors and helpers of the false messiahs and prophets. Opposed to these characters are the disciples to whom the story is told. Included in this narrative role are the "elect" (13:20,22,27) referred to as the "many" (13:5) and those who are persecuted (13:9-13). The helpers in this role are the Holy Spirit (13:11), the Lord (13:20), the angels (13:27) and the fig tree (13:28-29). It is a story about conflict and torment in which persecution and deception will play an enormous role. In addition to persecution the false messiahs and prophets will pretend that they are Jesus, the Messiah (13:5). They will even perform signs and miracles (13:22) to lead astray the elect. The time co-ordinates of the narrative are indicated by phrases introduced by ἐκείνη and τότε and references to events which will come about (beginning), and (end) by the return of the Son of man (13:26). The latter (end) is imminent, it will occur in the time of the contemporaries of Jesus: "I tell you this: the present generation will live to see it all" (13:30 NEB). The former (beginning) lies in the near future although not even the Son knows the exact time of "that day" (13:32). There is a necessity for the conflict to take place - it must happen (13:7). The gentile mission also first has to take place (13:10). The narrative space includes earthly and heavenly scenes. In terms of the plot of the "narrative" the task set for the false messiahs and prophets is to lead astray the elect (disciples), which will only be accomplished if the opponents of the false messiahs (the elect) are unable to read the signs, and do not endure and keep in mind the paraenesis they receive.

In addition to the fact that the speech of Jesus is told in the future tense while most of Mark's text is told in the past tense, there is a shift in, what may be called the 'conceptual perspective'. I am here referring to the way of representing things, the symbolic universe of Mark 13:5-37. Jesus is still presented as the One who sees things in God's terms. There is a change in the conceptual perspective by the introduction of a new way of presenting material. What I mean is the theological perspective from which the material is presented - the way in which Jesus sees the world
and its future in the narrative of Mark. This is not the place to enter into the scholarly debate about whether Mark 13 is apocalyptic or not (cf. Brandenburger 1984), but a few remarks seem to be necessary.

The main difficulty concerning the theological perspective of Mark 13:5-37 is that of definition. Apocalyptic is used in many confusing ways and that explains the difference of opinion with regard to the supposedly apocalyptic nature of Mark 13. Following the research of Hanson (1976) and others, apocalyptic to my mind (cf. Vorster 1986) refers to a crisis phenomenon and apocalyptic eschatology to a meaning system, a theological perspective. Apocalyptic usually arises when the values and structures of a society lose all meaning for some minority group within a particular society and are replaced by a new symbolic meaning system. It is therefore at once a crisis phenomenon and an all-embracing approach to life in which the future determines the present. It is not concerned with the future only. Adherents of apocalyptic are not merely interested in the future. The contents of their visions and revelations also affect their views on the present and the past. Because life is seen in relation to the future there is great emphasis on correct conduct and ethics. Eschatology is of paramount importance. The past, present and future are interpreted in terms of the expectation of a new future or age and a new world in which supernatural space (heaven) and figures play an important role. Against this background one may ask how apocalyptic is Mark 13?

It is difficult not to read Mark 13 in its intertextual relationships and to overlook the traces of apocalyptic imagery in the chapter (cf. Brandenburger 1984). The eschatological conflict and the promise of the return of the Son of man are obviously two of the master symbols of a new symbolic universe which the text offers, making it different from the previous sections. Mark 13:5-37 presupposes a new context of communication. The material given in Mark 13:5-37 refers to a narrative world which is different from that in the previous chapters and the reader is expected to have a different frame of reference from the previous sections in Mark's story in order to understand the codes of the text. Chapters 1-12 undoubtedly generate certain expectations about the future by previews and hints through which the reader is educated on how to read Mark 13. He is aware of the return of
the Son of man (cf. 8:38), of future suffering for the sake of Jesus (8:27-9:1) and of the imminent coming of the kingdom (9:1). Most of this information is, however, related to the death and resurrection of Jesus which the reader is expected to see as something which has to happen to the Son of God. In Mark 13 conduct is determined by the coming of the end which will be sudden, and not by the death and resurrection of Jesus. End-time events are given in images which are familiar to those who are acquainted with apocalyptic imagination and theology. That determines the new context of communication. On the ground of the reliability of Jesus as character the reader is entrusted through the eyes of Jesus with a view of what will happen in the immediate future. The future and future events are presented to the four and thus to the reader as new knowledge. Things that will happen, of which they did not have to the faintest clue, are now made known to the four. They are in addition told how to react to the new situation which will arise.

One of the recurring problems in the interpretation of Mark 13:5-37 is that of reference. This does not only apply to verse 14 which remains a crux interpretum with regard to the speech as can be seen in the history of interpretation (cf. Brandenburger 1984:49 ff.). It also applies to the speech as a whole and to texts written from an apocalyptic perspective in particular. It is obvious that these texts, like any other text, refer in some way or another and that extratextual realities play a role in this regard. It should, however, not be forgotten that the primary function of texts written from an apocalyptic perspective is not to refer to extratextual realities. In the case of Mark 13:5-37 it is clear that the speech has a function with regard to the complete narrative and that it creates a narrative world of its own within the narrative world of Mark’s gospel. It is the image of a future of conflict, persecution, tribulation, cosmic changes and the unexpected coming of the Son of man which is used to persuade the four to be on the alert, and not the events in the extratextual world to which each narrated event could possibly refer. That is why one should determine the semantic function of the text rather than its possible reference to extratextual realities. In the history of the interpretation of Mark 13 it appears to have been the other way round. Far more importance was attached to the possible historical inferences that could be made, than to the semantic function of these intertextual
realities. I am not saying that texts written from an apocalyptic perspective do not reflect the real world out of which they arose, only that their primary function should not be looked for in terms of extratextual reference. I will return to this problem below. First, there is a need to reflect on the semantic function of Mark 13:5-37.

Our text is an interesting mixture of apocalyptic imagery and paraenesis. It is remarkable that almost everything which is said to, and thus about the four to whom the speech is directed, is done by way of imperatives (cf. blipe te in 13:5,9,23,33; mē threel-sthe in 13:7; mē promerimmāte in 13:11; proseuchesthe in 13:18; mē pisteeete in 13:21; māthete in 13:28; ginōskete in 13:28,29; blipe te agrupnette in 13:33; gregorette in 13:35,37 and the singular subjunctives in 14-16). It is expected from the four disciples to act in a certain way during the end time. This is of particular interest with regard to the interpretation of the text, since language is used to some end. To use language is to do things; it is to make language perform one or more functions (cf. Chatman 1978:162ff.; Halliday 1978:19ff.). The question may rightly be asked what the function of language is in Mark 13:5-37. Is it to inform the reader about all the events which are referred to in the chapter, or is it to persuade the reader? To me there seems to be little doubt about the answer. The use of imperatives is self-explanatory. Mark 13:5-37 was not in the first instance written to inform the four about the future, but rather how to expect the future - that is, to be prepared for the future by being alert and aware of what to expect. It is the paraenetic mode of expression which dominates the text, not in the sense of "ethical" admonitions, but of the stringing together of imperatives of conduct. The imperatives in Mark 13:5-37 have the same characteristics as paraenetic admonitions which are devised as ethical precepts (cf. Perdue 1981:242-246). On the basis of the authority and trustworthiness of Jesus these imperatives are given to "... define the ideal behaviour for those entering into a new social position or group" (Perdue 1981:249). Perhaps the most important remark made by Perdue (1981:249) for our purpose is that these admonitions call the recipient to serious reflection about his initial entrance into his present position, which is a matter of resocialization. Does the language of Mark 13:5-37 lead the reader to such reflection before he reads the closure of Mark's story? The language used in Mark 13 is used to do something and
that is to convince the reader about the perspective of Jesus, that is the life and works of the Son of God seen in terms of the things of God - the suffering and return of the Son of man. To accept the story the reader has to take a different stance than the one taken by the disciples.

One has to keep in mind the development of the plot of Mark's narrative in an attempt to understand Mark 13. The reader has been prepared systematically to accept the ideology of the things of God, namely the idea of a kingdom and messiahship which is not of man. Until Mark 13 he is prepared to accept the predictions of the suffering, death and resurrection on the ground of the reliability of Jesus. In terms of redundancy the reader is in fact well prepared for the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark 13 is however, of vital importance for the time after the resurrection and for the implications of his being Son of God, who will return as Son of man. It substantially undergirds the total resocialization of the reader who has to accept the view that the Son of God had to suffer and that the end is not yet, neither with the death and resurrection of Jesus nor with rumours about end time signs like wars (cf. 13:7). It implies a closure of the plot in the future.

It seems to me that Petersen's interpretation about the disciples and their refusal in Mark 13 cannot be accepted. He infers too much from Mark 13 and in the end ignores the text and its directives for the reader. He regards the disciples as the protagonists of the story - not a set of orders of conduct to disciples who lack understanding (cf. Petersen 1980:165). This is best seen in the following remark:

Some, who were declared false by Jesus, proclaim that the messiah has come, and with him the end, that is, the Kingdom of God, while prophets attest to the eschatological presence by performing signs and wonders (13:6:21-23). Opposed to the messiahs and prophets are the four disciples who, in this story, say that the end is not yet but that it will come next when, with cosmic signs, the Son of man will come in clouds with great power and glory (13:24-27,29) (Petersen 1980:165-166).

This is the hub of Petersen's interpretation. It stands and falls with the question whether "in this story" the four disciples say that the end is not yet - as he maintains - or whether they are expected to say so - as I have argued above. I do not doubt that the disciples, according to the text, are expected to say that the end is
not yet and so on, and that their role is that of opposing the protagonist, that is the false messiahs and the false prophets. They are not the protagonists in the story of Jesus in Mark 13:5-37. They are once again given the instruction to comprehend the implications of story of Mark. They are undoubtedly not presented in their after-Galilee meeting (in the real world or continuum of Mark's narrative world), but in their state of incomprehension. They are again, as in chapters 1-12, put in the privileged position of receiving inside information on the after-resurrection period and are expected in the continuum of Mark's story to make the viewpoint of the things of God their own.

Much of what Petersen has to say in connection with Mark 13 is useful. He seems, however, in his literary interpretation of the text to have been led by historical inferences about the first flesh and blood readers and the problem of the "historical" as well as the literary closure of Mark's gospel. In the long run Mark's disciples are not personages in a narrative world but real persons. The task of the interpreter becomes one of establishing what the real readers knew and what their positions were. Once this is established the text is interpreted in the light thereof. The reason for this is found, amongst others, in Petersen's use of the term "implied reader". For him the implied reader is not a textual construct (cf. Booth 1983:137; Iser 1978:34), a reader encoded in the text, but a real flesh and blood reader implied by the text. This is misleading and nothing less than the construction of a possible reader. His results are not literary but rather historical, based on inferences made from the text. There is a very sophisticated mixture of literary and historical information in these studies as is seen in the following remark:

From a literary perspective, therefore, Jesus' predictions are the implied author's fictions, based on his knowledge of events that are either past or present (Petersen 1984:45).

Is fiction now becoming factual and is that the reason for the historical inferences? One should remember that all we have is the text, a contextless text and that in the first place the Gospel of Mark is a narrative, rather than a history of Jesus and his disciples.

There is enough literary grounds to argue the importance of the fact that Mark 13:5-37 is a narrated speech and that its position in the order of the narrative is significant. The narrative message of
the text ties in with the theme of the incomprehension of the disciples. From an apocalyptic perspective they are admonished to reconsider their position as followers of Jesus and encouraged to resist the persecution, tribulation and false messages of the false messiahs and prophets who will try to lead them astray. Similar to the closure of the Gospel of Mark in 16:8, Mark 13 is an open-ended story. The reader is left with the gap of the fulfilment of the Galilee episode, but also with the gap of the fulfilment of the predictions in Mark 13. This is one of the significant ways in which the reader is guided to read the text constructively. It leaves the reader with the strong expectation of an imminent parousia. It is very difficult for a modern reader, who is accustomed to the delay of the parousia, not to realise that Mark wrote a story for people who lived a long time ago.

4 CONCLUSION
A literary interpretation of Mark 13 can never pretend to solve all the problems in the text. It can only offer a particular reading of the text based on certain presuppositions as we have seen above. What is more, there is more than one literary reading possible in accordance with literary vantage points. I have not tried to give an exhaustive treatment of the narrated speech. I have simply dealt with a few, to my mind important, problems. In the first place it seems clear that much more attention should be spent on the narrative character of Mark 13, also on the fact that the speech in Mark 13 is told from the perspective of a reliable character who is trusted to talk about the future, even though he himself confesses that he does not know everything (13:32). The point of view from which he offers his information will also have to be studied in greater detail, but from a literary and not a literary comparative viewpoint. In the third place much more attention should be paid to semantic function in New Testament studies.

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Prof. Dr. W.S. Vorster, University of South Africa, P.O. Box 392, Pretoria 0001. Republic of South Africa.