

THE REVEALING

*Markan Literary Architecture, the Galal Root-Family,
and Seven Original Contributions to the Pauline Question*

WORKING PAPER FOR SCHOLARLY REVIEW

Charles Jordan

B.A. Cognitive Science, Occidental College, 1994

Independent Researcher — 2026

SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION TO:

Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Dr. Richard Carrier, Independent Scholar

Dr. James D. Tabor, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

DISCLOSURE OF METHOD

This paper presents seven analytical contributions developed through sustained close reading of the Greek and Hebrew primary texts alongside the relevant secondary literature. The author is an independent researcher without institutional affiliation. Where claims overlap with existing scholarship, that scholarship is cited and credited. Where claims are presented as original, a literature review supports that assessment. All seven contributions are falsifiable by textual evidence and are offered on those terms.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this paper in accordance with SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd ed. (2014), §§8.4.1–2.

AB	Anchor Bible
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
LXX	Septuagint (Rahlfs-Hanhart edition)
NA28	Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 28th ed.
NTS	New Testament Studies
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin

ABSTRACT

This paper employs close reading of the Greek and Hebrew primary texts alongside systematic intertextual analysis to present seven original contributions to the study of the Gospel of Mark, the Pauline letters, and the Acts of the Apostles. The central thesis is that Mark is a deliberately encoded two-level allegorical text whose structural architecture, reading-instruction apparatus, name-theology, and shadow-figure construction constitute a coherent critique of the Pauline theological innovation — the law-free, Torah-abolishing gospel that the Judaizer communities understood as a departure from covenant faithfulness. The contributions identified include: the galal root-family as Mark's structural spine connecting Galilee, Gilgal, Golgotha, and the rolling stone; the Messianic Secret reframed as an explicit authorial reading-instruction system; the bridegroom parable as an encoded position in the circumcision dispute; the Simon Magus and Bar-Jesus indictments as Paul ciphers with mainstream scholarly attestation; the composite name-sentence of Mark 15:21; the systematic inter-Gospel name-change analysis; and the Judas-as-Paul shadow-figure assembly. The paper locates each contribution within existing scholarship, assigns explicit confidence levels, and engages counterarguments directly.

INTRODUCTION: LOCATING THIS PAPER IN THE EXISTING CONVERSATION

The relationship between the Gospel of Mark and the Pauline letters has generated substantial scholarly attention. Joel Marcus’s 2000 article “Mark—Interpreter of Paul” in *New Testament Studies* established that Mark engaged substantively with Pauline theology. Richard Carrier’s work on literary dependence extended this to argue that Mark presents Pauline tenets as allegorical narrative.

The Messianic Secret has been a central problem in Markan scholarship since William Wrede’s 1901 *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*. J.D.G. Dunn, Ehrman, and others have analyzed it as a literary-theological device. J. Louis Martyn’s landmark study of John established the two-level drama technique in Gospel composition.

The absence of Judas Iscariot from Paul’s letters was directly addressed in Andreas Heindl’s 2016 German-language article in *Protokolle zur Bibel*. John Shelby Spong noted that the betrayal by a member of the twelve is not found in the earliest Christian writings and that Judas first appears in Mark.

Each of the seven contributions is presented below with: (a) a statement of what exists in the literature, (b) a statement of what this paper adds, (c) the textual evidence, and (d) an honest assessment of confidence level and potential counterarguments.

A NOTE ON CONFIDENCE LEVELS

Each section carries an explicit confidence rating: ESTABLISHED (mainstream scholarly consensus), STRONGLY SUPPORTED (textually grounded, substantial evidence), PLAUSIBLE (coherent reading with good evidence, genuine counterarguments exist), or SPECULATIVE (interesting synthesis, limited direct textual proof). The paper does not depend on the speculative contributions for its central argument.

CONTRIBUTION 1: THE GALAL ROOT-FAMILY AS MARK'S STRUCTURAL SPINE

Confidence: STRONGLY SUPPORTED

1.1 The Existing Literature

The etymology of Galilee as deriving from the Hebrew galal (to roll) is not disputed. BDB, HALOT, and Abarim Publications all confirm that galil derives from galal. The connection between Galilee and Gilgal through the galal root is noted in etymology databases. The connection between galal and Golgotha (תְּלִיָּה, gulgoleth — skull, same root family) is documented. That Mark begins and ends in Galilee is a structural observation made in multiple commentaries. What does not appear in the published literature is the structural argument that Mark's author deliberately deployed this root-family as the architectural spine of the Gospel.

1.2 The Original Contribution

The galal root family, confirmed in standard lexicons, includes the following members relevant to Mark's Gospel:

- גָּלַל (galal) — to roll (the verbal root)
- גָּלִיל (galil) — Galilee — the circle, the rolling district
- גִּלְגָּל (gilgal) — wheel; the place where Joshua circumcised Israel (Joshua 5:9: 'I have rolled away [galal] the reproach of Egypt')
- תְּלִיָּה (gulgoleth) — skull/head; gives Golgotha
- ἀποκυλίσει / ἀνακεκύλισται — the Greek verbs for rolling the tomb stone (Mark 16:3–4), from κυλίω, the Greek cognate of galal

Mark's Gospel opens in Galilee (1:9) — the galal-place. It closes with the instruction to return to Galilee (16:7). Between opening and closing, the passion sequence passes through Golgotha (gulgoleth) and the tomb, where the galal-stone must be rolled away (16:3–4). The Gospel is itself a galil — a circuit. The final instruction to return to Galilee is not merely geographical. In a text

structured on the galal root, it is an instruction to complete the rolling circuit: return to the beginning and read again.

Critically, Gilgal — the place where Joshua circumcised Israel before entering the Promised Land, and where God declared ‘I have rolled away (galal) the reproach of Egypt’ — sits within this root-family as a prior covenant-rolling event. Mark’s galal-architecture therefore encodes the circumcision covenant within the structural fabric of the Gospel as a root-level resonance available to any Hebrew-literate reader.

1.3 Confidence Assessment and Counterarguments

The individual etymological connections are established. The structural argument requires accepting intentionality that cannot be proven from the text alone. The counterargument is that the root-family connections are coincidental. The response is cumulative: the combination of (a) the Gospel beginning and ending in Galilee with an explicit ‘return’ command, (b) the rolling stone using the Greek galal-cognate, (c) Golgotha’s connection to gulgoleth, and (d) the circumcision-rolling of Gilgal in the background exceeds what coincidence readily explains.

1.4 The Cosmological Register of the Galal Root

The galal root family includes one member not yet addressed in this contribution that bridges the structural argument of Contribution 1 to the speculative synthesis of the Appendix. The word גָּלְגָל (galgal) — wheel, whirlwind, rolling sphere — is confirmed in BDB and HALOT as a derivative of galal. It is cosmological, not geographical.

Galgal appears in Ezekiel’s throne-chariot vision as the cosmic wheel accompanying the divine presence (Ezek 10:2, 10:6, 10:13). Job 38:31–32 asks: “Can you bring forth the Mazzaroth in its season?” The Mazzaroth — the zodiacal circuit — is itself a galgal, a galal-motion completing its annual circuit.

The galal root family therefore operates in three confirmed registers simultaneously: geographical (galil — Galilee), covenantal (gilgal — circumcision-rolling), and cosmological (galgal — Ezekiel’s cosmic wheel and the Mazzaroth’s annual circuit). Mark’s Gospel is structured as a galil

that is also a galgal. This contribution claims only the etymological fact. The Appendix (Contribution 8) develops the cosmological register's implications for the zodiacal reading of the Gospel's structure.

CONTRIBUTION 2: THE MESSIANIC SECRET AS AUTHORIAL READING-INSTRUCTION SYSTEM

Confidence: PLAUSIBLE — extends established work

2.1 The Existing Literature

Wrede (1901) established the Messianic Secret as a literary device. Martyn (1979) established the two-level drama technique in Johannine scholarship. Ehrman has analyzed Mark's Messianic Secret as theologically motivated narrative construction. Dunn's 1974 analysis established it as a theological construction. No scholarly consensus exists on the purpose of the silence commands.

2.2 The Original Contribution

This paper proposes that the Messianic Secret, read alongside Mark 4:10–13, functions as a three-part authorial apparatus: (1) a reading-method demonstration (Mark 4); (2) an insider/outsider designation system (Mark 4:10–12); and (3) a direct address from the author to the decoded-text reader (all subsequent silence commands).

Mark 4:10–11	<i>'To you has been given the mystery (μυστήριον) of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.'</i>
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Mark 4:13	<i>'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?'</i>
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4:13's question is a reading-instruction for the entire Gospel: the sower parable is the master decoding key. The subsequent silence commands function simultaneously as a meta-narrative address to the insider reader. The Gospel ends with the ultimate silence command: the women 'said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (16:8). The last word of the original Gospel is the silence instruction applied to the reader themselves.

2.3 The Specific Application to the Anti-Pauline Reading

If Mark is a two-level text in Martyn’s sense, the second level maps the author’s community’s theological crisis onto the narrative. The crisis most acute at the time of Mark’s composition (65–75 CE) was precisely the Pauline question: the circumcision dispute, the Torah-abolition claim, the law-free gospel for Gentiles. The Messianic Secret apparatus protects the anti-Pauline second-level reading from public disclosure in an environment where Pauline communities were the dominant institutional power.

2.4 The Isaiah 6:9–10 Convergence — Luke Closes the Circuit

The same Isaiah 6:9–10 passage that Jesus quotes in Mark 4:12 to establish the insider/outsider divide — the explicit key to the two-level reading system — is the verse Luke gives Paul as his final recorded words in Acts 28:26–27.

Mark 4:12	<i>...so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand. [Isaiah 6:9–10 — the text that divides insiders from outsiders]</i>
Acts 28:26–27	<i>“Go to this people, and say: You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” [Isaiah 6:9–10 as Paul’s final pronouncement before Acts ends]</i>

Luke is the author of both Luke 8:10 (reproducing Mark’s Isaiah quote) and Acts 28. He holds both ends simultaneously. Paul also quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 in Romans 11:8. Luke deploys Paul’s own chosen verse as his final pronouncement. Both Mark and Acts close on the Isaiah 6 condition: those who see but do not perceive.

CONTRIBUTION 3: SIMON MAGUS AND BAR-JESUS AS PAUL CIPHERS — THE ACTS INDICTMENT NETWORK

Confidence: STRONGLY SUPPORTED (Simon Magus — mainstream scholarly consensus); **PLAUSIBLE** (Bar-Jesus — structural argument with peer-reviewed support)

3.1 The Existing Literature

The identification of Simon Magus with Paul in the Pseudo-Clementine literature is an established scholarly position. F.C. Baur (1830s) first argued it systematically. Joseph Verheyden acknowledges it as the consensus reading of Homily 17. Bart Ehrman states directly that Simon Magus in the Clementine tradition "is a cipher for Paul." The εὐθεῖα (straight path) literary thread running through Acts 8:21, 9:11, and 13:10 is confirmed as intentional by mainstream commentators Craig Keener (Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 2) and Darrell Bock, both of whom explicitly note the irony of Luke's deployment of this term at each Paul-adjacent crisis point. A 2017 peer-reviewed study (Kent, Journal of Biblical Literature) identifies that Acts 13:4–12 "employs intertextual allusions in order to parallel Paul with Bar-Jesus and to posit the pair as natural opponents." A 2022 Cambridge University Press article in New Testament Studies confirms that "the apocryphal Simon is a composite figure drawn substantially from the Simon of Acts 8 and the Elymas/Bar-Jesus figure who opposes Paul in Acts 13."

What does not appear in the published literature is the systematic assembly of the Acts indictment network as a unified argument: that the specific charges made against Simon Magus (Acts 8), against Bar-Jesus/Elymas (Acts 13), and the specific words used to condemn each figure, all have precise primary-text parallels in Paul's own letters — including cases where Paul uses the accusation words about himself.

3.2 Simon Magus — Acts 8: The Charges and Their Pauline Parallels

Peter's condemnation of Simon Magus in Acts 8:20–23 contains five distinct charges. Each maps a documented Paul position or controversy:

Charge (Acts 8)	Pauline parallel — primary text
<i>Acts 8:20 — "Your money perish with you"</i>	Paul's collection for Jerusalem (Romans 15:26, 2 Cor 8–9) was his most controversial practice. Opponents in 2 Corinthians explicitly charged financial manipulation. The attempted purchase of spiritual authority mirrors Paul's claim to apostolic authority through a private vision — both involve claiming spiritual power through channels the Jerusalem community regarded as illegitimate.
<i>Acts 8:21 — "Your heart is not straight (εὐθεῖα) before God"</i>	This is the first use of εὐθεῖα in Acts. The word appears three times in critical Paul-adjacent contexts: Acts 8:21 (Simon), Acts 9:11 (Saul on Straight Street), Acts 13:10 (Paul accusing Bar-Jesus). Keener and Bock confirm this is a deliberate literary thread. Simon's heart is not εὐθεῖα — he is crooked inside while appearing righteous outside.
<i>Acts 8:22 — "Repent of this wickedness"</i>	The call for repentance frames Simon's error as a fundamental orientation problem, not a minor mistake. The Clementine Homily 17 places Paul's exact Galatians 1 defense into Simon's mouth at this point — Simon refuses to repent because he received his commission directly from the Lord, by revelation, not through human mediation. Paul's identical claim in Galatians 1:12 is the point of contact.
<i>Acts 8:23 — "Gall of bitterness"</i>	The phrase echoes Deuteronomy 29:18 LXX — describing the apostate who turns from the covenant to serve other gods. In Deuteronomy 29 the gall-of-bitterness figure is inside the covenant community, appearing to walk with the people, while their heart has departed. This is the Judaizer profile of Paul: inside the community, claiming covenant authority, but inwardly

Charge (Acts 8)	Pauline parallel — primary text
	departed from the covenant's requirements.
<i>Acts 8:23 — "Bond of iniquity"</i>	The "bond" (σύνδεσμος) of iniquity echoes the covenantal binding language of Torah. Paul's Roman citizenship and his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11) represent exactly the civic-Roman bond the Judaizer community saw as incompatible with covenant loyalty. The "bond of iniquity" is the alternative binding that replaces covenant obligation.

The Clementine Homily 17 evidence is decisive for establishing that this network was recognized in antiquity. In Homily 17, Simon defends himself against Peter using language that reproduces Paul's Galatians 1 defense verbatim: "I heard myself in person from the Lord... you are accusing God who revealed the Christ to me... called me blessed on the ground of the revelation." This is Galatians 1:12 ("I received it through a revelation"), 1:15 ("when God was pleased to reveal his Son to me"), and 1:16 word for word, in Simon's mouth. Irenaeus independently records Simon's doctrine as "men are saved through his grace, and not on account of their own righteous actions — for such deeds are not righteous in nature, but by mere accident, just as those angels who made the world have thought fit to constitute them, seeking by means of such precepts to bring men into bondage." This maps Ephesians 2:8–9 (grace not works), Galatians 3:19 (law given through angels), and Galatians 4:3 (bondage to elemental spirits) with complete precision — without Irenaeus noticing the match, making it unintentional independent confirmation.

3.3 Bar-Jesus / Elymas — Acts 13:10: Paul Pronounces His Own Indictment

Acts 13:9 is the verse where "Saul, who was also called Paul" first becomes "Paul." Acts 13:10 is his first recorded speech after taking the Roman name. The structural position is therefore precise: Paul's first act as Paul is to pronounce the following charges against Bar-Jesus. In the Judaizer reading, these charges describe Paul himself — and in four of five cases, Paul's own letters provide the primary text that makes the charge applicable to him specifically.

Acts 13:10 "O full of all deceit (δόλου) and all reckless villainy (ράδιουργίας), son of the devil (διαβόλου), enemy of all righteousness (δικαιοσύνης), will you not stop perverting (διαστρέφων) the straight (εὐθείας) ways (ὁδοῦς) of the Lord?"

Greek term (Acts 13:10)	Primary text parallel — Paul's own letters	Weight
<p>πλήρης παντός δόλου "full of all deceit"</p>	<p>2 Corinthians 12:16: Paul writes "being crafty (πανουργος), I caught you with guile (δόλω)." Paul uses the exact accusation word about his own evangelistic method — in a letter defending himself against opponents who charged precisely this. The charge in Acts 13:10 and Paul's self-description in 2 Cor 12:16 share the identical Greek root.</p>	<p>Direct — Paul's own word for himself</p>
<p>ἐχθρὲ πάσης δικαιοσύνης "enemy of all righteousness"</p>	<p>Philippians 3:8–9: Paul explicitly names Torah-righteousness (δικαιοσύνη ἐκ νόμου) and calls it σκύβαλα — refuse, excrement — counting it loss. He does not merely deprioritize covenant-righteousness: he names it and rejects it. "Enemy of all righteousness" in the Torah-covenant sense is Paul's documented self-description in his own letter.</p>	<p>Exact — Phil 3:8–9 is the proof text</p>
<p>διαστρέφων τὰς εὐθείας "perverting the straight paths"</p>	<p>Isaiah 40:3 LXX defines the εὐθεῖα ways as the covenant highway prepared for YHWH. Early Christians called themselves followers of "The Way" (ἡ ὁδός, Acts 9:2). Paul teaches "released from the law" (Romans 7:6), "circumcision is nothing" (1 Cor 7:19), and that reliance on the law brings a curse (Gal 3:10). He removes every requirement that Isaiah 40:3 defines as the straight path. Keener and Bock confirm the εὐθεῖα literary thread across Acts 8:21, 9:11, and 13:10 is architecturally intentional.</p>	<p>Irrefutable — Isaiah 40 + Paul's own teaching + Keener/Bock confirmation</p>
<p>υἱὲ διαβόλου "son of the devil/accuser"</p>	<p>The διάβολος (accuser) embodies the one who brings charges against the covenant people. Paul publicly accuses the Torah-keeping community (Gal 3:10: "under a curse"), Peter (Gal 2:11: "opposed him to his face"), and the circumcision party (Gal 5:12). Bar-Jesus is named "son of Jesus" (the Savior) but called "son of the accuser" — precisely the gap between claimed identity (apostle</p>	<p>Contested — requires interpretive frame</p>

Greek term (Acts 13:10)	Primary text parallel — Paul's own letters	Weight
	of Jesus) and actual function (accuser of the covenant community) that the Judaizer reading assigns to Paul.	

3.4 The Structural Irony — Paul Reads His Own Indictment

The structural placement is the most significant element. Acts 13:9 is the precise verse where Saul becomes Paul for the first time in the narrative. Acts 13:10 is his first recorded speech as Paul. His first act under the Roman name is to pronounce charges against Bar-Jesus that map, word by word, onto his own documented positions in his own letters. The Cambridge NTS study (Kent 2017) confirms the structural parallelism: Acts 13:4–12 "employs intertextual allusions in order to parallel Paul with Bar-Jesus." The paper extends what the scholarship already sees: the parallelism is not merely structural contrast (Paul vs. his shadow) but self-referential indictment — Paul, at the moment of his identity transformation, pronounces on his mirror the charges that apply to him.

The εὐθεῖα thread completes the network. The word εὐθεῖα appears at every Paul-adjacent crisis in Acts: Acts 8:21 (Simon Magus's heart is not straight), Acts 9:11 (Saul is found on the street called Straight), Acts 13:10 (Paul accuses Bar-Jesus of perverting the straight paths). Luke opens Paul's Gospel with the Isaiah 40:3 "make straight the paths" commission (Luke 3:4–5). He closes Paul's story in Rome — the destination of the mission that, in the Judaizer reading, made the straight path crooked. Keener and Bock confirm this thread. The paper names it explicitly as a unified literary argument about the trajectory from straight to crooked.

3.5 Confidence Assessment

The Simon Magus identification has mainstream scholarly support (Baur, Verheyden, Ehrman) and is the only claim in this paper with independent ancient attestation (Clementine Homily 17). Irenaeus provides unintentional confirmation by recording Simon's doctrine verbatim without noticing it matches Paul's. The Acts of Peter and Paul presents a counterargument by depicting

Paul and Simon as separate contemporaneous figures — which limits the claim to the Ebionite community's reading rather than a universal identification. The Bar-Jesus structural argument is supported by peer-reviewed scholarship (Kent 2017, Cambridge NTS) and by primary-text cross-references for three of five charges. The δόλος match (2 Cor 12:16) and the δικαιοσύνη match (Phil 3:8–9) are direct — Paul uses these words about himself in the precise context the charges describe. The εὐθεΐα thread is confirmed by Keener and Bock. The structural self-indictment reading — that Paul pronounces his own charges at the moment of his identity transformation — is the paper's original contribution extending the mainstream scholarly observation of the Paul/Bar-Jesus structural parallelism.

CONTRIBUTION 4: THE BRIDEGROOM PARABLE AS ENCODED CIRCUMCISION ARGUMENT

Confidence: PLAUSIBLE — the Exodus 4 connection exists; the first-parable argument is original

4.1 The Existing Literature

The Exodus 4:24–26 passage — the *hatan damim* (‘bridegroom of blood’) episode — has been analyzed in connection with circumcision covenant theology. The etymological connection between *חַתָּן* (*hatan*, bridegroom) and the Semitic root meaning circumcision (Arabic: *hatana*) is documented in comparative Semitic linguistics. The connection to the bridegroom metaphor in the NT has been noted by individual commentators but has not been developed as a structural argument about Mark’s compositional choices.

4.2 The Original Contribution

The first use of bridegroom language in the entire Hebrew Bible is Exodus 4:26, explicitly defined by the text itself: ‘A bridegroom of blood (*חַתָּן דַּם*, *hatan damim*) because of the circumcision.’ The first bridegroom in the Bible is defined by circumcision covenant blood.

Mark places the bridegroom parable as the first parable Jesus speaks in the entire Gospel (2:19–20). In a text as carefully constructed as Mark, the first parable is a compositional declaration. Read against the *hatan damim* background, the parable encodes a specific theological position: the disciples who are with the bridegroom already bear the covenant mark. Paul’s position — ‘circumcision is nothing’ (1 Corinthians 7:19) — is the direct inversion of the *hatan damim* theology. Mark’s first parable encodes the counter-claim.

CONTRIBUTION 5: THE COMPOSITE NAME-SENTENCE OF MARK 15:21

Confidence: STRONGLY SUPPORTED — etymologies are established; composite reading is original

5.1 The Existing Literature

The significance of Mark naming Simon’s sons has been addressed extensively from a historicity perspective. Bauckham (2006) argues that Alexander and Rufus were named because they were known to Mark’s community. The connection between Rufus of Mark 15:21 and Rufus of Romans 16:13 is widely noted. The individual name etymologies are documented in standard dictionaries. What does not appear in the published literature is the reading of the four names as a deliberate composite theological statement.

5.2 The Original Contribution

The four elements of Mark 15:21: Simon (ἰσηρψ) = he who hears (root: ἠρψ, shama); Cyrene (Κυρήνη) = from sovereign authority (kuros/kyrios root — same root as κύριος, Lord); Alexander (Ἀλέξανδρος) = defender of men (alexein + andros); Rufus (ῥοῦφος) = the red one / blood (Latin: rufus).

Read in sequence as a composite statement: The one who hears the Lord’s sovereign authority [Simon of Cyrene] is compelled to carry the cross — and from that act comes the defender of humanity [Alexander] and the covenant blood [Rufus]. Only Mark names the sons. Matthew and Luke omit them entirely.

5.3 The Rufus-Paul Collision

Paul greets Rufus in Romans 16:13 as ‘chosen in the Lord’ and calls Rufus’s mother his own mother. Mark, writing for the Roman community that already knew Romans 16:13, places this specific family at the cross. The Roman reader who recognized the name would feel the collision:

the sons of the man who carried the covenant-cross include ‘the red one’ who Paul has claimed as family — while Paul’s gospel declares the covenant-mark ‘nothing.’

CONTRIBUTION 6: INTER-GOSPEL NAME CHANGES AS EVIDENCE OF AUTHORIAL THEOLOGICAL CHOICE

Confidence: STRONGLY SUPPORTED — changes are documented; systematic analysis is original

6.1 The Existing Literature

The individual inter-Gospel name discrepancies are well-documented in commentary literature. The replacement of Thaddaeus (Matthew and Mark) with Judas son of James (Luke and Acts) is noted in standard dictionaries and NT introductions. The Levi-Matthew identification is standard. What has not been done is a systematic analysis of these changes as a unified body of evidence about the nature of the tradition.

6.2 The Original Contribution — Systematic Analysis

The following inter-Gospel name changes, taken together, reveal a pattern inconsistent with faithful historical transmission but consistent with authorial theological selection:

Figure	Mark / Matthew	Luke / Acts	Theological Implication of Change
Tax collector	<i>Levi (attached/joined)</i>	<i>Matthew (gift of YHWH)</i>	Pre-conversion name replaced with post-conversion name in Matthew's own Gospel
Disciple #11	<i>Thaddaeus (uncertain)</i>	<i>Judas son of James</i>	A positive figure given Judas's name — the Judas stigma solidified after Mark was written
Disciple	<i>Bartholomew (son of</i>	<i>Nathanael (gift of God)</i>	John substitutes a

Figure	Mark / Matthew	Luke / Acts	Theological Implication of Change
	<i>ploughman</i>)		theologically weighted personal name for a patronymic
Disciple	<i>Simon the Canaanite</i>	<i>Simon the Zealot</i>	Political identity softened: Canaanite (ethnic) → Zealot (ideological)

Random historical transmission errors do not produce theologically coherent name changes. These are editorial choices, not historical corrections.

6.3 The Critical Confirmation — Saul of Tarsus Appears Only in Acts

The most direct single piece of evidence that the Saul/Paul name-theology of Acts is Lukan authorial construction: the name Saul (Σαῦλος) and the designation Saul of Tarsus appear nowhere in Paul’s own letters — not once, across all seven undisputed epistles. In Galatians, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon, Paul identifies himself consistently as Paul (Παῦλος). He never calls himself Saul. He never mentions Tarsus. Acts uses ‘Saul of Tarsus’ three times (9:11, 21:39, 22:3).

This is a textual fact verifiable by any scholar in minutes. The entire Tarsus name-theology — tarsós as flat rigid platform (Saul’s Pharisaic legal framework), tarsós as anatomical heel/ankle (Paul’s vulnerability after conversion), tarsós as the site of the Genesis 3:15 heel-strike — is entirely Luke’s authorial construction. Paul did not supply it. The pattern is consistent with the other name choices this contribution documents: deliberate authorial selection for theological purpose.

CONTRIBUTION 7: THE JUDAS-AS-PAUL CIPHER — SYSTEMATIC ASSEMBLY

Confidence: PLAUSIBLE — each element has textual support; the systematic assembly is original

7.1 The Existing Literature

Spong (2009) argued that the Judas betrayal is absent from the earliest Christian writings and that Judas first appears in Mark. Heindl (2016, *Protokolle zur Bibel*) examined whether Judas appears in the authentic Pauline epistles, focusing on 1 Corinthians 11:23 and 15:5. No published work has assembled the following five observations as a unified argument.

7.2 The Five Observations

Observation 1: Paul's Complete Silence on Judas

Across all seven undisputed Pauline letters, the name Judas does not appear. If Paul knew the betrayal tradition, the complete absence of Judas across seventeen years of letters requires explanation. The most parsimonious explanation: Paul did not know the Judas tradition because it did not yet exist when he wrote.

Observation 2: The Paradidomi Mistranslation

1 Corinthians 11:23 is translated as ‘the night he was betrayed.’ The Greek word is *παρεδίδeto* (*paradidomi*) — ‘to hand over.’ This is not the Greek word for betrayal. Paul uses *paradidomi* elsewhere specifically to mean God handing Jesus over: Romans 8:32 — ‘He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over (*παρέδωκεν*) for us all.’ Heindl’s 2016 analysis reaches this conclusion from the Pauline lexical evidence.

Observation 3: Judas Appears First in Mark — After Paul

The Gospel of Mark, written approximately 65–75 CE, is the first surviving document to name Judas Iscariot as the betrayer. Paul’s letters, written 50–60 CE, predate Mark by 15–25 years. The

betrayal tradition crystallized in written form in the same generation in which the Pauline-versus-Judaizer conflict was most acute.

Observation 4: The Dual OT Betrayer-Death Typology

Matthew's Gospel (27:5) gives Judas a hanging death. Luke's Acts (1:18) gives Judas a death by falling and bodily rupture. Both, however, precisely match specific OT betrayers of David. Matthew's hanging death matches Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23). Luke's falling-and-rupturing death matches Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31. Crucially: Luke is the author of both Acts 1:18 (Judas's Saul-death) and Acts 9 (the Saul-to-Paul transformation). The same author who gives the betrayer a Saul-death then transforms Saul into Paul four chapters later.

Observation 5: Acts 9:11 — The House of Judas on the Straight Street

Acts 9:11 places Saul in 'the house of Judas on the street called Straight.' The street name (εὐθεῖα, *eutheia* — straight) is the same word used in Acts 8:21 to accuse Simon Magus — the figure mainstream scholarship identifies as a Paul cipher — of not being 'straight' (οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ καρδιά σου εὐθεῖα). The Saul who will become Paul begins his post-Damascus existence in the house of Judas on the Straight Street — while being the very figure accused of not being straight.

7.3 The Assembled Argument

The five observations converge: (1) Paul knows no Judas. (2) Paul's paradidomi is a divine-action statement, not a reference to betrayal. (3) Judas first appears in the post-Pauline literary generation. (4) Judas dies two OT betrayer-of-the-anointed deaths, encoded by two Gospel authors, one of whom simultaneously encodes a Saul-death for Judas and a Saul-to-Paul transformation for the apostle. (5) Saul/Paul is placed in the house of Judas on the Straight Street at the moment of his transformation. The hypothesis: Judas Iscariot is a literary shadow-figure built by the Gospel authors to encode a critique of Paul within the narrative of Jesus's passion.

SYNTHESIS: THE COHERENCE OF THE SEVEN CONTRIBUTIONS

The seven contributions are individually separable — each stands or falls on its own textual evidence. But they form a coherent whole. The galal structural architecture establishes the Gospel as a deliberate circuit with rolling and circumcision covenant theology woven into the root-family spine, and the cosmological register (galgal) bridging to the zodiacal layer of the Appendix. The Messianic Secret as reading-instruction establishes that Mark explicitly teaches an allegorical reading method in 4:10–13, sealed by the same Isaiah 6:9–10 verse Luke deploys as Paul’s final words. The Simon Magus and Bar-Jesus cipher network establishes that Acts deploys two figures whose specific charges map Paul’s own letters word by word. The bridegroom-as-first-parable establishes that the first parable of the Gospel encodes the circumcision dispute through the Exodus 4 hatan damim background. The composite name-sentence of Mark 15:21 demonstrates that the passion narrative deploys name-theology as a compositional tool. The inter-Gospel name changes demonstrate that the Gospel authors operated as theological editors, with Saul of Tarsus existing only in Luke’s authorial construction as the most decisive single evidence. And the Judas-Paul cipher assembly provides the specific hypothesis that unifies the paper.

PRINCIPAL COUNTERARGUMENTS AND RESPONSES

The Intentionality Problem

The most serious counterargument applies to all seven contributions: literary patterns can be found in any sufficiently rich text. The response is cumulative: the probability that seven independent literary patterns all coincidentally encode the same anti-Pauline position is lower than the probability that the convergence reflects a unified authorial intention.

The Historical Transmission Alternative

Against the cipher/literary construction arguments, the alternative is that the name variations reflect genuine historical complexity and that Judas's absence from Paul is explained by the difference in genre. This argument has merit for most of Paul's silences. It is less convincing for Judas specifically because the betrayal-by-an-insider is precisely the kind of community-founding trauma that letters addressing community problems would reference.

The Relation to Carrier's Mark-as-Pauline-Allegory Thesis

Carrier has argued that Mark presents Pauline theology as allegorical narrative — in defense of Paul. This paper argues the opposite direction. The tension is real and productive. Mark may be a more complex text than either thesis alone accommodates — engaging deeply with Pauline theology while simultaneously encoding critiques of Pauline innovation on specific issues. The tension between the two theses is a research question, not a refutation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented seven contributions to the study of Mark's Gospel, Pauline literature, and early Christian literary composition. The contributions range from strongly supported (the galat structural argument, the composite name-sentence of Mark 15:21, the inter-Gospel name-change analysis, the Saul of Tarsus observation) to plausible (the Messianic Secret as reading-instruction system, the bridegroom-as-first-parable argument, the Judas-Paul cipher assembly). None is speculative in the sense of requiring evidence outside the primary texts.

The central hypothesis — that Mark is a two-level allegorical text with an anti-Pauline literary architecture — is testable and falsifiable. The paper does not argue that this hypothesis is proven. It argues that it is sufficiently supported by textual evidence to warrant serious scholarly engagement, and that the seven contributions assembled here are original enough to add to the existing conversation. The text is the evidence. The text is available to everyone.

APPENDIX: CONTRIBUTION 7 — THE OPHIUCHUS HYPOTHESIS

Confidence: SPECULATIVE — cosmological synthesis; not provable from primary texts alone

WHY THIS BELONGS IN A SCHOLARLY APPENDIX

The following argument crosses from textual analysis into cosmological interpretation. It cannot be verified by the primary Greek and Hebrew texts alone. It is included because: (a) it has a genuine textual anchor in John 3:14; (b) it connects directly to the longer ending of Mark through Acts 28 and the early Christian identification of Ophiuchus with Paul; (c) the specific synthesis presented here does not appear in published scholarship; and (d) the parallel between the excluded thirteenth constellation and the excluded thirteenth disciple is structurally precise enough to warrant scholarly attention. It is presented as a hypothesis, not a claim.

A.1 The Textual Anchor — John 3:14

The argument begins with the text, not the stars. In John 3:14, in the Nicodemus conversation, Jesus explicitly provides the interpretive lens for his own crucifixion:

John 3:14	<i>"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."</i>
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Jesus identifies his crucifixion with the episode of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:8-9 — the snake raised on a pole that healed everyone who looked at it. The thing that bites becomes the thing that heals. The instrument of death, raised and displayed, becomes the instrument of life. This is not cosmological speculation — it is Jesus's own stated typology for his mission, embedded in the canonical text of John.

This is also the precise mythological structure of Ophiuchus/Asclepius: the serpent bearer who holds the deadly thing and transforms it into healing power, who overcomes death, who is placed

among the stars. The structural mythology of Ophiuchus and the Jesus typology of John 3:14 share the same form. The John 3:14 / Ophiuchus connection has been noted in Christian Medical Fellowship literature. What has not been developed is the structural argument that follows from it.

A.2 The Zodiac-Genesis Correspondence

The Mazzaroth of Job 38:32 is widely identified with the zodiacal signs. An ancient Hebrew astronomical tradition, noted in modern scholarship, holds that the signs were created as a mnemonic device to preserve the biblical narrative. Genesis 1:14 states that the celestial bodies were given "for signs and for seasons," providing textual grounding for reading the heavens as a narrative system.

The following sequential correspondence between the twelve zodiacal signs and Genesis 1-3 is proposed. The sequence follows the narrative order of Genesis precisely:

Sign	Genesis Correspondence	Key Text
Capricorn	In the beginning — primordial earth-water hybrid marks the cycle start	<i>Genesis 1:1-2</i>
Aquarius	The waters — Spirit moved over the face of the deep	<i>Genesis 1:2</i>
Pisces	Let the waters swarm with living creatures	<i>Genesis 1:20</i>
Aries	Livestock — the ram as archetypal domesticated animal	<i>Genesis 1:24-25</i>
Taurus	Wild animals — the bull as large creature	<i>Genesis 1:24-25</i>
Gemini	Male and female He created them — the twin	<i>Genesis 1:27</i>

Sign	Genesis Correspondence	Key Text
	human figures	
Cancer	God separated the waters above from below	<i>Genesis 1:6-7</i>
Leo	Adam — the lion as king; humanity placed in dominion over creation	<i>Genesis 1:26</i>
Virgo	Eve — the woman, the harvest, taken from the man	<i>Genesis 2:21-22</i>
Libra	The scales of judgment — God saw that it was good	<i>Genesis 1:31</i>
Scorpio	You shall surely die — the sting of the death-curse	<i>Genesis 2:17</i>
Sagittarius	The angel with the flaming sword barring return to Eden	<i>Genesis 3:24</i>

The correspondence is sequential and covers all twelve signs without forcing any assignment. The most structurally significant correspondences for the argument that follows are Scorpio (the death-curse: "you shall surely die") and Sagittarius (the armed guardian barring return to Eden). These are the last two signs of the sequence and the ones adjacent to Ophiuchus.

A.3 The Maskilim — Daniel 12:3, the Magi, and the Unsealed Sky

The cosmological layer of this paper has until now rested on two textual anchors: John 3:14 (Jesus's explicit identification with the bronze serpent) and the *λεπίδες* of Acts 9:18 (the serpent-shedding language at Paul's conversion). A third anchor exists in the Hebrew Bible that has not yet been assembled into this argument. Daniel 12:3 provides a canonical OT text that names the

insider community — those who decode prophetic truth — and declares their relationship to the stars as their destiny and their medium.

Daniel 12:3–4 (ESV)	<i>"Those who are wise (Hebrew: maskilim, מַשְׁכִּילִים) shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end."</i>
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Three observations about this text are directly relevant to the paper's argument.

First, the maskilim (from sakal — to understand, discern, have insight) are specifically those who comprehend prophetic truth — those who decode what is hidden. This is the same community that Mark 4:10–13 designates as those to whom the μυστήριον of the kingdom has been given. Mark's insider community and Daniel's maskilim are structurally identical: those who have the decoded reading that those outside cannot perceive.

Second, the maskilim shall shine like the stars. The stars are their destiny and — critically — their medium. Daniel 12:4 immediately seals the scroll: the text cannot be read until the time of the end. But the stars are not sealed. What the scroll conceals, the sky preserves. The maskilim shine like the stars because they read what cannot be sealed. This is the canonical Hebrew-Bible foundation for the claim that the truth written in the sky cannot be edited, interpolated, or burned — a claim the paper has made on logical grounds but without a primary text anchor. Daniel 12:3–4 is that anchor.

Third, Daniel's connection to the Magi is documented in the tradition Matthew's audience would know. Daniel 2:48 records that Daniel was placed in charge of all the wise men (chakim) of Babylon. Jewish tradition holds that Daniel founded an order of magi and instructed them to watch for the Messiah through the generations. The magi of Matthew 2 are — in this tradition — the institutional heirs of Daniel's school: the maskilim walking forward through centuries, carrying the decoded prophetic truth in the unsealed medium of the sky.

Matthew 2 then encodes precisely what Daniel 12:3 promises. The maskilim — the Magi, heirs of Daniel's school — read the star and find the child. The chief priests and scribes are summoned;

they know the sealed text (Micah 5:2) and cite it correctly. But they do not go to Bethlehem. The text-knowers stay in Jerusalem. The star-readers find the child. Matthew's opening image is the Daniel 12:3 promise enacted: the maskilim shine like the stars they read, while the institutional keepers of the sealed scroll miss what the unsealed sky declares.

The structural argument this adds to the paper's cosmological layer: Mark closes on a silence command and a return to Galilee — go back to the beginning, complete the galal circuit, say nothing publicly. Daniel 12:4 closes on a seal command — seal the scroll until the time of the end. Both are protective silence commands attached to decoded prophetic truth carried by an insider community under pressure. Matthew then opens with the maskilim demonstrating the correct methodology: they read not the sealed scroll but the unsealed sky. The galal circuit of Mark's Gospel is the galgal circuit of the Mazzaroth. The instruction to return to Galilee is, within the root family documented in Contribution 1, also the instruction to complete the cosmic wheel. The maskilim of Daniel 12:3 are the ones who know how to do this — because they shine like the stars they read.

This section upgrades the appendix's confidence level from speculative to plausible. The argument now rests on three independent textual anchors: John 3:14 (NT explicit), *λεπίδες* Acts 9:18 (NT lexical), and Daniel 12:3 (OT canonical). Three independent primary texts from two testaments pointing in the same direction is the threshold at which a speculative synthesis becomes a plausible one. The cosmological layer is not proven. But it is no longer without canonical foundation.

A.4 The Structural Problem — The Blocked Path

The zodiacal circuit from Capricorn (the beginning) through Sagittarius traces the Genesis narrative from creation through exile. The standard path terminates in exile: the death-curse at Scorpio, and the flaming sword at Sagittarius permanently barring return to the Tree of Life. The twelve-sign zodiac, as mapped to Genesis, encodes a one-way journey. There is no return path within the twelve signs. The way back to the center of the garden is blocked.

This structural reading raises the question the framework itself generates: is there a path beyond the flaming sword? The twelve-sign zodiac as mapped to Genesis says no. But Ophiuchus is not one of the twelve.

A.5 Ophiuchus — The Excluded Thirteenth

Ophiuchus, the Serpent Bearer, sits between Scorpius and Sagittarius on the actual celestial ecliptic. The sun passes through it for approximately eighteen days each year. It was excluded from the twelve-sign zodiac to preserve the symmetry of the twelve-month calendar. This is astronomical fact.

The constellation is depicted as a man holding a serpent, identified in Greek mythology with Asclepius — the divine healer who raised the dead, learned from a serpent, was killed by Zeus for threatening the boundary between life and death, and was placed among the stars. In Egyptian mythology it corresponds to Imhotep, the physician-architect deified after death. The structural mythology: a healer associated with serpents, who overcomes death, killed by divine authority, elevated to cosmic status. These parallels to the Jesus narrative are pre-Christian and documented.

The crucial astronomical detail: in its southern extension, Ophiuchus points toward the Galactic Center — the gravitational heart of the Milky Way. If the twelve-sign zodiac encodes the Genesis narrative as proposed above, the Galactic Center toward which Ophiuchus points corresponds to what lies beyond the flaming sword: the Tree of Life at the center of the garden, the axis mundi of creation.

A significant convergence between the Ophiuchus hypothesis and Mark's primary textual tradition has not previously been noted. Jesus uses the title "Son of Man" (Greek: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; Aramaic: bar enash) as his primary self-designation throughout Mark's Gospel. The phrase derives from Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel sees "one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" who approaches the Ancient of Days and receives everlasting dominion. Jesus deploys this exact reference at the critical Libra-judgment moment of his trial: "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). The high priest

tears his garments in response — the institutional outer covering torn at the moment the cosmic claim is made.

The astronomical observation is this: Ophiuchus — the human figure, the Serpent Bearer — stands in the galactic plane and points in its southern extension toward the Galactic Center, the gravitational heart of the Milky Way. The Milky Way itself was described by ancient observers as a band of mist or cloud across the night sky. Daniel's Son of Man comes "with the clouds of heaven" to the Ancient of Days at the cosmic center. Ophiuchus, the human-form figure in the sky, stands between the death-zone and the blocked path, pointing toward that center. Whether the author of Daniel intended this astronomical correspondence cannot be established from the text. The structural parallel between the bar enash arriving at the Ancient of Days through the clouds and Ophiuchus pointing toward the Galactic Center through the Milky Way is noted here as an observation worth scholarly attention, not as a claim of deliberate encoding.

A.6 Paul as the Serpent — Not the Bearer

A crucial clarification strengthens the hypothesis considerably. In the Ophiuchus constellation, the serpent (Serpens) is a separate constellation that Ophiuchus divides into two halves — Serpens Caput (the head) and Serpens Cauda (the tail). Ophiuchus holds the serpent but is not the serpent. The two are distinct figures in the same visual field, performing fundamentally different functions. The Serpent Bearer does not destroy the snake. He holds it, contains it, and transforms what it carries into healing power.

In this framework, Paul occupies the position of the serpent — not of the bearer.

The Pauline gospel introduces into the covenant community what the Judaizer tradition experienced as venom: the abolition of Torah, the declaration that circumcision is nothing, the law-free path that bypasses the covenant sign. This is the bite. The community is bitten. The question the Ophiuchus framework then generates is not how to destroy the snake, but who can raise it on the pole.

In John 3:14 Jesus explicitly answers: as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. The Serpent Bearer raises the snake — displays it elevated and clearly visible for all to see — and the looking-upon-it becomes the healing. The venom and the medicine are the same substance in different frames. Numbers 21:8-9 encodes this precisely: the very thing that bites is the thing that, raised on the pole and looked upon clearly, heals the bitten. The snake is not negated. It is displayed and transformed.

This reframing resolves a tension in earlier formulations of the hypothesis. Paul does not need to occupy the position of the excluded thirteenth — a parallel requiring several inferential steps. Paul is the serpent that the Serpent Bearer holds. Jesus/Yeshua is the one who takes what has bitten the community, raises it on the pole of the original covenant, and transforms the encounter with it into the path toward life. The original Mark, on the argument of this paper, is itself the act of raising the snake on the pole: it displays the Pauline venom clearly through its encoded two-level architecture, so that those who look upon it correctly can be healed of its effects.

The Acts 28 Malta episode reads with fresh precision in this frame. Paul is bitten by a viper — the serpent encountered by a snake. The islanders expect him to die. When he survives, they declare him a god. In the Judaizer reading this is precisely the mistake: Paul surviving the serpent-bite is not the Ophiuchus miracle of transformation. It is the snake surviving its own kind. The second-century community that added the longer ending of Mark enshrined this mistake as the climactic sign of apostolic authority — taking the snake-surviving-snake episode and encoding it as proof of the Serpent Bearer's power, when the Serpent Bearer had already been identified in John 3:14 as Yeshua alone.

A.7 Lepides — The Serpent's Scales at the Damascus Conversion

The most precise single textual confirmation of the Paul-as-serpent reading within the NT is a word that appears exactly once in the entire canon: *λεπίδες* (*lepides*), Acts 9:18. This is the word Luke uses to describe what falls from Saul's eyes at the moment of his Damascus recovery.

Acts 9:18 | *"Immediately something like scales (ὡς λεπίδες, hōs lepidēs) fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized."*

The Greek word *λεπίς* (*lepis*, singular) / *λεπίδες* (*lepidēs*, plural) occurs only here in the entire New Testament. Both the noun and the accompanying verb *ἀποπίπτω* (*apopipto*, fell away) are hapax legomena — single occurrences with no other NT parallels. Luke, writing with a physician's precision and a literary sophistication demonstrated throughout Luke-Acts, chose this specific word at this specific moment. The choice is not accidental.

The word *lepis* carries four simultaneous resonances, each textually grounded:

- **Serpent biology:** Serpents shed their scales (*lepidēs*) when passing from one state to another — the universal ancient symbol of renewal and transformation. The shedding of scales is the defining biological act of the serpent. When *lepidēs* fall from Paul's eyes at the moment Saul becomes Paul, Luke is deploying the serpent-shedding word at the apostle's moment of transformation.
- **The Leviticus covenant-cleanness marker:** The Septuagint uses *lepidēs* in Leviticus 11:9-10 to determine clean and unclean status — fish with scales are clean, fish without scales are unclean. Scales are the physical marker of covenant membership in the dietary law. When Paul sheds *lepidēs*, he sheds the covenant-cleanness markers — and emerges as the apostle who will declare those markers "nothing" (1 Corinthians 7:19).
- **The Tobit inversion:** The verb form of *lepis* appears in Tobit 11:13, where a film (*lepis*-like) peels from Tobit's eyes, restoring his sight and leading to his renewed Torah-faithfulness. Luke demonstrably knew Tobit and used it extensively. Paul's Damascus recovery is a Tobit-inversion: Tobit shed his scales and returned to covenant faithfulness; Paul sheds his scales and departs from it.
- **The Malta serpent closing the circuit:** At Damascus, Paul sheds scales (*lepidēs*) — the serpent's act of transformation. At Malta (Acts 28:3-5), Paul is bitten by a viper and survives. The two serpent-episodes frame Paul's entire apostolic career: scale-shedding at the beginning, serpent-bite-survival at the end. Between them: the law-free gospel, circumcision declared nothing, the Torah declared a curse. The serpent that shed its covenant scales at Damascus is the same serpent the Maltese viper cannot kill.

This observation moves the Paul-as-serpent reading from the speculative tier into the plausible tier. It does not require importing cosmological frameworks — it requires only reading the Greek word Luke chose, noting that it appears nowhere else in the NT, and recognizing its lexical range: serpent-scales, covenant-cleanness-markers, and the Tobit-inversion pattern. Luke's choice of

lepidēs at the moment of Saul’s transformation is the most precisely encoded textual confirmation that the serpent-shedding motif is embedded in the Acts narrative of Paul’s conversion — whether by deliberate authorial design, by providential word-choice, or by the rich semantic field of the Greek language that Luke was deploying at full sophistication.

A.8 The Longer Ending of Mark — The Contest Encoded in Text

The longer ending of Mark (16:9-20) is universally accepted by scholars as a second-century addition to the original Gospel. The oldest manuscripts — Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus — end at 16:8. The vocabulary, style, and themes of 16:9-20 differ substantially from the authentic Markan text. The scholarly consensus is that the longer ending was added no earlier than the second century, likely as a compensatory ending for a Gospel whose original conclusion — the silence command of 16:8 — was felt to be insufficient.

The longer ending’s climactic sign is serpent-handling (16:17-18):

Mark 16:17-18

"These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons... they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

This sign appears nowhere else in the authentic NT. No other Gospel contains it. No authentic Pauline letter contains it. It appears only in the second-century addition to Mark. And it maps precisely onto one specific event: Paul's survival of the Maltese viper bite in Acts 28:3-5, where Paul shakes off the snake without harm and the islanders declare him a god.

The early Christian tradition itself recognized this connection. Christian Medical Fellowship literature notes that in early Christianity, the constellation Ophiuchus was associated specifically with Saint Paul holding the Maltese Viper. The second-century community that added the longer ending was encoding the Ophiuchus-as-serpent-bearer mythology into their climactic sign — and they applied it to Paul and his followers.

A.9 The Reversal — What the Addition Reveals

The longer ending therefore creates a structurally extraordinary situation. A text that this paper's six primary contributions argue was an original anti-Pauline two-level allegory was extended by a second-century community that encoded Pauline mythology as its climactic sign. The addition reverses the trajectory of the original.

The two textual chains the longer ending connects are in direct tension:

- Backward to John 3:14 — Jesus's own identification with the lifted serpent, placing the Ophiuchus typology with Yeshua and his transformation through death
- Forward to Paul — Acts 28 (the Maltese viper survival), where the Ophiuchus typology is enacted by Paul and recognized by the islanders as divine commission

The longer ending is therefore not merely a liturgical supplement to an incomplete Gospel. It is evidence of a community contest over who holds the Ophiuchus position — the Serpent Bearer who opens the path through death. The original Gospel, on the argument of this paper, placed that position with Yeshua. The longer ending claims it for the Pauline community. The addition encodes, in its serpent-handling sign, the exact theological contest that the original Gospel's two-level architecture was designed to address.

A.10 The Naked Youth — The Ophiuchus Figure Within the Original Mark

One further textual observation connects the Ophiuchus hypothesis to the original Markan text specifically. The naked young man (νεανίσκος, *neaniskos*) of Mark 14:51-52 and 16:5 — unique to Mark, appearing nowhere in Matthew or Luke — enacts the Ophiuchus transformation within the narrative itself. The mainstream observation that both appearances are the same figure, connected by the sindon (burial linen), is established in exegetical literature.

Mark 14:51-52 — Gethsemane

Mark 16:5 — The Tomb

The youth is wrapped in a sindon (burial linen). He is seized. He sheds the sindon and runs away naked. The sindon is the same word used for Jesus's burial cloth (15:46). He enters the passion wrapped in burial cloth and is stripped to nakedness.

The same neaniskos reappears — dressed in white (*stolē leukē*), seated at the right of the empty tomb, announcing the resurrection. The burial linen has become the white robe. The naked liminal state is resolved into transformation.

The arc — burial linen to nakedness to white robe — enacts the serpent-shedding pattern within the narrative. A serpent sheds its old skin (covering), passes through a vulnerable naked state, and emerges renewed. The neaniskos does precisely this between Gethsemane and the tomb. He is the human figure within Mark's original narrative who enacts the Ophiuchus transformation — moving through death-wrapping, through the naked liminal passage, into the white-robed announcement of resurrection.

This figure appears only in Mark — the Gospel this paper argues was a deliberately encoded two-level text. His two appearances bookend the passion and resurrection. He is unnamed, silenced (he runs away), and then transformed into the herald who delivers the final instruction: "Go to Galilee" — the galal-command that closes the circuit. He is the human Ophiuchus of the original text, performing the serpent-shedding transformation that the longer ending's community would later claim for Paul.

A.11 Summary and Falsifiability

THE COMPLETE OPHIUCHUS ARGUMENT

Jesus in John 3:14 explicitly places himself in the position of the bronze serpent raised on a pole — the Ophiuchus/Asclepius typology of the healer who transforms death into life. The twelve-sign zodiac, mapped sequentially to Genesis 1-3, encodes the human journey from creation through exile — permanently blocked at Scorpio (death-curse) and Sagittarius (flaming sword). Ophiuchus, the excluded thirteenth, sits between these two signs, pointing toward the Galactic Center. The excluded-thirteenth parallel between Ophiuchus and Judas/Paul is structurally precise. The naked youth of the

original Mark enacts the serpent-shedding transformation within the text. And the longer ending (second-century addition) encodes the serpent-bearing mythology in its climactic sign, applying it to the Pauline community — revealing the contest between two communities over who holds the Ophiuchus position. The original Gospel places it with Yeshua. The addition claims it for Paul. The longer ending is itself the evidence of the contest.

This hypothesis is falsifiable on the following grounds: (1) If the zodiac-Genesis correspondence can be shown to be arbitrary rather than sequential, the structural framework fails. (2) If the John 3:14 self-identification carries no Ophiuchus cultural resonance in the first-century Hellenistic world — a world saturated with the Asclepius cult — the typological connection fails. (3) If the longer ending of Mark can be shown to have no connection to Paul's Acts 28 episode in the tradition that added it, the contested-claim reading fails. The hypothesis stands or falls on these three points, and the author invites correction on any of them.

What does not seem to exist in the published literature — scholarly or popular — is the complete synthesis: the Genesis-zodiac correspondence map combined with the Ophiuchus bypass reading combined with the longer ending of Mark as evidence of the community contest over who holds the Serpent Bearer position. This specific synthesis is offered here for the first time, with the confidence level it deserves: speculative, structurally coherent, and in need of scholars better equipped than this author to pursue or refute it.

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Note on Sources

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