

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNBELIEF OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

Throughout Mark's Gospel, the disciples are the 'unbelieving generation' (9:19; cf. 6:6), blind and deaf (8:18; cf. 4:12), and like Jesus' adversaries and outsiders, fail to understand Jesus (e.g., 6:52; 8:17; cf. 3:5; 10:5).<sup>605</sup> In his Gospel, Mark also uses the same language 'hardness of heart,' which was applied to Jesus' opponents in a hostile meaning, in order to indicate the disciples' failure to believe in Jesus (6:52; 8:18-19). But more interesting from a literary point of view is that the disciples' unbelieving attitudes seem to increase, which leads them to misunderstanding, and then to deny Jesus.<sup>606</sup> Does the concept of unbelief then mean the disciples' intentional rejection of Jesus, like the opponents' unbelief? If not, what is the meaning of 'unbelief' in relation to the disciples? How then does the language 'hardness of heart' function in relation to the disciples' unbelief? The purpose of this chapter is to examine those passages in Mark where the theme of unbelief applies to the disciples, in order to elucidate the meaning of the unbelief of the disciples (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:14-29 etc.).

#### 3.1 THE DISCIPLES' UNBELIEF IN THE STORM AT SEA (4:35-41)

The first clear hint Mark gives of the disciples' failure of understanding comes in 4:13. Although the disciples in distinction to the outsiders possess the secrecy of the kingdom, they have failed to comprehend the meaning of the parable. Jesus' following explanation appears at first to have resolved the problem. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, their failure of understanding has been continued in three boat scenes (4:35-41; 6:47-52; 8:14-21),<sup>607</sup> each which focuses on the disciples' failure to understand a significant aspect of Jesus' identity; the third scene brings

<sup>605</sup> Cf. Joseph B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark." *JBL* 80 (1961): 262.

<sup>606</sup> As Theodore Weeden noted, the disciples' hardness of heart moves through three stages: imperceptiveness in 1:1-8:26; misconception of the nature of Jesus' messiahship in 8:27-10:52; and betrayal, abandonment, and denial of Jesus in 14:10-72 (T. J. Weeden, "The Heresy That Necessitated Mark's Gospel," *ZNW* 59 [1968] 145-58. *idem.*, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], 20-51.

<sup>607</sup> Recent scholarship has pointed out and examined the structure and importance of the boat scenes in Mark's narrative. The most detailed examination of this section is from Norman Petersen, "The Composition of Mark 4:1-8:26," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980), 185-217; see also Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 57-68.

this movement to a climax.<sup>608</sup>

The storm-stilling episode and the other sea story in 6:45-52 are only two miracles presented in Mark's narrative directly for the disciples.<sup>609</sup> More strikingly, the miracle in 4:35-41 is followed by a condemnation of the unbelief of the disciples present. This in itself may suggest that Mark is dealing here with a different kind of unbelief to we have considered thus far.

### 3.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

In Mark's Gospel, we can see that the episodes leading up to the parable of the sower establish basic patterns and themes that support the readers in identifying groups in the Gospel typifying each kind of response to the good news, but even so, the major focus of the plot's synopsis is on the material following it.<sup>610</sup> The readers' perception of each succeeding episode is composed by the hearing-response typology developed by the parable of the sower. As also the material immediately after the parables section, Mark 4:35-6:6a is sharply clarified by this orienting perspective.<sup>611</sup> Mark 4:35-6:6a divides the people illustrated by the good earth from those presented by the various types of unproductive earth: faith versus fear (unbelief).<sup>612</sup> Having brought the section on parables to a conclusion, the implied author turns his concentration to a natural miracle (4:35-41). In the story of the stilling of the storm, he indicates the disciples' failure to understand Jesus' divine identity.

This episode of the stilling of the storm (4:35-41) involves two major themes: a christological theme which, drawing on various motifs in the OT passages such as Ps 107:23-32 and Jonah 1:1-16, sets forth Jesus as one greater than Jonah and as one who himself exercises God's cosmic dominion over the natural elements; and the disciples' failure of recognition, which portrays their unbelief and fear before the threatening storm.<sup>613</sup> The first theme climaxes in the wondering question, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

---

<sup>608</sup> James S. Hanson, *The Endangered Promises Conflict in Mark* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 229-30.

<sup>609</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 213.

<sup>610</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 164.

<sup>611</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 189.

<sup>612</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 81; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 175.

<sup>613</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

(4:41). The question of “Who is this?” seems to echo the crowd’s puzzlement in 1:27 and is to be seen alongside the places where Jesus’ critics raise the question about him as well (e.g., 2:7; 3:22).<sup>614</sup> This theme is perhaps Mark’s major interest throughout his writing (cf. 1:1). Only God and the demons recognize the truth until Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. Even the disciples, who see his power firsthand, cannot arrive at the full truth until then. The second theme is revealed in the rebuke: “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (4:40). They have not yet understood the full identity and power of this man whom even wind and sea obey. In this episode, the failure of the disciples is directly related to their ignorance of the true identity of their passenger, whilst Jesus’ unique power stands out even more boldly by way of contrast to their cowardly fear.

It is often felt that a certain tension exists between these two motifs. Mark 4:40 interrupts the narrative flow between the miracle (v 39) and the choral response (v 41), and seems ill-placed after the accomplishment of the miraculous deed. Many scholars therefore suggest that 4:40 has been secondarily interpolated in order to transpose a nature miracle or epiphany story into a new discipleship key.<sup>615</sup> However, another possibility is that, in contrast to Matt 8:26 Mark has simply moved 4:40 forward from its earlier location before 4:39 to its present conspicuous position in order to give prominence to the charge of unbelief.

Also, Mark attempts to create a link between this episode and the previous parable of the sower (4:1-34).<sup>616</sup> The doubled time reference in v. 35 locates it at the end of the same day that has been filled with the teaching of 4:1-34;<sup>617</sup> it commences with the same formula used to introduce each earlier part of the parabolic teaching (kai. legei autoij, “and he said to them,” v. 35 cf. vv. 2. 11. 13. 21); and it occurs in the same boat that has served all day as Jesus’ pulpit (c. 36; cf. 4:1).

<sup>614</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 340.

<sup>615</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 213.

<sup>616</sup> L. Schenke argues that Mark is responsible for this linkage, *Die Wundererzählungen des Markusevangeliums* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974), 1-17.

<sup>617</sup> Cf. F. Neirynck, *Duality in Mark: Contribution to the Study of the Markan Redaction* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1972), 46.

The disciples have been described as responding immediately and positively to Jesus before Mark 4. But in Mark 4, the disciples appear to enter the contest with a clear with advantage, for the implied author reports at the end of the stories section that “privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (4:34b; *kat' idian de. toi' idipij maqhtai' epe, luen panta*). Despite their special position ('around him') and privilege in which they received the mysteries of the kingdom of God,<sup>618</sup> the disciples reveal their lack of understanding in their question in 4:10.

Thus, with the allusion of Isaiah 6:9, Jesus indicates that the disciples' failure of understanding is the same as the outsiders, i.e. the religious leaders whose hearts are hardened. The two preliminary questions in 4:13 warn the disciples against copying the hardness of the outsiders (incomprehension) and seem harsh: “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?” (*Ouk oidate thn parabolhn tau, thn( kai. pwj pasaj taj parabolaj gnwsesqet*). In the narrative, Jesus sometimes hurls rhetorical questions in pairs, revealing his surprise and aggravation at the disciple's failures: “Why are you cowards? Don't you have faith yet?”; “How long am I to be with you? How long am I to put up with you?”; “Simon, are you sleeping? Weren't you strong enough to keep watch one hour?”<sup>619</sup>

In spite of their failure of understanding, the disciples are not among those who fall under the divine judgment. Rather, Jesus privately explains all things to his own disciples. Jesus does not care about the outsiders' ignorance, but he privately explains things to his own disciples who hear the parable of the sower (4:33-34). Disciples are no different from outsiders in needing explanations for the parables, but they are different from the outsiders in that they come to Jesus for explanation.<sup>620</sup>

The episode of Jesus and the disciples crossing the sea in a storm reflects the

<sup>618</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 220. Compare Mark 4:13 with Matte 13:18-23 and Luke 8:11-15. Matthew and Luke delete the Markan question.

<sup>619</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 49.

<sup>620</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 160: “At Qumran a similar idea is expressed. According to 1QS 5:11-12, the wicked ones who are outside the covenant are those who have not sought and examined his decrees in order to know the hidden things in which they err by their own fault and because they treated revealed matters with disrespect.”

disciples' failure to understand, which has already been introduced in 4:13. This episode advances through three stages. The introduction (4:35-36) sets the scene and includes two important elements for understanding the charge of unbelief. The initiative of Jesus in undertaking the journey and announcing its goal, and the comment on his presence with the disciples in the boat.<sup>621</sup> The latter element is emphasised by the awkward construction *paralambanousin auton wj hñ en tw| pl oi w|* ("they took him along, just as he was, in the boat"), as well as by the allusion to 'other boats.'<sup>622</sup> In the context of this episode, these boats are most probably for the wider circles of followers described in 4:10, but the effect of their mention in v. 36 is to emphasize the fact that the disciples, who fail to understand Jesus, are the very ones with whom Jesus is quartered.<sup>623</sup>

The second section (4:37-39), which recounts the storm itself, begins and closes on contrasting notes.<sup>624</sup>

v. 37 *kai. ginetai lailay megalh anemou* ("and a furious squall came up")

v. 39 *kai. egeneto gal hñh megalh* ("and it was completely calm")

In between these verses, a contrast is described between the faithless fear of the disciples and the trustful response of Jesus.

Third section (vv. 40-41) begins, like the first, with Jesus directing the disciples (*kai. eipen autoi j*; "and he said them") and includes the instructive commentary on what has just happened.<sup>625</sup> The reaction of the disciples is diagnosed as a case of fearfulness and faithlessness, and the reason for this condition is intimated in their fearful reaction to Jesus' awesome presentation of power.<sup>626</sup> They have not yet understood the full identity and power of this man whom even wind and sea obey.

### 3.1.2 Exegetical Perspective on The Text

The disciples' spiritual ignorance introduced in 4:13 emerges again in this episode. This episode and sea-walking story (6:45-52) are the only two miracles

<sup>621</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 215.

<sup>622</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 175.

<sup>623</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 87.

<sup>624</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 215.

<sup>625</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216.

<sup>626</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 222.

presented in Mark's Gospel directly involving the disciples. Strikingly, they are characterized by incomprehension and fear. When the disciples were in the boat straining against the wind, they performed poorly on their first test as to faith. They did not yet believe in Jesus; they were afraid and had no faith (54:38, 40).

### 3.1.2.1 The Meaning of Jesus' Sleep

Meanwhile, Jesus lies asleep in the stern of the boat (4:38). The graphic depiction of Jesus' on the cushion in the stern of the boat provides a stark contrast to the description of the furious storm. At the same time, the parallel with Jonah's sleep during a life-threatening storm is hard to overlook.<sup>627</sup> Some scholars argue that Jesus' peaceful sleep in the midst of a raging storm is an indicator of his own faith in God's care (Job 11:18-19; Pss 3:5; 4:8; 121:3-4; Prov 3:23-26),<sup>628</sup> while others argue that it signifies Jesus' sovereignty and security, and contrasts with the fear of the disciples.<sup>629</sup> Jesus' subsequent action (4:39) and the disciples' response (4:41) seem to support the latter.

Indeed, even Jesus' sleep is part of his likeness with God. In Ancient Near Eastern myths, the supreme divinity is often described as sleeping as a sign of his sovereignty: there are no opponents powerful enough to upset his sleep.<sup>630</sup> Having to rouse Jesus from his sleep evokes another biblical theme of sleep as a divine prerogative and symbol of divine rule. Isaiah 51:9-10 may shed more light on Jesus' sleep:<sup>631</sup>

Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?

Jesus' sleep is another token of his divine sovereignty which the disciples do not yet understand, and the formidable power of the tempest is promptly overcome when he arises and speaks.<sup>632</sup> According to Marcus, the sleeping of Jesus

<sup>627</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 266; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

<sup>628</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 276; Garland, *Mark*, 191; Painter, *Mark*, 87.

<sup>629</sup> Gnllka, *Markus* 1: 195; Guelich, *Mark*, 266.

<sup>630</sup> B. F. Batto "The Sleeping God: An Ancient Near Eastern Motif of Divine Sovereignty," *Biblica* 68 (1987): 153-77.

<sup>631</sup> See also Ps 44:23-24

<sup>632</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 192.

demonstrates that he is showing his sovereignty and power over the sea and is answering to the disciples' complaint that he is unconcerned about their death. The widespread image of the sleeping God, then, combines the notion of omnipotence with that of apparent indifference, and both ideas seem to be important in our passage: Jesus demonstrates his sovereign power over the elements, thus answering his disciples' complaint that he is unconcerned about their fate.<sup>633</sup>

The account of the Jesus' asleep in the boat in the midst of a raging storm would probably remind the readers of the biblical story of Jonah (Jon. 1).<sup>634</sup> Cope has noted the thematic similarities between the two narratives:<sup>635</sup>

- 1) departure by boat (Jon. 1:3; Mk. 4:36)
- 2) an aggressive storm at sea (Jon. 1:4; Mk. 4:37)
- 3) a sleeping main character (Jon. 1:5; Mk. 4:38a)
- 4) badly frightened sailors (Jon. 1:6; Mk. 4:38b)
- 5) a miraculous stilling related to the main character (Jon. 1:14-15; Mk. 4:39)
- 6) a marvelling response by the sailors (Jon. 1:16; Mk. 4:41)

The overlap does not relate only to the shared themes, but also to various common terms. The verb ἀπολυμενα ('to die' 4:38) occurs three times in an almost identical form in the LXX of Jonah (mh. ἀπολυμενα--"in order that we not die"; 1:6, 14, 3:9).<sup>636</sup> The parallel between Jonah and Jesus could be expanded. Jewish legends, for example, depict Jonah threatening the sea monster Leviathan with eschatological destruction (e.g. *Pirqe R. El. 10: Tanhuma* on Leviticus, 8).<sup>637</sup> Mark 4:35-41, similarly, describes Jesus as eschatological conqueror of the sea, which is personified (Jesus 'rebukes' it), and there is perhaps a hint of his resurrection in the use of the verb ἐγειρουν ( 'to rise'; cf. Ac. 5:30) for the disciples rousing him (4:38).<sup>638</sup>

<sup>633</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 338; Edwards, *Mark*, 149.

<sup>634</sup> Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 266; Witherington III, *Mark*, 175.

<sup>635</sup> O. L. Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1976), 96-97.

<sup>636</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 266; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 333; Witherington III, *Mark*, 176.

<sup>637</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 337.

<sup>638</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

There are however significant differences between Mark 4:35-41 and the story of Jonah. Jesus' sleeping in the storm, indicating his power in the face of death differs from Jonah's sleeping during his attempt to escape from mission. The sleeping of Jonah through a storm in the hold of a maritime ship is plausible and credible. But the sleeping of Jesus stretched out on the deck of a small fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee through a storm so violent as to imperil boat and crew is not at all credible.<sup>639</sup> The disciples do not battle the storm as the sailors did, or cast lots to see who caused the calamity (Jon. 1:5, 7).<sup>640</sup> The disciples, moreover, do not ask Jesus to intervene with God, as the sailors requested in Jonah 1:6, but ask him to save them as the distressed sailors of Ps 107:23-30 request of the Lord.<sup>641</sup> The calm comes when Jonah is thrown overboard, not when he speaks (Jon. 1:15). Jesus does not pray to God but addresses the sea directly, and his word creates the great calm. The differences in the stories, when read together, make it clear that Jesus in Mark 4:35-41 is greater than Jonah (cf. Matt. 12:41 and Lk. 11:32), and in an essential way, more like God than like Jonah.<sup>642</sup>

However, the disciples do not interpret his untroubled sleep as evidence of his sovereignty, which will also ensure their welfare. They regard it as a token of his indifference to their safety in their hour of danger.<sup>643</sup> The disciples arouse Jesus with the charge that he does not care about their survival. Their question is understood as a complaint rather than a typical request for help to be expected in this kind of story (cf. Matt. 8:25). But some scholars take it to be more an indirect request for help (cf. Lk 8:24).<sup>644</sup> The sailors in the story of Jonah request that Jonah pray to his God for help (Jon. 1:6). Likewise, the disciples simply wanted him to share in their concern or help them by prayer in keeping with the story of Jonah and similar rescue stories in Judaism (Str-B, 1: 489-90).<sup>645</sup> The resulting wonder and question in 4:41 point out that Jesus acted contrary to their

---

<sup>639</sup> Cope, *Matthew*, 97; Gundry, *Mark*, 245-46.

<sup>640</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 149.

<sup>641</sup> Batto "The Sleeping God," 153-77.

<sup>642</sup> Pesch, *Markusevangelium* 1, 269; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 338; Garland, *Mark*, 193.

<sup>643</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

<sup>644</sup> B. M. F. van Iersel and A. J. M. Linmans, "The Storm on the Lake. Mk iv 35-41 and Mt viii 18-27 in the Light of Form Criticism, 'Redaktionsgeschichte' and Structural Analysis," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, ed. T. Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn, and W. C. van Unnik (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 20-21; Kertelge, *Wundererzählungen*, 96-97.

<sup>645</sup> Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 266.



expectations. Furthermore, as the story now stands, the disciples' cry sets the stage for Jesus' rebuke of their fear and unbelief. Therefore, "their cry does not come as a request but as an expression of despair and anger aimed at their 'Master [Teacher]'"<sup>646</sup> who apparently cared little about them."<sup>647</sup> Jesus' rebuke in 4:40 now sets the tone of the disciples' cry in 4:38. His rhetorical questions in 4:40 do look back to the disciples' plea (v. 38) and interpret it as an expression of fear and lack of faith.<sup>648</sup>

There is bitter irony that these same disciples will go to sleep on him in his hour of terror in Gethsemane, unmoved by his pleas for them to watch and pray with him (14:37, 40-41).<sup>649</sup> They do not sleep lightly because of their trust in God, but because of a bad case of heavy eyes (14:40). Jesus reproaches them "Are you still sleeping?" in a far more critical hour. Their sleep demonstrates that they do not care that he is about to perish. The early indication of heavy eyes that cannot see re-appears in this scene as their terror in the face of the storm overcomes them.

### 3.1.2.2 Jesus' Rebuking the Wind

Jesus answers their anxious cries by rebuking the wind with a word (4:39). As we observed in the previous section, in ancient society the sea was seen as a malicious deity, but in the Jewish context it was seen as the natural dwelling place for demons and spirits (2 Enoch 40:9; 43:1-3; 69:22; 4 Ezra 6:41-42; Job 2:2).<sup>650</sup> Jesus' response to the storm is expressed in terms similar to his first encounter with the man with an unclean spirit in 1:12-28. The verb *epetimhsen* ('to rebuke') in 4:39 reminds the reader of the use of the same term in 1:25. Also the verb *upakouēi autw̄* ('to obey him') is like the verb *upakousin autw̄* in 1:27.<sup>651</sup> Based on these observations, the calming of the storm is described in

---

<sup>646</sup> The response of the disciples exposes their faulty estimation of Jesus. They called him "Teacher" (*didaskalē*), which is the Greek equivalent of "Rabbi." According to Mark, this is an appropriate but hardly adequate as statement of faith.

<sup>647</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 267

<sup>648</sup> Werner Stenger, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 85.

<sup>649</sup> D. H. Juel, *Mark*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 77; Garland, *Mark*, 191.

<sup>650</sup> Witherington III, *Mark*, 176.

<sup>651</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 150.

the same way as the exorcism of 1:21-28. Based on a survey of Josephus, Philo, the Qumran literature, the Greek magical papyri, and rabbinic traditions, Kee argues that 'to rebuke' is unusual terminology for an exorcism narrative.<sup>652</sup> This assertion, however, needs to be qualified in view of the frequent use of נָעַר ('to rebuke') in a recently published Aramaic and Hebrew incantation text (tablet) from Galilee,<sup>653</sup> in which it almost becomes a synonym for 'to exorcise.'<sup>654</sup> Based on such OT texts, an Aramaic exorcistic spell uttered "in the name of I-am-who-I-am" (cf. Ex. 3:14) calls for God to rebuke the evil spirit,<sup>655</sup> and in other Aramaic spells the linkage of the verb 'rebuke' with the primeval divine conquest of the sea becomes clear (cf. Job 26:10-12).<sup>656</sup> The rebuked evil power is personified as Satan, 'the Adversary,' in Zech 3:2, a passage that forms the background for 1QM 14:10, where God rebukes the spirits of Belial's lot.<sup>657</sup> This applies also to 1QH fragment 4, 1:6, where he rebukes 'every destroying adversary' as part of the cosmic struggle that will soon end in the establishment of his undoubted sovereignty over the earth.<sup>658</sup> In view of this, we could see 4:35-41 in the framework of the victory of God over evil. Mark 4:39 shows that Jesus is speaking the words of command by which an evil spirit is conquered, as the forces of evil have power wrested from them. The hostile and estranged creation, under suppression of Satan, is brought under the reign of God.<sup>659</sup> In Mark's mind, the calming of the storm shows Jesus' power over the forces of supernatural evil just as clearly as the explicit healing of the possessed. This miracle shows him driving back and binding of demonic powers that have invaded the world--two skirmishes in the war, which in Mark's Gospel, begins with temptation in the

<sup>652</sup> H. C. Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," *NTS* 14 (1967/68): 232-46.

<sup>653</sup> This tablet, which has been called "Rebuking the Sea," was discovered in a field near Nazareth in the 1920s. Most of "Rebuking the Sea" was written in Hebrew (with a number of distinctively Aramaic features). Thus, it may be termed a Hebrew-Aramaic text (G. H. Hamilton, "A New Hebrew-Aramaic Incantation Text from Galilee: 'Rebuking the Sea,'" *JSS* 41 [1996], 225 in 215-49).

<sup>654</sup> Hamilton "Rebuking the Sea," 230.

<sup>655</sup> J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantation of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), Amulet, 2:7-10.

<sup>656</sup> J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulator: Aramaic Incantation of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), Amulets, 27:16-19; idem, *Amulets, Geniza* 4:3-8.

<sup>657</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 194; L. Williamson, *Mark, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 101.

<sup>658</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 194.

<sup>659</sup> Kee, "Terminology," 244.

wilderness, and concludes with the triumph of the cross.<sup>660</sup>

Jesus' exorcisms are evidence that he is the stronger one, able to break up Satan's kingdom (3:23-27).<sup>661</sup> Mark refocuses this impressive demonstration of Jesus' divine power by underlining the unbelief that Jesus' disciples exhibit during the episode.<sup>662</sup> Miracles like those Jesus performed early in his ministry could have been performed by other miracle workers, exorcists, or magicians. However, no one but Jesus could still the raging storm.

The Markan Jesus is also similar to the OT God in other ways. Like God in Psalm 46, he is Israel's helper, who is in their midst and works wonders through his word and, because of whom, they should not fear though the waters of the sea be troubled. The event of the Exodus is sometimes described with similar imagery: "He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry" (Ps. 106: 9; cf. Ps. 114:3-4).<sup>663</sup> Moreover, Zech 2:10-3:2 speaks of God dwelling in the midst of his people, rousing himself, and rebuking Satan, all of which correspond to elements in Mark 4:35-41.<sup>664</sup>

According to 4:39, Jesus commands the sea to keep silent or be still, in addition to rebuking the wind. In short, he emphasizes the forces of nature in a personal way, apparently presuming that a personal agency controls or is behind them. The response to Jesus' commands was immediate—the wind dropped and a great calm came over the sea.<sup>665</sup> That Jesus is able to transform a great storm (4:37) into a great calm (4:39) with just a word discloses that he has power to do what only the God who created the sea can do (see Gen 8:1; Job 26:12; Pss 65:7; 74:13-14; 114:3; Isa. 50:2; Nah. 1:4; 2 Macc 9:8).<sup>666</sup> Jesus has authority

---

<sup>660</sup> John, *The Meaning in the Miracles*, 73.

<sup>661</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle of Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonagh (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 101-2.

<sup>662</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224-45.

<sup>663</sup> Juel, *Mark*, 78.

<sup>664</sup> Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells*, 25, 52, 177.

<sup>665</sup> Witherington III, *Mark*, 176.

<sup>666</sup> Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 109; cf. Daniel J. Harrington, "The Gospel According to Mark," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990) 606-60. Even figures in the Jewish Scripture who perform miraculous feats with water do not approximate this action of Jesus in Mark.

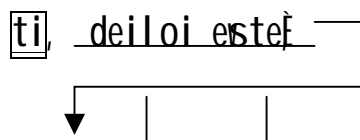
over the sea, the place of chaos, and evil, as God does. God was uniquely at work in Jesus. The description of the stilling of the storm in the language of exorcism is intended not simply to demonstrate that Jesus possesses power over nature as well as over illness and demon possession. Its ultimate purpose is to show that Jesus does what only God can do.<sup>667</sup> The awed response in 4:41 appropriately confirms this point. Nevertheless, the disciples did not understand that they had met with one who has divine power, so that they had to show their fear.

If the waves beating on the little boat are symbolic of the persecution being experienced by the Markan community, the persecution is shown by the linkage with 1:25 to have its source in Satan's pitiless hostility to Jesus' mission. However, the current story also demonstrates that this satanic opposition is ultimately ineffectual. Therefore, this episode describes not only the panic experienced by the little group of tempest-tossed disciples, which corresponds to the experience of Mark's community, but also the effect of Jesus' word: "And the wind died down, and there was a great calm" (egeneto gal hnh mega,l h).

### 3.1.2.3 Fear and Unbelief

The passage ends with dialogue between Jesus and the disciples that emphasize his divine identity, which the disciples are failing to understand. After conquering the threat of the sea, Jesus turns to the disciples and their unbelief, asking them in the boat: "Why are you afraid? Do you (still) not yet have faith?" (4:40 ti, deiloi, este? oupw ecete pistin?).

The syntactic structure of this verse is as follows:



Moses stretches his hand and rod over the Red Sea and divides those waters as well as closes them together again; however, the texts make it clear that it is the Lord's power executing these wonders (Ex. 14:16, 21, 26-27). Elijah uses his mantle and actually strikes the waters of the Jordan to part them (2 Kgs 2:8); but he did not simply command the water as Jesus does.

<sup>667</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 150. In the OT, God alone can save people from the storms of chaos (Pss 33:7; 65:8; 89:11; 104:7; Job 26:12; 38:8). Hence this is not simply a miracle story of salvation; rather it is a parable of Jesus as the Epiphany of God who does what only God can do.

ecete pistinē

oupw

Jesus has presented in these two questions the two basic alternatives for human response to the good news: fear (unbelief) and faith.<sup>668</sup> Fear comes from lack of faith, but faith can drive out fear.<sup>669</sup> The language of the reproof in 4:40, again echoes the persecuted Markan community, because the call not to be afraid and to have faith is recollective of the language of martyrdom (cf. John 14:27; 2 Tim 1:7, and especially Rev 21:8).<sup>670</sup>

Then, what does 'faith' mean here? Dibelius argues this faith as "belief in the power of the miracle-worker."<sup>671</sup> His argument would suppose that 4:40 belonged originally to the tradition, because this use of 'faith' is one of the features of this collection of 'tales,' according to Dibelius, in 4:35-5:43. The thrust of this and the following stories would then be to display Jesus as the great miracle-worker, who "excelled all other thaumaturgies."<sup>672</sup> Most scholars today take at least this second question in 4:40 to have been Mark's rhetorical technique, and Mark hardly had described faith for the disciples as belief in the power of the miracle-worker.<sup>673</sup> Some scholars take it to mean belief in God's helping power present and active in Jesus.<sup>674</sup> According to them, the question suggests that the disciples' fear of the wave's threat came from their failure ultimately to believe in God.<sup>675</sup>

The fear of the storm prevailed over their commitment to Jesus and their confidence that he did care for them (4:38), a reflection of their lack of faith that God could be at work in Jesus to protect them even during the threat of a furious squall. Thus, the disciples' response that follows in 4:41 actually answers Jesus' question in the negative sense. Their failure to understand who Jesus was (4:41) leads them to unbelief in the divine power present in Jesus' person. The event reveals their utter dependence on Jesus; he is their refuge and strength, an ever-

<sup>668</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 166.

<sup>669</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 225.

<sup>670</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 339.

<sup>671</sup> M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971), 79.

<sup>672</sup> Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 71.

<sup>673</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 267.

<sup>674</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 177; Cranfield, *Mark*, 175; Garland, *Mark*, 193.

<sup>675</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 276.

present help in difficulty, their Saviour, who can still the anger of the oppressors though they roar like the storm.<sup>676</sup> As a result, they must not fear (Ps 46:1-3; Isa. 51:12-16). Nevertheless, they continue to fail to believe in his identity. The unbelief of the disciples here refers to failure to understand the divine power as being presented in Jesus' person.

Jesus' question is in fact a double question, a common stylistic feature in Mark, as Neiryck has observed (cf. 1:24, 27; 2:7, etc.).<sup>677</sup> Things repeated require attention, and so the narrator may emphasize the importance of something by repeating what he wants to highlight. This fairly obvious use of repetition does not take us very far, but the use of repetition for purposes of emphasis is the starting point for observing what the narrator says to us categorically by means of repetition.<sup>678</sup> Typical of the narrator's discourse is the "progressive double-step expression," in which the first phraseology, statement, or question is extended or made specific by a second phraseology, statement, or question. While we are still assimilating the first question, a second question is provided that develops the first or sharpens it.<sup>679</sup> Double questions contribute to training the reader to follow the lead of the narrator as he takes incremental steps in his discourse. This double question is not answered in this episode, but the reader can easily infer from Jesus' words that the disciples have acted in a cowardly way, and do not yet have faith.

In 4:13<sup>680</sup> Mark begins 'the progressive double-step question' that shows a serious lack in the disciples' response to Jesus' teachings and deeds. In Mark's narrative, Jesus sometimes hurls 'the progressive double-step question,' revealing his surprise and irritation at the disciples' failures (cf. 4:40; 7:18; 8:17, 21). This phraseology has a pedagogical purpose, namely, to call the disciples to attention. Still, there is an undertone of warning to them. Even though they are

---

<sup>676</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 193.

<sup>677</sup> Neiryck, *Duality in Mark*, 54-63, 125-26.

<sup>678</sup> F. Neiryck, *The Minor Agreements of Matthew and Luke Against Mark with a Cumulative List* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1974), 276-77.

<sup>679</sup> R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991), 67.

<sup>680</sup> "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" (Ouk oidate thn parabolhn tauthn( kai. pwj pasaj taj parabolaj gnwsesqet)

insiders to Jesus' circle (4:11a), they seem to be in jeopardy of falling into the same incomprehension that afflicts 'those outside' (cf. 4:11-12; 7:18; 8:14-21).<sup>681</sup>

The readers receive insights into "what being inside is like, and there are clear guidelines about what becoming an insider entails."<sup>682</sup> The two preliminary questions in 4:13 warn the disciples against repeating the incomprehension of the outsiders, and seem harsh. However, here, Jesus questions their faith. Although Jesus privately explains all things to his own disciples, they do not understand his identity, but rather seem to be in peril of falling into the same unbelief as the Jewish religious leaders (in Mark's Gospel they are defined as Jesus' opponents). Therefore, Jesus' double-step question in 4:40 indicates the disciples' failure to believe, and warns them against mimicking the unbelief of the opponents.

The contrast between the disciples' behaviour and his demonstration of their different attitude to God is that Jesus trusts, while the disciples panic.<sup>683</sup> But for Mark, the point of the narrative is the disciples' failure to believe what is happening in the ministry of Jesus. His miracle, however, does not produce this faith even in those who are already disciples. Instead, we see that, in the face of the supernatural, they respond rather like the crowd. (cf. 1:27)

Since they are said to 'not yet' have faith, the reader may hold some hope for the disciples (cf. 8:17-18). 'Not yet' suggests something is lacking that could, or should, have been expected. And the basis for this expectation lies in Mark's previous reference to the disciples in the context that set them apart through their relationship to Jesus (e.g. 1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:14-15; 34-35; 4:10-12, 34).<sup>684</sup> The readers are predisposed not to be too critical of them at this early section in the Gospel, for perhaps they will yet at understanding and faith (cf. 14:28; 16:7).<sup>685</sup>

The disciples do not directly answer Jesus, but the narrator reports their reaction in a remarkably negative phrase: "They were [greatly] terrified" (εὐφοβήσαν

---

<sup>681</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 310-11.

<sup>682</sup> Smith, "Inside and Outside in Mark's Gospel," 366 in 363-67.

<sup>683</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 140.

<sup>684</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 268.

<sup>685</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 67; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 334.

φοβον μεγαν; 4:41).<sup>686</sup> The emphatic εφοβηθησαν φοβον μεγαν is an example of the accusative of the content, or cognate accusative, where the accusative is a cognate of the verb in meaning or etymology.<sup>687</sup> It serves a purpose when a qualifying word or phrase in the form of an attributive is used (μεγαν).<sup>688</sup> It occurs in the Septuagint with φοβερμαι ('fear') in 1 Macc. 10:8: εφοβηθησαν φοβον μεγαν (when the people heard that the king had given them authority to gather an army), and Ps 52:6 (53:5): εκει/ φοβηθησονται φοβον ου· ουκ ην φοβοj ("there they will be terrified, where there is no fear"—my translation). The Lord looks down from heaven on the world to see if there are those who understand and seek him. But the foolish people say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' There is no one who does good things. As the result, the Lord scatters their bones. Therefore, there they will be terrified. The clearest parallel to Mark 4:41, however, is Jonah 1:16: και εφοβηθησαν οι ανδρες φοβω| μεγα|ω| τον κυριον ("and the men feared very greatly the Lord"- my translation). The allusion to Jon. 1:16 differs, where the fear is the reaction of the sailors in recognition of the Lord, while Mark 4:41 shows Jesus as the one in whom God is manifested.<sup>689</sup> Yet, Mark 4:41 is also opposite of Jon 1:16, in that logically a storm does not preclude the presence of God - perhaps it while Jonah is fleeing from the presence of the Lord which leads to the storm on the sea, Jesus shows the presence of God in calming the storm on the sea.<sup>690</sup>

In the context of Jesus' question, the phraseology εφοβηθησαν φοβον μεγαν is not an attitude of worshipful adoration but admission of faithlessness. The verb φοβω is used repeatedly in later sections of the Gospel to describe reaction to Jesus, and usually seems to indicate an attitude which, through responding to the power of God as seen in Jesus, nevertheless stands in contrast to faith (e.g. 5:36; 6:50; 10:32; 16:8).<sup>691</sup> This fear, consequently, differs from that in 4:40

---

<sup>686</sup> It say literally, "they feared a great fear," a Semitic form of expression that echoes Jonah 1:10 (LXX).

<sup>687</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 109

<sup>688</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 89.

<sup>689</sup> R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 273.

<sup>690</sup> E. S. Malbon, "The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee," *JBL* 103 (1984) 366, n.11 in 363-77

<sup>691</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 152.



(deiloi).<sup>692</sup> The word *deiloi* refers to what resulted from their anxiety about the storm and so expresses a lack of faith, while the word *foβoi* refers to a sense of wonder in the presence of God. This response clearly corresponds to the experience of an epiphany,<sup>693</sup> and indicates the presence of God at work in Jesus. Although they have had the greatest opportunity to see and hear Jesus and have been given the mystery of the kingdom (4:11), they are still haunted by doubt and fear.<sup>694</sup> The disciples' fear in the face of the supernatural is appropriate. They do however, still have only an ambiguous inkling of who this man is in their midst, who exercises divine power. Thus, they do not trust in Jesus in the storm, since they do not recognise the presence of God at work in Jesus.

They must ask one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"<sup>695</sup> Taken from its immediate context, the question could express confusion and doubt about who Jesus was. Jesus has just shown himself to be greater than Jonah by his action. He achieves God's work of stilling the storm and calming the sea (cf. Ps. 107:28-29). Nevertheless, the disciples' response to Jesus' miracle does not come as faith but as a surprise. Mark simply develops the surprise element by raising the question about the disciples' lack of faith.

Elsewhere in the Gospel, some episodes are constructed around the questions posed by the characters in them.<sup>696</sup> The story of the stilling the storm is the example. Apart from Jesus' opening command to the disciples to make the boat trip (4:35) and the command whereby he silences the wind and the waves (4:39), the words spoken in the episode are entirely in the form of unanswered question:

"Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (4:38)

"Why are you cowards? Do you still have no (not yet) faith?" (4:40)

"Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (4:41)

The assumptions we are led to draw from these questions are of great

---

<sup>692</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 225.

<sup>693</sup> Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:197.

<sup>694</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 193.

<sup>695</sup> The answer, in light of Ps. 89:8-9, is that God does so, and once more the casting of Jesus in a divine light is an important part of Mark's purpose.

<sup>696</sup> R. M. Fowler, *Loves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico: Scholar Press, 1981), 167-68.

importance: the disciples do not trust Jesus, he thinks that they are cowards and that they have no faith, and they do not understand who he is. As important as all three assumptions are for understanding what is happening in this story, the connotation of the last question in the episode (4:41) is of overwhelming importance as a piece of implicit commentary from the narrator. It means that the people who think they know Jesus, even the disciples, may find themselves realizing that they really do not know who he is. "Who then is this?" is in a way the question that energizes the whole Gospel, story and discourse alike.<sup>697</sup> As often as this question is answered clearly and correctly in the Gospel (e.g., by the heavenly voice or the demons), even all these answers are never completely adequate. "Who then is this?" is a question that remains open for the reader and the disciples alike in the course of the telling of the story, and it may still be open at story's end (15:39).<sup>698</sup>

There is a contrast between the response of the disciples during the storm (4:40) and the fear of the disciples after the calming of the storm. The fear in 4:41 leads to the question "Who then is this?" which is similar with 1:27 and 2:7. The reader, of course, knows that Jesus is the Son of God (1:1, 9-11, 14). Yet, the disciples seem unable to interpret the significance of Jesus' identity. In Mark 4:41, the evangelist describes the fear of human begins in the presence of the supernatural. While the storm is frightening, the calming is terrifying.<sup>699</sup> The supernatural power of Jesus terrifies the disciples. This question suggests that faith is not yet fully formed, since they do not yet know what they can expect from Jesus. The question may point to an awareness that what Jesus does here is appropriate to God who controls the sea (Ps. 89:8-9). Nevertheless, the fear they expressed at this point in response to a manifestation of the divine was the awe

---

<sup>697</sup> S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). 15-42 in particular 19; D. Rhoads & D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 4; D. Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1982): 411-34, in particular, 414; N. R. Peterson, *Literary Criticism for New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 47; A. Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 31-3. 'Story' emphasizes this Gospel's content--what the story is about--based on historicity, in other words, the Gospel's story consists of events, characters and settings, etc., while 'discourse' is the rhetoric of this Gospel, namely how the story is told.

<sup>698</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 133.

<sup>699</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 110.

of ignorance, “Who is this?”<sup>700</sup> Jesus has demonstrated the authority of the sovereignty of God once more in overwhelming the forces of evil, and the question of the disciples leads the reader to christology in the framework of victory of the Kingdom.<sup>701</sup>

The final question sets the stage for Jesus’ epiphany and self-revelation in the second sea story of 6:45-52. Jesus’ statement in 6:50 offers the answer to the question of 4:41. As the episode now stands in Mark, however, Mark leaves the concluding question for his reader/ hearer to answer on the basis of the story.<sup>702</sup> Rather than ask a question to be answered later, either after Easter,<sup>703</sup> or at Caesarea Philippi by Peter,<sup>704</sup> Mark retains the rhetorical force of the question. According to Guelich, “it forces the reader to respond in view of the OT setting of the story, as well as the reader’s knowledge of the larger story. A greater than Jonah is here; one in whom God’s power is indeed at work (Jon. 1:4-6; Pss 74:12-17; 89:9; 104: 5-9; 107:28-29).”<sup>705</sup>

### 3.1.3 The Depiction of Unbelief

The unbelief of the disciples consists not in their refusal to die with Jesus, but rather in their own mistaken conviction that they are surely about to die with him and that he appears not to care (4:38). Within the episode, Jesus’ sleeping symbolizes the challenge posed to their faith. They could either understand his sleep as an expression of his divine power over the storm (Isa. 51:9-10) and, since they are called “to be with him” (3:14 *met’l autou*), be reassured of their ultimate safety.<sup>706</sup> Or they could see it as a sign of his indifference to their troubles (cf. Pss 44:23; 35:23; 59:5), and give way to fear. And this is precisely what they do.

The evaluation of their response as “fearfulness” and the use of the adverb “not yet” imply that, given the circumstances, better could have been expected of the

<sup>700</sup> Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 88.

<sup>701</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 111.

<sup>702</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 270.

<sup>703</sup> J. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer. Interpretation-Geschichte-Wirkungsgeschichte* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 151.

<sup>704</sup> Gnilka, *Markus*, 197.

<sup>705</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 270.

<sup>706</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

disciples.<sup>707</sup> They had observed Jesus' divine authority through his miraculous activities; they had been given privileged access to the mystery of the kingdom (4:11); they, in 4:33-34, were given explanations to help their understanding of his parabolic teaching; nevertheless, they had shown their lack of understanding in their question (4:10) and Jesus' question (4:13); now, he was portrayed with them in the boat facing the same danger, and yet they still had no faith in his power and willingness to rescue them, since they had still not yet understood his full identity (v. 41).<sup>708</sup>

Some Markan scholars argue that the charge of unbelief is levelled against the disciples here not so much because they failed to trust in Jesus' miraculous intervention, but because they did not exercise miracle-working power themselves against the elements.<sup>709</sup> This view has much to commend it. The storm scene is portrayed as an exorcism (cf. previous section 4.1.2), and in 3:15 the disciples had been specially authorized to cast out demons. It is this kind of failure they experience again in 9:14-29, in which they are also blamed for unbelief. Furthermore there is a network of passages in which the narrator seems to imply that Jesus expected the disciples to perform miracles. In 6:37 he teaches the empty-handed disciples to feed the multitude in the wilderness (cf. 8:4); in the second sea episode (6:45-52), Jesus approaches to the struggling disciples walking on the sea, but his intention is to pass by the boat (v. 48), as if his aim was simply to put them in mind of their assigned power; in 8:14-21 he demonstrates frustration at their anxiety over having only one loaf of bread with them so soon after experiencing the feeding miracles;<sup>710</sup> and in 11:22-5, he

---

<sup>707</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

<sup>708</sup> In 6:52 and 8:17-19, Mark uses the language "hardness of heart" to indicate the disciples' lack of understanding as a cause of unbelief

<sup>709</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 47, 90, 124, 129; J. Coutts, "The Authority of Jesus and of the Twelve in St. Mark's Gospel," *JTS* n. s. 8 (1957): 112 in 111-18.

<sup>710</sup> Mark 8:14-21 is traditionally understood as describing a failure of the disciples to trust in Jesus for material provision. Gibson has recently argued strongly against this opinion, suggesting instead that the disciples failed to bring extra bread on the boat in order to dishearten Jesus from a further display of divine favour to those outside Israel, such as he had shown in 8:1-10 (J. B. Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mark 8:14-21," *JSNT* 27 (1986): 31-47. But why would their electing not to bring bread prevent this? After all, in the feeding miracles Jesus multiplied limited resources? Perhaps a better way to interpret this difficult passage is to perceive Jesus rebuking the disciples for failing to

describes miracle-working faith as a feature of the new discipleship community. Mark continually attributes to faith the ability to do what God alone can do. Furthermore, his consideration in v. 41 may be that the disciples failed to exercise miraculous power, because they failed to understand that Jesus had such cosmic authority to assign to them in the first place.

Whether this is the case, or whether, as on balance seems more likely, their unbelief lay in a lack of situation in Jesus' power to rescue them, the result is the same: a belief that the condition is hopeless and that Jesus does not care (4:38).<sup>711</sup> The disciples thus present the contrary attitude to what Jairus is encouraged to show. He is instructed not to fear but only to have faith (5:36); the disciples are rebuked for unbelief and for being overwhelmed with fear (4:40). Jesus' response to the disciples' attitude, "Do you not yet have faith?" (οὐπω ἐχετε πίστιν) implies an absolute absence of faith on the part of the disciples. Jesus employs the rhetorical question as 'shock strategy' to drive home the seriousness of their falling into the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders (cf. 8:14-21). Schille argues that the intended tone of the two rhetorical questions in 4:41 is one of appalled indignation that the disciples as 'insiders' who have received so much, are still unable to manifest faith in times of plight.<sup>712</sup>

Mark does not illustrate faith as the automatic or continuous possession of those who follow Jesus. The foundation of discipleship is described as an action of trust in Jesus for provision, protection and ultimate salvation, and insofar as they continue to follow him (cf. 1:14-20). This remains their basic posture. But in specific circumstances of need, their common faith in him must manifest itself in an immediate and actual expression of trust that will prevail over fear and discharge power. At this point, a failure does not cancel their commitment to Jesus, but it is a serious inconsistency. And since the core of their commitment is faith, the corresponding failure can only be, in Mark's view, unbelief.

---

recognise that his miraculous provision in the desert had connotations for them and their material needs too (Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 217.n., 2). Just as they did not go without in the wilderness feedings, because supply greatly exceeded demand (8:19-21), so they will not lack bread now.

<sup>711</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 218.

<sup>712</sup> G. Schille, "Die Seesturmerzählung Markus 4,35-41 als Beispiel neutestamentlicher Aktualisierung," *ZNW* 56 (1965): 38 in 30-40.

The absence of faith in 4:35-41 then is not the entrenched unbelief of Jesus' opponents, but a specific failure by those within the community of faith to manifest active confidence in Jesus' power in a crisis. Matthew has his own unique technical term: *oligopistoj* ('little faith').<sup>713</sup> However, according to Mark the line between faith and unbelief is more sharply drawn. When believers fail to respond in faith, they are not simply of 'little faith.' They are actually falling into the power of unbelief that stands opposed to God's kingdom.

The reaction of the disciples has been seen as negative: "They were terrified [*foboj*] and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'" (4:41). In negative sense the word *fobon* means 'fear' or 'terror' while in positive sense the word means 'respect' or 'awe.' In Mark 4:40 and 41, the word means negative fear, since the disciples do not perceive Jesus' identity. Kelber argues that the word *foboj* is a functional element of Mark's discipleship theology and is related to a lack of understanding and to unbelief rather than being reverential.<sup>714</sup> Also, Kertelge says that the disciples have no positive answer to the question of who Jesus is, but only a negative reaction of *foboj* as a fault of belief.<sup>715</sup> Furthermore, Tyson sees their *foboj* as evidence of the disciples' blindness.<sup>716</sup> Although they were terrified by the supernatural power of Jesus, they did not understand who this man, is so that they did not believe the presence of God in Jesus. "Such fear and lack of understanding from those who have had greater opportunities to hear Jesus' powerful words and see their amazing results than any other group confirm the hardness beneath the accepting surface of the disciples."<sup>717</sup>

### 3.1.4 Summary

The disciples are portrayed in 4:35-41 as 'unbelieving believers.' They are called

---

<sup>713</sup> For exploration of this term, see H. J. "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held (London: SCM, 1963), 294;

<sup>714</sup> Kelber, *Kingdom*, 47-50.

<sup>715</sup> K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium* (Munich: Kösel, 1970), 100.

<sup>716</sup> J. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," in *The Messianic Secret*, ed. C. Tuckett (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 36.

<sup>717</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 166. In the next section, we will deal with the matter of the disciples' hardness of heart.

from Jesus to be with Jesus in 3:13-19; they receive the special privilege for understanding the kingdom (4:10-11, 23-24, 34b); and they are identified as 'insiders' and his true family (3:20-35). Nevertheless, in 4:1-34 they show a failure to understand Jesus' teachings about the kingdom in the question underlying 4:10. Jesus' question of to the disciples in 4:13 indicates their failure to understand. The stilling of the storm continues the disciples' failure to understand Jesus' identity in relation to the motif of unbelief. The disciples are inner circle, those who have been entrusted with the mystery of the kingdom of God; they have been given explanations of Jesus' "riddles." The disciples perform poorly on their first test of faith. They do not yet trust Jesus; they are afraid and have no faith (4:38, 40). The reason for their unbelief is that they still have not understood the unique identity of Jesus (4:41).

The tranquillity of Jesus' sleep in the face of storm (4:38a), the sovereignty with which he rebuked the chaotic and demonic powers of nature (4:39 cf. Ps 107:28-29) and the wonder caused in the disciples (4:41a; cf. John 1:10, 16) testify to the reader of one greater than Jonah, an epiphany of God's power and presence in Jesus and his action. Jesus commands the sea to be calm, in addition to rebuking the wind. The response to Jesus' commands was immediate—the wind dropped and a great calm came over the sea. What Jesus in his ability to transform a furious storm into a calm with just a word reveals is that he has power to do what only the God who created the sea can do (see Job 26:12). Jesus has power over the sea, the place of chaos and evil, as God does. God was uniquely at work in Jesus. Nevertheless, the disciples did not understand that they had met with one who has divine power, so they had to show their fear<sup>718</sup> as a proof of faithlessness (4:40).

The great fear that the disciples experience at his conquest of the elements (4:41) bespeaks an awareness of having witnessed divine revelation and activity, and is at the same time a gauge of how inadequate their perception of Jesus' person has been to date. But the interrogatory format of their response leaves Mark's readers unsure as to whether the disciples yet have sufficient insight to

---

<sup>718</sup> The great fear that the disciples experience at his conquest of the elements (v. 41) demonstrates an understanding of having witnessed divine revelation and activity, and is at the same time a measure of how inadequate their comprehension of Jesus' identity has been to date (Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 220).

answer their own question, and avoid similar failure in the future. It soon becomes apparent that they do not. The episode in 4:35-41 is the first in a cycle of three related boat scenes in which the basic cause of the disciples' failure of faith reveals itself as a continuing, even deepening malaise (6:45-52; 8:14-21). In the third and climatic scene, the disciples who still have no faith in 4:40 still do not grasp who Jesus is (8:17, 21). The disciples' lack of understanding was attributed to the 'hardness of their hearts,' so that even though showing his miracle they still fail to believe in his divine identity (6:52; 8:17-18). So long as they lack an adequate perception of who Jesus is, they remain vulnerable to failing faith.

### **3.2 THE DISCIPLES' UNBELIEF SHOWN IN FAILURE OF EXORCISM (9:14-29)**

This story has at least a triple focus: (1) the faith (or coming to faith) of the helpless suppliant, (2) the failure and unbelief of the disciples, and (3) the faith of Jesus himself. At this juncture, we are concerned only with the unbelief of the disciples (9:14-19, 28-29). The location of the story in the discipleship-teaching section of the Gospel (8:27-10:52), plus its beginning and ending focus on the disciples, indicates that Mark's principal concern in this episode is the condition of the disciples as unbelievers.<sup>719</sup> This description of the disciples centres on their failure, despite special authorization (3:15; 6:7) and past success (6:12), to cope with a particularly severe case of demonic possession (9:18). In this episode, the disciples' failure is characterized in two related ways: as absence of faith (9:19), and as lack of prayer (9:28).<sup>720</sup>

The failure of faith in 4:35-41 occurs in the presence of Jesus, while the unbelief in 9:14-29 occurs during his absence on the Mount of Transfiguration. The scene is yet another example of a dismal failure of Jesus' closest followers. The three selected disciples failed to perceive Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain, then the remaining nine failed to carry out the kind of ministry Jesus has previously authorized and empowered them to do.<sup>721</sup> The disciples' unsuccessful attempt to exorcise a demon from a boy ignited the argument (9:14, 18). They were asked to cast the demon out of a man's son, but they were unable to do so (9:18).

<sup>719</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 111.

<sup>720</sup> E. Schweizer, "The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark," *Interpretation* 32(1978): 389 in 387-99

<sup>721</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 267.



Jesus' response is strong, as he classes the disciples with the "unbelieving generation" (9:19). Afterwards, the exorcism was successfully accomplished by Jesus (9:25-27), after which the disciples could privately, in a house, deal with the problem of their failure to exorcise. Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon? (9:28). Jesus' answer is that they did not have faithful prayer (9:29). Despite the exigency of the time, the disciples' understanding of faith remains ambiguous.

### 3.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The disciples are not opponents, nor do they interpret his actions as hostile; rather, they simply do not understand the significance of what is happening.<sup>722</sup> Throughout Mark's narrative, the lack of understanding surfaces as due in part to their fear and lack of faith (cf. 4:38; 6:51).<sup>723</sup> In the storm episode (4:35-41), the narrative parallels their fear with lack of faith, both of which portray their inability to understand Jesus' identity. Elsewhere, their lack of faith keeps them from understanding the meaning of the desert feeding, which in turn leaves them terrified when Jesus walks on water (6:45-52).<sup>724</sup> They were terrified on the sea and in the desert, because their hearts were hardened and they were unable to understand what was really happening.<sup>725</sup> The climax comes in the final boat scene (8:14-21). The disciples are once again anxious about bread because they have only one loaf. Once more they do not understand the power of faith because of their hardened hearts (6:52). And they do not understand what the signs in the desert mean about Jesus and about the rule of God.<sup>726</sup> In exasperation Jesus blames them of being blind and deaf, with hardened hearts. At this point, Jesus' disciples are not far from his antagonists.<sup>727</sup>

In 9:14-29, due to lack of faith, the disciples are unable to exorcise a demon from a boy who had been brought by his father for healing. Upon hearing of that failure, the disciples are designated as an "unbelieving generation" (9:19). Mark follows

<sup>722</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark As Story*, 124.

<sup>723</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 231.

<sup>724</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark As Story*, 125.

<sup>725</sup> J. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," *JBL* 80 (1961): 261-68; David J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," *JBL* 91 (1972): 491-500.

<sup>726</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 362.

<sup>727</sup> Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 398.

the healing of the possessed boy with Jesus' second passion prediction (9:30-32). Once again, the disciples respond to the prediction by the lack of understanding and faith. This time it is portrayed by debating the extent of their individual greatness.

Perhaps, the important question regarding the composition of this episode is why it is placed here in Mark's narrative. The answer to this question puts in the observation made earlier that almost the entire of 8:27-10:52 is interested in the two themes of the coming passion of Jesus and the disciples' failure to understand Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.<sup>728</sup> This is why the disciples are prominent in the episode; they are quarrelling with scribes in 9:14-15, are described as unable to cast out a demon in v. 18, are evaluated as an "unbelieving generation," and are instructed as to the cause of their failure to exorcise in 9:28-29.<sup>729</sup> Moreover, he uses the minor character (the petitioner's faith) as an exhortative tool in order to urge the disciples to recognize their own unbelief (cf. 9:20-24). The disciples' unbelief means that they are concerned with a specific miracle like exorcism, rather than accepting Jesus' passion and death.

The sequential link between this miracle story and the Transfiguration story<sup>730</sup> is kept by portraying Mark 9:14-29 as an event which occurred just after they came down from the mountain (9:9) and rejoined the other disciples (9:14).<sup>731</sup> Through

---

<sup>728</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 147.

<sup>729</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 48.

<sup>730</sup> According to Marshall's analysis, the opening scene (9:14; "When they came down to the other disciples") serves to connect this story to the previous narrative (9:2-13). That is, Marshall indicates that "the opening scene picks up the themes of the discipleship, incomprehension, scribal opposition and 'epiphanic' appearance, present in 9:2-13" (Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 114 n. 1). This narrative also has a thematic link with the Transfiguration story by foreshadowing Jesus' death and resurrection mentioned in the previous passage (9:9-13) through the portrayal of the healing of the boy who others regarded as dead in 9:26-27 (Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy*, 122-24; Matthew and Luke describe the exorcism as a healing instead of using the resurrection language of Mark [cf. Matt 17:18; Luke 9:42]). The boy with the unclean spirit, after being terribly convulsed, lay so still; the people thought that he was dead, "but Jesus, taking him by the hand, raised him up; and he stood" (9:27). The appearance of death, followed by being raised up, foreshadows the impending death and resurrection of Jesus. After all, he has foretold his death and resurrection in 8:31-33, and will predict his passion again in 9:30-32.

<sup>731</sup> In the light of Pryke's view that the word "mountain" in both 9:2 and 9:9 is redaction (E. J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel: A Study of Syntax*

such sequential link, Mark wants his reader to understand these stories not as individual separate stories, but as a unified story. While Jesus was with only three disciples (Peter, James, and John) on the mountain, the remainder of the disciples were with the crowd of people and failed to fulfil the commission originally given them in 3:15. They were asked to cast a demon out of a man's son, but they were unable to do so (9:18). Jesus' response is strong, as he classes the disciples with the "unbelieving generation."<sup>732</sup> They continue to be faithless and hard-hearted (cf. 4:40; 6:50, 52; 8:17-21). They appear almost indistinguishable from unregenerate humanity (cf. 8:12, 38).<sup>733</sup> The disciples have power over demons only because Jesus has given it to them, and they have it only if they exercise it with trust in God and not as an independent personal power. Thus, their failure is because they do not trust in Jesus through faith (v. 19).

### 3.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief

While Jesus has been up on the mountain in 9:2-13, a crowd had gathered around the remaining disciples.<sup>734</sup> At that time, the father of the boy had appealed to Jesus' disciples to cast out the evil spirit (9:18) because the principal

---

*and Vocabulary as Guides to Redaction in Mark* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 144). But Chu argues that Mark uses this word intentionally in order to link the three passages (9:2-8; 9:9-13; 9:14-29) together. So the passages can be comprehended as an original whole (S. W-W. Chu, *The Healing of the Epileptic Boy in Mark 9:14-29: Its Rhetorical Structure and Theological Implications*, [Michigan: UMI, 1988], 60).

<sup>732</sup> On this remark being directed to the disciples, see Lane, *Mark*, 332; Cranfield, *Mark*, 301.

<sup>733</sup> Witherington III, *Mark*, 433.

<sup>734</sup> The intricacy of the existing narrative lies partly in the number of characters involved in the drama. This is the only story in which all of the seven characters, who include the possible dramatic persons of a miracle story (Jesus, vicarious petitioner, sick person, demon, crowd, opponents, and the disciples) are involved. Each of the characters, apart from the scribes (v. 14), has its own 'history' in the story, moving from the margin to the centre, then back to the margin again. The disciples, for example, figure in vv. 14-19, are ignored in vv. 20-27, then reappear in v. 28. In v. 19 the failure of the disciples is ascribed to faithlessness, while in 28f it is connected with a lack of faithful prayer. The petitioner has a secondary role in vv. 14-19, a central place in vv. 20-24, and then is not mentioned again. The crowd is prominent in the first part of the story, but withdraws into the background in the second part. According to the different characters or groups Jesus addresses or is in conversation with, Marshall divides the whole narrative into four scenes: Scene 1: Jesus and the crowd (vv. 14-20); Scene 2: Jesus and the father (vv. 21-24); Scene 3: Jesus and the demon (vv. 25-27); Scene 4: Jesus and the disciples (28-29)-- Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 114-15.

basic to discipleship was that “the messenger of a man is as man himself.”<sup>735</sup> The disciples were supposed to be able to do what Jesus could do on the basis of leader and follower, teacher and student. The fact that Jesus sent out his disciples indicates that he had confidence in them to do what he did, in that they were already prepared and educated to function as he did. In Jesus’ absence the disciples stood in his place and were regarded as he is. It was therefore reasonable and legitimate to expect that they possessed the power of their master.<sup>736</sup>

For their part, the disciples had good reason to believe that they could drive out demons in the context of their mission, and they had been successful (cf. 6:7, 13). They undoubtedly tried in various ways to heal the boy, but they were inadequate for the resistance they encountered.<sup>737</sup> “They possessed the power of God only in personal faith, but during Jesus’ absence an attitude of unbelief and self-confidence, based on past success, had exposed them to failure.”<sup>738</sup> Their inability appears to have shaken the father’s confidence in Jesus’ ability to do anything (cf. 9:22 “if you can”).

### 3.2.2.1 Patron-Client

First of all, the patron-client format of this passage has proved a viable and useful method for exploring the disciples’ unbelieving failure. In the Mediterranean society, a patron-client type of relationship grew out of the principal of reciprocity between persons of unequal status in which a low-status person in need (client) has his need met by having recourse to a higher-status person (patron) for favour.<sup>739</sup> Unequal patron-client contrasts are defined by Elliot and Moxnes in the following way:

It is a personal relation of some duration entered into voluntarily by two or more persons of unequal status based on difference in social roles and access to power, and involves the reciprocal exchange of different kind of ‘goods and services’ of value to each partner... [D]esigned to advance the interest of both partners.... [A] ‘patron’ is one who uses his/her influence to protect and assist some other person who becomes his/her ‘client,’ who in return provides to this patron certain valued services... In this reciprocal

---

<sup>735</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 331.

<sup>736</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 331.

<sup>737</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 363.

<sup>738</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 332.

<sup>739</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 80.

relationship a strong element of solidarity is linked to personal honour and obligations informed by values of friendship, loyalty, and fidelity.<sup>740</sup>

Patron-client relations are social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power. The basic structure of the relationship is exchange of different and very unequal resources. A patron has social, economic, and political resources that are needed by a client. In return, a client can give expressions of loyalty and honour that are useful for the patron.<sup>741</sup>

Such patron-client relations are commonly employed to resolve the inadequacies of all institutions, that is, to protect social lower-status persons from the vagaries of life.<sup>742</sup> Thus, the slave might be protected against the dangers of being sold, killed or beaten, while the slave owner obtains the trust and commitment of the slave in question. Therefore, what a patron-client relationship fundamentally involves is bestowing and outfitting economic, political or religious institutional arrangements with the overarching quality of kinship. "Such relations 'kin-ify' and suffuse the persons involved with the aura of kinship, albeit fictive or pseudo-kinship."<sup>743</sup> And since the hallmark of kinship as a social institution is the quality of commitment, solidarity or loyalty realized in terms of generalized reciprocity, patron-client relationship take on this kinship dimension.<sup>744</sup> Thus, economic, political and religious interactions now occur between individuals bound together by mutual commitment, solidarity, and loyalty in terms of generalized reciprocity, rather than the balanced reciprocity of unconnected equals or the negative reciprocity typical of superiors to their subordinates.

Patrons were higher-status persons who controlled resources and were expected to use their positions to hand out favours to low-status persons based on

---

<sup>740</sup> J. H. Elliott, "Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society: A Short Reading Guide," *Forum* 3/4 (1987): 42 in 39-48.

<sup>741</sup> H. Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relationship and the New Community in Luke-Acts," in *The Social world of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1991), 242.

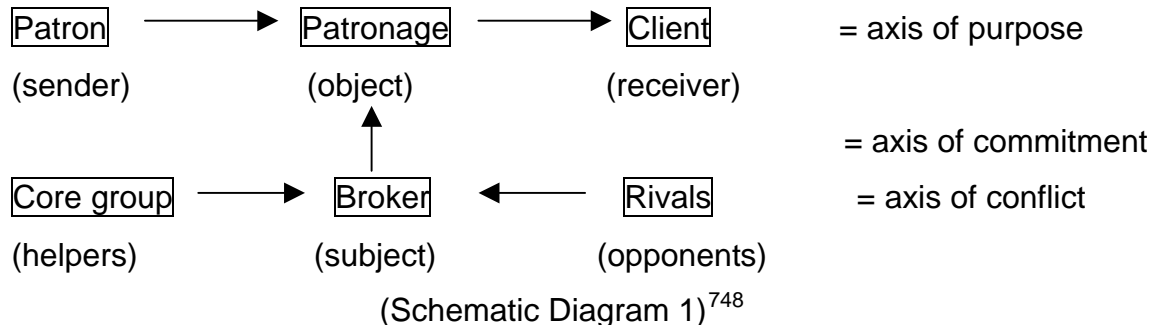
<sup>742</sup> S. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 36. "Patron-client relationship took on many shapes, ranging from long-term, even hereditary, responsibilities toward each other and each other's families, to groups of people who organized themselves in solidarity around certain powerful figures, who could further their common cause" (Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 36-37).

<sup>743</sup> B. J. Malina, "Patron and Client: The Analogy behind Synoptic Theology," *Forum* 4/1 (1988): 8 in 2-32.

<sup>744</sup> Malina, "Patron and Client," 8-9.

friendship and favouritism. Benefactor patrons were expected to big-heartedly support city, village, or client. The Roman emperor related to major public officials this way, and they in turn related to those beneath them in similar fashion.<sup>745</sup> Brokers mediated between patron above and clients below. The patron controlled first-order resources (land, goods, funds, power), while broker controlled strategic contact with or access to patron, and distributed the goods and services a patron had to provide.<sup>746</sup> City officials served as brokers of imperial resources. Clients were dependent on the generosity of patrons and brokers to survive well in the system.<sup>747</sup> They owed loyalty and public acknowledgment of honour in return.

Malina applied this type of patron-client (especially using the concept of favouritism) to understand and present God. In short, his argument is in the following way: God, as the heavenly patron, allows vertical relationship with the Israelites. Jesus, in proclaiming this arriving patronage (the kingdom of God) and by gathering its clientele, sets himself up as broker. He recruits a core group to facilitate his brokerage and enters into conflict with rivals in the same profession.



With his core group and new recruits, Jesus founded a person-centred faction to compete for limited resources bound up with brokerage with the heavenly Patron. With the end of Jesus' brokerage career, his core group appears as a group-centred faction with features of his own.<sup>749</sup>

<sup>745</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 236

<sup>746</sup> Malina, "Patron and Client," 12.

<sup>747</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 236-37.

<sup>748</sup> Cf. David L. Barr, *New Testament Story: An Introduction* (CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1987), 29-31.

<sup>749</sup> Malina defines a faction in the following way: "A faction is a coalition of persons (followers) recruited personally, according to structurally diverse principles by or on behalf of a person in conflict with other person(s) with whom they (coalition members) were formerly united over honor and/or control of

Jesus also sends out a core group of his faction, the Twelve, to function as brokers of divine grace (6:7, 12-13). When they are unsuccessful due to their lack of faith, the crowd comes directly to Jesus (9:17-18). It is clear from Mark's account of the disciples that they also should be defined as brokers. They were called by Jesus (1:16-20; 2:14-15), given shares of his power and authority to heal and preach the kingdom of God (3:14-15), and became his followers and client. The ambiguity of the role of the broker is emphasized also in the commissioning of the Twelve (6:6b-13). They go out without property and possessions or means to defend themselves, i.e., they are to be total outsiders in society.<sup>750</sup> They did however bring with them the full powers of God to heal and to preach the kingdom. They come as brokers who give access to the power of God. Their reception by supporters means the establishment of a patronage bond, but of new kind.<sup>751</sup> Therefore, the disciples can be called as brokers for God's patronage, like Jesus. They are mediators between God and people, commissioned by Jesus and sharing in his power. Moreover, they must trust in Jesus and understand his identity. But, they failed to understand his identity in the boat (6:52; 8:18) and to trust in Jesus' power (9:19). Thus, they could not exorcise successfully (9:18).

### 3.2.2.2 Unbelieving Generation

Jesus' exasperation in 9:19 (+W genea. apistoj) is directed against his entire generation, which as a whole has remained in unbelief.<sup>752</sup> The disciples, the scribes, the crowd, the man from the crowd, all those gathered at the scene are in some way marked by a lack of faith.<sup>753</sup> Jesus includes the disciples within the unbelieving generation, since in part it is the father's portrayal of their failure that brings about Jesus' expression of dissatisfaction. The father of the possessed boy must also be in the present unbelieving generation. Later in the healing story the father describes himself as unbelieving (9:24), so that he confesses his own

---

resources and/or 'truth' ("Patron and Client," 24).

<sup>750</sup> Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relation," 261.

<sup>751</sup> Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relation," 261.

<sup>752</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 230; Lagrange, *Marc*, 239; Nineham *Mark*, 243; Taylor, *Mark*, 398; J. F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus. Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>753</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 139.

identification with the unbelieving generation.

We have argued that the lament over the faithless generation in 9:19 is not addressed solely to the disciples, but embraces everyone present. Nevertheless, it is news of the disciples' failure that occasions the lament, and they are indeed included in the "unbelieving generation." The fact that the expression "O unbelieving generation" was addressed to the disciples can be grammatically proved. In 9:16, Jesus' question is aimed at them (*autouj*), that is, at the disciples.<sup>754</sup> When Jesus responds with his lament in 9:19, he directs his response at them (*autoij*), presumably once again at the disciples.<sup>755</sup> A pronoun in the third person plural could be addressed only to them. The narrative begins with the disciples' incapacity (9:18) and concludes with lack of understanding (9:28). These two negative characteristics can be explained by the disciples' unbelief.<sup>756</sup>

As applied to the disciples, the term "unbelieving generation" carries a particular sting. The term indicates that in their failure the disciples are discredibly indistinguishable from the adulterous and sinful generation that opposes the kingdom (8:38), and, more pointedly, from this generation that does not believe in Jesus, rather but seeks miraculous signs outside a genuine faith relationship (8:12).

In their unsuccessful attempt to exorcise the possessed boy, the disciples were acting indistinguishably from those who stand outside and opposed to the kingdom (cf. 4:11-12). They not only failed to understand the inadequate faith of the father, which Jesus indicates before healing of the boy, but they also failed to understand the essential place of faith in their own use of delegated authority.<sup>757</sup> This comprises a culpable negation of their mission as disciples, and time is running out to remedy the situation.

The word *genea*. is linked to the past and the people who in this case do not

---

<sup>754</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 50,

<sup>755</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 333.

<sup>756</sup> Explaining the reason of the disciples' incapacity to work the miracle, Matthew directly talks about their unbelief (Mt. 17:20).

<sup>757</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 365.



believe. The people steeped in Jewish tradition would take the pejorative use of “this generation” as typological, as hinting at an analogy between the latter days on the one hand and the day of Noah and of the wilderness (Moses), which came to be reckoned corrupt, and marked by disbelief, and headed for damnation.<sup>758</sup> In Deut 32:20, the generation of the wilderness is called the “faithless generation” (cf. Ps 94:10).<sup>759</sup> Furthermore, the NT elsewhere compares the latter days with the faithless days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-38; Lk. 17:26-27; 1Pe. 3:20). Thus, “this generation” reflects stories of disbelief. So, in 9:19 “this generation,” which has failed to act with faith in Jesus, resembles the generation of the wilderness, which grumbled and disobeyed God’s command despite God’s mighty salvific acts.<sup>760</sup>

Although the disciples had been privileged to be with Jesus and possessed the power of healing (6:13), they had been defeated through unbelief when they stood in his place and sought to exercise his power (9:14-19). Due to their lack of faith and hardness of heart (4:40; 6:50, 52; 8:17-21), the disciples continued to fail to understand the nature of their task and of the relationship to Jesus that they must sustain.<sup>761</sup> The qualitative implication of “unbelieving generation” (9:19) presupposes that the disciples remain indistinguishable from the Jewish religious leaders who demand signs, but are primarily untrue to God (8:12, 38).

On the contrary, Jesus referred to the ‘new generation’ based on faith. The father actually went to Jesus and asked him to heal his boy if he could (9:22). Jesus indicated that the power does not lie with people, but with faith (9:23). When the disciples approached Jesus to know the reason of their failure to exorcise, he typified the new generation (9:28-29). The unbelieving generation tried to work using their own power, while the new generation should trust God in Jesus to provide for their needs (9:29). The disciples did not actually understand what was going on (9:32). Thus, they were actually looking at themselves, and not at God to provide for their needs.

---

<sup>758</sup> See, e.g., *m. Sanh* 10:3; *Mek.* on Exod 15:1; *b. Nid* 61a. Cf. Evald Lövestam. *Jesus and ‘This Generation’: A New Testament Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 11-17.

<sup>759</sup> “A perverse generation (LXX: *genea*), children in whom there is no faithfulness (*pistij*).

<sup>760</sup> D. C. Allison, JR., *The Intertextual Jesus. Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 59; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 366.

<sup>761</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 332.

### 3.2.2.3 The Double Rhetorical Question

Moreover, Jesus' questions, "How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (9:19 εἰς πότε προΐμαμι ἐσόμενός εἰς πότε ἀναξομαι ὑμῶν) emphasize how antithetical unbelief is to Jesus' message and his own faith in God.<sup>762</sup> Jesus expresses in his complaint "the loneliness and the anguish of the one authentic believer in a world which expresses only unbelief."<sup>763</sup>

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus hurls rhetorical questions in pairs, revealing his surprise and aggravation at the disciples' unbelief.<sup>764</sup> The two preliminary questions in 4:13 indicate the fact that the disciples are duplicating the unbelieving incomprehension of the outsiders: "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" In 8:17, Jesus uses the double question in order to indicate the disciples' spiritual ignorance: "Do you still not understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (cf. 7:18). Schenke thinks that the "how long" formulation may by intention, be allusion to the same phrase in Isaiah 6:11, to recall the account of the 'outsiders' in Mark 4:11 which draws on Isaiah 6:10.<sup>765</sup> Indeed the language in 9:19 as a whole calls to mind a complex of negative associations from the OT which are here attributed here, by implication, to the shamed disciples (Deut 32:5, 20; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2; Isa 65:2).<sup>766</sup>

The question "How long shall I stay with you?" predicts the time when Jesus

<sup>762</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 51.

<sup>763</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 332.

<sup>764</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark, as Story*, 49.

<sup>765</sup> Schenke, *Die Wundererzählungen des Markusevangeliums* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974), 322-25; cf. the comment of Isaiah 6:9-10 in this thesis (chapter 2). Isaiah received his fate-laden message: "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:9-10). Their fate has been sealed. There is no escape. The prophet, no doubt out of concern for his people, asked: "How long, O Lord?" (Isa. 6:11) How long must the prophet declare this harsh message and carry out the unhappy task of heightening the spiritual obduracy of God's people? God's answer was that the prophet was so to preach until total destruction and exile had taken place (6:13)—Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 20.

<sup>766</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 221.

would no longer be with his disciples.<sup>767</sup> Implicit in the account is that the disciples are expected to keep away from unbelief.<sup>768</sup> “How long” refers to how little time he has left to remove their unbelief to empower them more fully with the power that can drive out demons.<sup>769</sup> The question “how long shall I put up with you?” is a measure of Jesus’ infinite patience. Unbelief causes Jesus’ distress and even hinders his ministry (cf. 6:5).

#### 3.2.2.4 A Stage of Reciprocal Question and Answer

In Mark 9:28, the disciples asked Jesus why they were unable to cast out the demon. Evidently, they remain unclear on precisely what their shortfall of faith entailed, because they had clearly expected success. In 9:29, Jesus teaches them the fact that the power actually comes from faithful prayer.

The disciples are actually revealing their failure in the house. The disciples’ question is understandable, given the fact that Jesus had earlier given power over unclean spirits (6:7). Their question discloses a primitive misunderstanding deriving from supposition about exorcism in their first-century world. They may have questioned that there was something wrong with their technique that made things go awry. In the ancient world, magicians, sorcerers, and exorcists sought to hit the right mixture of words and actions that would evoke the proper divine power to accomplish the desired effects.<sup>770</sup> They would weave mysterious enchantments employing powerful divine names, carry out mysterious actions, and use special instruments. It was all a matter of technique.

Jesus’ answer to his disciples makes clear that his exorcisms have nothing to do with mysterious tradition, techniques, or chants, but only prayer: “this kind can come out only by prayer” (9:29 *τὸ τοῦ γένους ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ*).<sup>771</sup> Mark intends to refer to prayer in 9:29 to serve as an

<sup>767</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

<sup>768</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

<sup>769</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 364.

<sup>770</sup> John L. Pilch, “Power,” in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, eds. J. Malina & John J. Pilch (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 158-60.

<sup>771</sup> A textual variant adds “and fasting” to the prerequisite of prayer in 9:29. It was weak manuscript support and was added because fasting was an interest of the early church (Acts 13:2; 14:23). “Fasting” was added to prayer in some texts of Acts 10:30 and 1 Cor. 7:5. For two reasons, this understanding does not fit the

interpretative commentary on the charge of faithlessness in 9:19.<sup>772</sup> In Mark 11:23f, faith and prayer form a tight unity.<sup>773</sup> Mark understands prayer as the source of faith's power and the expression of its presence. It is not a particular technique, but the end of all technique (cf. 12:40), since prayer is simply the verbal expression of faith, which looks wholly to God for the release of his power.<sup>774</sup> Therefore, in the exorcism scene, it is not simply a matter of whether Jesus' words are framed as a petition, but whether Mark conceives of his authority to act as being received and exercised in prayerful dependence on God (cf. 1:35; 6:41, 46; 14:32).<sup>775</sup>

In keeping with this, Mark 9:28 indicates that the unbelief of the disciples is their self-confident reliance upon their own strength. So their question sets an emphasis on "we" and betrays the longing to depend on their personal professional skills and power.<sup>776</sup> Basically they have considered their ability to exorcise as their own independent possession rather than an authority delegated by Jesus through prayer. In this episode, the self-confident optimism is in fact faithlessness, since it neglects the prayerful reliance on God. Because their hearts are hardened, they failed to understand that their ability to exorcise was attributed to prayerful dependence on God.

Jesus' insistence on the necessity of prayer points beyond itself to the need for faith, so that the key to driving out this type of demon is the faith that prayer represents.<sup>777</sup> This response contains at least the implicit criticism that the disciples had failed because they had not acted in prayer and sincere faith. Consequently, the disciples, as well as the father of the possessed boy, share in an inadequate faith (cf. 9:23).

Those who belong to the unbelieving generation do not drive out demons. The

---

context: 1) Jesus has already rejected fasting as unsuitable until the bridegroom is taken away (2:18-20); 2) This understanding turns fasting into a work that succeeds in obtaining power from God (Garland, *Mark*, 357).

<sup>772</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 215; Lane, *Mark*, 336; Cranfield, *Mark*, 306.

<sup>773</sup> Marshall, *Faith as Theme*, 222,

<sup>774</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 222.

<sup>775</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 222.

<sup>776</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 358.

<sup>777</sup> See, Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 214-15.

power belongs entirely to God and is awarded by him through a faith of prayer. Therefore, the disciples' faithless attitude brought their failure to cast out evil. Mark does not tell us anything of the father's and the crowd's reaction to the boy's deliverance. Everything focuses on the lesson for the disciples (or Mark's reader).<sup>778</sup> While the exchange with the father emphasizes the importance of faith, the dialogue with the disciples insists on the necessity of prayer (9:29).

Since Jesus did not offer up prayer to exorcise the demon; the prayer that he has in mind is not some magical incantation, but close and enduring relationship with God. Mark hints that Jesus regularly engaged in tense prayer. He went out alone to pray (1:35; 6:45-46), but the disciples interrupted him, because they were preoccupied with their own agenda.<sup>779</sup> The one time he specifically asks them to pray with him they sleep instead (14:37-40). The reader/hearer therefore can learn for the disciples' negative example what happens to those who neglect prayer and faith, and try to operate under their own steam.<sup>780</sup> Jesus' positive example demonstrates that only a life governed by faith and prayer can keep away the threat from the evil spirits.

The reference to prayer in 9:29 does not introduce an entirely new element into the narrative. On the contrary, the rhetorical function of 9:29 is to direct attention back to the instance of the one whose prayer in this story did lead to the demon's expulsion, namely the father of the possessed boy.<sup>781</sup> The central part of the story is devoted to the way Jesus draws out a prayer of faith from the father (9:21-24) because it exemplifies the attitude required of the disciples in their own exercise of healing power,<sup>782</sup> and also the requisite attitude they must seek in those to whom they minister (cf. 6:11). They had failed on both counts (9:18 and

---

<sup>778</sup> The healing miracle of Bartimaeus that occurs during the journey to Jerusalem conveys a lesson for discipleship.

<sup>779</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 357.

<sup>780</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 357. These same disciples ironically have the gall to report to Jesus that they obstructed the successful exorcism of an outsider casting out demons in his name. The reason they did this was because "he was not one of us" (9:38).

<sup>781</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

<sup>782</sup> The fact that the father is set as an example for the disciples is recognized by Kertelge, *Wunder Jesu*, 177; Koch, *Wundererzählungen*, 121; Schenke, *Wundererzählungen*, 327, 345. Cf. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 25-27; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 130, 132-33.

22). The father moves from the defective ‘if you can’-prayer to the prayer of trustful dependence: “I believe, help my unbelief” (9:24 *pisteuwl bohqei mou thl apistia*).<sup>783</sup>

The father’s first plea demonstrates his lack of faith: “But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us” (9:22). The plea contrasts dramatically with the leper who boldly asserted: “if you are willing, you can make me clean” (1:40).<sup>784</sup> In 1:40 the leper had apparently expressed uncertainty over Jesus’ willingness to help (*lean qel hlj*); the father seems to doubt his ability (*ei; ti dunh*).<sup>785</sup> Jesus responds to the leper’s expression of uncertainty with compassion (*spl agcni sqeij*; 1:41), but he responds to the father’s doubting request for compassion (*spl agcni sqeij*; 9:22) with a rebuke. Jesus throws offending words back at the father (9:23).<sup>786</sup> In this way, he emphasizes the presence of doubt in the father’s request. The father is not at all confident that Jesus, despite his remarkable reputation, can do anything to help. The unbelief of the father is easily explained as the result of the disciples’ failure to exorcise the demon in the first place.<sup>787</sup> The father may have reasoned that if Jesus’ disciples could not overwhelm the demon, then perhaps Jesus himself would not be able to either.<sup>788</sup>

In his second cry for help, the father moves from doubt to a faith mixed with unbelief. In response to Jesus’ implicit call for faith, the father cries: “I believe; help my unbelief” (*Pisteuwl bohqei mou thl apistia*, 9:24). The dramatic impact of the faith-confession and its theological depth lies in the fact that it is paired with a simultaneous acknowledgement of unbelief.<sup>789</sup> Elsewhere faith and unbelief appear as mutually exclusive categories (e.g. 4:40; 6:6; 15:32), whereas here they seem to be contemporaneous experiences.<sup>790</sup> How is this to be understood?

This is paradoxical formulation. “A paradox is the offering of a ‘concealed

<sup>783</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

<sup>784</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 367; Garland, *Mark*, 355.

<sup>785</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 367.

<sup>786</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 140.

<sup>787</sup> Witherington III, *Mark*, 267; Hooker, *Mark*, 224.

<sup>788</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 52.

<sup>789</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 120.

<sup>790</sup> Gnlika, *Markus*, II, 50; Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 121; Nineham, *Mark*, 244.

invitation' to perform a 'dance step,' but the dance step often appears at first to be restricted to bouncing back and forth between stark opposites."<sup>791</sup> When the distraught father of the demon-possessed boy says "I believe; help my unbelief," we can only ponder the mysteries of the co-existence of faith and doubt in the father, dancing back and forth between these conflicting but perhaps even mutually dependent opposites. The paradoxical formulation of believing unbelief is certainly not meant to describe the father as double-minded, ambivalent, or still held fast in unbelief.<sup>792</sup> Nor is the second clause to be taken as a correction or a revocation of an over-hasty claim to a faith greater than that he in reality possesses.<sup>793</sup> Nor again is the formula particularly meant to characterize an emergent, weak or immature faith,<sup>794</sup> or a faith about to collapse into unbelief.<sup>795</sup> The formula shows that in the father there is a tension between faith and belief, and that faith can only continue to exist by dint of divine aid.<sup>796</sup>

This does not imply that the presence of unbelief should be accepted with air of resignation.<sup>797</sup> The father pleads for deliverance from his unbelief, and it is this that proves and constitutes his faith.<sup>798</sup> At the same time he recognizes that such deliverance is never definitive but is continually needed. The present imperative *bohgei* in 9:24 contrasts with the aorist imperative *bohghson* in his plea for decisive help for his son (9:22). The aorist imperative has to do with performing an action instantaneously, once for all, especially an action which is not currently being done, while the present imperative has to do with continual, habitual, repeated or ongoing action.<sup>799</sup> Faith is not a secure possession attained once for all, but is ever threatened by the reassertion of unbelief from which the believer needs rescue.<sup>800</sup>

---

<sup>791</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 185.

<sup>792</sup> Achtemeier, "Miracles and Historical Jesus," 480; Gould, *Mark*, 169.

<sup>793</sup> G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 131; Nineham, *Mark*, 244.

<sup>794</sup> Swete, *Mark*, 200; Lane, *Mark*, 334.

<sup>795</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 161; Johnson, *Mark*, 400.

<sup>796</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 121.

<sup>797</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 121.

<sup>798</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 368.

<sup>799</sup> Porter, *Idioms of the Greek*, 53, 225.

<sup>800</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 122. Perceiving that he is not capable of enduring faith, the father does not place his trust in his own capacity to go on trusting and believing, but looks beyond himself to the object of his faith, the

The father's prayer simultaneously confesses confidence in the omnipotence of God's power in Jesus, and a radical lack of confidence in his own subjective ability to maintain faith without external aid.<sup>801</sup> To this attitude the disciples are now summoned, and at the same time reminded that all things are possible to one who believes (9:23).

The dialogue between Jesus and the petitioner in 9:23-24 offers an object lesson for the disciples, who encounter the danger of unbelief, on the importance of full faith in Jesus. This function is confirmed by the final and climatic word in 9:29 that prayer is the means for unbelieving believers to obtain the faith and resources to conduct the required ministry.<sup>802</sup> If we accept that the disciples are the central theme of the passage and its context, we can suppose that the father's phrase "I believe; help my unbelief," presents the position of the unbelieving disciples (as well as that of Mark's community which they represent).<sup>803</sup>

The disciples' unbelief in this story is not the fearful desperation of 4:35-41, but a self-confidence that leads them to fail to exorcise. According to Marshall, "both kinds of unbelief—anxious self-concern and misplaced self-confidence—are inconsistent with the disciples' commitment to trust in Jesus for provision protection and ultimate salvation."<sup>804</sup> When the disciples failed to follow Jesus in accordance with their initial faith commitment, they are indistinguishable from those without faith and hardened in unbelief. For Mark, discipleship evidently involves a continuing struggle for the victory of faith over unbelief.

### 3.2.3 Summary

This episode does not focus so much on Jesus' authority over the demons, but turns our attention to the disciples' unbelief and failure. The disciples' unbelief occurs during Jesus' absence on the Mount of Transfiguration. The disciples' unsuccessful attempt to exorcise a demon from a boy occasioned the discussion

---

power residing in Jesus, for the necessary strength to maintain faith.

<sup>801</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

<sup>802</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

<sup>803</sup> B. F. W. Iersel, *Mark: Reader-Response Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 125.

<sup>804</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.



(9:14). The disciples are described as unable to cast out a demon (9:18), are evaluated as “unbelieving generation” (9:19), and are instructed as to the cause of their failure in 9:28-29.

In their abortive attempt to exorcise the boy, the disciples are acting no differently than those who stand outside and opposed to the kingdom.<sup>805</sup> They not only failed to perceive the inadequate faith of the petitioner, but they also failed to understand the necessity of faith in their own use of delegated authority.

The disciples could exorcise only in personal faith, but during Jesus’ absence their faithless attitude, that is, self-confidence based on past success, had exposed them to failure (9:18). Since the disciples regarded the exorcism almost as a technique learned from him (cf. 9:17-18), they failed to realize the centrality of dependent prayer in deploying Jesus’ delegated power (9:28-29). The misplaced self-confidence is inconsistent with the disciples’ commitment to trust in Jesus for provision, protection and ultimate salvation. When the disciples fail to follow Jesus with their initial faith commitment, they are indistinguishable from the unbelieving generation without faith and hardened in unbelief. In Mark’s evaluation, discipleship evidently involves a continuing struggle for the victory of faith over unbelief.

### **3.3 HARDNESS OF HEART AMONG THE DISCIPLES**

In Mark 6:52 and 8:17-18, Mark uses the language “hardness of heart,” which was applied to the Jewish religious leaders in a hostile meaning, in order to indicate the disciple’ unbelieving attitude. In Mark 3:5, the language identifies the Jewish religious leaders’ conscious refusal to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and his eschatological message (repentance and faith in 1:14-15), and implies God’s impending judgment upon their unbelief. Does then the language ‘hardness of heart’ mean the disciples’ intentional rejection of Jesus and the same judicial implication for them, like the opponents? If not, what is the function of the language in relation to the disciples’ unbelief? The purpose of this section is to analyse the two passages in Mark where the language applies to the

---

<sup>805</sup> Tyson, “The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” 261-68; Hawkin, “The Incomprehension of the Disciples,” 491-500.

disciples in order to understand the function of the language.

### 3.3.1 The Disciples' Hardness of Heart in the Sea-Walking Story (6:45-52)

The disciples' unbelief described in 4:40 appears again in the sea-walking story (6:45-52). This story and the storm-stilling story (4:35-41) are the only two miracles offered in Mark's narrative directly involving the disciples.<sup>806</sup> More remarkably, the disciples are characterized by lack of faith and understanding, which is associated with hardness of their hearts (6:52). Following the first feeding, the disciples are again in the boat like 4:35-41, straining against the wind, and Jesus comes to them, intending to pass them by.<sup>807</sup> When they see him, they become 'terrified,' and the narrator reports that their amazement and fear (unbelief)<sup>808</sup> result from their failure to understand the loaves miracle, a condition brought on by the hardness of their hearts (6:52). At this point, the reader/hearer is likely to be astonished itself, since the disciples are said to display the same condition as that of the authorities (cf. 3:5), whose intentional refusal to believe in Jesus has been declared (3:6).<sup>809</sup> "The audience's reaction to the opposition of the religious authorities moves it to embrace the goals of Jesus, a move whose difficulty (Mark 4) has been ameliorated by the presence of followers who share both the vision and its consequence."<sup>810</sup>

Through the portrayal of the astonishing epiphany of Jesus with the sea-walking miracles, and the disciples' unbelieving reaction to it, the vital message of this story is confirmed.<sup>811</sup> Despite this revelation of Jesus' divine identity and mission, however, the disciples' lack of faith and understanding still remains unresolved in the story because their hearts are hardened (cf. 6:52).<sup>812</sup> This conflict between revelation and lack of faith, which is related with "hardness of heart," continues to escalate up to the end of the storyline of the disciples (cf. 8:14-21; 16: 14).<sup>813</sup>

---

<sup>806</sup> Kelber, "The Blindness of the Disciples," 30-31.

<sup>807</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 268.

<sup>808</sup> In 4:35-41 these concepts are associated with unbelief.

<sup>809</sup> P. Achtemeier, "Toward the Isolation of Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," *JBL* 89 (1970): 267 in 265-91.

<sup>810</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises Conflict in Mark*, 233.

<sup>811</sup> Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 155.

<sup>812</sup> J. F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 338 in 332-43.

<sup>813</sup> J. F. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark," *JETS* 42/1 (1999): 32 in 21-35.

### 3.3.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The disciples had been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for the outsiders everything was in riddles without explanation (4:10-12).<sup>814</sup> Mark 4:13-34 informs us that besides the privileged information which the disciples had received about kingdom, Jesus explained his parables to them in private, presumably because they did not understand the parables and required explanation despite their privileged knowledge.<sup>815</sup> The problem is that the disciples also did not understand and needed help.

The disciples' spiritual ignorance introduced in 4:13 is repeatedly displayed in the three sea-scenes (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21). In 4:35-41, Jesus' stilling of the storm leaves them wondering who he is (4:41), and Jesus suggests that their fear of the storm while in his presence is a sign of their continuing lack of faith (4:40). In 6:45-52, they do not recognize him when they see him walking on the sea and are terrified; and when he identifies himself they are "utterly astonished" (*ἐκίστατο*; 6:51). And lest there be any doubt as to their failure of understanding, Mark concludes the story by telling his readers that the disciples' unbelief, which is demonstrated in their astonishment, was related to their failure to understand what he has done with the loaves in the preceding episode in 6:30-44:<sup>816</sup> their hearts were hardened and therefore they did not understand Jesus' actions in either episode (6:52).

The parallels between the episode of Jesus calming the storm (4:35-41) and the story of the walking on the sea (6:45-52) are prominent: both events occurred in the evening; 4:39 and 6:51 both have *kai. ekopasen o` anemoj* ("and the wind went down"); and both have a reaction of wonder after the calming, along with an indication of unbelief in the midst of the storm itself; in both, Jesus is absent (in the first, he is asleep [4:38]); in the second, he is separated [6:47]); in both, the

---

<sup>814</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 235; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 269; cf. Marcus, "Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology," 559; Bruce Hollenbach, "Lest They Should Turn and be Forgiven: Irony," *The Bible Translator* 34 (1983): 316 in 313-321.

<sup>815</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 107.

<sup>816</sup> Norman R. Petersen, "The Composition of Mark 4:1-8:26," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 205 in 185-217.

disciples are in distress on the sea (4:37; 6:48); in both, Jesus shows his power over the storm (4:39; 6:51); in both, they do not understand his identity (4:41; 6:52).<sup>817</sup> It seems obvious that the evangelist emphasizes the implication of the first story with the second.<sup>818</sup> Mark suggests that the disciples' fear of the storm during his absence is a mark of their continuing lack of faith (4:40). They do not recognize him when they see him walking on the sea and are terrified (6:49-50). Since their hearts were hardened, they did not understand Jesus' actions in either episode (6:52). Thus, they have failed to trust in Jesus in the midst of the storm repeatedly.

Mark emphasizes the connection by recalling the feeding story as the key to understanding this one (cf. 6:52).<sup>819</sup> The disciples have watched Jesus' feeding the crowd and should therefore not be surprised to see him walking on the sea. Jesus has already revealed himself to the disciples as Moses' successor by feeding the crowd, indeed as greater than Moses, since he himself provided the crowd with bread.<sup>820</sup> If he now reveals himself as one who is able to cross the sea, this too would seem to point him out not merely as Moses' successor, but as one who is far greater.<sup>821</sup> The crossing the sea and the gift of Manna are the central miracle in the Exodus story, and it is therefore not surprising to find Mark trying these two miracles of Jesus closely together (cf. Ps. 78:13-25).<sup>822</sup> As Brown says, the Passover Haggadah (*Dayyenu* section) and later rabbinic texts closely connect the gift of Manna with the Israelites' crossing of the sea, so this is a natural connection to make.<sup>823</sup> Since Mark thus ties these two events together, it is likely that he wants his reader to understand them both as complementary revelation of Jesus.<sup>824</sup>

---

<sup>817</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 129.

<sup>818</sup> E. S. Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing in Mark 4-8 Reading and Rereading," *JBL* (1993): 221 in 211-230.

<sup>819</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 107.

<sup>820</sup> L. WM. Countryman, "How Many Baskets Full? Mark 8:14-21 and the Value of Miracles in Mark," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 648 in 643-655.

<sup>821</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 169; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 430.

<sup>822</sup> William Richard Stegner, "Jesus' Walking on the Water: Mark 6:45-52," in *The Gospels and the Scripture of Israel*, eds. C. A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 217.

<sup>823</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 255.

<sup>824</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 103.

### 3.3.1.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief and 'Hardness of Heart'

Through the description of the extraordinary epiphany of Jesus upon the sea and the disciples' terrified reaction to it, the central message of this story is confirmed. Despite this revelation of Jesus' true identity and mission, however, the incomprehension of the disciples still remains unresolved in the story because their hearts are hardened (cf. 6:52). This conflict between revelation and incomprehension by hardness of heart continues to escalate up to the end of the storyline of the disciples (cf. 8:14-21; 16: 14).

#### Narrative Settings Based on Unbelief

The focus of the story now shifts from Jesus to the disciples. By the time evening comes, the boat has reached the middle of the sea, while Jesus is on the dry land, alone (6:47). The settings of this story function not only to provide a cohesive link between other stories of the sea (4:34-41; 8:14-21), but also to stress and highlight the themes of unbelief, which is associated with "hardness of heart," according to the plot. The typological temporal references (evening and night)<sup>825</sup> are set to present the disciples' distress.<sup>826</sup> "The contrast between evening, by which time the boat is already in the middle of the sea, and the fourth watch of the night, which is the last, stresses the force of contrary wind by indicating that the disciples have rowed nearly all night without making much headway."<sup>827</sup> Mark's use of *basanizomenouj* ("suffering") in 6:48 to illustrate the disciples' torment adds to this emphasis.<sup>828</sup> During this time, when the disciples are in the boat on a storm-tossed sea, the disciples are afraid because they fail to believe and understand Jesus' identity as the Son of God; their hearts are hardened (6:52).

Since the words for 'making tortuous progress' and 'rowing'<sup>829</sup> can have nuances of judicial torture (2 Macc 7:13; 4 Macc 6:5; *Mart. Pol.* 2:2) and persecution (Rev.

---

<sup>825</sup> These times are the important temporal setting of the voyage in Mark's story (4:35; 6:47,48), and eschatological time (cf. 13:33-36). Further, these times are related to the passion of Jesus himself (Mark 14-15).

<sup>826</sup> Cf. Joanna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 39 in 32-45.

<sup>827</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 335.

<sup>828</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 335.

<sup>829</sup> The word "rowing" (*el aunein*) can have a nuance of persecution (e.g. Homer *Odyssey* 5.290; Sophocles *Oedipus the King* 28)—H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon with a Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 529.

9:5; 11:10; 12:2), the distress of the Markan disciples at sea would probably remind Mark's community of eschatological affliction and puzzlement they themselves were experiencing in the wake of the persecution.<sup>830</sup> In particular, when Mark's audience read this story, there were in that audience those who may have regarded themselves in the same light as the disciples in the storm-tossed boat.<sup>831</sup> The poetic image of the storm-tossed boat at night, describing a very precarious and threatening situation, reflects the eschatological danger and distress of Mark's audience.<sup>832</sup>

### Jesus' Divine Action and The Disciples' Incomprehension

Jesus came to the disciples across the rough sea, for he had seen his disciples exerting themselves against a strong wind and drove them off their course (6:48). When compared with other gospels, only Mark refers to Jesus' seeing (*idōn*) the disciples in distress.<sup>833</sup> In Mark, Jesus' seeing the disciples in trouble forms a contrastive correspondence to the disciples' seeing (*idontej*; 6:49; *eidon*; 6:50) Jesus walking on the sea.<sup>834</sup> Throughout Mark's Gospel, the author puts particular emphasis on Jesus' 'seeing,' his piercing glance that is especially directed at disciples (1:16, 19; 2:14; 3:34; 8:33; 10:14, 23), potential disciples (10:21; 12:34), and other objects of his compassion (2:5; 5:32; 6:34).<sup>835</sup> In 2:5 and 5:22, 'seeing' has a nuance of supernatural insight, and that is the case in 6:48 as well because of the darkness and the distance between Jesus on the hill and the disciples the midst of the sea. Jesus' miraculous 'telescopic vision' enabling him to see so far away in the dark hours of the fourth watch, draws

<sup>830</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 423, 427.

<sup>831</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 107.

<sup>832</sup> Woodroof, "The Church as Boat in Mark," 242.

<sup>833</sup> E. S. Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark. A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization," *JBL* 108 (1989): 259 in 259-281.

<sup>834</sup> John Paul Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Function of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, and John 6:15b-21*, *Analecta Biblica* 87 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981), 68; Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 212. With auditory language "hearing," the visual language "seeing" is not simply to be taken literally. This language is considered as "grand metaphors" that appears again and again in Mark's narrative-- R. M. Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Direction and Indirection in the Gospel of Mark." *Semeia* 48 (1989): 127. Further, Fowler argues, "Not only are people physically blind, deaf, and mute in the story (e.g., in 7:31-37 and 8:22-26), but Jesus also takes up blindness, deafness, and infelicitous speech as metaphor for the intellectual and spiritual deficiencies of his closest followers (e.g., 4:12; 8:16-21; cf. 6:52)."—*Let the Reader Understand*, 212.

<sup>835</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 423.

attention to the disciples' suffering.<sup>836</sup> By contrast, the disciples are blind so that they misperceive Jesus to be a ghost when they see him. Thus, they fail to believe in Jesus, but rather they are terrified (cf. 6:50).

Jesus goes out to the disciples, walking on the sea, and “wants to pass by them” (6:48). He intended to show himself to let them to know he was with them, revealing his power and protection.<sup>837</sup> To understand the importance of Jesus' walking on the sea, one should consider the traditional meaning of this incident in the OT and Jewish literature. In particular, in the OT this figure is described as a divine epiphany (Job 9:8, 11; 38:16; Ps 77:19).<sup>838</sup> Jesus did not walk on the sea as an entertaining device to amaze his disciples. His action conveys to them and to the audience his identity as Son of God (cf. 1:1, 11). He comes as a divine figure to rescue his distressed disciples.

Furthermore, Mark's explanation of “passing by” (parelqeiñ 6:48)<sup>839</sup> when connected to a divinity, alludes to an epiphany.<sup>840</sup> In Ex. 33:19-34:7, God's appearance to Moses provides a background for the meaning of Jesus “passing by” in his walking on the sea, i.e., epiphany. The text simply uses the language of theophany familiar from the Septuagint (cf. 33:19, 22; arel euşomai). In both Ex. 34:5-6 and Mark 6:48, the “passing by” of God and Jesus completes the three-part delineation of his coming: in Exodus, God descended, stood there with Moses, and passed before him; in Mark Jesus came to the disciples, walking on

---

<sup>836</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 350.

<sup>837</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 90-91.

<sup>838</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 432; Nineham, *Mark*, 180; Kertelge, *Wunder*, 145; Herry Fleddermann, “And He Wanted to Pass by them, (Mark 6:48),” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 393 in 389-395; Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 129. Interestingly, it is Wisdom of whom this ability to walk on sea is predicated in Sir 24:5-6, and it can be said with certainty that the portrayal of Jesus as the incarnation of divine Wisdom is a very early christological move. See. Ben Withering III, *Jesus the Sage* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), *passim*.

<sup>839</sup> In the Septuagint, this verb is used to refer to an epiphany in Gen. 32:31-33 the face of God “passed by” Jacob when he was wrestling with the angel. Job 9:8, 11 reads, “He... treads on the waves of the sea... When he pass me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.” See also Dan 12:1, which refers to the glory of the Lord passing by; Amos 7:8; 8:2 (Garland, *Mark*, 263n 3).

<sup>840</sup> The epiphany in Mark 6:45-52 does not occur on a mountain as a traditional place for encountering but on the deep sea (v. 47).

the sea, and was going to pass by them.<sup>841</sup> In addition, both these are followed by proclamations of identity (Ex. 34:6; Mark 6:50). Thus, after Jesus comes, walking on the sea, he intends to show himself fully to the disciples in his salvific<sup>842</sup> and epiphanic action.

In addition, the OT allusions to a pause or stilling of a storm and to making a way or path in the sea occur in contexts illustrating that they are divine acts of salvation (Ps. 107; Isa 43:16). Qumran 1QH 6:23-24, also shows that the need to make a way on a stormy sea calls for divine intervention:<sup>843</sup>

ותהיי) תי כמלח באוניה בזעף ימים  
[I am] as a sailor in a ship amid furious seas;<sup>844</sup>  
גליהם וכול משבריהם עלי המו  
their waves and all their billows roar against me.  
רוח ערעיים (לאין) דממה להשיב נפש  
[There is no] calm in the whirlwind that I may restore my soul,  
ואין נתיבת לישר דרך על פני מים  
no path that I may straighten my way on the face of the waters.  
ויה תהום לאנחתי ונפשי תגיע עד שערי מות

The deeps resound to my groaning and [my soul has journeyed] to the gates of death.

Jesus is shown to perform a divine action, proper only to God in the OT, in rescuing his disciples by stilling the storm. For the disciples, it comes through the wonderful appearance of Jesus walking—thus making a way or path—on the sea and performing a properly divine saving action.<sup>845</sup> For in the OT, and in some later Jewish texts, it is consistently God (or his wisdom) who walks on the sea and crushes its waves; thus it demonstrates that clearly Jesus is God (see. e.g. Job 9:8; Hab 3:15; Ps. 77:19 Isa. 43:16; 51:9-10; Sir 24:5-6).<sup>846</sup>

<sup>841</sup> Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 69.

<sup>842</sup> A free, but accurate, translation would be: “And he wants to save them.”--Fleddermann, “And He Wants to Pass by Them,” 392 in 389-95. In Mark 6:46-53, the Markan Jesus does not rescue his disciples out of the sea but enables them to continue the voyage.

<sup>843</sup> My dissertation, *Harness of Heart in Mark*, 124-25; cf. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 29.

<sup>844</sup> G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 183.

<sup>845</sup> The Markan Jesus removes the obstacles of the disciples' voyage.

<sup>846</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 432. As Theissen presents, in classical Greek, Hellenistic, and NT narratives, a rescue at sea is accomplished through the epiphany of a god (Homeric Hymns 33:12; Aristedes Hymns to Serapis 33; Acts 5:17-25; 12:3-19)-*The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 101.



Jesus meant to pass by the disciples, but when they saw him walking upon the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified (6:49). Unfortunately, instead of strengthening their faith, Jesus' action instilled unbelieving fear. They thought Jesus was a phantasm, a ghost, perhaps even a sea demon, since it was believed that demons dwelt in such places.<sup>847</sup>

The word φόβηται ("fear"), throughout Mark's Gospel, is related to the disciples' unbelieving reaction.<sup>848</sup> The disciples were afraid when confronted with Jesus' divine power to calm the water (4:41). They also were filled with fear when they saw Jesus' walking on the sea (6:50) and he appeared transfigured (9:6). Their fear in following Jesus to Jerusalem is a sign of their unbelief and incomprehension (9:32; 10:32). Just as the disciples failed when they beat a retreat at Jesus' arrest (14:50-52), followed him from a distance (14:54), and denied him before others (14:66-72), so the women failed by standing at a distance during his crucifixion (15:40), and now they fail again as they flee from the tomb and say nothing to anyone. Although in 16:8 the women are commanded to tell the disciples the message of the resurrection and the promise, they say nothing to anyone because of fear (ἐφόβηθησαν).<sup>849</sup> The women's fear can be interpreted as an unbelieving reaction.

All of them saw Jesus and were deeply troubled. Jesus walks on the sea like God and speaks to them like the true God: "It is I (ἐγώ, εἰμι).<sup>850</sup> Don't be afraid" (6:50 μή φοβείσθε). As Lane indicates, in the OT texts (Pss 115:9; 118:5; Isa. 41:4, 13; 43: 1; 44:2; 51:9), such words coupled with an exhortation to take heart or have no fear appear to make up a formula of divine self-revelation.<sup>851</sup> The Greek ἐγώ, εἰμι means, literally, 'I am,' by which God reveals himself at the burning bush (Ex.

<sup>847</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 221; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 236.

<sup>848</sup> P. J. Achtemeier, "Mark as Interpreter of the Jesus Traditions," *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 344 in 339-352.

<sup>849</sup> A. T. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure in Mark 16:7, 8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 289 in 283-300.

<sup>850</sup> See. Ex. 3:14; Deut. 32:39; Pss 115:9; 128:5-6; Isa. 41:2-14; 43:1-13; 44:1-5; 46:4; 48: 12; 51:9-16; 52:6; John 8:58. These words are used elsewhere in Mark's Gospel only twice. In 13:6 as the claim of false christs, and in 14:62 as the answer of Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders.

<sup>851</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 236; Hurtado, *Mark*, 103; Hooker, *Mark*, 170.

3:14).<sup>852</sup> Jesus not only demonstrates that he has control over the sea, just as God does in the OT (e.g., Gen 1:2; Ex. 14:21-32; Pss 77:19; 107: 28-29), but even identifies himself before the disciples using God's name as he does in 14:62 where the high priest accuses him of blasphemy.<sup>853</sup> It is likely that Mark's reader was intended to catch the allusion to these OT passages in Jesus' words and see the point that Jesus is speaking the way God does.

The story of the stilling of the storm (4:35-41) concluded with the disciples' question: "Who is this that the wind and the sea obey him?" This story in chapter 6 answers the question with the epiphanic appearance of Jesus and his 'I am.'<sup>854</sup> However, the response of the disciples is astonishment (6:49-50). Isaiah 43:1-13 is important as backdrop for Jesus' self-identification "I am here."<sup>855</sup>

You are my witnesses, says the LORD,  
and my servant whom I have chosen,  
so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.  
Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.  
I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour (43:10-11 NRSV).

The self-identification is the answer to the disciples' question in 4:41, "Who is this?"<sup>856</sup> Jesus is the God who needs only say "It is I." According to Mark, Jesus is the Son of God (1:1), the one who can even take upon himself the very essence of God in the divine name, 'I am.' Jesus wished to pass the disciples by for their own benefit, to give them a full revelation of his identity, he cannot do so because of their unbelief and hardness of heart (vv. 49, 52).<sup>857</sup>

The cause of the disciples' distress on the sea, namely the contrary wind, is removed as soon as Jesus enters the boat (6:51a). Jesus' presence removes the storm as the disciples' obstacle, and he delivers them safely to the shore (v. 53). Not only does Jesus rescue the disciples from the storm, but he also helps them to finish their voyage.<sup>858</sup> But, instead of worshiping and confessing the divine

<sup>852</sup> Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 219; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 222.

<sup>853</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 198; Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 220, 222.

<sup>854</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 273.

<sup>855</sup> J. R. Donahue, "Jesus as the Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark," *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 373 in 369-386.

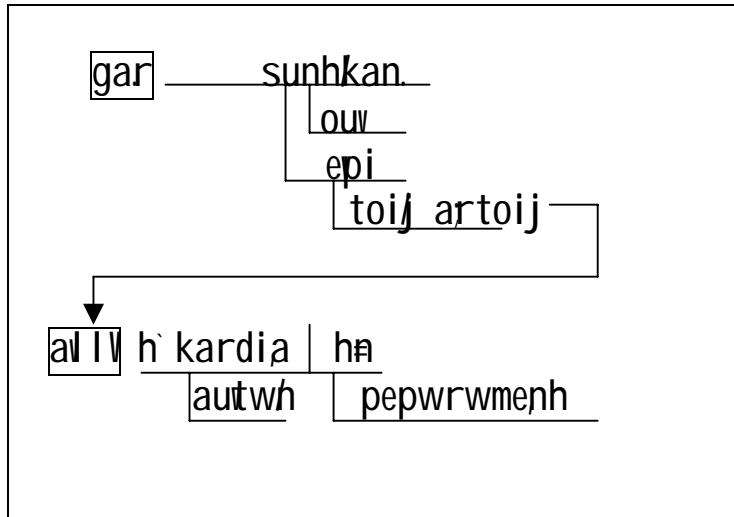
<sup>856</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 351.

<sup>857</sup> Fleddermann, "Passed by Them," 394.

<sup>858</sup> E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield:

character of Jesus, the disciples “were utterly astounded within themselves, for they did not understand on the basis of the loaves, on the contrary, their hearts were hardened” (6:51b-52).<sup>859</sup>

The Syntactic Analysis of 6:52



The explanatory clause *gar* in 6:52, which is used to interject the narrator’s commentary into the narrative, provides the readers with the crucial interpretive either clue or key to understanding the disciples’ faithless reactions preceding it.<sup>860</sup> Some scholars have thought that *gar* in 6:52 is used to introduce an explanation of the preceding phrase (6:51).<sup>861</sup> They do not even consider that there might be other possibilities. In a number of cases Mark uses *gar* as the beginning of a parenthetical statement, where he gives his personal explanation for what he has been recounted (cf. 1:16-17; 5:42; 11:13).<sup>862</sup> According to this

Sheffield Academy, 1981), 232.

<sup>859</sup> Matthew’s description (14:22-27) does not mention the disciples’ hardness of heart. Luke does not relate the story, but John does (6:16-21). Like Matthew, John does not refer to the disciples’ hardness of heart.

<sup>860</sup> R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Story in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico: Scholar Press, 1981), 164. The examples of the explanatory *gar* clause in Mark are found in: 1:16, 22; 2:15; 3:10, 21; 5:8, 28, 42; 6:14, 17, 18, 20, 31, 48, 50, 52; 7:3; 9:6, 31, 34; 10:22, 45; 11:13, 18, 32; 12:12; 14:2, 40, 56; 15:10; 16:4, 8.

<sup>861</sup> Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, 49; Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 127; Schenke, *Wundererzählungen*, 241.

<sup>862</sup> C. H. Bird, “Some *gar* Clauses in St. Mark’s Gospel,” *JTS* 4 (1953); 171-87; A. T. Robinson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1190, where he argues that sometimes the explanation *gar* may introduce can come in by way of an appendix

principle, Dwyer has argued that Mark 6:52 may contain more of a commentary on the unbelieving attitude of the disciples in the entire pericope than the reason for the amazement in 6:51b.<sup>863</sup>

Furthermore, Magness has argued that in 6:52 Mark may intend to connect the misunderstanding with the failure of perceiving during the storm, rather than a failure to appreciate the miracle and reverence the miracle-worker after the storm.<sup>864</sup> However, if 6:52 is an explanation for what he has recounted in the whole episode, it may contain even the amazement of the disciples in 6:51. Thus, we can believe that the amazement in v. 51 is an expression of unbelief when understood in connection with v. 52.<sup>865</sup> Therefore, I would conclude that Mark 6:52 gives a reason of the lack of recognition regarding Jesus and failure to act in faith during the storm, and after the storm. Mark comments that the disciples' unfaithful response in the whole pericope is, *because* (γαρ) they have not understood about the bread; their hearts are hardened.

#### *Failure to perceive the Shepherd Messiah*

Mark 6:52 implies that the disciples' lack of perception and understanding in the sea-walking story is connected to their lack of perception and understanding in the feeding story of 6:30-44 (cf. 6:52). Jesus has taken his disciples, recently returned from their missionary journey (6:12-13, 30), into the wilderness to rest. However, a crowd pursues them and so, like a shepherd, he teaches the vast crowd which is compared to sheep without a shepherd. Mark describes here in a narrative comment a scenario which only the reader is aware of:<sup>866</sup> "As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (6:34).<sup>867</sup> At the outset of the narrative, Mark describes Jesus as a shepherd and

---

to the train of thought (Mt. 4:18; Mk. 2:15; Rom. 7:2).

<sup>863</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 133.

<sup>864</sup> J. L. Magness, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1986), 97.

<sup>865</sup> P. Sellew, "Composition of Didactic Scenes in Mark's Gospel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 624 in 613-634.

<sup>866</sup> F. J. Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession (Mark 6:14-8:30)," *Biblica* 70 (1989): 153-172, esp. 163.

<sup>867</sup> Mark's particular note "He began to teach them" was said to indicate that Jesus was the Teacher of Wisdom, the One who brought the hearer certain

the crowd as “sheep without a shepherd” - an important allusion to several OT texts (Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Ezek 34:8; Zech 10:2). By providing food for the crowd, Jesus shows himself to be God’s promised “servant David...(who) shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezek 34:23).<sup>868</sup> The feeding of the five thousand should have demonstrated to the disciples that Jesus is the Shepherd Messiah.

Mark’s linking of the feeding miracle with the Shepherd Messiah coheres with the circle of ideas found in some traditions where the Messiah (Anointed One) was connected explicitly with the repetition of the provision of Manna (2 Bar, 29:3; cf. 6:5-15).<sup>869</sup> Along similar lines, the people mentioned in Mark 6 are not unlike those imagined by the Qumran covenanters as they waited for, and anticipated eating with the Messiah of Israel (1QS 2:11-22).<sup>870</sup> As a result, as most commentators agree, Mark’s Jesus is revealed by the feedings as Israel’s messianic Shepherd (*Pss. Sol.* 17:40; Jn. 6:15). If so, it appears that for Mark, the feedings were the clearest signs that Jesus is the Messiah, at least.

Nevertheless, the disciples show their obtuseness in the brusque manner: they order Jesus to send away the crowd when evening approaches (6:35-37). He responds, “You give them something to eat” (6:37a *δοτε αυτοις τι φαγειν*). They answer, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?” (6:37b *απελqontej αγορασωμεν δηναρικων διακοσιων αρτου και δωσωμεν αυτοις φαγειν*). Several scholars view the reaction of the disciples as part of Mark’s unbelief and misunderstanding motif.<sup>871</sup> Although there

---

wisdom and the message of the power of God (cf. 4Q185)-G. Vermes. *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 59. As the Wisdom Teacher, Jesus brings the certain message of the presence of God’s Kingdom (Guelich, *Mark*, 340). Jesus’ wisdom teaching takes parables in order to invites the hearer to enter the world of the parable to see differently in light of the parable. Thus, if the hearer does not have spiritual eyes, he is unable to accept Jesus’ identity and to understand his teachings. The hearer will have problems with his faith.

<sup>868</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 344.

<sup>869</sup> P. E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 232-33.

<sup>870</sup> Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, 179.

<sup>871</sup> R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 118. He argues, “The disciples’ possession of bread and money in 6:37-38, after having been expressly ordered

is no indication in 6:30-44 that they do not comprehend Jesus' identity in the feeding action, Mark describes explicitly their lack of understanding and hardened hearts in a somewhat conspicuous parenthetical comment in 6:52.<sup>872</sup> Thus, if they had recognized the truth, they might have understood Jesus' identity and acted in faith when he revealed himself walking on the sea. But because the hearts of the disciples are hardened, they did not perceive the importance of the feeding (6:52), and Jesus' identity. Thus, they fail to exercise faith.

Then, what is the cause of this incomprehension and unbelief? Mark's comment in 6:52 provides an answer. It proposes that the root cause of the disciples' lack of faith is 'hardness of heart' (ἡ καρδιά πεπρωμένη). The disciples did not perceive the significance of the feeding miracle because their hearts were hardened. And because they did not understand the significance of the feeding miracle, they did not recognize Jesus and act with faith when he manifested himself to them on the sea. The phrase 'hardness of heart' echoes the religious leaders' hardness of heart in 3:5. Now we see that the disciples are becoming more like the religious leaders. The verb πωροῶ ("to harden") is merely the verbal equivalent of the nominal πωρῶσις ("hardness") in the earlier passage. Yet, at least in the case of the religious leaders, their hostility seems to be of their own agency.<sup>873</sup> On the contrary, in the case of the disciples, the passive form of the verb πεπρωμένη ("hardened") indicates that they are powerless to do anything to relieve their obduracy.<sup>874</sup> The disciples should not simply be equated with the Pharisees and Herodians who have plotted to destroy Jesus (3:6).

### *The Disciples' Hardness of Heart*

In 6:45-52, "Jesus' disciples not only appear thick-headed, hard-hearted, faithless,

---

not to carry such, is yet another indication of the failure of their mission. Whatever they may have in common with Jesus and his mission, they are ultimately callous to his wishes and blind to the significance of his teaching and mighty deeds." See, Gnllka, *Markus*, 260; Schweizer, *The Good News*, 138; Taylor, *Mark*, 323. When the text is compared to the parallels in Matt. 14:17 ("We have only five loaves here and two fish"), and Luke 9:13 ("We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people"), it appears more disrespectful.

<sup>872</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 95; Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 156-57.

<sup>873</sup> Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 105.

<sup>874</sup> Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 157.

and fearful, like Israel in the wilderness, but also are drawing closer to the image of Israel's hard-hearted opponent, Pharaoh."<sup>875</sup> Through the language, Mark describes that the disciples are drawing closer to the Jewish religious leaders' unbelieving attitudes than Jesus in their life stance.<sup>876</sup> The language "hardness of heart" is used to warn the disciples to keep away from falling into the same rejection as the opponents and to encourage their faithfulness. According to this literary approach, Mark uses the disciples' 'hardness of heart' as an implicit appeal for the readers to succeed where the disciples fail to believe in Jesus.

The concept 'hardness of heart' means the unbelief and incomprehension of the opponents and the disciples. But, the difference between them and the opponents is significant. With regard to the opponents' unbelief (conscious rejection), the language 'hardness of heart' is "a hostility to Jesus which puts ritual correctness above doing good and saving life (3:1-6)."<sup>877</sup> While the disciples may be confused, they are not Jesus' adversaries. In 6:52, Mark shows the disciples as drawing closer to Jesus' opponents in blindness and unbelief, than to him in belief.

When Mark speaks of the disciples' hardness of heart, he is not pointing to a moral failure on their part over which they have full control.<sup>878</sup> Nor is he suggesting that hardness of heart can be overcome by simply trying harder. "Hardness of heart is a situation in which human beings find themselves in the face of God's revelatory action if God does not provide assistance to comprehend it."<sup>879</sup> Thus, hardness of heart clarifies the disciples' failure to perceive the significance of the feeding miracles, and their failure to recognize Jesus and exercise faith when he comes to them on the water.<sup>880</sup> It also emphasizes the

---

<sup>875</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 434.

<sup>876</sup> Outside of Mark's Gospel there are five references to hardness of heart in the NT (John 12:40; Rom 11:7; 11:25; 2 Cor 3:14; Eph 4:18). In all of these texts, the language is used in order to indicate the unbelieving actions of the people.

<sup>877</sup> Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, 118. In 12:12 the opponents already knew that Jesus had spoken the parable of the wicked tenants against them. Nevertheless, they refuse to accept the warning and repent their sins.

<sup>878</sup> Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 331.

<sup>879</sup> Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 158-59.

<sup>880</sup> Cf. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 170-75. Hardness of heart was the language used by the biblical authors to depict resistance which prevented the signs from achieving their assigned task.

mystery of Jesus' identity and the disciples' need of further divine assistance.<sup>881</sup> The promise of Jesus in 14:27-28 provides a hint regarding the removal of the disciples' hardened hearts and unbelief. We will deal with this problem in the next section of this dissertation.

According to Mark, their lack of faith keeps them from comprehending the meaning of the feeding miracle (6:52), which in turn leaves them terrified when Jesus walks on the sea. Their fear and concern about themselves on the seas and in the wilderness narrow their focus, so they cannot see what is really happening.<sup>882</sup> As a result, the reason for their failure of faith is that they still have not understood the unique identity of Jesus. They see the breaking-in of the rule of God over the threats of an unruly creation or watery chaos as Jesus exercises authority, which God possessed in the OT.<sup>883</sup> The disciples' unbelief, which is aligned to fear, comes when this fact is not understood, as a result of hardened hearts. The disciples' characterization, which is their failure to believe and understand by their hardened hearts, challenges the reader with the full demands and reality of discipleship.<sup>884</sup>

### **3.3.2 Jesus' Rebuke for the Disciples' Hardness of Heart (8:14-21)**

The disciples had been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for the outsiders everything was in parables without explanation (4:10-12). Nevertheless, Jesus explained his parables to them in private, presumably because they did not understand the parables and required further explanation despite their privileged information. Despite his continual teachings and miracles, the disciples' unbelieving behaviour still remains unresolved in this story because their hearts are hardened (cf. 6:52). The disciples' lack of faith associated with 'hardness of

---

<sup>881</sup> D. A. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 55-56. He argues, "In the Ancient world 'misunderstanding' was understood as a characteristic human response to divine revelation.... In the Gospels, the ignorance and fear of those in contact with Jesus are literary devices emphasizing the revelatory character of his words and the supernatural power evident in his deeds." Cf. Robinson, *Jesus the Teacher*, 167-68.

<sup>882</sup> Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciple in Mark," 263.

<sup>883</sup> Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 134.

<sup>884</sup> When Mark's audience read this story, there were likely those among them who may have regarded themselves in the same light as the disciples: afraid, unfaithful, and incomprehension because of hardness of heart. The characteristic of Jesus, who removes the storm as the disciples' obstacle and delivers them safely to the shore, comforts and encourages the readers, who fear a dangerous situation.



heart' continues to escalate up to the end of the storyline of the disciples (cf. 8:14-21; cf. 6:14).

After the two miracles of the feeding, Jesus returns by boat, with his disciples, to Dalmanutha (8:10). There the Pharisees seek a sign (8:11-12), despite what Jesus has shown them in several miracles, to which they are seemingly oblivious. Jesus and the disciples depart by boat to the district of Dalmanutha (8:10). In the boat, the disciples only have a single loaf of bread with them (8:14). When Jesus warns them against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15), they misunderstand; they think that he is referring to the fact that they only have a single loaf of bread with them (8:16). They failed to exercise faith, and were worried about the fact that they had insufficient bread because they did not perceive the significance of the second feeding miracle in 8:1-10.<sup>885</sup> There follows a conversation in which Jesus exposes the disciples' incomprehension and unbelief with a series, of rhetorical questions (8:17-20). Finally, Jesus asks whether this dialogue has left them still blind (8:21). As a result, this passage functions as the climax of the boat scenes illustrating the theme of the disciples' unbelief, which is associated with the language 'hardness of heart.'

### 3.3.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

This pericope is the third and last in a series of boat stories (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21), which have stressed the disciples' fear, lack of faith, and anxious self-concern, associating these with lack of understanding.<sup>886</sup> The first two stories are structurally similar, and one may have been modelled on the other.<sup>887</sup> In the first scene (4:35-41), Jesus calmed the sea and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. Their fear of the storm shifted to wonder about Jesus: Who is this one who can still storms? (4:41).<sup>888</sup> In the second boat scene, they are terrified, this time when Jesus comes to them walking on the waves. Mark explains their fear with the comment that "they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened" (6:52).

---

<sup>885</sup> D. J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Maracan Redaction," *JBL* 91 (1972): 495 in 491-500.

<sup>886</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 121; Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 148.

<sup>887</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 100-105.

<sup>888</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 309.

The third boat scene, as a climax to all the boat scenes, recapitulates the vital themes in the previous scenes (8:14-21).<sup>889</sup> In them, the disciples once again show their faithlessness and blindness, and the ‘hardening’ language of his rebuke, underscores their lack of faith and understanding. When Jesus warns the disciples against the leaven of Pharisees and Herod, they worry about a lack of provisions.<sup>890</sup> They do not recall the fact that Jesus had miraculously fed the crowd, and fail, therefore, to have faith in his ability to meet their needs.<sup>891</sup>

There is a parallel of affinity between 4:1-10 and 8:1-21. In Mark 8, Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees who demand a sign from heaven another sign. In Mark 4, he rejects the demand to give the outsiders the secret of the kingdom. At this point, 8:1-21 exhorts the disciples to understand the true identity of Jesus in the two feeding miracles, while 4:1-20 instructs them how to understand the parables.<sup>892</sup> Hence, the passages focus on epistemology; how the people can understand Jesus’ words and deeds. To understand and believe the secret of the kingdom in Jesus’ message, and to see and believe the kingdom in Jesus’ miracles, the disciples need ears to hear, eyes to see, and opened hearts, i.e. spiritual perceptiveness.

### Kai - Structure

The structure of this passage itself is indicated clearly in the text: the author places each new element apart by the conjunction *kai*, and a verb of speech.<sup>893</sup> By contrast, when the author does not want to designate a new structural element by ‘a change of speaker,’ “he uses asyndeton (*legousin* v. 19), or leaves the shift speaker to the reader’s intuition (beginning of v. 20).”<sup>894</sup> Thus the author’s signals give his readers a five-fold division of this passage:

v. 14 the narrative setting (*Kai. epelagonto ...*)

---

<sup>889</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 193.

<sup>890</sup> Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 121.

<sup>891</sup> J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: 1983), 74; Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark*, 232, 234.

<sup>892</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 314.

<sup>893</sup> L. W. M. Countryman, “How many Baskets Full? Mark 8:14-21 and the Value of Miracles in Mark,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 645 in 643-655.

<sup>894</sup> Countryman, “How many Baskets Full?” 645-46.

- v. 15 Jesus' warning about the 'leaven' of Pharisees and Herod (kai. dieste| | etonto...)
- v. 16 the disciples' incomprehension (kai. diel ogizonto ...)
- vv. 17-20 Jesus' dialogue with the disciples (kai. gnouj | egei autoi|j ...)
- v. 21 the concluding question (kai. e| egen ...) <sup>895</sup>

In this outline, it is notable that by far the greatest space is allotted to the conversation between them (vv. 17-20), which makes up about half of the whole passage.<sup>896</sup> It is likely that this is a section where Mark particularly wants the readers to concentrate their attention. Two themes are central here: one, the disciples' hardness; two, their failure to understand what Jesus has said to them and act in faith. Their best chance of understanding will come from paying careful attention to the detail of the two miracles of the feeding.

### 3.3.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief and 'Hardness of Heart'

This episode initiates with the statement that the disciples had forgotten to take "loaves" with them in the boat (8:14-15). The reference to the disciples' forgetting to bring bread (8:14) might recall the previous feeding miracle. At the second feeding (8:1-13), the disciples behave as if they had never been present at the first. Apparently, they do not believe that Jesus can perform the same feat again. They do not perceive Jesus' miraculous powers because of their lack of faith, which is a problem noted as early as the stilling of the storm (4:40). On the other hand, lack of faith, which they exemplify, is the reason why the miracles are in decline. Lack of faith is a barrier to miracles.<sup>897</sup> When the disciples feared during the storm, Jesus reproached them with the words, "Do you not yet have faith?" (4:40). When he visited to his own hometown, Jesus could act no miracle there, except that he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them. He was amazed on account of their lack of faith (6:5-6). The angry words between Jesus and the father of the epileptic boy (9:22-24) hinged on the issue of the father's lack of faith, so that he finally cried out paradoxically, "I believe; help my unbelief." Only then did Jesus exorcise his son.

### The Leaven of the Pharisees and The Leaven of Herod.

---

<sup>895</sup> Countryman, "How many Baskets Full?" 645-46.

<sup>896</sup> Quesnell, *Mind of Mark*, 108-10.

<sup>897</sup> Countryman, "How Many Baskets Full," 652.

Jesus' saying in 8:15 warns the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.<sup>898</sup> Leaven is used metaphorically in a number of ways. Leaven was to be maintained by keeping a small portion of leavened dough on hand in the household so that, when placed in a new batch of dough, it would leaven the whole for baking (e.g., Matt 13:33).<sup>899</sup> Its property of gradually pervading the dough serves as a negative here (e.g. 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:9) though more often as a positive (e.g. Matt 13:33; Luke 13:31).<sup>900</sup> Leaven was a common metaphor in various contexts for a corrupting element (Matt 16:6, 11, 12; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6, 7, 8<sup>901</sup>; Gal 5:9; in Greco-Roman authors such as Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 109, and Persius, *Satires*, 1. 24).<sup>902</sup> Its main metaphorical force in the NT seems to be in terms of powerful growth and influence. Here Jesus seems to be referring to the subtle corrupting influence of the Pharisees and Herod.<sup>903</sup> Jesus indicates that the influence of the Jewish religious leaders' unbelief, which is caused by their hardened hearts, penetrates in the lives of the disciples.

Luke sets this allusion to 'leaven' within the travel section (Lk. 9:51-19:28) of his gospel, and an explanation is given: the leaven of the Pharisees is their hypocrisy (12:1).<sup>904</sup> The disciples in Matthew come to understand that the leaven represents the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:12).<sup>905</sup> What is

---

<sup>898</sup> An intriguing parallel to the warning against "the leaven of Herod" is provided by the late Targum 2 to Esth 3:8 "Just as we remove the leaven, so may the evil rule be removed from us, and may we be freed from this foolish king" (H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 129).

<sup>899</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 131-32.

<sup>900</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 422; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 316; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 238.

<sup>901</sup> According to Jeremias, in the NT itself, 1 Cor 5:6-8 probably incorporates a tradition from a Jewish Christian Passover Haggadah in which leaven and its removal at Passover were symbols of the corruption of the last days and of God's final deliverance of his people from this corruption through Jesus, the Passover lamb (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966], 59-60).

<sup>902</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 252; Lane, *Mark*, 280; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 236.

<sup>903</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 237.

<sup>904</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 194; Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 507; cf. D. P. Moessner, "The Leaven of the Pharisees and this Generation: Israel's Rejection of Jesus according to Luke," *JSNT* 34 (1988): 21-46.

<sup>905</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 507; Hurtado, *Mark*, 126; Hooker, *St Mark*, 194; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 237; Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 422.

the leaven of the Pharisees in Mark?<sup>906</sup> Mark does not give an exact answer to the question. However, we are able to assume its meaning through examination of its wider and narrow contexts. In Mark's Gospel, the Pharisees are described not primarily as false teachers, but as those who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and has the power to speak and act for God (e.g., 2:1-3:6; 3:22-30).<sup>907</sup> When the Pharisees and Herodians witnessed the healing of the man with the withered arm, they refused to believe Jesus' identity in the miracle, but rather to plot against Jesus' life (3:6).<sup>908</sup> The same remarkable combination takes place in 12:13, where again Pharisees and Herodians join forces in trying to trick Jesus. The unbelieving attitude of Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus is therefore consistently one of hostility.<sup>909</sup> Moreover, the warning against the 'leaven' reflects back on the Pharisees' request for a sign in 8:11-13, which in turn must be read in the light of the feeding miracle in 8:1-10.<sup>910</sup> The Pharisees had asked for a "sign from heaven" (8:12b) despite having experienced the feeding miracle (8:1-9). They had failed to recognize Jesus' ministry, but sought a confirming indication from God to validate his ministry.<sup>911</sup> They witness miracles but remain in an unbelieving position. Jesus rejects their demand: "No sign will be given to this generation" (8:12).

Moreover, in 7:1-23 Jesus accuses the Pharisees of leaving "the commandment of God" and holding fast "the tradition of men." Beyond this, we should simply note that the Pharisees, who have seen and objected to the practices of the disciples with regard to ritual, are accused of following the tradition of men rather than the commandment of God (7:1-13).<sup>912</sup> Then, Jesus summons the people to hear and to understand (7:15-17), although they cannot understand. So, the

---

<sup>906</sup> McCombie, argues that the significance of "leaven" here is that it permeates and transforms, not that it is necessarily impure ("Jesus and the Leaven of Salvation," *New Blackfriars* 59 [1978]: 450-42).

<sup>907</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 126; cf. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 122.

<sup>908</sup> According to some commentators, it represents the common but disparate nationalism that hoped for a unified nation under a revolutionary messiah (Pharisees) or consolidation of power (Herod Antipas). Accordingly, Jesus warned his disciples against a false messianic hope and/or a narrow nationalism (Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 157; G. H. Boobyer, "The Miracles of the Loaves and Gentiles in St. Mark," *SJT* 6 [1953]: 77-87; Ernst, *Johannes*, 2260).

<sup>909</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

<sup>910</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 131-32.

<sup>911</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423.

<sup>912</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 122.

disciples privately ask Jesus about his parable to the people. In his response, Jesus first says, “Then are you also without understanding?” and then, “Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him...” (7:17-23). As a result, the Pharisees understand in terms of the traditions of men (unbelief), the people only hear Jesus’ parable, and the disciples do not understand it. All of them understand only in human terms, not God’s, or Jesus’.

Herod, too, is described as having a hostile interest in Jesus (6:14-16). In Herod’s response both to the Baptist and to the miracle-working Jesus of whom he is aware, though he may not observe the miracles (6:14-16), Herod is an exact counterpart to the Pharisees.<sup>913</sup> Like them, he was impressed with the miracle-working of Jesus (6:14); like them he does not understand Jesus’ divine power in the miracles (6:14); like them he refused to repent of the evil of his ways in the face of clear instruction (6:18); like them he would rather have God’s messenger killed, than that he look foolish and lose authority in the eyes of others.<sup>914</sup> When Herod himself heard of Jesus, he was moved not to faith, but to unbelieving fear and enmity.<sup>915</sup> Herod and the people did not understand and believe in Jesus’ divine identity demonstrated by his miraculous deeds. In short, Herod was just like the Pharisees in that miracles were to no effect in leading to understanding faith or repentance.

On this interpretation, the ‘leaven’ of the Pharisees and of Herod (zumhj twh Farisaiwn kai. thj zumhj -Hrwpdou) represent their refusal to accept the messianic implication of Jesus’ mighty actions, which have been clearly demonstrated in 8:11-13.<sup>916</sup> The applicability of this image to our passage is confirmed by the continuation, in which the ‘leaven’ is associated with a hardened heart (8:17).<sup>917</sup> Accordingly, Jesus warns his disciples against the ‘leaven’ of both since it leads to unbelief in his deeds and a concomitant failure to recognize who he really is.<sup>918</sup> In 8:15, the disciples are being warned lest they follow along the

<sup>913</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423.

<sup>914</sup> Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>915</sup> Petersen, “The Composition of Mark,” 209-10.

<sup>916</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423-34; Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark*, 254-55.

<sup>917</sup> Bennett, “The Herodians of Mark’s Gospel,” 234.

<sup>918</sup> Mary Ann. Beavis, *Mark’s Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark*

same path. The way to avoid that disaster is to allow their eyes and ears to be opened that they might not only remember, but also understand.<sup>919</sup>

### *The Disciples' Failure to Understand*

In spite of Jesus' warning concerning the unbelief of the Pharisees and Herod, the disciples do not understand that Jesus was not really talking about literal loaves. Instead, they continued discussing (*dielogizonto*)<sup>920</sup> with one another why they had no bread (8:16).<sup>921</sup> The lack of bread is simply not the issue. What is of concern is the disciples' failure to understand the point of the 'leaven' metaphor. After seeing two miraculous feedings, they are still concerned about whether they have enough food with them. They do not understand the meaning of Jesus' warning.

The disciples' failure to understand is characteristic of a thorough-going condition, which has been evident since the first mention of their lack of understanding, (4:13) in which they failed to understand the parable of the soils and seed. Hence, the final question is that "Do you still not understand?" Just as Jesus had earlier grieved over the disciples' lack of understanding the parable (4:13), so here he is amazed at their inability to understand his warning about the leaven of Pharisees and Herod.<sup>922</sup>

The disciples fail to understand what Jesus was saying about the leaven. It is not surprising that the disciples do not perceive Jesus' identity in the first feeding, but when the very same situation repeats,<sup>923</sup> their worry about the feeding suggests (8:1-10) "a perverse blindness that must disturb the reader."<sup>924</sup> Now when Jesus issues a warning concerning 'the leaven of Pharisees and the leaven of Herod,' i.e., their 'unbelief,' the disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying. Instead,

---

4:11-12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 111.

<sup>919</sup> Geddert, *Watchwords*, 70.

<sup>920</sup> This word renders the imperfect as durative action implying that the disciples simply ignored Jesus' warning in their concern about not having bread (Taylor, *Mark*, 366).

<sup>921</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 126.

<sup>922</sup> Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 227.

<sup>923</sup> Mark presents the feeding as two consecutive events, not two versions of the same event (cf. 8:19-20).

<sup>924</sup> Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 147.

the disciples concern themselves about not having bread (8:16). Jesus warns the disciples to avoid the negative example of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15), and demands that they recognize the significance of the feeding miracles with spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>925</sup> Nevertheless, they do not understand Jesus' identity in the feeding and so they fail constantly to have faith. The statement of the disciples in 8:16 provides a basis for their failure to trust in Jesus' divine origin. This description emphasizes a perverse faithlessness among the disciples.

The disciples have shown repeatedly their spiritual ignorance (4:13; 6:52; 7:18), and the rebuke is therefore appropriate: their hearts, like those of the Pharisees (3:5), appear to be hardened.<sup>926</sup> The disciples' spiritual unawareness brought on Jesus' stern rebuke of them in 8:17-18: "Why are you talking (dialogizesqe) about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (NIV).

This rebuke is the harshest comment on the disciples' hardness of heart thus far in Mark (cf. 4:13, 40; 6:52), and portrays them in language borrowed from the OT where rebellious Israel is condemned for disobedience of God's command and unwillingness to hear his prophetic word (e.g., Ps 95:8; Isaiah 63:17).<sup>927</sup> The verb *dialogizomai* ('to discuss' or 'argue') is used of Jesus' opponents in 2:6 and 8, where it is translated by 'to think,' and in 11:31.<sup>928</sup> In Mark 9:33, it is used of the disciples when they are again clearly failing to understand Jesus. This demonstrates that Mark has duplicated it here deliberately to indicate the kind of discussion, which stems from unbelief.<sup>929</sup>

The Jesus' questions in 8:17 suggest that the disciples' lack of faith is caused by their failure to understand the feeding miracles and their hardened hearts, that is, their spiritual insight is darkened.<sup>930</sup> They are blind and deaf, like people whom

---

<sup>925</sup> D. J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," *JBL* 91 (1972): 495 in 491-500.

<sup>926</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

<sup>927</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 126; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 511.

<sup>928</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

<sup>929</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

<sup>930</sup> Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples," 36.



Jesus heals with some difficulty before and after this passage.<sup>931</sup> In Mark 3:5, Jesus had been angered and deeply grieved by the hardened hearts of Pharisees who had questioned his healing on the Sabbath. In 3:6, they went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. According to Mark's point of view, therefore, the disciples indeed appear in danger of the 'leaven' of the Pharisees by sharing the same feature, 'hardness of heart,' appointed by the prophets to the Israelites who failed to obey and respond to the Lord's command.<sup>932</sup>

### Allusion of Jeremiah 5:21

In 8:18, Jesus' rhetorical questions continue by moving more directly to the prophetic accusation. There are two main points of contact between Mark 8:17-18 and Jeremiah 5:21,<sup>933</sup> where rebellious Israel is condemned for disobedience to God and a reluctance to hear his prophetic word. First, LXX Jer. 5:21 and Mark 8:18 have the same basic vocabulary: the wording  $\text{ofqal moi. autoij kai. ouv blepousin w\tau a autoij kai. ouk akoupousin}$  of Jer. 5:21 is similar to the expression at Mark 8:18  $\text{ofqal mouj econtej ouv blepete kai. w\tau a econtej ouk akoupete}$ <sup>934</sup> Secondly, the final word of 8:17, "Are your hearts hardened?" echoes the theme of 'hardness of heart' of Jeremiah 5.

### The Syntactic Structure of Mark 8:17b-18

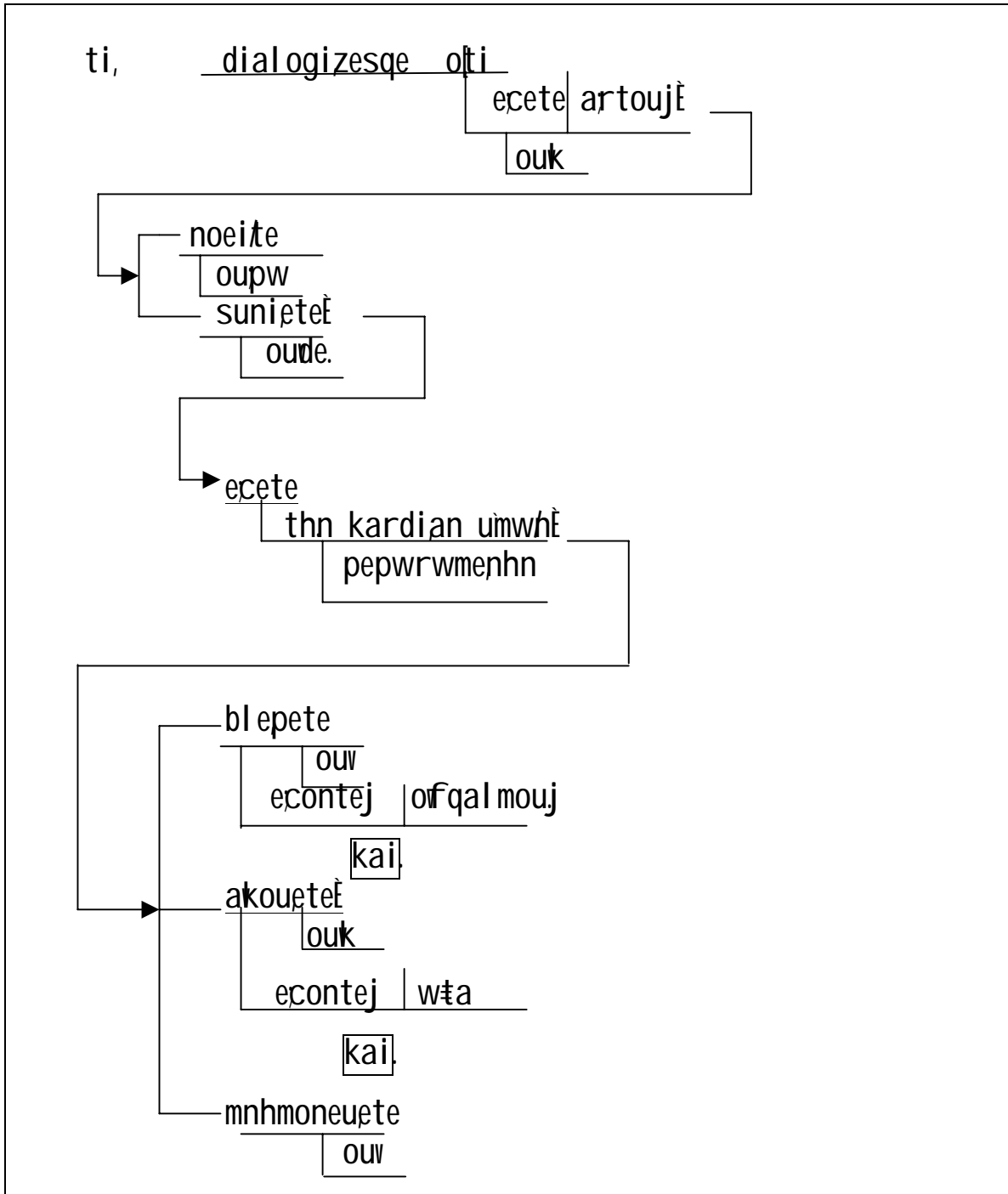
---

<sup>931</sup> H. Anderson argues that "For the evangelist the point of the question by Jesus is that his mighty works, like his parabolic teaching..., are a metaphorical language which should reveal the truth but in fact obscures it, which should call forth understanding but in fact is met with a blatant lack of it" (*The Gospel of Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 201-2)

<sup>932</sup> Guelich, Mark 1:1-8:26, 424. For the detailed discussion, see comment on Mark 3:1-6.

<sup>933</sup> It appears closer to Jer. 5:21 and also to Ezek. 12:2, but as a question it is closest in context to Isa, 42:18-20.

<sup>934</sup> Richard Schneck, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-VIII* (Vallejo: Bibal Press, 1994), 206.



Jeremiah 5:21, a prophetic accusation of Israel makes for most insightful reading alongside the current passage; it which foretells the Lord's punishment upon Israel for failing to understand the Lord, and mentions her wicked leaders, like the religious leaders in Mark's Gospel.<sup>935</sup> By the intertextual allusion of this passage, the author may have intended his audience to recall Jeremiah 5:21-31 in order to understand what he was trying to say about the significance of Jesus' ministry and the seriousness rejecting it.

<sup>935</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 12-27.

In Jeremiah 5:21-23, the prophet is told to declare that blindness and deafness have prevented Israel from understanding her dangerous state. This kind of language is related to her rejection (v. 23) in Isa. 6:10 and to the idols in Ps. 115:4-7.<sup>936</sup> Here, the language points out that Israel had become like the idols they worship, that is, senseless. Due to hardness of heart, Israel does not see the supervision of God's almighty power in nature (v. 22), or hear the voice of God in his words.<sup>937</sup> Because of a 'stubborn and rebellious heart' Israel had turned aside and gone astray that is to say, Israel had rejected God's dominion (v. 23).

In Jeremiah 5:25-28, the prophet describes what happens to Israel who rejects God's authority because of hardness of hearts.<sup>938</sup> The result is God's judgment. The cessation of rains was attributed to their sinfulness (v. 25).<sup>939</sup> Thus, the experience of drought (v. 30) can be understood as the coming of divine judgment, but also as a heaven-sent warning.<sup>940</sup> The divine judgment is developed in verse 29. As echoing verse 9, this verse affirms God's wrath and the inevitability of judgment: "Should I not punish them for this?" Consequently, through this hardening language, the prophet declares the Lord's judgment upon the Israelites who have stubborn and rebellious hearts.<sup>941</sup>

As Myers indicates, Jesus' questions in Mark 8:17-18 echo not only the passage in Jeremiah (and Isaiah and Ezekiel) but also Moses' words to Israel in Deut 29:2-4 LXX, which link with the previous Markan passage as well.<sup>942</sup>

You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great *trials* (peirasmouj) that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders (shmeiá). But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand (kardian eidenai), or eyes to see (ofqal mouj bl epein), or ears to hear (wta akouein)--NRSV.

<sup>936</sup> R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 187: "Although allusive, it connects foolishness with idolatry or rejection of true understanding of Yahweh (cf. Ps. 94:7-9)."

<sup>937</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 44-45.

<sup>938</sup> Martin Buber, *Right and Wrong* (London: SCM, 1952), 34-52.

<sup>939</sup> G. Rendsburg, "Hebrew RHM—'Rain,'" *VT* 33 (1983): 357 in 357-62.

<sup>940</sup> P. C. Craigie, P. H. Kelley, and J. H. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, WBC 26 (Dallas: Word Book, 1991), 96.

<sup>941</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25: To Pluck Up, to Tear Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 64.

<sup>942</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 225.

Here, we see the motifs of the hardened heart, the blind eyes, and deaf ear, all in the same order in which they appear in Mark 8:17-18, as well as the words of trials and signs, which appear in the previous Markan passage. A bit later in Deut. 32:7, the word ‘remember’ in 8:18 also comes to the fore.<sup>943</sup> If Mark is making a thoughtful allusion to these passages in Deuteronomy, then the prospect for the disciples is more hopeful than for the exegetes: ‘to this day’ they have not been granted perceptive hearts, eyes, and ears, but they will in the end receive them (cf. Deut. 30:1-8).<sup>944</sup>

The Markan Jesus is not saying that the disciples are equivalent to the Israelites, who rejected God’s authority because of their hardened hearts. Rather Mark’s language indicates that the disciples were in danger of missing the vital point about Jesus as the Son of God. As he may have reminded the disciples of the hardened Israelites in the past history, he also warns them against the Israel’s unbelieving attitude and he tries to encourage them to perceive more fully Jesus’ divine identity.<sup>945</sup>

### Spiritual Perceptiveness

For these effects, Jesus uses rhetorical questions rather than the prophet’s critical language. In this passage, the rhetorical questions function as a warning and exhortation. Jesus’ rhetorical questions implicitly contain a challenge to make a positive response, rather than anger and deep grief (cf. 3:5). Guelich argues in the following way:

The series begins and concludes with the loaded ‘not yet’ (oupw, 8:17, 21) holding out the real possibility that they, to whom the ‘mystery of the kingdom’ has been given, will know and understand. Their hearts are not hardened, they will see and hear. And perhaps not without significance, Mark chooses to use analogous prophetic texts to describe the disciples blindness and deafness rather than Isa 6:9-10 which characterizes those who are clearly ‘outside.’<sup>946</sup>

Unlike a statement of the outsiders in 3:5 and 4:12, the disciples’ hardness of heart is described with a question in 8:17. This question can be interpreted as a

<sup>943</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513.

<sup>944</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513; cf. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 425. Jesus’ concluding words to the disciples in 8:17 and 21, “Do you not yet understand?” suggest a similarly hopeful message (Cf. comment on 8:17, 21).

<sup>945</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 126-27.

<sup>946</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 425.

stimulus to further spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>947</sup> This positive interpretation is supported by the placement of this passage before the healing of a blind man and after the healing of a deaf-mute, which affirms that defective vision can be healed.<sup>948</sup> Ambrozic, similarly, notes that this pericope lacks the “damning conclusion” of 4:12 (lest they turn and be forgiven).<sup>949</sup> Consequently, the hardness of heart in the question is used to warn the disciples against the hardness of the Pharisees and Herod, rather than to identify them as opponents.

To stress the importance of the spiritual perceptiveness, in 8:14-21 Mark repeatedly uses the key words of  $\beta\lambda\epsilon\pi\omega$  (“to see”),  $\alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omega$  (“to hear”), and  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\omega$  (“to understand”) appeared in 4:12.<sup>950</sup> According to Geddert, every usage of these terms in Mark’s Gospel appears intended by the author to contribute to a carefully devised call for discernment concerning realities, which lie beyond the observations of the physical sense data.<sup>951</sup> The people can see and hear Jesus’ words and deeds, but if their hearts are hardened they cannot understand them. The disciples saw the miracles of the feeding, just as they had heard Jesus’ teachings and explanation in 4:1-34, and as they had seen his wondrous miracles in the first two boat episodes, but they did not understand anything, because their hearts were hardened.<sup>952</sup>

Mark uses these words in order to push for an understanding of the allusive meaning of miracles beyond visible things. The healing of the deaf-mute (7:31-37) and the healing of the blind man (8:22-26) bracket this passage with its emphasis on seeing, hearing, perceiving, and understanding (8:18, 21). Not only are the characters physically blind, deaf, and mute in Mark’s story, but Jesus

<sup>947</sup> Cf. J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 2 vols EKKNT 2 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978-79), 311.

<sup>948</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 512.

<sup>949</sup> A. M. Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom: Redaction-Critical Study of the Reference to the Kingdom of God in Mark’s Gospel* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1972), 63.

<sup>950</sup> Mark 8:17 differs from 4:12, which is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10, in one verb. The verb for understanding that is related to seeing in 4:12 is a form of the verb to see,  $\text{mh. idwsin}$  which is parallel to  $\text{mh. suniwsin}$  (the understanding associated with hearing. In 8:17  $\text{sunihmi}$  (‘understanding’) is accompanied by  $\text{noew}$  (‘perceiving’). See, G. H. Boobyer, “The Redaction of Mark IV. 1-34,” *NTS* 8 (1961), 63 in 59-70.

<sup>951</sup> Geddert, *Watchwords*, 60; Hawkin, “The Implication of the Disciples,” 493.

<sup>952</sup> Petersen, “The Composition of Mark,” 209.

takes up blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart as metaphors for the intellectual and spiritual ignorance, mainly of the disciples.<sup>953</sup> With this structure, Mark intends to illustrate that just as Jesus heals the deaf-mute and the blind man, it is he who can heal the disciples' hardened hearts, i.e. spiritual ignorance.

The disciples' 'hardness of heart' is indicated by Jesus' repeated question, "Do you still not (oupw)<sup>954</sup> understand? Are your hearts hardened"(8:17). Jesus uses this double question in order to warn the disciples against spiritual ignorance (4:13; 7:18). Nineham's comments on 8:17-18 are relevant here:

The words of Jesus...imply that the miracles, like the parables, have a meaning, which can, and ought to, be understood, but is in fact misunderstood. The reasons for such misunderstanding are not just intellectual or psychological, they are also moral, for the words translated 'hardened hearts' refer not only to unkindness, but also to obtuseness, blindness-to-truth engendered by moral shortcomings. The miracles, like the words of the Old Testament prophets, were capable of revealing truth; but it was all part of God's will that if they were met with culpable failure to understand, they could veil the truth and at the same time reveal the true character of those who failed to perceive their, meaning....<sup>955</sup>

In 8:14-21, the concept 'hardness of heart' which is associated with outsiders or opponents (2:7; 3:6; 4:11) is attributed to the disciples.<sup>956</sup> Like the Jewish religious leaders, the disciples do not understand the significance of what is happening. They are in danger of falling to the level of the Jewish religious hierarchy (cf. 3:5).<sup>957</sup> The use of the concept is not meant to imply that the disciples have now become opponents of Jesus. Rather, "it is indicative of an attempt by Jesus, by bombarding them with a series of rhetorical questions, to shock [to warn] his disciples and Mark's readers into appreciating the existential seriousness of their condition."<sup>958</sup>

---

<sup>953</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 212.

<sup>954</sup> This word oupw usually is rendered as "not yet" but "still not" is more accurate (see BAGD, 593). The difference, though seemingly small, is significant, because oupw implies that the disciples will eventually understand (Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 508).

<sup>955</sup> D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 216.

<sup>956</sup> F. J. Matera, "The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark's Gospel," *JSNT* 34 (1988): 11 in 3-20.

<sup>957</sup> R. A. Guelich, "Anti-Semitism and/or Anti-Judaism in Mark," in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity*, eds. C. A. Evans and D. A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 83.

<sup>958</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 212

Like the Pharisees, the disciples do not understand the larger meaning of the two miraculous feedings. By rhetorical questions, Jesus recalls for the disciples the two miracles of the feeding. The disciples answer without hesitation to his question about the amounts of fragments of food because they know these details. The disciples cannot ignore them. However, they fail to understand the larger meaning of the miracles, i.e. Jesus is the Messiah and Lord.<sup>959</sup> They are deaf and blind, like the people whom Jesus heals with some difficulty before and after this passage (7:31-37; 8:22-26). “Their experience of the feeding should have alerted them to the fact that all was not well, that the miracles were not producing faith.”<sup>960</sup> Thus, their ‘hardness of heart’ blinds them to the whole process. Consequently they need spiritual perceptiveness to understand Jesus’ words and deeds.

In Mark’s Gospel, even though Jesus continually demonstrates the divine signs, his opponents deliberately refuse to believe in Jesus and his teachings and deeds.<sup>961</sup> Thus, he determines to reject them and their hardened attitude. However, the disciples may be confused and blind, but they are not hostile to Jesus. Thus, Jesus is patient and explains the parabolic words and his deeds to them. Furthermore, he warns them to avoid the danger of falling into the same unbelieving attitude of the opponents. According to Mark, Jesus rebukes his disciples for failure to have faith in his ability to meet their needs which rests on failure to understand what is said.<sup>962</sup> If the disciples stop reproducing the hardening of the opponents, and repent of their faithlessness, they will be promised a healing of hardness and unbelief after his resurrection (cf. 14: 28; 16:7).<sup>963</sup> However, like Judas if they persist in hardness and unbelief, they will be rejected by God (14:21).

There is the charge in 8:18 that the disciples have ‘not remembered’ (kai. ouv mnhmoneuete) what was evident in the feeding events.<sup>964</sup> It is significant to note that the language of this charge is drawn from the technical term employed in the

---

<sup>959</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 282-83.

<sup>960</sup> Countryman, “How many Baskets Full?” 654.

<sup>961</sup> Cf. Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in Mark,” 259-81.

<sup>962</sup> Sellw, “Composition of Didactic Scenes in Mark’s Gospel,” 617.

<sup>963</sup> Donahue, “Windows and Mirrors,” 12.

<sup>964</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 317.

OT in exhortation against faithlessness (Deut. 4:9; 7:18; 9:7; Isaiah 17:10, etc.).<sup>965</sup> Accordingly, it indicates that the disciples fail to have faith in Jesus' ability.

#### Failure to Understand the Feeding Miracle

Mark 8:19-20 is an obvious summary of the feeding narratives: "when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?' 'Twelve,' they replied. 'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?' They answered, 'Seven.'" The first question recalls the first feeding in precise detail (6:34-44); the second alludes similarly to 8:1-10. The feeding accounts are seen as revealing the truth of Jesus' identity, and the disciples' hardness of heart is seen as failure to understand this. Perhaps a primary step forward is to acknowledge that the emphasis in this passage falls neither on the number in the respective crowds (five thousand and four thousand) nor on the number of loaves initially present (five and seven) but on the number of baskets of fragments left over, twelve and seven.<sup>966</sup> "It is these baskets of fragments that are the subject of Jesus' question, and the latter elicits the disciples' answers, "Twelve and "Seven" - answers that Jesus' final question (8:21) suggests are self-explanatory."<sup>967</sup>

In this view, the questioning about the numbers is understood as intended to indicate the meaning of the feeding miracles.<sup>968</sup> In the same way that the 'leaven' of the Pharisees and Herod is a symbol with an inner meaning, the feeding miracles implies a hidden sense that Jesus expects his disciples to understand a meaning hinted at by the numbers twelve and seven respectively.<sup>969</sup> That is, the numbers of the baskets of fragments as each feeding are seen as symbolic indications of who Jesus is.<sup>970</sup>

In his question about the feeding (8:19-20), Jesus expects his disciples to

<sup>965</sup> O. Michel, "mimnhskomai, ktI," *TDNT*, IV 675.

<sup>966</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513.

<sup>967</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513-14.

<sup>968</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.

<sup>969</sup> It is not strange for Mark to have seen symbolic sense in the feeding miracle and to have seen this sense as really being the secret of Jesus identity, since it is a Markan trait to stress the secretive and mysterious nature of Jesus message (cf. 4:10-13, 33-34; 6:52).

<sup>970</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.



understand the messianic secret hidden in the miracles of the feeding. If Jesus could feed vast crowds on two separate occasions, the disciples ought not to be concerned as to whether or not they have bread.<sup>971</sup> These questions of the feeding remind the readers of the narrator's comment in 6:52, "they had not understood about the loaves; but their hearts were hardened." Scholars like Quesnell and Beavis have argued the similarity in terminology and theme between Mark 8:17-21 and 6:45-52.<sup>972</sup> At Mark 8:17-21, Jesus, being with the disciples in the boat, indicates their hardness of heart. They do not recognize the messianic implication of Jesus' mighty deed, which has been clearly illustrated in the second feeding miracle. Thus, they cannot understand Jesus' warning about the yeast of the Pharisees. Then, at 6:45-52, the disciples are with Jesus in the boat. The disciples' unbelieving attitude at Jesus' walking on the sea at 6:52 takes place after the first miracle of the feeding (6:34-44). As a result, the disciples' hardness should be understood in the light of the hidden meaning of the miracles of the feeding.<sup>973</sup>

This episode concluded with Jesus' question to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21 οὐκ οὐδὲν οὐκ κατανοεῖτε). The obvious answer is that they did not understand. The disciples' question in Mark 4:41, "Who then is this?" indicates this section's recurring interest in their lack of understanding.<sup>974</sup> It resurfaces in the second boat story, "For they did not understand about the loaves, because their hearts were hardened" (6:52); it is picked up by Jesus, "Do you still not understand?" (8:21); it alluded to in his question "what do you see?" (8:23); then it is sharpened at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asks the disciples "Who do people say that I am?" (8:27); it is questioned again more pointedly in his "But who do you say that I am?" (8:29a); it is finally answered in part by Peter's response, "You are the Christ." (8:29b).<sup>975</sup>

The disciples' failure to understand the secret of the first feeding miracle (6:52) makes them unable to recognize the true nature of Jesus in the sea walking

---

<sup>971</sup> Countryman, "How Many Baskets," 645.

<sup>972</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 90-91; Quesnell, *Mind of Mark*, 114; "Mark 8:17-21 is clearly a more complete statement of the message of 6:52."

<sup>973</sup> Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters," 335.

<sup>974</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 231.

<sup>975</sup> Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 230.

(6:45-52).<sup>976</sup> In Mark's Gospel, the characters who dramatizes Mark's reader's frustration at trying to make sense of Jesus are the disciples, and this shared frustration serves both to tie the audience to the disciples and to indicate the transcendence of Jesus.<sup>977</sup> Mark intended his reader to understand that Jesus was not just a wonder-worker but also the Son of God. The disciples, with whom the readers are to identify themselves, show a less hostile, but nevertheless seriously, perception of Jesus.<sup>978</sup>

Mark 8:14-21 implies that the disciples themselves are in danger of falling into a similar sort of blindness about Jesus as the One who brings eschatological fulfilment.<sup>979</sup> The disciples are in peril of being infected by "the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod." Indeed, Jesus will shortly criticize Peter for his satanically inspired preoccupation with 'the things of human beings' rather the things of God."<sup>980</sup> The language 'hardness of heart' is used to warn the disciples to keep away from falling into the same rejection as the opponents, and to encourage their faithfulness. According to this literary approach, Mark uses the disciples' hardness of heart as an implicit appeal for the readers to succeed where the disciples fail to believe in Jesus.<sup>981</sup>

The adverb "not yet" (8:17 and 8:21) implies that eventually they will see and understand, though it will not come easily.<sup>982</sup> Unlike the religious leaders, their problem is not that they refuse to see and believe but they cannot see and believe until after Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>983</sup> Geddert correctly describes the disciples' situation in Mark's Gospel:

Followers, however dull and unfaithful, are patiently instructed. If they follow all along the way Jesus leads, they will eventually be transformed from mere 'data-collectors' into 'meaning-discerners.' It all hinges on the decision for or against Jesus."<sup>984</sup>

However, if the disciples succumb to the unbelieving leaven of the Pharisees and

---

<sup>976</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 337.

<sup>977</sup> Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 147-48.

<sup>978</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.

<sup>979</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

<sup>980</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

<sup>981</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 153.

<sup>982</sup> Cf. Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples," 32.

<sup>983</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 312.

<sup>984</sup> Geddert, *Watchwords*, 69.

Herod, they will never understand and believe in Jesus. If they continue to follow him along the way, Jesus will remove their hardened hearts so that they will believe in Jesus.

### 3.3.3 The Removal of Hardness of Heart (Blindness)

In Mark's Gospel, the narrator suggests to the readers a better response on the disciples' part in the future, in spite of the disciples' hardness of heart (blindness) toward Jesus' identity and message. Although the author in Mark's gospel does not refer to the removal of the disciples' hardness of heart which causes their unbelieving attitude, there are several passages which imply that the disciples, who due to their hardened hearts denied Jesus and fled from him at his arrest, would return to see Jesus and follow him with faith after his resurrection.

Over against the graphic description of the disciples' failure to believe, then, Mark builds a momentum through the rhetoric of prediction and fulfilment.<sup>985</sup> Mark invites the reader to think of the disciples as reconciled to Jesus following Easter.<sup>986</sup> As the readers experience the confirmation of many various predictions of Jesus in the narrative itself, it gains confidence that those predictions of Jesus that reach beyond the plotted narrative are reliable as well.<sup>987</sup> The passion predictions in 8:27-10:52 are the most obvious indications of this. Events unfold exactly as Mark's Jesus has predicted they would: Jesus is "handed over to the chief priests and Scribes" (10:33; 14:42), who "condemn him to death" (10:33; 14:64), spit on him (10:34; 14:65), and mock him (10:34; 15:31).<sup>988</sup> Prediction and promise made by Jesus are reliable and certain.

#### 3.3.3.1 The Disciples as Fishers of Men

Jesus' promise to Simon and Andrew that he would make them 'fishers of men' (1:17 ἀλιεῖς ἀναρρωπῶν) foreshadows the fact that the disciples, whose spiritual blindness is healed, will see Jesus and accomplish their mission.<sup>989</sup> The future

<sup>985</sup> D. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 114-15; A. T. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure-Mark 16:7-8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 297-98 in 282-300.

<sup>986</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

<sup>987</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 243-44.

<sup>988</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

<sup>989</sup> S. R. Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids:

tense  $\text{p}oi\text{h}\text{šw}$  (“to make”) indicates what will happen in the disciples’ lives and foreshows their future ministry (cf. 6:7).<sup>990</sup> There are several shades of meaning in this promise:

- 1) In the Qumran literature, the pious people are warned about the three nets of Belial [Satan] (CD 4:15-16; cf. 1QH 3:26), and with this background in mind a fisherman would be someone who would pull people out of the nets of Satan and transfer them securely into the net of God.<sup>991</sup>
- 2) Many scholars think that 1:17 alludes to Jeremiah 16:16 where the Lord promises ‘fishermen’ to find the people of Israel so that they may be brought to judgment and ultimate restoration.<sup>992</sup>
- 3) In the Greco-Roman society a fisher of people is often a teacher (e.g., Plato *Sophist* 218d-222d), and similar imagery can be found in the Jewish context; in *Abot R. Nat. (A)* 40, for example, different kind of pupils are compare to different kinds of fish.<sup>993</sup>
- 4) Jesus’ own calling to the brothers in our passage may easily be constructed as ‘fishing for people’ and may be intended as a paradigm of what the disciples will later do.<sup>994</sup>

The disciples’ fishing for people is probably a multivalent image that includes their future ministry, their future teaching, and their future exorcism (cf. 3:14-15; 6:7, 12-13; 13:9-10).<sup>995</sup> The disciples are called to be agents who will bring a compelling message to others that will change their lives beyond recognition.<sup>996</sup> For the fulfilment of their future missionary, their hardness of heart and faithlessness must be resolved.

### 3.3.3.2 The Disciples’ Preaching and Suffering in the Future

---

Eerdmans, 1998), 143.

<sup>990</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 51.

<sup>991</sup> J. Mánek, “Fishers of Men,” *NovT* 2 (1958): 138-41.

<sup>992</sup> J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1971), 184; Hurtado, *Mark*, 25; Lane, *Mark*, 67; Garland, *Mark*, 69; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 85.

<sup>993</sup> W. Wuellner, *The Meaning of “Fishers of Men”* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 12-15, 111-12.

<sup>994</sup> W. T. Shiner, *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 175-76.

<sup>995</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 185.

<sup>996</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 69.

In Mark 10:39, Jesus predicts that James and John will follow him in the pattern of his death, and in the future that the disciples will serve as his messengers to preach the gospel (cf. 1:1, 15): “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (10:39 to. pōth̄rion o) egw. pinw piēsqe kai. to. baptisma o) egw. baptizomai aptisqhsesqe).<sup>997</sup> According to Witherington, Mark 10:39 was taken early on in church history to mean that the disciples would be martyred, which it may well imply especially when Jesus says they will undergo such a baptism and drink cup, but at a minimum it implies that they will suffer for their allegiance to Jesus (cf. Acts 12:2).<sup>998</sup>

In 13:9-13, Jesus predicts that the disciples will be persecuted on account of him. They will be handed over to councils as Jesus was (13:9) because they preach his gospel. In fact, three times in 13:9-13 the disciples are predicted to be handed over, even by members of their own family. The disciples will be delivered up to councils, and in synagogues they will be beaten. Jesus’ disciples make appearance before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-22; 5:27-41; 6:12; 22:30; 23:1; 24:20; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.9.1 § 200 [in reference to James, the brother of Jesus]; *Life* 368).<sup>999</sup> In some of episodes in the book of Acts, the disciples are beaten (Acts 5:40; 16:19-23, 37), even stoned (Acts 7:58; 14:19).<sup>1000</sup> Jesus has in effect warned his disciples that they will be treated as heretics and as disturbers of the Jewish community. Jesus gives these warnings so that they will not be surprised, and can respond appropriately when suffering overtakes them.<sup>1001</sup> They will be singled out for persecution because they faithfully follow their Lord (see 4:17).<sup>1002</sup> Suffering will come to the disciples, because they will preach the gospel faithfully. As Hurtado asserts, the prediction “anticipates their future faithfulness beyond their immediate cowardice narrated in chapters 14-15.”<sup>1003</sup> Obviously, in the suffering situation, the disciples are not to be concerned

---

<sup>997</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 141.

<sup>998</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 287.

<sup>999</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 309. When sunedrion (“council”) is sometimes translated “Sanhedrin,” it is usually in reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin.

<sup>1000</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 309.

<sup>1001</sup> M. Hooker, “Trial and Tribulation in Mark XIII,” *BJRL* 65 (1982): 86 in 78-99; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last Day* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 404.

<sup>1002</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 493.

<sup>1003</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 23.

primarily with defending themselves but rather with proclaiming their faith. Clearly, this means that their unbelief is removed.

### 3.3.3.3 Jesus' Promise: "I will go before you to Galilee"

Since in the world of Mark's story Jesus' word is firm and sure, the audience is invited to assume that Jesus' promise about seeing the disciples in Galilee also comes to fulfilment (14:27-28).<sup>1004</sup> But the narrator does not describe a scene relating to their fulfilment. Nevertheless, he obliges the reader to project it. As the reader projects the fulfilment of Jesus' promise, the reader in effect projects the resolution of the disciples' blindness and hardness, and restoration of their faith.<sup>1005</sup> Mark 14:27-28 anticipates the ultimate reconciliation of Jesus and the disciples as: "You will all become deserters; for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. However, after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Although Mark does not appear to depict the full healing of the disciples' blindness in his Gospel, the promise of Jesus and the young man (14:28 and 16:7) give a hint that the disciples will gain their full sight for faith.<sup>1006</sup>

### Jesus' Promise in Mark 14:27-28

The promise of Jesus in 14:27-28 is provided in the context of the disciples' failure, i.e. the flight of the disciples at the time of Jesus' arrest (14:43-50) and the denial of Peter (14:66-72).<sup>1007</sup> In particular, the prediction that the disciples will fail to follow Jesus is supported by the quotation of Zechariah 13:7 (Mark 14:27), which introduces a new image—that of the sheep who are scattered.<sup>1008</sup> But the quotation in Mark has been changed. It is not "Strike the shepherd" (the imperative) but "I will strike the shepherd" (the first person singular).<sup>1009</sup> According to Painter, "This only makes clearer that God initiates the strike, not by commanding it, as in Zechariah, but by himself striking, and affirms the plan and purpose of God in the events that overtake Jesus (14:43-50)."<sup>1010</sup>

<sup>1004</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

<sup>1005</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology of Mark's Gospel*, 133-37.

<sup>1006</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 141-42.

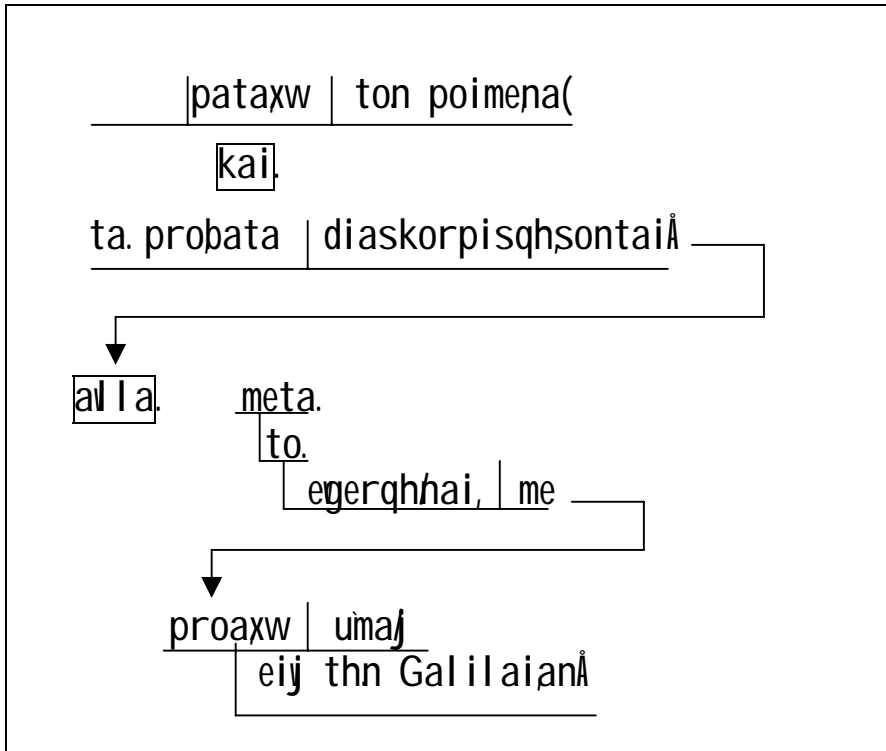
<sup>1007</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 142.

<sup>1008</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 344. Cf. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 188; Hurtado, *Mark*, 244.

<sup>1009</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 344; Garland, *Mark*, 530; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 376.

<sup>1010</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 188.

Syntactic Structure of Mark 14:27b-28



Here the image of the shepherd compels the reader to think of a shepherd leading his sheep.<sup>1011</sup> Not only will Jesus himself be raised; the scattered sheep will be brought together again, under their shepherd's leadership.<sup>1012</sup> The Last Supper scene contains many allusions to Zechariah 9-14: my blood of the covenant (Mark 14:24/Zech 9:11); that day, the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25/Zech 14:4, 9); the Mount of Olives (Mark 14:26/Zech 14:4); strike the shepherd (Mark 14:27/Zech 13:7); healing, forgiveness and restoration of the sheep (Mark 14:28/Zech 13:8-9).<sup>1013</sup> Marcus concludes from these allusions that Mark is on describing Jesus' last night on earth as the time of eschatological testing spoken of by Zechariah.<sup>1014</sup> Jesus' application of the Zech 13:7 to himself is similar to an interpretation found at Qumran, where this passage is cited in the *Damascus Document* with the understanding that the 'sheep' are the 'poor of flock,' that is, the members of the Qumran community, while the stricken 'shepherd' is perhaps the Teacher of the Righteousness (CD 19:7-13).<sup>1015</sup> Just as sheep are scattered

<sup>1011</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

<sup>1012</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 345.

<sup>1013</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 161.

<sup>1014</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 157-59.

<sup>1015</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 400; cf. C. Rabin, *The Zadokite Documents*

in suffering when their shepherd falls, the death of Jesus will cause the disciples to abandon him and will “mark the loss of centre point for their own communal fellowship.”<sup>1016</sup>

When their shepherd is stricken, the sheep will be scattered (kai. ta. probata diaskorpisqhsontai). Mark reverses the order of verb and noun (cf. LXX kai. diaskorpisqhsontai ta. probata [Qumran]) to focus attention on the sheep, who will be scattered without their shepherd.<sup>1017</sup> In a Jewish context, the scattering of the sheep is a temporary undoing of the messianic task of gathering the sheep, the lost, and the exiles of Israel (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Ezek 34:8, 12, 15; Zech 10:2; Bar 4:26; *Pss. Sol.* 17:4, 21, 26-28; *Tg. Isa* 6:13; 8:18; 35:6; 53:8: “From chastisements and punishments he [the Messiah] will bring our exiles near”; *Tg. Hos* 14:8: “They will be gather from among their exiles, they shall dwell in the shade of their Messiah”; *Tg. Mic* 5:1-3).<sup>1018</sup> The scattering of the sheep in Mark 14:27 and gathering the scattered is related with the striking of the shepherd and the denial of Peter. The scattering of the sheep must therefore refer to the unbelieving flight of the disciples in Mark 14:50-52 and the unbelieving denial of Peter in Mark 14:66-72.<sup>1019</sup>

The quoted passage goes on to prophesy the restoration of a remnant, amounting to one-third of the ‘sheep’ that have been scattered. Significantly, Zechariah informs us that this remnant will be restored (Zech 13:9). Although Mark cites only Zechariah 13:7, and not vv.8-9, he seems to assume the full passage<sup>1020</sup> because the promise of restoration in the Zechariah passage seems to underlie Jesus’ promise in Mark 14:28: “But after I have risen, I will go before you *in Galilee*” (NIV).<sup>1021</sup> According to van Iersel, the phrase *eij thn Galilajan*

---

(Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 31.

<sup>1016</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 511.

<sup>1017</sup> R. H. Gundry, *The Use of Old Testament in St Matthew’s Gospel with Special Reference to Messianic Hope* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 25-28.

<sup>1018</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 401.

<sup>1019</sup> R. H. Stein, “A Short Note on Mark 14:28 and 16:7,” *NTS* 20 (1973-74): 448 in 445-452.

<sup>1020</sup> Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel*, 144.

<sup>1021</sup> J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1992), 154-64.



in 14:28 and 16:7 should be understood as ‘in Galilee.’<sup>1022</sup> He reasons that the translation ‘into Galilee’ or ‘to Galilee’ is especially problematic for the interpretation of 16:7-8, while ‘in Galilee’ is not.<sup>1023</sup> Van Iersel could be correct, because in Mark εἰς, ‘to, into,’ often does encroach upon ἐν ‘in.’ A few obvious examples include 1:9, “he was baptized in (εἰς) the Jordan”; 1:21, “he was teaching in (εἰς) the synagogue”; 1:39, “and he was preaching in (εἰς) their synagogues in (εἰς) all Galilee”; 2:1, “it was reported that he was at (εἰς) home; and there are many others.<sup>1024</sup> According to Evans, “If we read Mark’s εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν as ‘in Galilee,’ then apparently Jesus has promised his disciples that after being raised up, ‘I shall go before,’ or lead them in Galilee, the original theater of ministry.”<sup>1025</sup> Instead of simply promising to go to Galilee before the disciples themselves arrive,<sup>1026</sup> Jesus promises to give them leadership in Galilee, just as he used to do before the fateful Passover visit to Jerusalem (cf. 10:32).<sup>1027</sup> It implies that he will recommence his shepherding role, leading them and calling them together for the resolution of their blindness and hardness, and restoration of their faith.<sup>1028</sup>

The prediction that the disciples will abandon Jesus is balanced by the promise of meeting in Galilee after the resurrection. In relation to 14:27, 14:28 denotes that this anticipated meeting can be a remedy (note ἀλλὰ, [but])<sup>1029</sup> for the scattering of the sheep and the loss of their shepherd, i.e. this meeting can remove their blindness and hardness as causes of unbelief. The re-gathering restores their faith and functions as fishers of men in spite of their desertion and denial.<sup>1030</sup> In Galilee the disciples who failed to understand Jesus, and denied him, and deserted him will be gathered together with him. Like a shepherd Jesus will lead

<sup>1022</sup> B. M. F. van Iersel, “To Galilee or in Galilee in 14:28 and 16:7?” *ETL* 58 (1982): 365-70.

<sup>1023</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 401.

<sup>1024</sup> C. H. Turner, “Marcan Usage: Notes, Critical and Exegetical, on the Second Gospel,” *JTS* 26 (1925): 12-20.

<sup>1025</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 402.

<sup>1026</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 845: Jesus will arrive before they do.

<sup>1027</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 530.

<sup>1028</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, vol 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 130.

<sup>1029</sup> This word denotes that the situation of the disciples will be changed after the resurrection.

<sup>1030</sup> Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” 151.

them and they will follow him with faith. Mark 14:28 and 16:7 also serve as a promise, not only that Jesus' future will involve vindication by God, but also that the disciples will be re-gathered as a group.<sup>1031</sup>

In Mark's Gospel, "Galilee" has been portrayed as the primary place for Jesus' ministry, and for the mission of the disciples (6:6-13).<sup>1032</sup> In Galilee the disciples were called, trained, instructed, and sent by Jesus. Thus, the connotation of its allusion in the repeated promise is likely to be that the resurrected Jesus will regroup his disciples to perform their mission in faith.<sup>1033</sup> At this meeting in Galilee Jesus will regroup, heal the disciples' blindness, and restore their faith so that they might fulfil their responsibilities as Jesus' messengers between the time of the resurrection and the parousia.<sup>1034</sup>

The disciples, in meeting Jesus, at last see who he is and what he was about.<sup>1035</sup> At the transfiguration, the three disciples saw Jesus in heavenly splendour and were told by God himself that Jesus is his beloved Son (9:3, 7); Jesus, in turn bound the three to silence about this revelation until after the resurrection (9:9). In the parable of the wicked husbandman, Jesus predicted death and resurrection for himself as the Son of God (12:6-8, 10-11). Against the background of these events, it becomes apparent that the disciples, seeing Jesus in Galilee following the resurrection, see him in heavenly splendour as the risen Son of God, who, nevertheless bears on his person the marks of the crucifixion.<sup>1036</sup> Seeing Jesus as the risen yet crucified Son of God, the disciples finally see what, until now, had eluded them: the secret of Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the purpose of his ministry, death on the cross (1:1; 9:7; 12:6-11; 15:39). The disciples' spiritual blindness is healed, and they come to accurately see Jesus' identity.

The disciples, in seeing who Jesus is and what he was about, see the essence of

---

<sup>1031</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 377.

<sup>1032</sup> J. F. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel," *JETS* 42/1 (1999): 29 in 21-35; Hurtado, *Mark*, 282.

<sup>1033</sup> Cf. Fuller, *Formation of the Resurrection*, 59-62; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California, 1974), 409-38.

<sup>1034</sup> R. H. Stein, "A Short Note on Mark XIV. 28 and XVI. 7," *NTS* 20 (1974): 445-452; Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, 75-95.

<sup>1035</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

<sup>1036</sup> Cf. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 259.

discipleship, which is to follow him with spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>1037</sup> In the crucial section 8:27-10:45, the disciples failed to see the essence of the discipleship, for they failed to understand Jesus' identity as the Suffering Messiah. Since the disciples failed to perceive Jesus' passion predictions concerning the heart of his ministry, so they also failed to see the instruction on discipleship.<sup>1038</sup> In Galilee, however, the disciples do finally understand the truth of Jesus' passion predictions: they see Jesus as the crucified one whom God has nevertheless raised. Correspondingly, the disciples also now understand the essence of the discipleship in which they must follow Jesus with spiritual perceptiveness. Accordingly, due to the resolution of their blindness, hardness and unbelief, the disciples are able to see who he is and what he was about, and to follow Him with faith.<sup>1039</sup>

#### Jesus' Promise in Mark 16:7

A fourth passage that foreshadows the resolution of the disciples' blindness and unbelief is Mark 16:7. Here, a young man announces a plan for Jesus to regroup with the disciples in Galilee after his resurrection. The regrouping stands in relation to the resolution of the disciples' insensibility and unbelief. The young man's declaration in 16:7, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you in Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you," points back to a promise made by Jesus earlier in the narrative (14:27-28): The young man includes the phrase "just as he said to you" (16:7 καὶ ὡς εἶπεν ὑμῖν), to clarify that he is referring back to Jesus' promise in 14:28. In its repetition in the command to the women, those who forsook Jesus and fled and the one who denied and cursed him are promised that Jesus will go before them to Galilee where they will meet him.<sup>1040</sup> This meeting with the risen Jesus presumably denotes the restoration of the disciples' faith under their mission. The verb Προαγει in 16:7 is in the present tense, while it was in the future in 14:28 (προαξω), perhaps suggesting that Jesus is on the way there as the angel speaks.<sup>1041</sup> This verb more probably means 'go at the head of' then 'go ahead of, precede,' i.e. it

<sup>1037</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 143.

<sup>1038</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

<sup>1039</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 245.

<sup>1040</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 144.

<sup>1041</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971), 365.

suggests “a movement of the disciples behind Jesus rather than their movement from where they are to a place to which he has already gone, viz. Galilee.”<sup>1042</sup> The verb *proagei* recalls the terminology used in relation to Jesus and his disciples with Jesus going on before them (10:32) the disciples coming after him (1:17, 20; 8:34).<sup>1043</sup> When they follow him they will see him and their faithfulness will be renewed.<sup>1044</sup>

The young man conveys the message given to the disciples: you will see (*oyesqe*) Jesus in Galilee. Galilee perhaps signals a new initiation for those who deserted or denied Jesus.<sup>1045</sup> When considering the themes of the disciples’ hardness and blindness, the word *oyesqe* not only denotes to see the appearance of a physical Jesus but may also denote to recognize Jesus’ true identity through the restoration of spiritual insight.<sup>1046</sup> Throughout Mark’s Gospel, since the disciples’ hearts are hardened and their eyes are closed (6:52; 8:14-21; 16:14), they do not understand and believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection. But now they will see fully and they will see the risen Jesus.<sup>1047</sup> Jesus will heal their blindness so that they will understand fully who he is, what his life and death mean, and how they must now follow him.<sup>1048</sup> They will see and believe in the risen Jesus, and their mission as fishermen (1:17) is restored.

Although in 16:8 the women are commanded to tell the disciples the message of the resurrection and the promise, they say nothing to anyone because of fear (*efobouhnto*). The women’s fear can be interpreted as an unbelieving reaction. The word *fobepmai* is related to the disciples’ unbelieving reaction throughout

---

<sup>1042</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 200. Fuller argues for ‘precede’ because ‘go at the head of’ would “entail the picture of the Risen One as an earthly wanderer” (R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* [London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971], 61). This is only true if Mark is regarded as highlighting the actual resurrection of Jesus rather than the relation of the risen Jesus to the community (Best, *Following Jesus*, 202n 6).

<sup>1043</sup> A. T. Lincoln, “The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7,8,” *JBL* 108/2 (1989): 289 in 283-30.

<sup>1044</sup> Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 212.

<sup>1045</sup> Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 211.

<sup>1046</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 40.

<sup>1047</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 201.

<sup>1048</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 615.

Mark's Gospel.<sup>1049</sup> The disciples were afraid when confronted with Jesus' divine power to calm the water (4:41). They also were filled with fear when they saw Jesus' walking on the sea (6:50) and he appeared transfigured (9:6). Their fear in following Jesus to Jerusalem is a sign of their unbelief and incomprehension (9:32; 10:32). Just as the disciples failed when they beat a retreat at Jesus' arrest (14:50-52), followed him from a distance (14:54), and denied him before others (14:66-72), so the women failed by standing at a distance during his crucifixion (15:40), and now they fail again as they flee from the tomb and say nothing to anyone.

Although the women have failed to carry out their commands, the readers know that the risen Christ will indeed lead the disciples in Galilee.<sup>1050</sup> The Markan readers by now know that Jesus' predictions invariably come to pass, such as his repeated predictions of his passion and resurrection "after three day."<sup>1051</sup> Presumably the first readers (Christians in the first century) knew that the resolution of the disciples' blindness and unbelief had been accomplished in the era following the close of the narrative.<sup>1052</sup> After the resurrection, Simon, Andrew, and the others would serve in the work of preaching Jesus' gospel. The weight of external evidence proves that the promise hinted at in Mark's narrative is fulfilled, i.e. the earliest Christians regarded the disciples, Peter, James, and John, as the pillars of the mother church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9 cf. 1 Cor 1:12).<sup>1053</sup> Furthermore, God overcomes human failure through the power of God's promise. Should the woman's fear and silence prove capable of thwarting God's intention to reconcile the disciples to Jesus, every other promise in the Gospel becomes suspect as well, and so does God's power and God's character.<sup>1054</sup>

Mark describes the disciples' failure to believe as a means of encouraging his first audience in the face of their failure to trust in Jesus.<sup>1055</sup> Though he leaves the unbelief of the disciples unresolved at the end of his story, he means his audience to project the resolution of their unbelief beyond the end of the

<sup>1049</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 620

<sup>1050</sup> Painter, *Mark*, 256.

<sup>1051</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 538.

<sup>1052</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 258-59.

<sup>1053</sup> Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure," 286-87.

<sup>1054</sup> Cf. N. Petersen, "When is the End not an End? Literary Reflection on the Ending of Mark's Gospel," *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 153 in 151-66.

<sup>1055</sup> Petersen, "When is the End not an End?" 157.

narration.<sup>1056</sup> Some interpreters generally indicate two aspects of the narrative, which support such a reading. First, Jesus makes predictions concerning a post-resurrection meeting with the disciples (9:9; 14:25, 27). Mark's narrative serves in every other way to emphasize the reliability of Jesus' predictions.<sup>1057</sup> As the momentum of the promise-fulfilment scheme builds through the narrative, it impels the audience over the final verse of the Gospel, in which the women flee from the tomb and "say nothing to anyone" (16:8 *ouden. ouden eipan*).<sup>1058</sup> As Lincoln puts it "the silence of the women was overcome by Jesus' word of promise."<sup>1059</sup> Likewise, these scholars indicate that Jesus' Olivet discourse (Mark 13) presumes a significant role for the disciples in the post-resurrection period (cf. 13:9-23).<sup>1060</sup> Again, the audience is directed to fill in the gap created by the Gospel's ending in a way that projects the resolution of the disciples' lack of faith.<sup>1061</sup>

The crucial message that the disciples are renewed in spite of failure to trust in Jesus provides hope and encouragement that human failure is not the last word of the Gospel.<sup>1062</sup> The fate of the disciples rests not in their own ability to overwhelm, but in God's ability to break through their unbelief and rescue them from their blindness and incomprehension. Moreover, the reader is to project that the disciples come to understand everything Jesus had taught them about his identity and purpose, and that the essence of discipleship is following Jesus with

---

<sup>1056</sup> Petersen, "When is the End not an End?" 158; Best, *Following Jesus*, 15; Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 152.

<sup>1057</sup> D. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 114-15; Petersen, "When is the End not an End?" 154-55; A. T. Lincoln, "The Promise and Failure—Mark 16:7, 8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 283-300.

<sup>1058</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 217.

<sup>1059</sup> Lincoln, "The Promise and Failure," 292.

<sup>1060</sup> Juel, *A Master of Surprise*, 115; Lincoln, "The Promise and Failure," 292; Petersen, "When is the End not an End?" 164-66; Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 150.

<sup>1061</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 217.

<sup>1062</sup> Best argues that "the failure of the historical disciples followed their eventual forgiveness and known success as missionaries [would be] a source of great encouragement (*Following Jesus*, 12); Lincoln illustrates this view as well: "If, as disciples, the readers fail to stand up to the rigors of the way of the cross set out in the story, all is not necessarily lost. Christ's powerful word of promise will still prevail.... Mark's story allows for human failure even after the resurrection yet holds out the triumph of God's purpose despite this" ("The Promise and the Failure," 297).

spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>1063</sup>

### 3.3.4 Summary

The disciples are remarkably characterized by a lack of understanding, which is associated with hardness of their hearts (6:52; 8:17-18). Although Mark uses same language ‘hardness of heart’ at different points of his story to describe the opponents and to describe the disciples as well, he nevertheless retains a distinction between the two groups. With regard to the opponents’ unbelief, the language indicates their hostility to Jesus, in that they put ritual correctness above doing good and saving life (3:1-6). By contrast, through the same language the Markan Jesus warns the disciples to beware of falling into the opponents’ unbelieving attitudes. They may be confused. But, unlike a statement of the opponents in 3:5 and 4:12, the disciples’ hardness of heart is described with rhetorical questions in 8:17-18. When they are confronted with questions of the true nature concerning Jesus’ identity and of discipleship, they show spiritual ignorance because their hearts are hardened. Therefore, they need divine assistance for understanding Jesus’ identity.

What then is the fundamental source of the disciples’ hardened hearts and incomprehension? Their hardened hearts and unbelief are the result of Satan-inspired opposition. Throughout Mark’s Gospel, Peter shows his hardening attitudes in spite of Jesus’ continual warning (8:17). Jesus identifies him as Satan and as one who thinks human thoughts rather than the thoughts of God (8:33). He is influenced by the forces of darkness to think in merely human terms about the future of Jesus. When Jesus predicts his death, Peter rejects the idea of Jesus’ suffering (8:32). He also thought human thoughts rather than the thoughts of God (8:33). Further, due to hardness of heart Peter in Gethsemane falls into the temptation of Satan (14:32-38). This hardening situation becomes acute in his denial of Jesus in the passion narrative (14:30; 66-72). However, he is not hostile to Jesus like Judas, but he is afraid and blind. As soon as the rooster crows, he remembers Jesus’ prediction “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he repents of his sin (14:72). Although he denies Jesus, it is because of his fear, not because of his rebellion. Thus Jesus will forgive him and

---

<sup>1063</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113-14.

heal his hardness in the new commission at Galilee (cf. 16:8).<sup>1064</sup>

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

In chapter three, we established that, particularly in Mark's Gospel, the disciples are characterized by "faithlessness" in regard Jesus' ability to act in accord with his true identity; and they do not progress in their faith and understanding in any significant way as the narrative moves toward its climax.

In 4:35-42 unbelief is connected to fear. The disciples and Jesus are in a boat, when a storm arises. They awaken Jesus and implore him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then Jesus asks "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" If they had enough faith in Jesus' power, they would not have been cowardly but would have trusted in Jesus to care for them. So long as they lack an adequate understanding of who Jesus is, they remain vulnerable to failing faith. And in 9:14-29 we again encounter a display of unbelief of the disciples. After the boy's father told Jesus that the disciples were unable to cure his son, the theme of unbelief is introduced in Jesus' response: "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (9:19). In this instance, he explains that the disciples' faithlessness has resulted in an inability to heal. In contrast, Jesus speaks of the ability they would have had if they simply had adequate faith (or prayer). Thus, one way of denoting their unbelief at this point in the narrative is as inadequate faith for healing.

At 8:15-16 the connection between unbelief and understanding is made explicit. What the disciples misunderstand is not merely Jesus' enigmatic saying. Rather, the disciples do not understand Jesus' warning, as well as the truth that, even though they had forgotten to bring physical bread, this would not be problematic for Jesus. At 14:32-42 (Jesus in Gethsemane) the disciples are not keep watch and pray with Jesus as he had requested. Instead, they fall asleep. Their actions imply that the disciples continue to lack understanding that the time for the fulfilment of Jesus' mission has arrived. When the time for Jesus' arrest and

---

<sup>1064</sup> Cf. Mark 8:38: "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."



crucifixion arrives, the disciples respond by abandoning Jesus to his fate (14:66-72).

In Mark's Gospel, the disciples' unbelief does not mean the intentional rejection of Jesus, like the opponents' unbelief, but it means their persistent inability to understand who Jesus is and what he is about (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:14-29 etc.). Nevertheless, 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).

In Mark 6:52 and 8:17-18, the concept 'hardness of heart,' which is associated with outsiders or opponents (2:7; 3:6; 4:11), is attributed also to the disciples. It is not meant to imply that the disciples have now become the opponents of Jesus. Rather, it is indicative of an attempt by Jesus, by bombarding them with a series of rhetorical questions, to shock his disciples and to warn Mark's readers into appreciating the existential seriousness of their condition.

With this characterization in mind, the disciples do not function as transparent for the Markan community, because their lack of understanding and unbelief cannot be demonstrated to refer to any extra-textual group, their less than ideal description does not produce complete identification with them by Mark's readers. The characterization of the disciples as those who misunderstand and have 'lack of faith' does not support their function as the criterion of the Markan discipleship either. Rather, the disciples function to illuminate aspects of the Markan discipleship by providing at times a negative example of (a foil to) discipleship for the reader.

In addition, Mark's characterization of the disciples plays another special role for the reader in this narrative communication. The readers identify with the disciples on the basis of the similarity of situation and problems facing them both. As he identifies with the disciples' unbelief, he repents of their failure to trust in Jesus and to follow him. As the reader also has empathy with the disciples, he is warned against the disciples' unbelieving attitudes. On the one hand, as the reader is told of Jesus' promise of the restoration for the failed disciples (14:28; 16:7), he expects that Jesus will forgive his unbelieving behaviours and restore

his faith. Finally, the portrayal of the disciples in a negative light functions as just one part of the larger composite of Markan discipleship, which includes Mark's use of other characters as examples of discipleship, and Jesus himself as a model for it.