

UNBELIEF AS A THEME IN MARK'S GOSPEL

by

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SUMMARY

Title: Unbelief as a Theme in Mark's Gospel

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Countless articles and monographs have been published which have paid attention to the various themes in Mark's Gospel. However, to date there is no publication that attempts to understand the theme 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel. This study attempts to investigate the literary-theological functions of unbelief as a theme in Mark. This approach is based on the exegetical perspective of several passages (2:1-12; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 6:1-6; 8:14-21; 9:14-29; 11:27-33; 15:27-32) in which the theme of unbelief appears.

Given this approach, it becomes clear that, although at different points of his Gospel, Mark applies the term 'unbelief' used to depict Jesus' opponents to the disciples as well, he distinguishes between the two groups. This applies also to his description of the unbelief of both the groups. The opponents' unbelief does not mean primarily a lack of insight, but rather a conscious refusal to believe Jesus' claims and demands. Throughout Mark's Gospel the opponents, due to their hardened hearts, they are ever seeing and hearing but never understanding (3:5; 4:12). Similar to 1QS 3:18-21, in Mark 4:15 the fundamental source of the opponents' rejection is the result of Satan-inspired opposition (1QS 3:18-21; Mark 4:15) Since Satan prevents the opponents from listening to Jesus' message, they do not understand it and reject him and eventually bring about his death (3:6).

Thus, to the opponents, Jesus' salient teachings and miracles have only produced rejecting questions, rather than belief (cf. 3:6, 21, 22-29, 30-31; 6:1-6). Therefore, their obstinate rejection necessarily excludes them from obtaining forgiveness of God. However, if they repent of their sins and accept His prophetic message, they will gain God's forgiveness as a benefit in the Kingdom (cf. 12:34).

On the other hand, the disciples' unbelief, unlike the opponents' unbelief, does not consist in the wilful rejection of Jesus. But, the disciples' unbelief implies their failure to

believe in Jesus' identity (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:14-29 etc.) shown in his teachings and actions. The disciples are in danger of being the outsiders whose hearts were hardened, having eyes but not seeing, and ears but not hearing (8:17-18; cf. 3:5; 4:11-12). Although the hardness of heart, which is associated with Jesus' opponents, is also attributed to the disciples, the use of this term is not meant to suggest that the disciples have sided with the opponent of Jesus. Rather, it is indicative of an attempt by Jesus, by bombarding them with a series of rhetorical questions, to warn his disciples who are in mortal danger of succumbing to the same unbelief that has afflicted the opponents. Thus, unlike a direct statement regarding the opponents' hardness of heart in 3:5 and 4:12, the disciples' hardness of heart is obliquely described through rhetorical questions in 8:17-18.

The theological perspective that is presented in the theme of unbelief in Mark is that an attempt is made to emphasize faith, which stands literally in contrast to unbelief. Through speech acts concerning unbelief, Mark emphasizes the fact that those who are the true disciples must follow Jesus with faith under difficult circumstance. For this purpose, he uses specific individuals as examples (the woman with a haemorrhage, Jairus, the paralytic, and the Syrophenician woman) who respond to Jesus' demand with faith and spiritual insight, in order to move Christians toward faith or trust in him along with a perceptiveness of his identity.

<KEY TERMS>

Unbelief

Rejection

Hardness of Heart

Hostility

Blindness and Deafness

Failure to Believe

Incomprehension

Misunderstanding

Faith

Spiritual Perceptiveness

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. General Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
Ant.	Antiquities
BC	Before Christ
Cf.	Confer
CD	Cairo-Damascus Document
ch(s).	Chapter (s)
ed(s)	Editor(s)
e.g.	For example
esp.	Especially
i.e.	That is
LXX	Septuagint
mss	Manuscripts
MT	Massoretic Text
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Tg. Onq.	Targum Onqelos
Vol.	Volume

B. Abbreviation of the Bible

Ge.	Genesis	Mt.	Matthew
Ex.	Exodus	Mk.	Mark
Lev	Leviticus	Lk.	Luke
Nu.	Numbers	Jn.	John
Det.	Deuteronomy	Ac.	Acts
Jos.	Joshua	Ro.	Romans
Jug.	Judges	1 Co.	1 Corinthians
Ru.	Ruth	2 Co.	2 Corinthians
1 Sa.	1 Samuel	Gal.	Galatians
2 Sa.	2 Samuel	Eph.	Ephesians
1 Kig.	1 Kings	Php.	Philippians

2 Kig.	2 Kings	Col.	Colossians
1Ch.	1 Chronicles	1 Th.	1 Thessalonians
2 Ch.	2 chronicles	2 Th.	2 Thessalonians
Ezr.	Ezra	1 Ti.	1 Timothy
Ne.	Nehemiah	2 Ti.	2 Timothy
Est.	Esther	Tit.	Titus
Job	Job	Phm.	Philemon
Ps.	Psalms	Heb.	Hebrews
Pr.	Proverbs	Jas.	James
Ecc	Ecclesiastes	1 Pe.	1 Peter
Ss.	Song of Songs	2 Pe.	2 Peter
Isa.	Isaiah	1 Jn.	1 John
Jer.	Jeremiah	2 Jn.	2 John
La.	Lamentations	3 Jn.	3 John
Ezk.	Ezekiel	Jude.	Jude
Da.	Daniel	Rev	Revelation
Hos.	Hosea		
Joel	Joel		
Am.	Amos		
Ob.	Obadiah		
Jnh.	Jonah		
Mic.	Micah		
Na.	Nahum		
Hab.	Habakkuk		
Zep.	Zephaniah		
Hag.	Haggai		
Zec.	Zechariah		
Mal	Malachi		

C. Abbreviations of Reference Works

AJT	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrew University Seminary Studies</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bullentin</i>

BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
Forum	<i>Foundations & Facets Forum</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Studies</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JThS	<i>Journal of the Theology for Southern Africa</i>
JTS	<i>Journal for Theological Studies</i>
LB	<i>Linguistica Biblica</i>
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Thology</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament & Exegesis</i>
NovT	<i>Novem Testamentum</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
SJT	<i>South-Western Journal of Theology</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TRINJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	<i>World Biblical Commentary</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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