

Is There “The Son of God” in Mark 1:1?: An Extraordinary Message from the Son of God

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ABSTRACT

There has been debate over the phrase “υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ” (Son of God) in Mark 1:1, which some textual critics believe is not original and was added later (known as the shorter reading). Conversely, other textual critics still argue that this phrase is original (known as the longer reading). This study will demonstrate that the presence of the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ in Mark 1:1 is justified. Considering external evidence, I find that although various witnesses support both the shorter and the longer readings and are backed by ancient manuscripts evenly distributed, examining the genealogical relationship provides strong evidence for the phrase’s existence. The omission of υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ in some majuscules should be understood as a homoio-teleuton error made by scribes. Additionally, internal evidence also strongly supports the phrase’s presence, as seen in the frequent use of this phrase, which is closely related to the Messianic Secret and inclusio. This evidence leads to the firm conclusion that the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ truly appears in Mark 1:1. The inclusion of this phrase at the start of Mark’s Gospel delivers an extraordinary message that contrasts sharply and is radically different from what first-century readers in Judaism, Hellenism, and the Roman Empire would have expected.

Keywords: the son of God, textual criticism, ECM, external evidence, internal evidence, Messianic Secret.



Introduction

There has been debate over the phrase “υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ” (Son of God) in Mark 1:1, which some textual critics believe is not original and was added later by scribes.¹ On the other hand, some critics still argue that this phrase is original.² These two positions are known as “the shorter reading” (without the phrase) and “the longer reading” (with the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ). The debate became even more complex when Bart D. Ehrman, one of Metzger’s students, accused the scribes of deliberately inserting this phrase to promote the Christological view that was common at the time, thereby weakening the adoptionist view.³ However, Tommy Wasserman has challenged this accusation by demonstrating that the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ does not effectively refute the adoptionist view and contradicts the results of pargenealogical coherence analysis.⁴

Regardless of this debate, doubts about the originality of this phrase continue. This can be seen in the *Novum Testamentum Graece Nestle-Aland* series. The editors chose the shorter reading in the NA²⁵ edition (1963). However, the shift to the longer reading started with the publication of the NA²⁶ edition (1979) and continued through NA²⁷ (1993) and NA²⁸ (2012) editions.⁵ Nevertheless, doubts still exist, so these editions continue to place the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ in brackets ([...]).⁶

To understand this debate, we will examine the critical apparatus in Mark 1:1 of the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) version:

Table 1. Variant Reading⁷

Variant Reading	Witnesses
1. υἱου του θεου	037. 1. 13. 33. 69. 124. 205. 209. 346. 427. 543. 565. 579. 700. 788. 792. 826. 828. 837. 892. 983. 1342. 1424. 1582. 1689. 2193. 2542. 2886. L547. L844. Byz. [706*. 949C. 1506-2. 1555C]. AntEp. Chrys. Did. Epiph. Eus. Ir. Serap. SevGab. TitB. Cyr. Phot. PsAth
2. υἱου θεου	01C1. 03. 05. 019. 032. 706C. 732. 2148
3. υἱου του κυριου	1241
4. του υιου του θεου	382. 740. PsAth
5. του θεου	055. 752. 949*. 1337. 1506-1

1 Adela Yarbro Collins, “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1,” in *Text and Contexts: The Function of Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts*, ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 111-27; Peter M. Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” *New Testament Studies* 37, no. 4 (1991): 621-29, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500021998>; Max Botner, “The Role of Transcriptional Probability in the Text-Critical Debate on Mark 1:1,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2015): 469, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43900986>.

2 Alexander Globe, “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 2 (1982): 209-18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1509560>; David Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (2005): 33-48, <https://equipthecalled.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/SWJTS-48.1-Hutchison.pdf>; Tommy Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’ was in the Beginning (Mark 1:1),” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 1 (2011): 20-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24637864>.

3 Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 72-75.

4 Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God,’” 49; Tommy Wasserman and Peter J. Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 50.

5 Jennifer Knust and Brent Nongbri, “Book Reviews of *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, vol. 1/2: *Die Synoptischen Evangelien/The Synoptic Gospels: Das Markusevangelium/The Gospel according to Mark*, edited by Holger Strutwolf, Georg Gäbel, Annette Hüffmeier, Marie-Luise Lakmann, Gregory S. Paulson, and Klaus Wachtel,” *Novum Testamentum* 67, no. 2 (2025): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341752>.

6 UBS5 gave this text a C rating, while the SBL edition omitted this phrase entirely.

7 University of Münster, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/ecm>.

There are six variants, four of which support the longer reading. The second variant omits the article $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ before the object words $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ or $\kappa\upsilon\omicron\iota\upsilon$, while the first variant, chosen by ECM, includes this phrase with the article. Alexander Globe explained that the practice of adding articles was common among the scribes to follow the Attic Greek grammatical standards, for example: $(\tau\omicron\upsilon\tilde{\iota}) \upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ (see Mark 3:11; 14:61; Rom 8:19; and Gal 2:20 for the double article).⁸ Furthermore, Gregory S. Paulson found that the witnesses supporting the reading $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ have good coherence.⁹ That is why ECM prefers this variant. Regarding the change from the object word $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ to $\kappa\upsilon\omicron\iota\upsilon$, and the omission of the word $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ in the fifth variant, Wasserman considers these as scribal errors.¹⁰ Regardless of these differences, we can assume that the witnesses in the first, second, and fourth variants support the longer reading.

So, is there “the Son of God” in Mark 1:1? This study aims to show that the existence of the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Mark 1:1 can be justified, as it is supported by various external and internal evidence. Considering external evidence, I find that although various witnesses support both the shorter and the longer readings and are backed by ancient manuscripts evenly distributed, examining the genealogical relationship provides strong evidence for the phrase’s existence. The omission of $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in some majuscules should be understood as a *homoioteleuton* error made by the scribes. Additionally, internal evidence also strongly supports the phrase’s presence, as seen in the frequent use of this phrase, which is closely related to the Messianic Secret and *inclusio*. This evidence leads to a firm conclusion that the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ truly appears in Mark 1:1. The inclusion of this phrase at the start of Mark’s Gospel delivers an extraordinary message that contrasts sharply and is radically different from what first-century readers in Judaism, Hellenism, and the Roman Empire would have expected.

Research Methods

The method used is a literature study with reference to the textual variants of Mark 1:1 in the *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior I.2/: Die Markusevangelium*. This study will examine various external and internal evidence by comparing various studies that have been conducted previously by textual critics. At the end of this study, I will also include the significance of the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in the context of the first-century world.

External Evidence

To consider external evidence, I will compare the date of the witness, geographical

⁸ Globe, “The Caesarean Omission,” 217; Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 173.

⁹ Holger Strutwolf, Gregory S. Paulson, and Klaus Watchel (eds.), “Text-Critical Commentary,” in *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior I.2/: Die Synoptischen Evangelien/The Synoptic Gospels: Das Markusevangelium/The Gospel According to Mark* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 9.

¹⁰ Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God,’” 23.

distribution, and genealogical relationship.¹¹

Date of Witness

Considering the date of the witness is the first step in evaluating external evidence. The assumption is that the older a manuscript is, the closer it is to the *Ausgangstext* (the initial text). Johann Albrecht Bengel stated, “Most important of all, ancient witnesses [are to be preferred] to modern ones.”¹² Generally, majuscules are older than minuscules. Likewise, manuscripts written on papyrus are typically older than those on parchment.

Table 2. Date of Witness¹³

Variant	2th-3th c.	4th c.	5th c.	6th-7th c.	8th c.	9th c.	10th c.	11th-15th c.
-	Or.	01*. AstS. Bas. Serap. TitB. L:Ialt. K:S ^{mss}	HesH. OrLat. SevGab	OecV. AnastS	1555*. GermC	038	L2211	28. CPA:CL 2148. 69. 124. 205. 209. 346. 427. 543. 579. 700. 788. 792.
(του) υίου του θεοῦ			05. 032. Chrys.			037. 565.		826. 828. 837. 983. 1342. 1689.
	Ir.	03. Did. Eus. Serap. TitB. PsAth.	Epiph. SevGab. Cyr.	01C1. 1. 13.	706C. 732.	1424. L844. Phot.	1582. 2193. AntEp	2542. 2886. L547. Byz. 382. 740.

These data show that the oldest majuscule supporting the shorter reading is the Codex Sinaiticus (4th century), while the longer reading is supported by the Codex Vaticanus (4th century).¹⁴ In the same century, other witnesses supporting the shorter reading are Latin witnesses and Sahidic witnesses (4th century). In contrast, we find no other witnesses (except the Church Fathers) supporting the longer reading.

ECM does not mention any papyrus witnesses in Mark 1:1, but Wasserman once cited the latest papyrus findings from Oxyrhynchus, which are estimated to date from the third or fourth century. This papyrus is an amulet that records Mark 1:1-2 without the phrase υίου θεοῦ: αρχη του ευαγγελιου ιησου του χριστου. In this regard, Wasserman also adds that there are two other ancient amulets (P. Berlin inv. 6096 [4th century] and PSI VI 719 [4th-5th century]) that record the incipit of Mark and include the phrase υίου θεοῦ.¹⁵ Regarding the witnesses of the earliest Church Fathers, ECM notes that the longer reading is supported by Irenaeus (2nd century), Didymus Alexandrinus, Eusebius Caesariensis, Serapion Thmuitanus, and Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria (3rd-4th century).¹⁶ Meanwhile, the witnesses supporting the shorter reading come from Origen (3rd century),

11 Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 302.

12 Johann Albrecht Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 1:xviii.

13 University of Münster, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-catalog>.

14 Tommy Wasserman, “The Amulet of Mark 1:1-2,” *Evangelical Textual Criticism* (blog), May 10, 2012, http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2012/05/amulet-of-mark-11-2_10.html.

15 Wasserman, “The Amulet of Mark 1:1-2.”

16 Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’,” 26-34.

Asterius Sophista, Basil of Caesarea, Serapion of Thmuis, and Titus of Bostra (4th century).¹⁷ Therefore, it can be concluded that considering the date of the witnesses shows that various majuscules, minuscules, and Church Fathers support both readings.

Geographical Distribution

The next consideration is geographical distribution. A reliable manuscript is not only old but also widely distributed. Stanley E. Porter asserts, "Readings supported by witnesses from various geographical locations should be preferred over those supported only by manuscripts from a single geographical region."¹⁸ This may be because geographical differences reduce the likelihood of intentional changes by scribes. Manuscripts are distributed within their respective regions without the scribes ever being aware of the other copies. In this context, considering geographical distribution becomes crucial.

Table 3. Geographical Distribution¹⁹

Variant	Alexandrian	Western	Caesarean	Byzantine
-	01*. Bas. Serap. HesH. TitB. CPA:CL	28. L:Ialt. OrLat. GermC	038. K:S ^{mss} . SevGab. OecV. AnastS	AstS. GermC. 1555*. L2211
(του) υίου τοῦ θεοῦ	03. 01C1. 019. 032. 33. 1424. 1. Did. Epiph. SevGab. Eus. Serap. TitB. PsAth. Cyr. AntEp	05. Ir.	13. 69. 124. 209. 346. 543. 1582.	037. 205. 382. 427. 565. 740. 892. 579. 700. 706C. 732. 788. 792. 826. 828. 837. 983. 1342. 1689. 2542. 2193. 2148. 2886. L547. L844. Chrys. AntE. Phot. Byz

These data (table 3) illustrate the geographical distribution of each witness. Witnesses supporting both the shorter and longer readings are spread across different regions. Although more witnesses support the longer reading than the shorter one, this does not imply that the witnesses supporting the shorter reading are weak or unreliable. This is because the majuscules supporting the shorter reading are distributed across various categories (01*. 038), just as the majuscules supporting the longer reading appear in different categories (03. 01C1. 019. 032. 05. 037).

Minuscules supporting both readings are also widely distributed. For the shorter reading, supporting minuscules are found in the Western (28) and Byzantine (1555*) categories. L2211), while the longer reading is supported by minuscules in the Alexandrian (33. 1424. 1), Caesarean (13. 69. 124. 209. 346. 543. 1582), and Byzantine (205. 382. 427. 565. 740. 892. 579. 700. 706C. 732. 788. 792. 826. 828. 837. 983. 1342. 1689. 2542. 2193. 2148. 2886. L547. L844). The witnesses of the Church Fathers who support both readings are also widely distributed across various categories. Therefore, consideration of geographical distribution does not provide sufficient support for the longer reading.

¹⁷ Head, "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1," 624-25.

¹⁸ Porter and Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 141.

¹⁹ Edited by the author.

Genealogical Relationship

The final consideration of external evidence is genealogical relationship. To find the genealogical relationship, I will use pregenealogical coherence analysis in the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM).²⁰ Pregenealogical coherence analysis examines the level of coherence between witnesses supporting the longer and shorter readings. The principle is that the level of coherence indicates the quality of transmission. The higher the level of coherence of the supporting witnesses, the better the quality of transmission by the scribes. Conversely, the lower the coherence percentage, the lower the transmission quality.

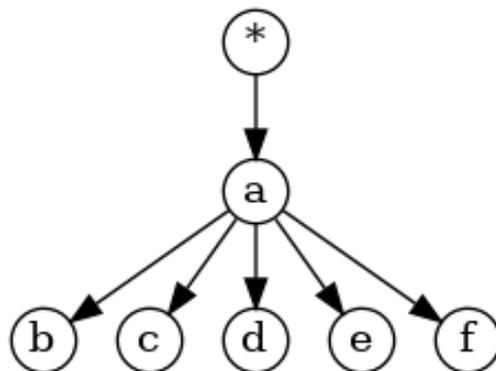
In the pregenealogical coherence analysis, we will focus on several relevant Greek manuscripts as found in the ECM. I will use the “Find Relatives” feature to identify the closest relatives by comparing the highest coherence percentage values. Greek manuscripts we will examine in this analysis are:

The shorter reading: 01. 038. 28. 1555. L2211

The longer reading: 03. 05. 032. 1. 13. 019. 706. 732. 037. 565. 892. 1424. L844. 33. 1582. 2193. 2148. 69. 124. 205. 209. 346. 427. 543. 579. 700. 788. 792. 826. 828. 837. 983. 1342. 1689. 2542. 2886. L547. 382. 740

The local stemma (fig. 1) shows the genealogical reconstruction performed by CBGM, which provided the primary basis for the selection of readings in ECM and NA28. This local stemma indicates the origin of each variant. In this case, variant f represents witnesses supporting the shorter reading, while variants a, b, c, d, and e support the longer reading. From figure 1, it is clear that witnesses supporting the shorter reading (variant f) come from those supporting the longer reading (variant a), rather than vice versa. How could this happen?

Figure 1. Local Stemma Mark 1:1²¹



For more details, we will compare the closest relatives of witnesses supporting the shorter reading with those supporting the longer reading.

²⁰ Wasserman and Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism*, 47-50; Tommy Wasserman, “Historical and Philological Correlations and the CBGM as Applied to Mark 1:1,” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 20 (2015): 1-11, <https://jbt.org/v20/TC-2015-CBGM-Wasserman.pdf>.

²¹ University of Münster, <https://ntg.uni-muenster.de/mark/ph352/coherence/2>.

Table 4. The Pregenealogical Coherence of the Closest Relatives to Witnesses with the Shorter Reading at Mark 1:1²²

Witness with Shorter Reading	Closest Relative to Shorter Reading	Rank (% Agreement)	Closest Relative to Longer Reading	Rank (% Agreement)
01	038	79.82%	019	1 (89.61%)
038	28	82.80%	2193	2 (83.87%)
28	1555	49 (83.67%)	565	1 (89.80%)
1555	28	83.67%	105	1 (95.92%)
L2211	28	83.50%	377	4 (85.48%)
Average	-	82.69%	-	88.94%

Table 4 shows that the coherence between witnesses supporting the shorter reading has a lower average (82.69%) compared to witnesses supporting the longer reading (88.94%). This is evident not only in the average but also in the percentage details. This indicates that the transmission quality supporting the shorter reading is poor. Furthermore, these data also answer how witnesses supporting the shorter reading are influenced by those supporting the longer reading. It suggests that witnesses of the longer reading are potential ancestors of those supporting the shorter reading.

Table 5. The Pregenealogical Coherence of the Closest Relatives to Witnesses with the Longer Reading at Mark 1:1²³

Witness with Longer Reading	Closest Relative to Longer Reading	Rank (% Agreement)	Closest Relative to Shorter Reading	Rank (% Agreement)
03	019	90.06%	01	89.29%
05	372	75.76%	038	8 (74.85%)
032	1495	76.90%	1555	15 (75.68%)
1	209	99.42%	1555	30 (88.92%)
13	826	99.37%	28	85.44%
019	892	90.38%	01	89.61%
706	1457	95.52%	1555	26 (92.26%)
732	2106	97.90%	1555	47 (87.24%)
037	18	90.94%	1555	88.30%
565	788	1 (89.18%)	28	89.80%
892	019	1 (90.38%)	01	4 (85.76%)
1424	517	1 (95.91%)	1555	27 (88.34%)
L844	055	93.18%	1555	86.90%
33	019	1 (88.86%)	01	2 (86.81%)
1582	209	100.00%	1555	31 (88.92%)
2193	1	98.53%	1555	89.74%
2148	949	93.84%	1555	24 (91.52%)
69	826	1 (96.20%)	1555	41 (85.42%)
124	788	95.03%	28	86.59%
205	2886	1 (99.11%)	1555	48 (87.24%)
209	1582	100.00%	1555	31 (88.92%)

²² University of Münster, https://ntg.uni-muenster.de/mark/ph352/find_relatives#pass_id=1&labez=.

²³ University of Münster, https://ntg.uni-muenster.de/mark/ph352/find_relatives#pass_id=1&labez=.

346	543	1 (97.67%)	1555	63 (86.30%)
427	2106	1 (97.30%)	1555	57 (87.20%)
543	826	1 (99.42%)	1555	50 (86.30%)
579	118	1 (86.61%)	1555	83.14%
700	2193	1 (89.44%)	1555	18 (87.46%)
788	826	97.07%	1555	43 (86.26%)
792	18	1 (89.71%)	1555	41 (87.35%)
826	543	99.42%	39	39 (86.84%)
828	826	1 (98.83%)	1555	49 (85.96%)
837	543	1 (95.85%)	1555	45 (85.06%)
983	1689	1 (97.00%)	84	84 (84.21%)
1342	33	1 (85.84%)	1555	21 (83.97%)
1689	983	1 (97.00%)	1555	78 (82.28%)
2542	1495	1 (89.15%)	1555	53 (85.71%)
2886	209	1 (99.41%)	1555	40 (88.17%)
L547	124	1 (90.57%)	1555	102 (83.02%)
382	351	1 (93.53%)	1555	42 (90.59%)
740	2607	1 (90.86%)	1555	28 (88.50%)
Average	-	93.59%	-	86.56%

Consistent with previous results, these data (Table 5) again demonstrate that the coherence level supporting the longer reading is significantly higher (93.59%) than the evidence supporting the shorter reading (86.56%). Indeed, some witnesses (706, 2148, 382) have high coherence scores with 1555. However, their values still do not exceed those of testimonies supporting the longer reading.

At this point, it can be concluded that the pregenealogical coherence analysis strongly supports the longer reading. As shown by the coherence percentage, the testimonies supporting the shorter reading are more influenced by those supporting the longer reading. Additionally, the coherence levels of the witnesses supporting the longer reading are much higher than those supporting the shorter reading. This indicates that the transmission quality in the longer reading is significantly better than in the shorter reading.

Internal Evidence

In considering internal evidence, I will examine transcriptional probability and intrinsic probability.²⁴

Transcriptional Probability

The first consideration of internal evidence is transcriptional probability. This involves various possible changes made to the text by scribes, either intentionally or unintentionally.²⁵ In Mark 1:1, textual critics who support the shorter reading believe that the addition of the phrase $\nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ was done intentionally. Since this text appears at the very beginning or introduction of a book, it is unlikely that the scribes forgot to include this

²⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 302-03.

²⁵ Porter and Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 150.

phrase.²⁶ Furthermore, this phrase is part of the *nomina sacra*, abbreviations used by ancient scribes for divine names or titles. It is impossible that the scribes would have made such a careless mistake.²⁷

Moreover, the absence of this phrase also suggests a more difficult reading, as it appears to weaken Jesus’ identity as the Son of God.²⁸ Because this reading is more difficult, it is very likely that υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ was intentionally added by the scribes. This aligns with Griesbach’s canon, which states that the shorter reading should be preferred over the longer one, since scribes are often tempted to add something to the text to clarify its message.²⁹

In contrast, textual critics who support the longer reading believe that the absence of the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Koridethi is more likely due to a mistake. In this case, the scribes were essentially fallible humans copying with very limited facilities (no tables!),³⁰ making it quite possible for them to make unintentional errors.³¹ The scribes may have made a “homoioteleuton” error, which is a mistake in copying words with the same ending. This could very well be the case in Mark 1:1, which ends with four *nomina sacra* sharing the same ending -ου: ΙΥΧΥΥΥΘΥ.³² Wasserman points out that this kind of error occurred in the Codex Augiensis (F), which also left out Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in 2 Corinthians 1:1.³³ Therefore, the absence of the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ in Mark 1:1 should be viewed as an unintentional error.

Regarding Griesbach’s canon, it is important to note that although Griesbach once stated that the shorter reading should be preferred over the longer one, J. David Miller has reexamined this canon and shown that Griesbach never explicitly intended to say this.³⁴ According to Miller, Griesbach actually pointed out that in some cases the longer reading could also be prioritized, especially if the omission was due to *homoioteleuton*.³⁵ Therefore, the absence of this phrase does not mean the shorter reading is more reliable. Instead, Griesbach’s canon actually supports the authenticity of the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Intrinsic Probability

The second consideration is intrinsic probability. This involves reviewing various possibilities made by the author of the book based on the consistency of grammar, style, context, and theology.³⁶ In Mark 1:1, the phrase υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ appears consistently in many passages

26 Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 178

27 Botner, “The Role of Transcriptional Probability,” 469.

28 Botner, 470; Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1,” 627.

29 Porter and Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 155.

30 Bruce M. Metzger, *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 123-37.

31 Neilos, one of the scribes of lectionary 299 in the twelfth century, has mentioned various challenges in copying texts, such as fatigue, drowsiness, stupidity, and nearsightedness. See. Charles L. Quarles, *New Testament Textual Criticism for the 21st Century: A Practical Guide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2025), 128-29.

32 Wasserman and Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism*, 44; Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’,” 3; Darrell Bock, *Mark* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 108; Kalle O. Lundahl, “Mark 1:1: How to Display Differences in Biblical Manuscripts in Editions and Translations,” *Harvard Theological Review* 117, no. 1 (2024): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816023000378>.

33 Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’,” 47.

34 J. David Miller, “The Long and Short of *Lectio Brevior Potior*,” *The Bible Translator* 57, no. 1 (2006): 11-16, <https://translation.bible/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/miller-2006-the-long-and-short-of-lectio-brevior-potior.pdf>.

35 Miller, “The Long and Short,” 12; Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 303.

36 Quarles, *New Testament Textual Criticism*, 147-48.

(3:11; 3:11; 5:7; 8:38; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36, 61; 15:39). This indicates that the presence of this phrase is significant and aligns with Mark's writing. However, textual critics who support the shorter reading argue against this. They contend that the frequent appearance of the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Mark does not necessarily mean it should be at the beginning of the book. For instance, in the Gospel of Matthew, the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ also appears multiple times (Matt. 2:15; 4:3, 6; 8:29; 11:25-27; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 27:40, 43, 54; 28:19), yet Matthew does not use this phrase at the beginning of his gospel.³⁷

In this regard, I believe that the presence of this phrase is not simply because it is frequently used in the Gospel of Mark. Instead, I think Mark deliberately placed this phrase at the beginning of his book because it is closely connected to the motif of the Messianic Secret.³⁸ This motif only appears in Mark's narrative, where Jesus' identity as the Messiah is usually hidden in various miracles and parables. When evil spirits acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus forbade them to tell anyone (Mark 1:23-25; 34; 3:11-12). When Jesus healed the sick, he forbade them to tell others (Mark 1:40-45; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). In teaching parables, Jesus did the same (Mark 4:10-12). Even to his own disciples, Jesus forbade them to tell others (Mark 8:27-30; 9:2-9). These various clues confirm that Jesus did not want to be known through parables and miracles, but rather through his suffering and the work of the cross (Mark 14:62; 15:39).³⁹ This is what is meant by the Messianic Secret in the Gospel of Mark.

So, what is the connection between this phrase at the beginning of the book and the Messianic Secret? By placing this phrase at the beginning (1:1) and the end of his book (15:39), Mark intended to create an *inclusio* in his narrative.⁴⁰ *Inclusio* is a literary method used by Mark to remind and lead his readers to focus on Jesus' identity as the Son of God, revealed through His suffering and His work on the cross. Therefore, considering the intrinsic evidence supported by the Messianic Secret motif and *inclusio*, we can again conclude that the existence of this phrase is highly justified.

An Extraordinary Message from “the Son of God”

How does the presence of the phrase $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Mark 1:1 uniquely and significantly influence the interpretation of the Gospel of Mark? How does this phrase convey an extraordinary message? As I stated earlier, Mark intentionally placed this phrase at the beginning of his book to communicate an extraordinary Christological message to his readers, who lived in the context of first-century Judaism, Hellenism, and the Roman Empire.

In the context of Judaism, Mark sought to convey an extraordinary message about the Son of God. The Jewish understanding of the Son of God always refers to the Old Testament, where the Son of God is described as a king descended from David (2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 2:1-12; 89:19-29).⁴¹ For them, the Son of God was a king who would establish

³⁷ Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1,” 626-27.

³⁸ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret: Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 1971).

³⁹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary) (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 18-19.

⁴⁰ John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sacra Pagina) (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 60; Bock, *Mark*, 108-09.

⁴¹ Joel F. Williams, *Mark* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament) (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 18-19.

David’s kingdom and bring justice to Israel. This led the Jews to understand the king in a political sense. However, it is not a king in the political sense that Mark tells us about, but a king who suffered and was crucified.⁴² By introducing Jesus as the Son of God at the beginning of his book, Mark gave a message that contrasts with that of the first-century Jews.

In the Hellenistic context, Santiago Guijarro once described a pattern he observed in first-century Hellenistic biographies.⁴³ He noted that biographers often begin their writings with impressive social and educational backgrounds. For example, Flavius Josephus was portrayed as coming from a respectable family, with his father from a priestly lineage and his mother from a royal line, and how Josephus’ educational journey led him to become a Pharisee. Similarly, Philo of Alexandria tried to connect his birth in Egypt with Moses’s life experiences. Just as Moses was educated in Pharaoh’s palace and learned the customs of his time, so too was Philo’s background. In contrast to these narratives, Mark started his writing with Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. Mark wanted to convey an extraordinary message to his readers that the point of Jesus’ story is not about his social background or education, but about his divine identity as the Son of God who suffered and was crucified.

In the context of the Roman Empire, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God also conveyed a subversive message to the empire.⁴⁴ In the first century, the Roman Empire often used the terms “son of god” and “gospel” as propaganda to unify different regions of the empire. In this case, the Roman Empire promoted and praised Augustus Caesar as the “son of god.” However, Mark presented a completely different and extraordinary message to his readers: it was not Caesar who was the son of God, but the crucified Jesus who was the Son of God.

By beginning his book with the phrase $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, Mark conveyed an extraordinary message about Jesus as the Son of God. This phrase is not just meaningless introductory information; on the contrary, as we have seen, Mark creatively used this phrase to convey an extraordinary message to his first-century readers. It seems that Mark wanted to say, “This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose life was very different and unlike anything you have ever heard before!”

Conclusion

This study has shown that the presence of the phrase $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in Mark 1:1 can be supported by both external and internal evidence. Evaluation of external evidence indicates that although both the shorter and longer readings have ancient witnesses that are evenly distributed, however, as we have seen, the genealogical relationship strongly favors the longer reading. The absence of the phrase $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in several majuscules is more likely due to copying errors by the scribes. Similarly, internal evidence suggests that Mark

42 Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 18.

43 Santiago Guijarro, “Why Does the Gospel of Mark Begin as It Does?,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2003): 28-38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014610790303300105>.

44 Kim Huat Tan, *Mark: New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 13-15; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34B) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), lxxxii-lxxxiii.

intentionally placed this phrase at the beginning of his Gospel to link it with the Messianic Secret and the inclusio. In this way, the phrase $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ delivers an extraordinary message to the first-century world.

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