

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**MARK'S THEOLOGICAL PURPOSE AND MESSAGE: FAITH AND SPIRITUAL  
PERCEPTIVENESS AS A PREREQUISITE OF DISCIPLESHIP**

The exegetical examination of all the *apistia* / *apistoj* references in Mark's Gospel is now complete. Chapter two and three paid close attention the nature and source of the unbelief of two groups: Jesus' opponents, and Jesus' disciples. The opponents' faithlessness consists in their dynamic and intentional refusal to surrender their power in submission to God's, which is present in Jesus. At the centre to the disciples' unbelief is their failure to understand the power and authority of Jesus. This chapter will pay close attention to the rhetorical and theological functions of the theme 'the disciples' unbelief' and that of various minor characters; this will be discussed in relation to faith and spiritual perceptiveness as prerequisites of discipleship.

#### 4.1 THE THEOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE DISCIPLES' UNBELIEF

In Mark's Gospel, the portrayal of the disciples as those who follow Jesus and act as his helper in ministry weaves through the narrative. This part of their portrayal has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the disciples are legitimate followers of Jesus; they do leave former lives to follow Jesus, and they are present with him in his ministry. Nevertheless, they consistently lack faith in Jesus and therefore show incomprehension (4:40; 9:19; 8:15-16). In addition, the disciples frequently demonstrate an inadequate understanding of Jesus' teaching communicated through his parables (4:13). It is because of their unbelief that they often fall short of Jesus' expectation for them in their role as his followers.

When the Markan reader is confronted with the portrayal of the disciples' unbelief, the effect of this portrayal upon the reader is two-fold. Firstly, their unbelieving story causes the reader to distance himself (herself) from the disciples' faithlessness, that is, to choose not to identify with the disciples at that particular regard.<sup>1065</sup> Secondly, the disciples' negative portrayal works as a pedagogical tool to steer the reader toward faith in contrast to the disciples. In this way, the portrayal of the disciples as unbelieving works as a foil in the narrative, challenging the reader to follow Jesus more faithfully than the disciples. One way to conceive of the faithless disciples' function, then, is as an incentive to the reader toward becoming true disciples who follow Jesus consistently with faith.<sup>1066</sup>

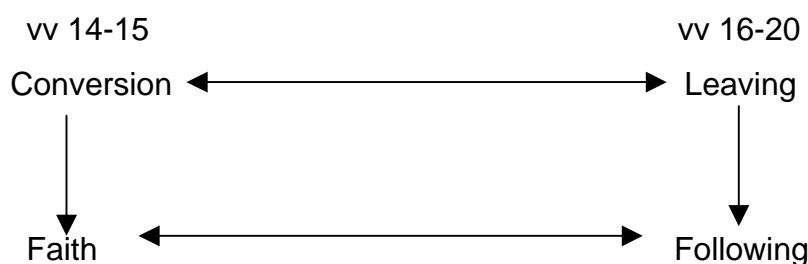
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<sup>1065</sup> Steven Mailloux, "Learning to Read: Interpretation and Reader-Response Criticism," *Studies in Literary Imagination* 12 (1979): 103-105.

<sup>1066</sup> Here I draw upon distinction between "true disciples (as described in Jesus'

#### 4.2 INITIATION OF DISCIPLESHIP WITH FAITH

Mark states faith as an element of discipleship for his reader through the literary composition of 1:14-20. Mark does not simply together put 1:14-15 and 1:16-20, but links them in such a way that they form a small literary unit that is set off from the surrounding context. By forging such a link between 1:14-15 and 1:16-20, Mark points out that the disciples' giving up of their former lives and following Jesus, assumes and expresses the repentance and faith demanded in 1:15. The relationship can be conceived diagrammatically as follows:<sup>1067</sup>



The arrangement of the two accounts therefore attests to the centrality of repentant faith as the beginning of discipleship, and also demonstrates the real character and connotations of such faith for those individuals summoned to join Jesus on his mission.<sup>1068</sup>

Mark considers discipleship-faith as a condition pregnant with practical consequences.<sup>1069</sup> It means essential repentance, an important break with the existing order. The true disciples abandon their possessions and their means of livelihood; their nets and boats (1:18, 20); they give up their position of human authority over hired servants (1:20); and most demanding of all they separates themselves from family ties and traditions, the main source of identity for first century Palestinians.<sup>1070</sup>

Both the abandonment and faith bring a new comprehension and experience of

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teaching) and “actual disciples” (the twelve as they are actually described in the narrative).

<sup>1067</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 135.

<sup>1068</sup> Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 25-48; Tannehill, *Sword of His Mouth*, 43-45.

Even so, Mark is not suggesting that the disciples instantly confess Jesus to be Messiah (that is slow in coming, cf. 8:27), but that they sense his divine approval to declare and achieve the beginning rule of God.

<sup>1069</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 137.

<sup>1070</sup> See Kee, *Community*, 153; G. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*. The social Dimension of Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 39.

family (3:31-35; 10:29), a new concept of authority and servant-hood (9:35; 10:31), and a new attitude to economic things and social positions (10:21-27; 12:41-4).<sup>1071</sup> Simon and Andrew still show familial worry (1:30), and evidently keep their house (1:29) and maybe their boat (3:9; 4:1, 35). But these are put at the removal of the kingdom, and are no longer their means of support and identity. They are to be replaced by a new sense of dependency on divine commission (2:23; 6:8) and protection (4:35-41; 6:48-52).<sup>1072</sup>

Since the decision to follow Jesus plunges the disciples into a total lack of material and personal security, the nature of following him demands absolute faith, which is total dependence on Jesus for all things needed. The degree of this faith is the disciples' preparedness to entrust their destiny Jesus, both in this life where it will bring suffering and dispossession (8:34; 10:29; 13:9-13; 14:27), and in future kingdom, for which they look to Jesus for participation in its consummation (cf. 8:36; 10:30, 37).<sup>1073</sup>

The purpose of the disciples' following is to become fishermen (1:17). This is not simply a prophecy of their future mission (cf. 13:10) but the initiation of a continual process of personal transformation that runs throughout the Gospel. Their omnipresent attendance as witnesses of Jesus' ministry (5:40; 8:19; 9:2), their authorization to proclaim, heal and exorcise (3:14; 6:7, 13), and the repeated appeal for them to hear and understand (4:13; 6:52; 8:14-21), are all part of this process of being made into something they were not before. And the prerequisite of this process is the primary commitment to, and on-going maintenance of, faith in Jesus (4:40; 9:19).

#### 4.3 THE FAITH AND SPIRITUAL INSIGHT OF MINOR CHARACTERS

Mark's largely negative portrayal of the disciples is one of the significant means that he uses to instruct the reader concerning the demands of following Jesus faithfully. Nevertheless, Mark's rhetorical strategy to come to a fuller understanding of Jesus'

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<sup>1071</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 138. It is his reluctance to live at such risk that disqualifies the rich man from following after Jesus, despite his perceptiveness and piety.

<sup>1072</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 138.

<sup>1073</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 138.

identity and mission, and to faithful following of him cannot be limited to the treatment of the portrayal of the disciples as unbelieving, because he also uses his presentation of minor characters to move the reader toward a proper response to Jesus. Thus, through the treatment of some individuals who respond to him with faith and spiritual perceptiveness, Mark attempts to move the reader toward faith or trust in him along with an understanding of his person.<sup>1074</sup>

At this point, Mark portrays some individuals (like the haemorrhaging woman, Jairus, the Syrophoenician woman, Bartimaeus) as foils for the disciples, since these individuals exemplify, in at least one special action, that Jesus' true disciples must follow him with faith and spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>1075</sup> In particular, a crucial minor character in the overall development of the characterization of these individuals from the crowd is Bartimaeus in 10:46-52. The narrative of Bartimaeus, together with an earlier healing story of a blind man (8:22-26), encourages the reader to respond with faith in Jesus' demands, but also with a faithful following of Jesus.

#### 4.3.1 The Gerasene Demonic (5:1-20)

Mark 4-8 is set as a distinct section within the overall narrative through the repeated use of the boat motif. In this section the three boat scenes describe Jesus with his disciples: the stilling of the storm (4:35-41), the walking on the sea (6:45-52) and the conversation concerning the leaven (8:14-21).<sup>1076</sup> In each of the boat scenes, Jesus (or the narrator) rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith and understanding (4:40; 6:52; 8:17-18).<sup>1077</sup> Thus, in Mark 4-8, the author begins to emphasize the growing incomprehension and lack of trust on part of the disciples. In Mark 4:1-8:21 minor characters (the Gerasene demonic, Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman, a Syrophoenician woman, the deaf man) begin to serve as foils for the disciples who fail to trust in Jesus.<sup>1078</sup> Their response to Jesus is portrayed as a contrast to the response of the disciples, since these

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<sup>1074</sup> William, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 89.

<sup>1075</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 105. On the idea of the individuals from the crowd as foils for the disciples see Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 25-27; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 132-34.

<sup>1076</sup> Cf. Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing," 214.

<sup>1077</sup> See. Peterson, "Composition," 206-207.

<sup>1078</sup> Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 36-37

minor characters exemplify faith and understanding.<sup>1079</sup>

Mark follows up his narration of the parable discourse with a series of miracle stories (4:35-5:43). The miracle which immediately follows the parable discourse is the stilling of the storm, the first boat scene that Jesus with the disciples (4:35-41). In this scene, the disciples are characterized as fearful and unbelieving. Jesus not only rebukes the waves but also rebukes the disciples for their timidity and lack of faith (4:40). Moreover, the narrator indicates that the disciples 'feared a great fear' (εὐφοβήσαν φόβον μέγαν, 4:41). The fear, which initially is directed at the fierce storm, is later focused on Jesus, the one who demands the obedience of the wind and the sea.

Mark 5:1, Jesus and the disciples arrive on the other side of the sea at the region of the Gerasene. Immediately, Jesus is met by a man with an unclean spirit (5:2). The possessed man sees Jesus from afar, runs to him, and prostrates himself before Jesus (5:6). The possession of the man leads Jesus to deal directly with the demons who are controlling the man (5:7-13). Jesus' conversation with the unclean spirits in this episode is similar to his conversation with the unclean spirit in Mark 1:23-26. As before, the unclean spirit cries out with a loud voice (5:7; 1:26). The unclean spirit rejects any basis for a relationship with Jesus (5:7; 1:24). In both episodes, the unclean spirit fears destruction and torment (5:6, 10; 1:24). Jesus' command to the unclean spirit to come out of the man is parallel to Jesus' earlier command of exorcism (1:25; 5:8). As before, the unclean spirits obey the command of Jesus and come out of the man (1:26; 5:13).<sup>1080</sup>

Nevertheless, Mark 5:1-20 contains a few unique features. These features serve to stress the power and destruction of the demons who have possessed the Gerasene demoniac. In this scene, Jesus asks for the name of the unclean spirit, and the spirit responds with the reply "My name is Legion, for we are many" (5:9). This name, which represents a great number, highlights the extent of the possessed man's domination.<sup>1081</sup> In addition, a unique feature is the fact that Jesus commands the demons to enter into a nearby herd of swine (5:11-13). The

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<sup>1079</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 109.

<sup>1080</sup> Williams, *Other Follower of Jesus*, 110.

<sup>1081</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 184.

demons leave the Gerasene demoniac and enter swine, causing them to rush down a steep bank into the sea where they drown (5:13). At this point, Mark describes again the destructive nature and evil intent of the unclean spirits.<sup>1082</sup>

Those who were tending the herd of swine flee and report the event throughout the region, and the people of the region come to see what has happened (5:14). When they come, the people of the region see the man who has been possessed seated, clothed and having a sound mind (5:15).<sup>1083</sup> The calm attitude of the man in contrast to his previous furious rage is not unlike the calm after the storm in Mark 4:35-41. The response of the spectators is similar to the response of the unbelieving disciples in the preceding episode.<sup>1084</sup> They become frightened after they learn of the miracle, and, like the disciples, their fear is directed at Jesus.<sup>1085</sup> They express their fear by asking him to leave their region (5:17).

In contrast to the people of the region and thus, in contrast to the disciples, the man who had been possessed is not terrified Jesus. Instead of wanting to be rid of him, he begs (parekal ew) Jesus for permission to remain with him (5:18).<sup>1086</sup> The utterance of the man's request corresponds to expression in 3:14 concerning the disciples. There Jesus selects the twelve in order that they might be with him (iħa metV autou/h=5:18). The implication of the man's request is that he wants to become a disciple of Jesus.<sup>1087</sup> Jesus refuses his request and sends him back to his own house and to his own family, in order that he might report to them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for him (5:19). In 5:19 his command does contain certain limitations. However, the man's response is an unlimited declaration concerning Jesus (5:20). Instead of *reporting* what Jesus had done for him, the

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<sup>1082</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 282; Lane, *Mark*, 186.

<sup>1083</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 281; Hurtado, *Mark*, 69.

<sup>1084</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 110.

<sup>1085</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 149; Fisher, K. M. and U. C. von Wahlde, "The Miracles of Mark 4:35-5:43: Their Meaning and function in the Gospel Framework," *BTB* 11 (1981): 14 in 13-16.

<sup>1086</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 110. The word *parekal ew* is used seven times in Mark's Gospel and four of those seven uses are in 5:1-20. The demons plead with Jesus that he might not send them out of the region (5:10, 12). The people of the region plead with Jesus that he might leave their area (5:17). In contrast, the healed demoniac pleads with Jesus in order that he might be with Jesus (5:18)-Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 110, n. 4.

<sup>1087</sup> Gnllka, *Markus*, 206; Guelich, *Mark*, 284-85; Schweizer, "Life of faith," 391.

man *declares* what Jesus did for him.<sup>1088</sup> Instead of making his report at his home, the man makes his assertion in the Decapolis, with the consequence that all are astonished.<sup>1089</sup>

In contrast to the people of the region and in contrast to the disciples, the man is unafraid in the presence of Jesus. Although the healed man asks Jesus to be his disciple, Jesus sends the man home, moving him from a life among the tombs to a life among his own family. Nevertheless, the healed man freely proclaims Jesus' miraculous power.

#### **4.3.2 The Faith of the Haemorrhaging Woman and Jairus**

The series of miracle stories that began in Mark 4:35 continues with the healing of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:21-43.<sup>1090</sup> Once again individuals come to Jesus when their situations seem beyond hope, when all human efforts at a solution have come to an end. Faith and fear continue to be prominent themes in 5:21-43, with Mark's describing minor characters as those who overcome fear and respond with faith. Consequently, the responses of these minor characters stand in contrast to those of the disciples, who continue to fail to follow Jesus with faith.

The intercalation of one episode within another episode is a common literary technique in Mark's Gospel.<sup>1091</sup> Mark will begin the story of one episode, stop in the middle of it, move to another episode, and then return to first in order to complete it. In 5:21-43 Mark begins the story of Jairus, but before completing it he inserts the healing of the haemorrhaging woman within his story of Jairus, and then he returns to complete the Jairus' story.<sup>1092</sup> Mark uses intercalation, at least in part, to elucidate the meaning and significance of two stories that have been

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<sup>1088</sup> Peterson, "Composition," 213-14.

<sup>1089</sup> Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters," 340; Gnilka, *Markus*, 206-207.

<sup>1090</sup> On the importance of the themes of fear and faith in Mark 4:35-5:43 see Fisher and von Wahlde, "Miracles," 14; Tolbert, *Sowing*, 164-72.

<sup>1091</sup> Donahue (Are You the Christ? 42) lists the following passages as examples of intercalation in Mark's Gospel (3:20-21[22-30] 31-35; 5:21-24 [25-34] 35-43; 6:7-13 [14-29] 30-32; 11:12-14 [15-19] 20-26; 14:1-2 [3-9] 10-11; 14:12-16 [17-21] 22-25; 14:54 [55-65] 66-72.

<sup>1092</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 113.



brought together.<sup>1093</sup> Through the use of intercalation, Mark is able to emphasize both similarities and difference between Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman, thereby enhancing his characterization of each individual.

Mark reveals a number of differences between Jairus and the woman. The woman is described at the opposite end of the spectrum to Jairus.<sup>1094</sup> Jairus is a prominent leader in the religious community, while the woman has a condition that would render her ritually unclean, thus isolating her from the religious community (cf. Lev. 15:25-27, 33). Jairus has a family and a large household (5:35, 40), whereas the woman's problem would tend to preclude childbearing and/or terminate marriage,<sup>1095</sup> and lead to social isolation, since ritual impurity was communicable by mere touch. Jairus is undoubtedly a man of means, while the woman has impoverished herself seeking a solution to her problem.<sup>1096</sup>

In spite of their many differences, Jairus and the woman have in common their trust in Jesus and his power. Unlike Jairus, who falls at Jesus' feet, the woman approaches Jesus from behind, overcoming the press of the crowd, and touches his garment (5:27). Jairus seeks help in public, but the woman seeks healing in secret.

#### 4.3.2.1 The Haemorrhaging Woman (5:25-34)

This event happens as Jesus is on his way to Jairus' home as requested (5:24). This story recounts a woman having a haemorrhage (5:25) for twelve years and depicts, at the same time, her pitiful and worsening situation (5:26).<sup>1097</sup> She suffers much under many physicians,<sup>1098</sup> spends all she has, and does not

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<sup>1093</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 142-44; Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 39. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 91-92.

<sup>1094</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 104.

<sup>1095</sup> Derrett, "Mark Technique," 476.

<sup>1096</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 115.

<sup>1097</sup> In contemporaneous Hellenistic healing miracles the patients' situation is usually reported just to reflect the severity of the illness (Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 20).

<sup>1098</sup> Lane states that one remedy consisted of drinking a goblet of wine containing a powder compound from rubber, alum and garden crocuses. Another treatment consisted of a dose of Persian onions cooked in wine administered with the summons, 'Arise out your flow of blood!' Other physicians prescribed sudden shock or the carrying of the ash of an ostrich's egg in a certain cloth" (*The Gospel of Mark*, 192 n. 46). This reflects, to some degree, the terrifying experiences that

improve, but instead gets worse. She is left without money and without hope. Goppelt's brief comment is to the point: "Faith first gained contour when the individual would forgo self-help and self-guarantee in the concrete situation and would seek and find help in Jesus. Faith had to be the break with the status quo."<sup>1099</sup>

However, the word 'to hear' (5:27a) is the critical turning point of her life. Through her hearing she gets awareness about Jesus, especially about his healing power. Knowledge about Jesus' healing power allows her to take the very first step of faith. Hence faith, according to Mark, always involves hearing about Jesus, whose identity as the Son of God guarantees his power to heal.<sup>1100</sup>

The series of acts based on her hearing is reported in 5:27. The use of asyndeton with participle can be listed in the following way:

5:27a "When she heard about Jesus," (akousasa peri. tou/ Vlhsou/)

5:27b "she came up behind him in the crowd" (el qousa en tw/ oclw/ opisqen)

5:27c "and touched his cloak." (hlyato tou/ imatiou autou%)<sup>1101</sup>

It is clear from the above that her hearing brings about her coming, and her coming brings about her touching Jesus. The faithful touch changes her life.

When Mark describes the woman's internal thoughts in 5:28, he is predicting the concluding hermeneutical judgment on her behaviour as an expression of faith in 5:34.<sup>1102</sup> The emphasis on the woman's absolute confidence in Jesus indicates that her trust exists not in some magical source, but particularly in the presence of God's saving power in Jesus. Furthermore, the woman's knowledge concerning Jesus' healing power implies her confidence that "Jesus can absorb her disease without being endangered himself."<sup>1103</sup> Jesus regards her austere faith and unlimited confidence in Jesus' healing power to be effective just by

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she went through under various treatments by various physicians.

<sup>1099</sup> Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament: The Ministry of Jesus in Its Theological Significance vol 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), 152.

<sup>1100</sup> W. R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: JOST, 1980), 82.

<sup>1101</sup> G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 134.

<sup>1102</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 105.

<sup>1103</sup> Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 134.

touching his garment.<sup>1104</sup> Thus, faith is confidence in Jesus' power to heal.<sup>1105</sup>

The authenticity of the woman's faith is approved by her immediate experience of healing power: "Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering" (5:29). "Her faith completes the circuit, as it were, and allows the power of God, which is constantly going forth from Jesus, to leap the gap from God to the powerless human suppliant."<sup>1106</sup> The account when viewed in the wider Markan context, 5:29 serves to prove both that Jesus' power is ultimately under the authority of God, and that it carries an inherent disposition toward receptive faith.<sup>1107</sup>

When Jesus realized that power had gone out from him, he immediately turned around and asked in 5:30, "who touched my garment?" Both the woman and Jesus are aware that a healing has taken place, but the disciples are without understanding. When Jesus turn around and asks who touched him, the disciples question the sense of Jesus' inquiry in light of the pressure of the crowd (5:30-31). In spite of the reaction of the disciples, Jesus continues his attempt to make a private and secret healing into a public event. Jesus brings the woman's faith into the open.<sup>1108</sup>

"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (5:34). Jesus recognizes the woman's faith and refers to it as basis for her salvation. When considering 5:29 which mentions power as the source of this healing, the woman's faith has saved her because it has permitted the going forth power out of Jesus to do its intended work in her life.<sup>1109</sup> In addition, this proclamation emphasizes the individualism faith. "Faith is no communal system

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<sup>1104</sup> Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 134.

<sup>1105</sup> C. H. Bird, "Some *gar* Clauses in St Mark's Gospel," *JTS* 4 (1953), 180.

<sup>1106</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 106.

<sup>1107</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 106.

<sup>1108</sup> In view of the crowd pressing around Jesus (5:31) there must have been many who touched Jesus. However, the story has laid a special emphasis on the woman's deliberate and purposeful touch, the touch of faith that effects the healing. The disciples' response to Jesus' question "who touched me?" (5:31) explicitly shows their lack of faith.

<sup>1109</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 108.

of belief or practice, but an immediate personal involvement: your (S0U) faith.”<sup>1110</sup>

The woman experienced disease individually, isolating her from the healthy community. Now an individual investment of faith restores her to health.

Through her faith and confidence in Jesus’ power to heal, she is released from her ritual uncleanness. The word ‘to heal’ (sešwken) not only refers to the physical healing that the woman had experienced, but also entails the spiritual salvation that makes her a member of the family of God (5:34).<sup>1111</sup> She becomes a renewed member of her social community, and gains a new identity. Jesus’ addressing of the woman as daughter reveals the fact that she is now a member of the family of God. She came to Jesus as a ‘woman’ (gunh. 5:25) with a sickness. However, she went home as an accepted ‘daughter’ of God’s family.

The salvation that Jairus is seeking for his daughter (5:23) has come to this woman through faith (5:34). She expressed her faith through her complete confidence that Jesus had the authority to help her and through her willingness to overcome the density of the crowd to reach Jesus. Unlike the disciples, who fear and follow Jesus having no faith, the woman has faith.<sup>1112</sup>

#### 4.3.2.2 The Faith of Jairus (5:21-24, 35-43)

In this episode, we find almost the same elements of faith as in the story about the woman with the haemorrhage. Jairus’ knowledge about Jesus is clear from his action toward Jesus. Jairus, a synagogue ruler, comes to Jesus and in the presence of a large crowd falls at Jesus’ feet (5:21-22).<sup>1113</sup> He is clearly a man of

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<sup>1110</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 107.

<sup>1111</sup> Werner Foerster and G. Fohrer, “swłzw,” *TDNT* 7 (1964), 400-20.

<sup>1112</sup> Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 299.

<sup>1113</sup> Malbon (“Jewish Leader,” 275-76) treats Jairus as a member of the Jewish religious leadership, which, in general, stands opposed to Jesus. But instead of being an opponent of Jesus, Jairus puts his faith in him. Malbon concludes that Jairus is one of the exceptions to the general portrayal that the Jewish religious leaders are the opponents of Jesus. Mark schematises the group characterization of the religious leaders, but he refuse to absolutize the schema. However, it is not at all clear that Jairus should be grouped together with opposing religious leaders in the first place. Nothing in the narrative up to this point would give any indication that there is antagonism between the Jesus and the synagogues, or that a leader of synagogue would side with the scribes and Pharisees in opposition to Jesus. Jesus seems to be welcome in the synagogues throughout Galilee, and these

high standing. The ruler of a synagogue was an elected official and one who was held in esteem by the Jewish community. His major responsibilities were the supervision of the synagogue building and the arrangement of synagogue services.<sup>1114</sup>

Although he is a prominent synagogue leader, he does not send a servant but comes himself to Jesus and, despite the presence of a very large crowd, bows down before Jesus.<sup>1115</sup> Earlier in the episode the leper and the Gerasene demonic fall at Jesus' feet in acknowledgement of his authority (1:40; 5:6). In the same way, Jairus humbles himself before Jesus' authority. He confronts a desperate hopeless need in that his daughter is at the point of death, and so he pleads with Jesus to come and touch his daughter so that she may be well and live (5:23). His request demonstrates his complete confidence that Jesus has authority to save his daughter from illness and death.

At this point Mark introduces another extreme of the testing of faith. While the woman finds salvation and peace, Jairus' situation becomes more desperate. He receives the news that his daughter has died (5:35). Jairus' faith is threatened on two levels. His original expectation that his daughter would be saved is shattered.<sup>1116</sup> Furthermore, there is marvellous irony in the description of Jesus as the teacher. According to a member of the rulers' household, Jesus is but a teacher, not someone who has power to save the daughter's life. But from Mark's perspective, "it is virtually because Jesus is a teacher that he can help, for his didactic words carry the power of action, while his actions are integral expression of his message of the presence of God's kingly might."<sup>1117</sup>

Now he is expected to believe in Jesus' power to raise the dead, about which he may show a great deal of scepticism. He is required to show a radical faith in

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synagogues serve as the setting for his teaching (1:211-27, 39; 3:1-6). Mark does not introduce Jairus as someone who has ties to the religious authorities, but rather he seems to describe Jairus as one member of the large crowd that has gathered around Jesus.

<sup>1114</sup> Cranfield, *Mark*, 183; Gnilka, *Markus I*, 214; Guelich, *Mark*, 295; Gundry, *Mark*, 278; Lane, *Mark*, 190; Marshall, *Faith*, 94-05.

<sup>1115</sup> Marshall, *Faith*, 95; Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 114.

<sup>1116</sup> Marshall, *Faith*, 97.

<sup>1117</sup> Marshall, *Faith*, 97.

Jesus' ability to confront a crisis situation even in raising the dead girl.<sup>1118</sup> Jesus himself disregards the message of despair and appeals directly to Jairus' faith: "Do not fear, only believe" (5:36). The command "Do not fear" adequately reflects Jairus' situation. He is afraid, he is sceptical, and he is about to give up.<sup>1119</sup> It means that fear and faith cannot combine together. Fear must be eliminated if faith is to emerge. It is interesting to note that fear and lack of faith (4:40) and lack of perceptiveness (6:49-52; 9:32; 10:32) are all directly related.<sup>1120</sup>

However, Jesus encourages him by saying "Do not be afraid, hang on to the faith and confidence that you have in me" (5:36). "The present imperative *μονον πιστευε* is primarily a call for continuing trust in Jesus more than for a particular belief in his capacity to raise the dead."<sup>1121</sup>

The Christians as well as Jairus are challenged to hang on to the seemingly fragile and shaken faith in Jesus as the story unfolds. Mark wants to challenge Christians through Jairus' experience to a new and deeper perceptiveness of faith for following Jesus.

#### **4.3.3 The Faith of the Syrophenician Woman (7:24-30)**

Mark 7:1-23, in which Jesus uses parabolic language to reject the teaching of the Pharisees concerning ritual defilement, functions as an important background to Mark's presentation of the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30). In this scene, the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching with a lack of understanding. In private, the disciples inquire further about the meaning of the parable, and the inquiry precipitates Jesus' criticism for their lack of understanding (7:17-18). Like the outsiders, the disciples are not able to perceive Jesus' parabolic teaching. The negative portrayal of the disciples stands in contrast to the presentation of the Syrophenician woman that follows.

Unlike the disciples in the previous episode, the Syrophenician woman exemplifies faith and understanding. Mark incorporates his initial portrayal of this woman after

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<sup>1118</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 196.

<sup>1119</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 97.

<sup>1120</sup> Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 76.

<sup>1121</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 97.

his introduction of both Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman. The Syrophenician woman is different from both the haemorrhaging woman and from Jairus in that she is Gentile. Before describing the woman's request about her daughter, Mark states the woman's identity as Gentile (7:26).<sup>1122</sup>

The woman requests Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter, but Jesus responds with an enigmatic remark: "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the bread of the children and throw it to the dogs" (7:27). Possibly, the words in 7:27 are in the nature of a test of faith.<sup>1123</sup> Elsewhere in Mark's Gospel, Jesus often ascribes healing to people's persistent faith (2:5; 5:34; 10:52).<sup>1124</sup>

She accepts Jesus' assertion that the children are to be fed first before the dogs get anything.<sup>1125</sup> She reacts with a quick wit and expands on his riddle: "Yes. Lord...but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). The woman understands the sense of Jesus' riddle immediately. Most of Jesus' listeners in Mark's Gospel do not understand without some explanation. The story about what really contaminates a person, for example, is completely lost on the disciples (7:14-18).<sup>1126</sup> By contrast, this woman acknowledges, without any prompting, that 'the children' in the story implies Israel and 'the dog' refers to the Gentiles. Israel understood itself to be the children of God.<sup>1127</sup> Some stated contempt for unclean, idolatrous Gentiles by the use of the denigrating term 'dog'.<sup>1128</sup>

The Syrophenician woman subscribes to the correctness of Jesus' parable, but instead of viewing it as a rejection she uses it to further her claim on behalf of her

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<sup>1122</sup> For Mark' description concerning the Gentile character of the woman see Cranfield, *Mark*, 247; Guelich, *Mark*, 385; Hurtado, *Mark*, 105; Lane, *Mark*, 260. Garland states the fact that "most Jews in the first century (John 18:28; Acts 10:28) shared without question the prejudice that Gentiles defiled one by touch, just like a person with a flux. They regarded their uncleanness as something innate, not caused by the list of impurities in Leviticus 11-15" (*Mark*, 288).

<sup>1123</sup> P. Pokorny, "From a Puppy to a Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis Demonstrated from Mark 7:24-30/Matt 15:21-28," *NTS* 41 (1995): 328 in 321-37.

<sup>1124</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 468.

<sup>1125</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 288.

<sup>1126</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 288.

<sup>1127</sup> Deut. 32:6; Isa. 1:2; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1 Rom 9:4; Jub. 1:28.

<sup>1128</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 289.

daughter.<sup>1129</sup> She indicates that the dog under the table can eat what the children waste.<sup>1130</sup> The woman's answer demonstrates her more adequate comprehension more about the bread that Jesus provides than even the disciples have.<sup>1131</sup> The disciples have witnessed the feeding of the five thousand (6:31-44) and will witness the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10), but still do not understand the 'bread' that Jesus provides (8:14-21). This woman, who did not participate in either of the feedings, begs to receive only the bread crumbs falling from the table.<sup>1132</sup> She realizes that she is not in a position to demand God's mercy and does not take offence when Jesus tells her so. She will gladly accept the status of the household dog if it means getting fed.<sup>1133</sup>

Jesus relents and grants her request: "Because you have said this, go; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). Then, how should we interpret an adverb phrase "dia. touton ton logon"? It can be translated literally as follow "Because of these words." But, in the broad Markan context, it can be interpreted as "because of your faithful confession," because in the healing miracle stories, a patient's healing depends on his (her) faithful response (2:5; 5:34; cf. 15:28). If so, the woman's response in Mark 7:28, which brings about the saving of her daughter, shows her perceptiveness and faith. Hearing this joyful news, the woman goes back home and finds her daughter cast onto her bed (7:30), presumably having been thrown there by the cast out demon (cf. 7:26) in a departing expression of malice (cf. 1:26; 9:25).<sup>1134</sup>

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<sup>1129</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 120.

<sup>1130</sup> "Such wild dog lived outside of cities (cf. Rev. 22:15) and ate carrion, including the flesh of unclean animals and even human beings (cf. Exod. 22:31; 1Kgs 4:11): dog, therefore, are often associated with uncleanness (see *b. B. Qam.* 83a). The New Testament continues this negative attitude; what is holy should not be thrown to the dog, who are associated with pigs (Matt 7:6) and are often a symbol for opponents and heretics (2 Pet 2:22; Phil 3:2; Rev. 22:15 etc.)"-Marcus, *Mark*, 464. It would be an overstatement, however, to state that the image of the dog is always negative in the OT and Jewish literature. Friendly dog, for example, appear in some manuscripts of Tob. 6:1 and 11:4 (Marcus, *Mark*, 464). Domestic dogs, moreover, can symbolize righteous Gentile. Midrash Ps. 4:11, for example, like our passage, compares Gentile to dog at the eschatological banquet; in both passage the dog get to eat, but do not dine as sumptuously as the invited guests or family do (Marcus *Mark*, 464).

<sup>1131</sup> See Guelich, *Mark*, 389; Kelber, *Story of Jesus*, 38; Lane, *Mark*, 259.

<sup>1132</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 289.

<sup>1133</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 289.

<sup>1134</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 470.



On the basis of her faithful response, she is helped, and her daughter is healed. Thus, the Syrophenician woman stands in contrast to the disciples, who fail to follow Jesus with faith. They lack understanding and faith (6:50-52). Although they are described as insiders and have been given the secrecy of the kingdom (4:11), they do not understand the parables (4:13) and the meaning of the feeding miracles (6:52). In contrast to the disciples as fallible followers, the Syrophenician woman has confidence and faith. Although Jesus treated her initially as an outsider, the Syrophenician woman shows the perceptiveness of an insider through her comprehension of Jesus' parable concerning the bread (7:27-28).

#### **4.3.4 The Significance of Spiritual Perceptiveness Shown in the Healing of the Deaf-Mute Man (7:31-37)**

There is an affinity between 4:1-10 and 8:1-21 in the form of a parallel. 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 have spiritual eyes for understanding the miracles, while 4:1-20 instructs them to have spiritual ears to perceive the parables. Hence, both passages focus on epistemology; i.e. how the people are to perceive Jesus' words and deeds. In order to listen to the secret of the kingdom in Jesus' message and to see the kingdom in Jesus' miracles, the disciples need ears to hear, eyes to see, and opened hearts, i.e. spiritual perceptiveness.

To stress the importance of the spiritual perceptiveness, Mark repeatedly uses the key words of  $\beta\lambda\epsilon\pi\omega$ ,  $\alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omega$ , and  $\nu\omicron\epsilon\omega$  in 8:14-21. Mark uses these words in order to push for an understanding of the allusive meaning of miracles behind and beyond the 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 takes up blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart as metaphors for the intellectual and spiritual ignorance of, mainly, the disciples.<sup>1135</sup> With this structure, Mark intends

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<sup>1135</sup> Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 212.

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.

Mark employs the episode of the Syrophenician woman to exemplify the requirement of following with faith, and then follows this event with the healing of a deaf-mute man, a miracle story that symbolizes the need for spiritual perceptiveness. The deaf-mute man entails the disciples' spiritual state and forecasts that the disciples' ears are to be opened to hear Jesus' word and their tongues loosened to spread the good news about him (cf. 13:10).

The deaf-mute man is needy, unable to hear or speak properly, yet he is befriended and brought to Jesus (7:32). In healing this deaf-mute Jesus uses a sequence of actions, not just a spoken word. He begins by putting his fingers his ears, symbolic of opening them.<sup>1136</sup> Next, he spits and touches his tongue, symbolic of loosening his tongue.<sup>1137</sup> Then he looks up to heaven, the source of his power (as he did when he uttered a blessing before the feeding of the five thousand 6:41), and sighs deeply, a gesticulation of prayer.<sup>1138</sup> Cranfield states that the sigh "indicates the strong emotion of Jesus as he wages war against the power of Satan, and has to seek divine aid in urgent prayer."<sup>1139</sup> Marcus also suggests that Jesus' sigh may indicate a struggle with a demonic obstacle; cf. Mark 8:11-12, in which he will sigh again as a result of Pharisaic 'testing,' a word with a satanic nuance (see 1:13).<sup>1140</sup>

As a result, the thrusting of Jesus' fingers into the man' ears, his use of spittle, and his sighing all have exorcistic implications. Thus, his actions link this story

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<sup>1136</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 299. Hull suggests that Jesus thrusts his fingers into the man's ears in order to create a passageway through which the evil spirit causing the deafness may exit--J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1974), 83.

<sup>1137</sup> Marcus argues that Jesus' use of spittle ironically foreshadows the way in which his opponents will later spit at him (14:65; 15:19); cf. 10:34). Marcus, *Mark*, 478. This association may propose that Jesus' curative power is somehow related to the salvific effect of his suffering, just as the "raising" language in the healing in 5:35-43 pointed to his resurrection-Marcus, *Mark*, 479.

<sup>1138</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 299.

<sup>1139</sup> Cranfield, *Mark*, 252.

<sup>1140</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 474. "If a demon is able to sigh when it wrestles with an exorcist (cf. *T. Sol.* 5:12-13), then it makes sense for an exorcist to sigh as he struggles with a demon" (Marcus, *Mark*, 474).

with the exorcisms that so dominate the first half of Mark.<sup>1141</sup> This demonic aspect is never far below the surface in Mark's Gospel. If Jesus is creating a new kingdom by "doing all things well" (7:37), a most important aspect of this action of new creation is his triumph over satanic evil, which reviews God's primordial victory over demonic chaos 'in the beginning.'<sup>1142</sup>

Mark gives the reader Jesus' healing words "Ephphatha," which he translates, "Be opened!" so that the reader will not mistake it for some magical incantation (7:34).<sup>1143</sup> Immediately, the man's ears are opened and his tongue loosened (7:35). These events are probably to be understood not only literally, but also symbolically. The opened ears phrase is used in Jewish texts as a symbol for revelation; the Hymnist of Qumran praises God for having opened his ears to marvellous mysteries (1QH 1:21), and the Targum interprets the opening of the deaf ears in Isaiah 35:5, which is alluded to in Mark 7:37, as enabling the people to hear the words of the prophets.<sup>1144</sup> Similarly symbolic is the 'unshackling' of the man's tongue, which allows him to join with his companions in announcing what Jesus has done. This feature continues the exorcistic image of 7:33-34, and indicates the deliverance of the Gentiles from their captivity to demons into the joyful liberty of the announcement of the good news.

In the context of Mark's Gospel, Jesus' healing of a deaf-mute takes on symbolic significance.<sup>1145</sup> Jesus' healing of physical deafness raises the hope that Jesus will heal spiritual deafness. Earlier, in Mark's Gospel, defective hearing is used as a metaphor for the inability to comprehend Jesus' teaching and mission.<sup>1146</sup> In Mark 4:12, Jesus characterizes the outsiders as those who hear but do not understand. The outsiders have a defective perceptivity, and by implication a defective hearing as well. This relationship between defective perceptivity and defective hearing may also be observed in the scenes where Jesus initiates his teaching with the commands to 'hear' (4:3, 9, 23, 24; 7:14).<sup>1147</sup> Those who do not hear are those who do not perceive.

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<sup>1141</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 478.

<sup>1142</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 478.

<sup>1143</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 299.

<sup>1144</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 479.

<sup>1145</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 192; Hooker, *Mark*, 186.

<sup>1146</sup> Williams, *Other Follower of Jesus*, 123.

<sup>1147</sup> Williams, "Minor Characters," 218; idem., *Other Followers of Jesus*, 123.

Like the outsiders, the disciples struggle to hear and perceive correctly. Mark condemns the disciples at the end of the second boat scene for their lack of understanding (6:52). In Mark 7:14, Jesus commands the disciples and the crowds all to hear and understand. In private, the disciples then ask Jesus to explain his parable, and Jesus responds by censuring them for their spiritual ignorance (7:17-18). The disciples' question reveals that they did not hear and understand. In contrast to the disciples, the Syrophenician woman hears about Jesus and perceives his teaching (7:25, 28). The deaf man stands in contrast to the disciples.<sup>1148</sup> He has a similar problem, and inability to hear, but in contrast to the disciples, he is healed of this disorder by Jesus.

The extent to which the healed deaf man stands in contrast to the disciples may be seen in Mark 8:14-21. Here, Jesus warns them against the leaven of Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. But the disciples do not recognize his warning, and they discuss their failure to bring bread along on the Journey. Jesus rebukes them through a series of pointed questions that stress their failure of understanding. In a metaphorical way, Jesus emphasizes their incomprehension by asking, "Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?" (8:18). The disciples' failure of understanding reveals failure to hear Jesus' teaching.

As a result, the healing story of the deaf man reflects the disciples' spiritual deafness in Mark's Gospel. Also it foreshadows that just as he heals the deaf man who faces a physical deafness, Jesus will be able to heal the disciples' spiritual deafness, which will bring true understanding. Furthermore, this healing story encourages those who want follow Jesus to have spiritual hearing and challenges them to nurture perceptivity.

#### **4.3.5. The Disciples and Two Blind Men on the Way (8:22-10:52)**

The midsection of the Gospel (8:22-10:52) traces the way from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. Throughout the midsection Mark uses the phrase 'on the way.'<sup>1149</sup>

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<sup>1148</sup> Cf. Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 399-400.

<sup>1149</sup> For more detail observation of the motif of "the way," see B. M. F. van Ieresel, "Locality, Structure and meaning in Mark," *Linguistica Biblica* 53 (1983): 45-54;

At the very outset (8:27) Jesus, ‘on the way,’ asks the crucial question concerning his identity. This whole midsection of the Gospel concludes with the statement (10:52) that Bartimaeus after having received sight ‘followed him on the way’ (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ). In 9:33, Jesus asks his disciples what they had been discussing ‘on the way,’ and in 9:34 the reader is reminded that it had been ‘on the way’ that the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest. In 10:17, Mark uses literally the same phrase, “as he was setting out on his way” (Καὶ ἐκπορευομένου αὐτοῦ εἰς ὁδόν). In 10:32, finally, the way motif is linked with Jerusalem for the first time: “and they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem” (+Hsan de. ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἀναβαίνοντες εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα)<sup>1150</sup>

In addition to the motif of the way, Mark has placed a comprehensive frame around the mid-section. At the outset, he narrates the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), and at the end, the healing of the blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52).<sup>1151</sup> The whole section is thus framed by two stories each of which describes the opening of the eyes of a blind man. The opening of eyes is what Jesus does at the beginning and at the end of the way, and this is also what characterizes his relation with the disciples all along the way.<sup>1152</sup> In first half of the Gospel (1:1-8:21), because of their blindness, that is, hardness of heart and blindness, the disciples have failed to response to Jesus’ teachings and deeds with faith.<sup>1153</sup> In the midsection (8:22-10:52), Jesus will struggle to remove the hardness from the disciples’ hearts, to heal them of their blindness, and to pull them out of incomprehension into perceptiveness, so that they succeed in following Jesus with faith on the way.<sup>1154</sup> To open the eyes of the disciples and make them see is the overriding purpose of the journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem.<sup>1155</sup> Just what Jesus does for the two blind men at the beginning and at the end, he tries also to do for the disciples all the way through.

What does he want them to see on the way? While on the way to Jerusalem

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idem., *Reading Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 18-30.

<sup>1150</sup> Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 43.

<sup>1151</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 290.

<sup>1152</sup> Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 43.

<sup>1153</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

<sup>1154</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 426; Marcus, *Mark*, 515.

<sup>1155</sup> Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 44.

Jesus three times predicts his impending death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In a general sense, each passion-resurrection prediction conveys the same message: the Son of Man must die, and he will be resurrected after three days. There is an emphasis on Jesus' suffering: his being rejected, delivered up into the hands of the religious leaders, tortured and killed. On the way to Jerusalem (his death), he spares no efforts to open their eyes and make them see the meaning of his life; he is going to be a suffering and rejected person, tormented, and killed; but he will overcome death and rise after three days.<sup>1156</sup> If they do not see the meaning of his life, they will fail to follow him with faith. There will be no excuse if they do not know. Jesus has made every effort to open their eyes.

At this point in Mark's narrative the audience fully recognizes serious problems concerning the disciples and their discernment of Jesus' message and mission. Will they learn to see the meaning of Jesus' redemptive mission, or will they remain blind to the realities of Jesus' life and death? We learn the answer to this question in the disciples' response to the three passion-resurrection prediction.

#### 4.3.5.1 The Disciples' Unbelieving Misunderstanding, Denial and Betrayal of Jesus on the Way

Each passion prediction is the first component of a three-part unit, which focuses on the disciples' failure to accept Jesus as suffering Messiah.<sup>1157</sup> After each prediction of passion and resurrection, Mark relates an incident in which the disciples do not believe in Jesus as the suffering Messiah. In the first unit (8:27-33), which will occupy most of our attention below, we shall suggest the more appropriate incident of the confrontation between Jesus and Peter. The episode occurs with Jesus' question concerning his identity (8:27). Various identifications are suggested (8:28). The answers given to Jesus' first question remind his reader of the list of similar views given in 6:14-15; this repetition of these various labels for Jesus intensifies the concept that the question about who Jesus really

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<sup>1156</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 44-45.

<sup>1157</sup> Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 40-43; idem, *An Introduction*, 248-51; Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 104-11; Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 187-89; R. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 74 in 57-95; N. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 60-68.

is must be seen as the central issue in Mark's Gospel.<sup>1158</sup>

### Peter's Misunderstanding

In contrast to the various labels of others, Peter confesses Jesus as Christ (8:29), which is the same title given to Jesus at the beginning of Mark (1:1).<sup>1159</sup> This indicates that in Mark's Gospel the title is the correct one, and that Peter's use of the title implies some understanding of Jesus' identity. At first glance, Peter's confession would appear to indicate that he and the other disciples understand who Jesus really is, but this is not so. Jesus does not affirm Peter's confession of him as confirmation of his sight. Instead, he rebukes (επετιμησεν)<sup>1160</sup> him and instructs him to keep silent, because Peter's understanding of what *ὁ Χριστός* means is wrong, and needs correction (8:30).<sup>1161</sup> Jesus did not want it published abroad to all and sundry, lest it lead to gross misunderstanding.<sup>1162</sup> That Jesus is *ὁ Χριστός* is the truth, but not one for open proclamation according to Peter's understanding at that time.

Jesus' rebuke the disciples and change to be silent, may be part of the wider secrecy theme. So much has been written about the 'Messianic Secret' in Mark that it is sometimes overlooked that 8:30 is the only place in the Gospel where a specifically messianic secret is mentioned.<sup>1163</sup> The general theme of secrecy has

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<sup>1158</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 123-125; Hurtado, *Mark*, 134. As Hurtado argues in his commentary, "Mark has given his reader examples of people wondering about how to label Jesus. There are the crowds of 1:27 and 2:12 who are astonished at his bold actions. There are the teachers of the law of 3:22 who say he is a sorcerer (a view not repeated in 6:14-15 or here in 8:28). There are the crowds at Nazareth who see in Jesus only a home-town boy (6:2-3). There are the disciples, also, who up to this point have shown wonder and bewilderment at Jesus (4:41; 6:52). Only the voice from heaven (1:11) and the demons (1:24, 34; 3:12; 5:7) see the truth of Jesus' person." (*Mark*, 135).

<sup>1159</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 124; Garland, *Mark*, 324.

<sup>1160</sup> This verb was also used at 1:25 and 3:12 to describe Jesus' rebuking the demons to be silent (Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 124; Hooker, *Mark*, 203; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 240; Lane, *Mark*, 291; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330). In fact, Schweizer says, "Peter's reply shows that he has no better understanding than the demons in 3:11 and 5:7, who gave a far better answer" (*The Good News*, 174).

<sup>1161</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 324-25.

<sup>1162</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 325.

<sup>1163</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

been prominent throughout Mark's Gospel.<sup>1164</sup> This involves Jesus' commands that people not tell about healings that he has performed (1.40-45; 5.21-24, 35-43; 7.31-37; 8.22-26).<sup>1165</sup> Although these commands are sometimes disobeyed, in two instances (5.21-24, 35-43; 8.22-26) we have no reason to believe that those who are instructed to keep silence fail to do so. Throughout the Gospel, unclean spirits have supernatural knowledge of Jesus' identity; Jesus, however, restrains these spirits from proclaiming his identity publicly (e.g., 1.23-28; 1.34; 3.11).<sup>1166</sup> We are not told of the demons ever disobeying Jesus' command that they be silent. Both Peter's confession (8.29) and the transfiguration (9.2-8) result in commands to the disciples that they are not to tell what they have learned about Jesus' identity (see 8.30 and 9.9).<sup>1167</sup> Like the silence commands directed towards the demons, these commands are also kept. But Mark 8:30 is the only place where Jesus' identity as Messiah is the explicit subject of the call for secrecy.<sup>1168</sup> In 9:9, a similar rebuke will be given with regard to the christological revelation received on the mountain of transfiguration, but without an explicitly messianic focus (and again using instead the title 'the Son of Man' as in 8:31).<sup>1169</sup>

Why then does Jesus want his identity as Messiah not to be revealed? The subsequent use of the title in Mark's Gospel shows that although Jesus is the Christ, he is not the Christ of popular expectation (e.g., 9:41; 13:21-22; 14:61-62, 63-64).<sup>1170</sup> Most significantly, in Jewish tradition the term 'Messiah' was used of an earthly, political figure, a warrior-king who by his military exploits and passion for justice would gather the Jews there from the four corners of the earth, lead his people into victory over their Gentile overlords, restore the land of Israel to his chosen people the Jews, and, as a grand finale, bring peace to the whole world.<sup>1171</sup> According to popular belief, he would be descended from king David.

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<sup>1164</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 3<sup>rd</sup> (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963); idem, *Messianic Secret*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>1165</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, lxx.

<sup>1166</sup> M. A. Powell, "Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Mark," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 342 in 341-346.

<sup>1167</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, lxx.

<sup>1168</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

<sup>1169</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

<sup>1170</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 135.

<sup>1171</sup> W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 36. Cf. 1 Sam 16:1-3, 12-13; 2 Sam 12:7; Sir 46:13;



The role of the Davidic king is to liberate his people from alien (Roman) rule and from their own unrighteous rulers, and to restore his people to their land. This expectation is described in the Psalms of Solomon 17:21-25:

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,  
 the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel  
 in the time known to you, O God.  
 Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteousness rulers,  
 To purge Jerusalem from gentiles  
 who trample her to destruction;  
 in wisdom and in righteous to drive out  
 the sinners from the inheritance;  
 to smash the arrogance of sinners  
 like a potter's jar  
 To shatter all their substance with an iron rod  
 to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his wrath;  
 At his warning the nations will flee from his presence;  
 and he will condemn sinners by the thought of their hearts.<sup>1172</sup>

Moreover, the author of 4 Ezra describes that the Messiah, as a lion from the posterity of David, will triumph over the eagle (4 Ezra 12:34).<sup>1173</sup> He will judge the world and then deliver the faithful remnant of Israel. According to the apocalyptic book of Baruch, the Davidic king also will come in order to destroy the enemies of Israel and establish a new age. (Baruch 72-74).<sup>1174</sup> Jesus has not yet accomplished any of these hopes, but Peter expects with confidence that he will nonetheless.<sup>1175</sup> Jesus has been declaring the kingdom of God, but Peter is now convinced that he has learned the name of the king.<sup>1176</sup> But Peter, and the other disciples, do not have a clue as to how Jesus will be enthroned, or how he will prevail over the enemies. Jesus tries to open the disciples' spiritual eyes so that they can see that God will accomplish these purposes in an unexpected way. As Matera puts it, "Jesus is the expected Messiah in the most unexpected

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4Q252 5:1-7; *Testament of Judah* 22:3; *T. Jud* 24:1-6; CD 7:20; 1QSb 5:27-28; 1QM 11:4-9; 4Q175 1:9-13. One form of messianic expectation found in a number of Old Testament texts is linked to the figure of David (cf. 2 Sam 7; Pss. 2, 89, 109/110). This expectation foresaw the coming of a Davidic king who would restore the fortunes of the house of David (cf. Is 11:10; Amos 9:11-12) and who would rule with justice and be a saviour for Israel (cf. Is 7:14; 9:1-6; 11:1-2).

<sup>1172</sup> Trans. By R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 667.

<sup>1173</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 324.

<sup>1174</sup> Translation from the Syriac by R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 481-524.

<sup>1175</sup> Cf. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 144.

<sup>1176</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 324.

manner.”<sup>1177</sup> The popular enthusiasm for Jesus, and the hope that he might be persuaded to take a more political role as the leader of a Jewish nation (see Mk 10:35-37), would mean that the messianic language could be seriously misunderstood by both the disciples and the opponents.<sup>1178</sup>

Jesus’ hesitancy in accepting the title of Messiah suggests that he was anxious to make clear his non-political role (cf. Jn 18:36).<sup>1179</sup> The people considered the Messiah to come, as a saviour who would be a political deliver of Israel. However, Jesus’ mission was not political liberation (12:13-17).<sup>1180</sup> Jesus was certain that his mission would be misunderstood. Jesus, therefore, did not want the fact that he was the Messiah, to be revealed fully at the beginning of his public mission. According to Aune, “Jesus did not openly claim to be the Messiah during his ministry because his own conception of the Messianic office was quite different from that of his contemporaries.”<sup>1181</sup> Jesus spiritualised the Jewish messianic expectation, which were primarily politically oriented. Through the use of the relatively neutral title ‘Son of Man,’ Jesus reinterpreted the messianic role and

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<sup>1177</sup> Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 145.

<sup>1178</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

<sup>1179</sup> M. Loba, “Disclosure of the Messianic Secret in Mk 14:62. A Text Critical Response,” *Neotestamentica* 33 (1999): 113-123.

<sup>1180</sup> In the first century of the Christian era messianic expectations were widespread enough and strong enough to lead groups of people to accept various individuals as people sent by God to liberate his people. There are references in the Book of Acts and in the writings of Josephus, the first century C.E. Jewish historian, to prophets who organized popular prophetic movements that took up the ideas of the prophets of old. They appeared on the Palestinian scene, gathered a following about them and promised, among other things, to liberate Israel. One of these was Theudas (Acts 5:36; Jos., *Ant.* 2.259) who promised his followers that he would lead them dry-shod across the Jordan in a repeat of Joshua’s miracle (Josh 3:13-17). Another was an Egyptian prophet who led a group of followers up the Mount of Olives assuring them that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall. Popular messianic movements of resistance against the Roman occupiers were led by men such as Judas the Galilean (cf. Acts 5:37; Jos., *Ant.* 17.271-2), Simon (*Ant.* 17:273-6) and Athronges (Jos., *Ant.* 17.278-84) who had royal aspirations, but who were defeated by the Romans. Messianic expectations, then, were quite diverse at the time of Jesus and it is difficult to speak of a single Jewish messianic expectation. During the second great anti-Roman revolt of 132-135 C.E. Simon Bar Kochba was seen as a messianic figure and the fulfilment of OT prophecy (Num 24:17) but his revolt was put down and he himself killed.

<sup>1181</sup> D. E. Aune, “The Problem of the Messianic Secret,” *NovT* 11 (1969): 9 in 1-31.



suffering, death, and resurrection and, by implication, not one of military glory or political conquest (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). He also teaches the disciples that the Son of Man's giving of his life is a ransom for many (10:45). But his disciples misunderstand and show that their concept is otherwise (8:32-33; 9:32-34; 10:35-37). Faced with the scandal of a crucified Messiah the disciples failed to accept Jesus' identity as suffering Messiah. Mark repeatedly indicates to his readers that the Christology of Jesus' original disciples was in error.<sup>1189</sup> They fail to understand, indeed they misunderstood, the true significance of his person, message and mission, and their conduct in the story reflects this.<sup>1190</sup>

Peter indeed confesses or declares Jesus as the Messiah, but he fails to understand his teaching, particularly those relating to the suffering Messiah.<sup>1191</sup> This becomes pertinently clear when he rejects Jesus' own interpretation of his role as the messiah with his first prediction of his passion (8:31): "Peter took him, and began to *rebuke* (*epitimah*) him" (8:32 – my Italics).<sup>1192</sup> If Peter rebukes Jesus on the heels of Jesus' prediction, then Peter disagrees with Jesus' confession, and Peter's Christ confession cannot have been in accordance with Jesus' suffering Son of Man confession.<sup>1193</sup> For this rejection, Jesus rebukes Peter's unbelieving attitude again and identifies him logically in the context of their mutual rebukes as Satan (8:33): "He *rebuked* (*epetimhsen*) Peter."<sup>1194</sup> 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'<sup>1195</sup> The conflict between Jesus and Peter is all the more dramatic

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<sup>1189</sup> Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 53.

<sup>1190</sup> Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 53.

<sup>1191</sup> The Markan Jesus appears repeatedly in private sessions with his disciples in which they are invited to understand the true nature, meaning and significance of his teaching, person and work (e.g. 4:11-12, 33-34; 7:17-23; 8:31-3: 9:2-8, 28-29; 9:30-32; 10:10-12, 32-34; 13:3-37). Just as frequently, however, they are shown either failing to understand him (as in the first part of the Gospel; 4:41; 6:52; 8:14-21) or misunderstanding him (as, to an increasing degree, in the second part of the Gospel; 8:32-33; 9:5-6, 9-13, 32, 34; 10:13-14, 32, 35-45).

<sup>1192</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 125.

<sup>1193</sup> Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 105; Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 48.

<sup>1194</sup> Cf. Hooker, *St Mark*, 206-7; Gundry, *Mark*, 433.

<sup>1195</sup> The reference to the "on the side of man" may be an allusion to the political messianic expectations that Peter and the other eleven disciples he represented might have had of Jesus (R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Men, Tree, and Walking. A Conjectural Solution to Mk. 8:24," *The Expository Times* 103 [1992]: 173 in 172-74). There are many definitions of the title 'Messiah' at the time of Jesus, varying from a political-military figure to an eschatological teacher. But Mark desired to

if one remembers that in Mark's Gospel the word "rebuke" (epetimaw) is a technical term 'connoting exorcism language'.<sup>1196</sup> When earlier Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit (1:25), he identified and treated it as a demonic force. "The threefold rebuking in our story (8:30; 32; 33) conjures up a demonic milieu and suggests that each of the two protagonists treats the other as a satanic personality."<sup>1197</sup>

Peter was in action of the part Satan and tempting Jesus to go against the specific divine will that Jesus must go the route of death.<sup>1198</sup> "The initial declaration that Jesus was God's beloved Son (1:11) was followed 'immediately' by his temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Now, the drama is played out again at a human level. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah is followed by another attack attributed to Satan [8:33], this time working through Peter."<sup>1199</sup> In fact, Mark has formed his narrative so that he emphasises that Jesus confronts a severe temptation at the three most crucial turning points in the narrative: 1) the initiation of his ministry (1:11); 2) at Caesarea Philippi (8:33); 3) at Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>1200</sup>

"It is, of course, possible to see the use of the term 'Satan' here as generic, simply meaning adversary, but the apocalyptic feature of the narrative suggests a stronger reading."<sup>1201</sup> While Peter is not possessed, he is influenced by the forces of darkness to think in a merely human manner about the future of Jesus.<sup>1202</sup> So Peter unwittingly serves as Satan's tool here, ironically at the precise moment when he also has gained a partial insight into Jesus' identity (cf. 8:22-26).<sup>1203</sup>

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project a different kind of a messiah, who is not triumphalistic or conquering, but a messiah who is willing to be crucified and rejected.

<sup>1196</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 324.

<sup>1197</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 48.

<sup>1198</sup> Cf. S. Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 82.

<sup>1199</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 205.

<sup>1200</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 241.

<sup>1201</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 243. Cf. Schweizer, *The Good News*, 173; Painter, *Mark*, 126.

<sup>1202</sup> Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus*, 78.

<sup>1203</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 243.

Peter's unbelieving attitude has been foreshadowed in Mark 4 the cryptic allusion to failure of the seed, which falls on rocky ground. Tolbert has shown the negative fates if the seeds are allegorical intimations of people who fail to follow Jesus with faith throughout Mark's narrative.<sup>1204</sup> Of the portrayal of the fates of the seed, the longest is the one in 4:16-17: "Others, like seed sown on rocky places (*petrwðh*), hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away." The 'rocky ground' (*petrwðh*) may play on the name of Peter and his character is followed by failure.<sup>1205</sup> Peter is included among those whose hearts are hardened (8:17); he continues to fail to accept the future suffering of Jesus (8:32); Jesus identifies him with Satan and as one who thinks human thoughts rather than the thoughts of God (8:33).

According to Matthew, Peter, as a result of the confession "Jesus is Christ" (regarded as a statement of faith), is given authority over the church that is to come into being after the resurrection, and he is the rock on which it will be founded (Mt. 16:17-19).<sup>1206</sup> By contrast, according to Mark, he, as a result the confession (regarded as unbelief in terms of the true messianic concept), is described as "Satan," a passage omitted by Matthew.<sup>1207</sup> In contrast to Matthew, Mark portrays the disciples represented by Peter as having no faith. Mark's chief concern was a pastoral one. As Mark retells Peter's unbelieving confession, he urges his readers, who confront the delay of the *parousia*, persecution, martyrdom and false Christology, to recognize the necessity of suffering as the prelude to glory or vindication<sup>1208</sup> and to follow Jesus with faith during the era of suffering.

### *The Hallmarks of Unbelief*

The disciples do not understand the messianic secret even after the prophecy

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<sup>1204</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 151-60; idem, "How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 352-53.

<sup>1205</sup> Tolbert, "How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character," 353.

<sup>1206</sup> Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 130.

<sup>1207</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 156.

<sup>1208</sup> Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 130.

regarding the passion is made for the second time.<sup>1209</sup> While in the wake of the first prediction Peter displays his unbelieving confession, it is after the second prediction (9:31) that the disciples are exposed in their unbelieving attitude of an inability to understand Jesus.<sup>1210</sup> After the second passion prediction (9:31), the narrator relates an event in which the disciples argue who was the greatest (9:33-34). The disciples appear to derive their personal identities from a messianic concept of power and glory.<sup>1211</sup> Personal power and status is the disciples' favourite topic of discussion.<sup>1212</sup> Jesus then called the Twelve and taught them that who ever wanted to be first must be last of all and servant of all (cf. 9:35). They have failed to understand and believe in Jesus as the suffering messiah.

The second prediction is immediately followed by the succinct comment, "But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it" (9:32). Especially, 'fear' is the word most often contrasted to faith in the Gospel of Mark (4:40-41; 5:15, 36; 6:50).<sup>1213</sup> These two motifs, lack of understanding and fearful inhibition, reinforce the disciples' failure to accept in Jesus as the Son of Man.<sup>1214</sup> If they do not understand what is being said but are afraid to find out, they will fail to follow Jesus with faith.

It is obvious from the circumstances regarding the third prophecy about the passion, death and resurrection that the disciples are afraid to journey along the path of the cross (cf. 10: 32-34). On this occasion, too, they take a stance, which is quite different from that of Christ.<sup>1215</sup> This is seen in the request made by the sons of Zebedee. James and John ask for a share in Jesus' messianic glory, hoping that he will reward them with a position at his right and left hand (10:35-45).<sup>1216</sup> These sons of Zebedee ask for future 'cabinet' positions in the face of Jesus' third and last passion-resurrection prediction on the threshold of

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<sup>1209</sup> In 8:33, the disciples' failure to understand is the result of Satan-inspired opposition.

<sup>1210</sup> Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 106.

<sup>1211</sup> J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 108-109; Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 107.

<sup>1212</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 152-53.

<sup>1213</sup> Cf. The comment on 4:41.

<sup>1214</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 49.

<sup>1215</sup> Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus*, 84.

<sup>1216</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 238.

Jerusalem.<sup>1217</sup> The expressly stated wish, “to sit one at your right and one at your left, in your glory” (10:37), provokes Jesus’ allusive remark, “You do not know what you are asking” (10:38). They utterly disregard the necessity to drink the cup of suffering and to be baptized with the baptism that Jesus is baptized with.

#### *Failure to Believe in Jesus as the Suffering Messiah*

This section of the narrative section (8:27-10:52) also develops the disciples’ failure to accept Jesus as suffering messiah outside of these passion prediction units. The transfiguration event (9:2-8) and the following discussion between Jesus and the disciples who were privy to it (Peter, James, and John; 9:9-13) further confirms their confusion; Peter’s response to the appearance of Moses and Elijah suggests how taken he is with such a glorious appearance of Jesus’ identity, in sharp contrast to his preceding response to Jesus’ prediction of suffering.<sup>1218</sup>

Down in the village, a demon in possession of a young boy is getting the best of the disciples, who apparently now lack power over demons, which they once overcame (9:17-18). Further, they seek to prohibit a successful exorcist who was working in Jesus’ name, because he was not following them (9:38); they apparently desire exclusive rights to Jesus’ authority, and have failed to understand that Jesus’ ministry is to have no such boundaries.<sup>1219</sup> Their ‘this worldly,’ hierarchical view of authority manifests itself as well in their attempt to prevent children from coming to Jesus; and they are concerned about the reward they will receive for having left everything and followed Jesus (10:28-31).<sup>1220</sup> Again in each case, Jesus tries to heal their defective sight, but to no avail. As the narrative moves on from this section into the passion narrative, despite all hope to the contrary, the readers cannot but be surprised when the disciples ultimately deny him and flee (14:50).<sup>1221</sup>

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<sup>1217</sup> Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 51.

<sup>1218</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 205: “In contrast to his utter rejection of Jesus the Messiah’s word about the inevitability of suffering (8:31-33), this glorified Jesus in company with Elijah and Moses wins his approval (“it is well that we are here”) and his esteem.”

<sup>1219</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 154.

<sup>1220</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 238.

<sup>1221</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 242-43.



Furthermore, Peter in Gethsemane falls into the temptation of Satan (14:32-38). This unbelieving 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." He immediately repented of his sin (14:72). Although he denies Jesus, it is due to his fear, not because of his rebellion. Thus Jesus will forgive him and heal his hardness of heart in the new commission at Galilee (14:72; 16:7-8).<sup>1222</sup>

However, in spite of Jesus' continuous warning, Judas absolutely falls into the hostility and unbelieving rebellion of the Jewish leaders. Judas acts of his own volition to betray Jesus. He stands with the opponents to arrest and kill Jesus (14:43-47). About him, Jesus says "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (14:21). In the OT, the word "woe" (אוי) was the prophet's key word to announce impending judgment (Isa. 3:11; Mic 2:11). In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' pronouncement of woe upon the betrayer is one of two appearances of οὐαί, ("woe"; 13:17; cf. Matt 11:21; 23:13, 15-16, 23, 25, 27, 29; Lk 10:13; 11:42-44, 46-47, 52).<sup>1223</sup> And Jesus' second saying, "it would be better if he had not never been born," is used in other Jewish texts to express the Messiah's judgment of the betrayer, e.g., "when the Righteous One shall appear... it would have been better for them [i.e., those who denied the name of the Lord] not to have been born" (1 Enoch 38:2; cf. 2 Enoch 41:2; *m Hag* 2:1).<sup>1224</sup> God's judgment is coming upon the rebellion of Judas (cf. Matt 27:3-10).

As Mark introduces the episode of the healing of a blind man after the description of the disciples' blindness, he implies that the disciples' blindness ("hardness of heart")<sup>1225</sup> will be healed.<sup>1226</sup> Further, the repetition of οἱ φαλμοῖ, βλεπω, wεα,

<sup>1222</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."

<sup>1223</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 498.

<sup>1224</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 378.

<sup>1225</sup> Other figures of speech are used to express the idea of obduracy: 'blind eyes,' 'deaf ears,' 'stiff neck,' 'stubborn shoulder.' These figures are frequently used in reference to Israel (Deut 29:2-4; Is 6:9-10; 29:9-10; 63:17; Jer 5:21-23;

and *akouw* (4:12; 8:18, 23, 24 [twice], 25; 9:1, 9; 10:51, 52; 15:39) intensify his intention.<sup>1227</sup> The words ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ introduced in 4:12 are considered as ‘grand metaphors’ that appear again and again in Mark’s narrative.<sup>1228</sup> In fact, these references to ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ (or their opposites, ‘blindness’ and ‘deafness’) in either story or discourse have meaning beyond the literal, as Fowler argues:

[I]n 4:12, the reader can surely figure out minimally that his comment is suggesting that some who think they ‘see’ really do not perceive anything at all, and some who think they ‘hear’ really understand nothing.<sup>1229</sup>

Similarly, the two healings of a blind man (8:22-26) and Bartimaeus (10:46-52) sandwich Jesus’ instruction of discipleship (8:27-10:45) in order to reveal Mark’s theological intention, i.e. just as Jesus heals the blind men, he will heal the disciples’ blindness (the cause of unbelief) so that they follow Jesus with faith. Consequently, through these narrative compositions Mark emphasizes the importance of spiritual perceptiveness (insight) as a prerequisite for discipleship. The two episodes in which Jesus heals blind men reflect the relationship between the healing of the blind men and the healing of the disciples’ blindness, which causes their unbelieving behaviours.

#### 4.3.5.2 The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida (8:22-26)

Although the disciples seem to obey Jesus’ command, ‘Follow me’ (1:16-20; 2:14-15; cf. 10:28), they fail to understand and have faith in Jesus due to blindness (hardness of heart). Thus, throughout the Gospel, Jesus warns them against the hardness and blindness (4:10, 13, 41; 6:37, 52; 7:17; 8:4, 14-21). The disciples’ blindness and faithlessness reaches a crescendo in the last boat story (8:14-21). Still they do not understand about the loaves, and the succession short, brusque rhetorical questions on the lips of Jesus (8:17-21) reflect his exasperation. But what is of greatest significance here is that the language of 8:17-18 has the effect of classifying the disciples with outsiders (cf. 4:12). They seem to have lost their privileged position. However, in the next miracle (8:22-26), there is a hint of transformation, for the healings of the blind men are really paradigmatic of the

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Ezek 11:19; 12:1-3). Evans, “Hardness of Heart,” 298.

<sup>1226</sup> For more detail, cf. the comment of 8:22-26.

<sup>1227</sup> Cf. Marcus, *Mark 4:10-12*, 557-74.

<sup>1228</sup> Fowler, *Let the reader understand*, 127.

<sup>1229</sup> Fowler, *Let the reader understand*, 127.

disciples' future restoration.<sup>1230</sup>

### Literary Composition and Structure

The theme, which is important in 8:22-26, is not difficult to discern. The combination of this passage with 8:14-21 clearly indicates that Mark is continuing and intensifying his characterization of the blindness of the disciples begun as early as 4:1-34.<sup>1231</sup> Immediately following the discussion of 8:14-21 with its reference to the disciples' blindness and hardness of heart (8:17-18), there is this healing of a blind man.<sup>1232</sup> The position of the story is particularly important because it appears at a crucial point in the Gospel.<sup>1233</sup> It is generally recognized that 8:27-9:1 stands at the centre both of Mark's description of Jesus and his teaching on discipleship, and that with Peter's confession and Jesus' open declaration of the passion, Mark begins the second half of the Gospel.<sup>1234</sup> Most commentators also agree that there is some kind of symbolic relationship between the healing of the blind man and Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ.<sup>1235</sup> Thus, 8:22-26 is often considered a bridge between the two halves of the Gospel, a passage that binds Mark's description of the disciples in 8:14-21 and 8:27.<sup>1236</sup>

This episode is surely to be associated with the earlier healing of the deaf and dumb man in 7:31-37, both because the two episodes have several similarities in wording, and because each story seems to allude to Isaiah 35:5-6.<sup>1237</sup> The extensive similarities between these two passages may be seen in a synopsis of Mark 7:31-

<sup>1230</sup> Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 106.

<sup>1231</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 313. The blind man's healing occurs between two examples of the disciples' blindness (8:14-21; 8:31-33).

<sup>1232</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 133.

<sup>1233</sup> E. S. Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida," *NTS* 25 (1979): 375 in 370-383.

<sup>1234</sup> E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965), 121; Allen, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 117. Allen refers to the passage as an "epoch in the training of the disciples."

<sup>1235</sup> See the detailed discussion below. Cf. Schmid, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 153; Robbins, "The Healing of the Blind Man," 226.

<sup>1236</sup> Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 375.

<sup>1237</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 133: "The healing of the deaf and blind are exactly two of the things mentioned in Isaiah 35:5-6 as the kind of miracles that will accompany God's final salvation."

37 and 8:22-26. Fowler<sup>1238</sup> and Taylor<sup>1239</sup> both provide helpful synopses of the two passages. The parallel expressions in Mark 7:31-37 and 8:22-26 are all the more impressive because, for the most part they occur in the same order, with one obvious exception.<sup>1240</sup> Like the deaf man, the blind man is befriended by others who bring him to Jesus in order that he might be healed (7:32 and 8:22). Jesus takes them outside the village, so that he is separated from the crowd (7:33 and 8:23). They are healed by Jesus in this private setting (7:34-36 and 8:23-25). Some of the same techniques that Jesus used to heal deafness are followed again in the healing of blindness. Jesus uses spittle on their tongue and eyes, and places his hands upon them (7:33 and 8:23).<sup>1241</sup> At this point, the narrative diverges from the pattern found in the healing of the deaf man.<sup>1242</sup>

The healing of the blind man serves a similar purpose in the narrative to the healing of the deaf man. The similarity between 7:31-37 and 8:22-26 helps to emphasise the contrast between the healed minor characters and the disciples, as they are described in 8:14-21.<sup>1243</sup> Briefly, the former has been strategically placed before he rebukes them for their lack of spiritual insight (7:31-37).

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<sup>1238</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 105-106.

<sup>1239</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 368-69.

<sup>1240</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 123; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 238.

<sup>1241</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 128.

<sup>1242</sup> The similarity between the healing of the blind man and the healing of the deaf man serves to link Mark's description of the blind man with his description of other minor characters in the preceding narrative. The healing of the blind man also demonstrates other lexical associations with the earlier healing stories that feature minor characters. See the use *ferw* ("to bring" 8:22) in 1:32, 2:3 and 8:22, *parakalew* ("to ask for" 8:22) in 1:40, 5:18, 8:23, 25, and *apokaqisthmi* ("to restore" 8:25) in 3:5 and 8:25.

<sup>1243</sup> Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 399-400; Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 108. Earlier in Mark's narrative, defective seeing and hearing are used as metaphors for the inability to understand Jesus' teachings and missions, the inability which causes unbelieving attitudes. In 4:12 Jesus characterizes the outsiders as those who "may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding." The outsiders have a defective understanding, and by implication a defective seeing and hearing as well. Like the outsiders, the disciples struggle to see, hear, and understand correctly. The relationship between defective hearing and defective perceiving may be seen in that Jesus introduces his teaching with the command to hear (4:3, 9, 23, 24; 7:14). Later, in speaking to the opponents, disciples and crowd in 7:14, Jesus commands them all to hear and understand. In private, the disciples then ask Jesus to explain his teaching, and Jesus responds by criticizing them for their lack of understanding (7:18-19). The disciples' question shows that they did not hear and understand.

Immediately, after he rebukes them for their lack of the inability to understand, Jesus heals the blind man (8:22-26).<sup>1244</sup> Many commentators have argued for a symbolic reading of the healing of the blind man<sup>1245</sup> and the deaf man.<sup>1246</sup> Jesus' healing of physical blindness raises the hope that he will also bring spiritual sight to the disciples who are blind to his identity and mission. This physical healing of blindness serves as symbol for the spiritual healing of the disciples' sight, which also comes gradually and with difficulty.<sup>1247</sup> Jesus has already come across greater difficulty with the disciples than the blind man. But the healing of the blind man creates the expectation that Jesus will be able to bring true understanding to others, even to the disciples.

Moreover, a comparison of analogous scenes accentuates not only similarities, but also differences. Some of the differences between the two healings are of necessity, because the disorders that are treated are different. Yet the two healing stories use similar expressions to refer to the different maladies and to different parts of the body.<sup>1248</sup> There are significant ways in which the healing of the blind man differs from the healing of the deaf man. Unlike the deaf man, the healing of the blind man is processed in two different stages. The conclusion of the blind man's healing is also different. Unlike the deaf man, the blind man obeys Jesus' command to silence.

#### Exegetical Perspective on the Passage

The initiation of the healing process is depicted in 8:23, in which Jesus applies spittle to the blind man's eyes and placed his hands on the blind man. After the healing techniques are applied, Jesus tests their efficacy by asking the man a direct question, "What do you see?" (Ei; ti blepeijē). The blind man's reply is prefaced by the word *anabl eyaj* (8:24). In the Mark's Gospel and in the other NT, this word is used in three ways. In Mark 16:4 and Luke 19:5, this verb means

<sup>1244</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 123. The two healing stories bracket the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-8), the Pharisees' request for a sign (8:9-13), and the disciples' lack of understanding (8:14-21), with its emphasis on seeing, hearing, understanding (8:17, 18, 21)

<sup>1245</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 192; Gniska, *Markus*, 298-99; Hooker, *Mark*, 184, 186.

<sup>1246</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 105-14.

<sup>1247</sup> Johnson, "Mark viii 22-26," 370-83; Matera, "The Incomprehension of the disciples," 153-72; Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing," 225-26.

<sup>1248</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 106-107.

‘look up.’ Elsewhere it is used in the sense of ‘look up in prayer’ (Mark 6:41; 7:34).<sup>1249</sup> In this passage, the function of this verb is very different from its function in 7:34.<sup>1250</sup> Whereas it is used to describe ‘look up’ in context of prayers in 7:34 and applied to Jesus, in this verse it reflects an almost technical meaning of ‘regaining sight.’<sup>1251</sup> Wherever the verb is used in relation to blindness, it always means a regaining of sight (e.g., 10:51-52; Matt 11:5; 20:34; Luke 7:22; 18:43; John 9:11, 15, 18; Acts 9:12, 17, 18; 22:13).<sup>1252</sup> In 8:24, the verb portrays the moment of the healing for the blind man, but the healing is not yet perfect.

In 8:25, where Jesus puts his hand on the blind man’s eyes a second time, two different words are used to illustrate the restoration of the man’s sight (*dieþleyen* and *eneþlepen*).<sup>1253</sup> In 8:25, the verb *dieþleyen* (‘to see’) contrasts the perfect sight of the man after the second healing to his initial imperfect sight.<sup>1254</sup> The unclear images of myopia have gone. The use of the aorist indicates the point at which his sight is completely restored; now the man who looked like trees can be recognized as people.<sup>1255</sup>

In Mark’s Gospel, the word *emþlepw* is always used with an intensive meaning, maintaining the root importance of the preposition *en*, depicting a kind of seeing ‘into’ by which people can understand a person or situation at a glance.<sup>1256</sup> For example, in 10:21, Jesus has insight into the rich man’s character, and looking at him, loves him. In 10:27, Jesus greets his disciples’ amazement at his teaching

<sup>1249</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 312.

<sup>1250</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 199.

<sup>1251</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 154.

<sup>1252</sup> Johnson, “Mark viii. 22-26,” 376. An investigation of the usage of this word in LXX, classical Greek literature and early Christian Fathers confirms the meaning—Isaiah 42:18 (LXX); Tob. 11:8 (⌘); 14:2 (⌘ B); Herodotus 2, 111; Aristophanes, *Pl.* 95, 117, 126, 866; Plato, *Rep.* 10, 621b; *Phdr.* 243b; Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 48, 2 (Isa. 35:5f.); Pausanias 4, 12, 10; Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum* 2, 1, 547; John Chryostom, *Homily on the Gospel According to Matthew 32,7*; *Homily on the Gospel According to John 56:1* (Johnson, *Mark*, 377).

<sup>1253</sup> Three verbs describe the man’s progressive restoration of sight: he opens his eyes wide (*dialepw*), his sight is restored (*apokaqistanw*), and he can see all things clearly (*emþlepw*)—Garland, *Mark*, 312.

<sup>1254</sup> Johnson, “Mark viii. 22-26,” 377; Hooker, *St Mark*, 199.

<sup>1255</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 174.

<sup>1256</sup> Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Marc*, IXXX.

about the difficulty of entering the kingdom of God with an insightful glance which again designates that he is able to see into the hearts of men and sense the real significance of their questions: they are worried about the legality of their own commitment.<sup>1257</sup>

This analysis makes it clear, then, that the verb *eneblepen* is not merely a repetition of the verb *diebleyen*. The use of the aorist depicts the moment at which the man's sight is perfectly restored, while the verb *eneblepen* accounts for the complete restoration of his vision: he not only sees the men clearly but sees everything clearly.<sup>1258</sup> The use of the imperfect (*eneblepen*) indicates that his new vision will be an ongoing experience; the blind man continues to see everything with clarity.<sup>1259</sup>

The blind man is healed in two-stages. The two-stage healing is unique in Mark's narrative, and thus it sets the healing of the blind man apart from the healing of the deaf man and all other healing stories in the preceding narrative.<sup>1260</sup> The two stages of the healing in this passage do not mean Jesus' inability to heal the blind man immediately, but it is a process that Mark weaves into his narrative.<sup>1261</sup> The context of 8:22-26 readily demonstrates the fact that Mark links the physical healing of the blind man to the spiritual healing of the disciples' blindness, since the episode is sandwiched between two passages which provide crucial portrayals of the blindness of the disciples. The healing of the blind man in two stages implies the anticipation that the disciples' blindness will be resolved, and they will have full sight in the near future.

The description of the spiritual blindness of the disciples runs throughout the Gospel but is particularly focused around 8:22-26. In 8:14-21, the disciples demonstrate an implausible lack of understanding and unbelief, which are caused by their hardness of heart (or blindness) which is usually reserved for outsiders (4:10-12) and opponents (3:5). The rhetorical questions in 8:17-18 provide a

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<sup>1257</sup> Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 378.

<sup>1258</sup> Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 379.

<sup>1259</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 265.

<sup>1260</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 130.

<sup>1261</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 157.

warning both to the disciples and Mark's readers that a persistent lack of understanding could develop into a calcified blindness like that of the religious leaders who cannot see because they refuse to see.<sup>1262</sup> The previous boat scenes (4:35 and 6:45) also describe the dangers of seeing and not perceiving. Jesus' power to still the wind and waves produces unbelieving fear rather than believing worship and causes the disciples to wonder who he really is (4:41), while in 6:45 the disciples, who are described as believers (cf. 4:1-34), do not recognize Jesus in time of trouble, because they are not looking for him. Although they see him, they think he is a ghost (6:49).<sup>1263</sup>

It has been demonstrated above that the description of a two-stage healing in 8:22-26 is placed by Mark at the centre of the Gospel to continue his motifs of blindness and sight, and provides a symbolic interpretation which binds the two halves of the Gospel.<sup>1264</sup> The two-stage healing implies the fact that the disciples, who have a partial vision, need to possess full sight. According to Lightfoot, the healing of the blind man in two stages symbolizes the developing insight of the disciples as seen in the following episode (8:27-30).<sup>1265</sup> According to him, Jesus' initial healing touch is parallel to the first question put to the disciples concerning his identity (8:27): "who do people say I am?" The unclear sight of the blind man corresponds to the incorrect answers of others concerning Jesus' identity: "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets"(8:28). Jesus' second healing touch parallels his second question to the disciples concerning his identity (8:29a): "who do you say I am?" while the clear sight of the blind man symbolizes the insight of Peter who confess that Jesus is the messiah (8:29b).<sup>1266</sup>

Lightfoot's view faces one difficult problem, since in 8:29-29 they do not truly

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<sup>1262</sup> Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 379.

<sup>1263</sup> For the detailed discussion, see comment on Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52.

<sup>1264</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 123. Hooker, *St Mark*, 199; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 238.

<sup>1265</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934), 90-91. For a recent defence of the same viewpoint see Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 168; Cranfield, *Mark*, 245; D. J. Hawkin, "The Symbolism and Structure of the Marcan Redaction," *EvQ* 49 (1977) 104-105; Nineham, *Mark*, 218.

<sup>1266</sup> Hooker, *St Mark*, 199.



understand Jesus' identity as suffering Messiah.<sup>1267</sup> In 8:1-21 the disciples have never understood Jesus' divine power, which is implied in the feeding miracle,<sup>1268</sup> but they now understand him partially, that is, there is misunderstanding. The disciples, in Peter's representation, suddenly and surprisingly confessed the fact that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>1269</sup> However, it was only half sight, because they failed to understand Jesus as the suffering Messiah (cf. 8:33).<sup>1270</sup> Due to their partial vision, they continue to fail to believe and follow Jesus in 8:31-10:52 and 14:32-72. When Jesus predicts his death, Peter refuses to accept Jesus as Son of Man (8:32) and denies Jesus before a maidservant and mocking crowd (14:66-72).<sup>1271</sup> He also persisted in human thoughts rather than connecting to the thoughts of God (8:33). Judas betrays Jesus and stands with the opponents to arrest and kill Jesus (14:43-47).<sup>1272</sup>

The disciples are in need of the full sight and accompanying insight. Some commentators argue that the restoration of the disciples' full sight is going to be accomplished by the new meeting at Galilee after the resurrection (16:15-20).<sup>1273</sup>

Guelich argues concerning the healing of the blind in the following way:

The primary focus of this story, however, is on the man's total healing. The disciples show themselves to be in need of the second touch, and the story bespeaks their experiencing it. A time must come when they see all things distinctly. That time does not, however, come at Caesarea Philippi or by the time of Jesus' suffering and death in Jerusalem. In fact, it really does not come by the end of Mark's Gospel (16:8). But Mark's readers know it came for the disciples at some point after Easter.<sup>1274</sup>

In other words, the disciples possess only a partial vision in Mark 8:27-9:1, but they will possess full sight, and their spiritual blindness, which is a cause of

<sup>1267</sup> E. Best, "Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52," *SJT* (1970), 325-26; idem, *The Gospel as Parable*, 68; idem, *Following Jesus*, 135; Guelich, *Mark*, 430-31; Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 381.

<sup>1268</sup> See "The Sea-Walking Story."

<sup>1269</sup> Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 144.

<sup>1270</sup> E. Best, "Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52," *SJT* 25 (1970): 325 in 323-337.

<sup>1271</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 313. Peter suffers a serious recurrence of blindness in his denials (14:66-71). Twice he says that he does not know Jesus, and once that he does not perceive. He exhibits a stubborn case of blurred spiritual sight, but one that Jesus can also remedy.

<sup>1272</sup> Like the opponents, Judas never repented of his sin.

<sup>1273</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 137; idem, *Gospel as Parable*, 67-68; Guelich, *Mark* 430-32; Hooker, *Mark*, 198.

<sup>1274</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 436.

unbelief, will be healed after resurrection.<sup>1275</sup> In 8:22-26, the ability of Jesus to heal physical blindness indicates a more important reality: the risen Jesus will heal the disciples and those who follow him in the post-resurrection period.<sup>1276</sup> If the disciples remain in their partial-sighted state, they will continue to fail to understand and to believe in Jesus. To those who repent of their fault (cf. 14:72) Jesus will grant forgiveness and full sight. As a result, the healing of the blind man in two stages emphasises the necessity of spiritual perceptiveness for discipleship.

#### 4.3.5.3 The Healing of Bartimaeus<sup>1277</sup> on the Way (10:46-52)

This is the last in the series of blind/deaf healings discussed above. In 8:34 Jesus teaches the disciples and the crowds, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” But, in Mark 8:27-10:45, the disciples are shown to be spiritually blind. They do not understand his teachings about the suffering of the Son of Man and the demand that they must take up their cross and follow him. Thus, they could not follow Jesus on the way to cross. At this point, the healing of Bartimaeus, like an earlier healing story of a blind man (8:22-26), shows that Jesus gives not only physical sight but also spiritual insight to his followers and challenges the disciples to see his true identity.

#### Literary Structure and Composition

Mark frames the ‘way’ section (8:22-10:52), in which Jesus teaches about the way of the cross, with analogous episodes in which Jesus heals two blind men. In two healing stories Mark emphasises Jesus’ teaching concerning his own destiny and the implications of this destiny for those who follow him. At the beginning of the way section Jesus heals the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26), and at the end he heals blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52).

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<sup>1275</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 157-58.

<sup>1276</sup> Johnson, “Mark viii. 22-26,” 380.

<sup>1277</sup> The name of the blind man is bar-Timaeus, the son of Timaeus (a patronymic like bar-Jonah in Simon’s case). “Bartimaeus” is the Aramaic equivalent of “son of Timaeus” (Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 291). Some scholars argue, simply on the basis of finding a name in stories where names do not usually appear, that Bartimaeus must have been a historical person known to Mark’s community (J. D. M. Derrett *The Marking of Mark* [Shipton-on-Stour: Drinkwater, 1985], II 182; E. S. Johnson, “Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus,” *CBQ* 40 [1978]: 193-43; Taylor, *Mark*, 448).

The healing of Bartimaeus is parallel to the opening healing (8:22-26). Just as 8:22-26 begins a series, namely the stories passages in which the blindness and unbelief of the disciples is graphically described, so the healing of Bartimaeus concludes a portion of the stories which show that despite Jesus' patient instruction, his disciples are still unprepared for his journey to the cross (especially 10:35-45).<sup>1278</sup>

The passage forms the ending to the long section (8:27-10:52) where Jesus teaches about his coming suffering and death and about the way of discipleship.<sup>1279</sup> This long section is composed of three passion prediction units (8:27-9:29; 9:30-10:31; 10:32-52), the first and last of which close with the healing episodes of the blind men. "The three passion predictions themselves reveal that such cross-bearing will not be just the metaphorical, but also the literal experience of Jesus' followers, and Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem will start the process."<sup>1280</sup> The third passion prediction unit (10:32-52) begins with the account of events that they were on the way up to Jerusalem. Jesus was going ahead of them and "those who followed were afraid" (10:32). The disciples follow on the way with fear, rather than faith.<sup>1281</sup> In contrast, the unit concludes with the healing of Bartimaeus, having been saved by his faith, following on the way. Through the healing of Bartimaeus, Jesus (or Mark) exhorts the disciples (or Mark's readers) to respond in faith, not fear (unbelief), so that they can take up the cross and follow Jesus into persecution.

### Exegetical Analysis of the Passage

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, a blind beggar man was sitting by the side of the road (10:46). It was at Jericho that an earlier Jesus (Joshua) won a decisive victory and entered the Promised Land.<sup>1282</sup>

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<sup>1278</sup> Jonna Dewey, "Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 40 in 32-44.

<sup>1279</sup> However, healing is no longer the central part of Jesus' ministry after 8:26 because Jesus focuses on a special teaching, i.e. his death and resurrection (P. Feine, J. Behm, and G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1965], 65-66).

<sup>1280</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 191.

<sup>1281</sup> The word "fear" is connected with the disciples' unbelieving reaction throughout Mark's Gospel (cf. 4:41: 6:50: 9:6, 32 etc.).

<sup>1282</sup> John N. Suggit, "Exegesis and Proclamation. Bartimaeus and Christian Discipleship (Mark 10:46-52)," *JT South-Africa*, 74 (1991) 59 in 57-63.

Readers of the Greek Old Testament would know well enough that Jesus was the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which itself refers to the salvation which God will effect. Joshua is acclaimed in Ecclesiasticus 46:1: “He well deserved his name as a great saviour of the Lord’s chosen people. He wrought vengeance on the enemies who attacked them, and so put Israel in possession of its heritage” (REB). This then, as another Jesus enters Jericho, is the occasion for the inauguration of another victory and act of salvation, by which people are to be brought into the promised land, through the passion and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>1283</sup> But the disciples did not accept Jesus’ suffering and death for the salvation of the people. They asked for a share in Jesus’ messianic glory, hoping that he would reward them a position at his right and left hand (cf. 10: 35-45), rather than following him with faith on the way to the cross.

### Jesus as Son of David

The blind man, Bartimaeus, is setting by the side of the road (Para. thn òdon). The word òdoj is equivalent to the Hebrew דָרֶכְךָ (Ps 1:1).<sup>1284</sup> Just as the Hebrew was regularly used to refer to the way of life demanded by observance of the Torah (Jud. 2:22; 5:10; 2 King 22:2; Ezr 8:21; Ps. 1:6; 2:12; 7:13, etc.), so the Greek òdoj came to be used definitively of Christian way of life (Ac 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:22; cf. Jn 14:4-6), and was regularly used with a suitable qualification (e.g., 1 Pt 2:2, 21).<sup>1285</sup> The blind man therefore is by the side of the road, not yet on the way, which leads to sight, life, and discipleship. On the contrary, although the disciples are on the way, they fail to follow Jesus with faith.

On hearing that Jesus was passing by he called out “Jesus, ‘Son of David,’ have mercy on me” (10:47). Bartimaeus’ cry expresses his faith, since he is confident that Jesus is both able and willing to have mercy on him, that is, to heal him.<sup>1286</sup> Moreover, Bartimaeus displays his spiritual understanding, because he addresses Jesus with a messianic title, Son of David. The title appears only once in Mark’s Gospel. The literal the Son of David was of course Solomon. Why does

<sup>1283</sup> The information of such a contrast between Jesus the Lord is assumed by the author of Hebrews (4:8, 14), and is worked out in detail in the epistle of Barnabas (12:8-11). Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 59.

<sup>1284</sup> Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 58-59.

<sup>1285</sup> Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 59.

<sup>1286</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 103.

the blind man appeal to Jesus as the Son of David in his petition for his help and healing? What does this title 'Son of David' mean in this episode? Scholars have suggested two interpretations of the title in the NT, which is based on traditions found in the OT and developed in the Hellenistic period. The first possibility of understanding of the title draws on a politico-nationalistic figure.<sup>1287</sup> The expectation that Israel's glorious future was tied to a descendant of David is based on 2 Sam. 7:12-16, and what may be the clearest expression of the form that the expectation took for the Judaism of the NT period can be found in the *Pss. Sol.* 14:4, 21-32. Here, the 'Son of David' is ruler and king, who will wreak vengeance on Israel's enemies and re-establish its domination of Jerusalem.<sup>1288</sup>

The second possibility of understanding of 'Son of David' draws on Solomon's growing reputation in the Jewish writings of the first and second centuries BCE and CE.<sup>1289</sup> The title may mean "a Solomonic identity (*Pss. Sol.* 17:21), for David's great son was famous for his healing power and formulas for exorcism."<sup>1290</sup> Evidence from various second temple period documents indicates that, at least a part of Judaism, believed that Solomon's special wisdom (1Kgs. 4:29-34) enabled him to control evil spirits.<sup>1291</sup> When Josephus retells the story of Solomon in his *Antiquities*, he says that "God granted him [Solomon] knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men, He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcism with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return" (8.44-45).<sup>1292</sup> Josephus links Solomon with the power to exorcise demons. This is not just mythology for Josephus. He illustrates this by means of a contemporary event that he personally witnessed. He tells the story of Eleazar, the Jewish exorcist, who appeals successfully to Solomon's name and knowledge during an

<sup>1287</sup> P. J. Achtemeier, "'And He Followed Him': Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52," *Semeia* 11 (1978): 125 in 115-145.

<sup>1288</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 130-32.

<sup>1289</sup> Cf. D. Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David," *HTR* 68 (1975): 235-52; cf. C. H. Gordon, *Adventures in the Nearest East* (Fairlawn: Essential Books, 1957), 170-71; L. Fisher, "Can this be the Son of David," in *Jesus and the Historian, Written in Honor of Ernest Cadman Collwell*, ed. F. T. Trotter (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 82-97.

<sup>1290</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 132.

<sup>1291</sup> L. Perkins, "Greater Than Solomon (Matt 12:42)," *TRINJ* 19 (1998), 209 in 207-217.

<sup>1292</sup> Trans, William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 153.

exorcism conducted in the very presence of Vespasian, the Rome emperor (*Ant.* 8.46-48).<sup>1293</sup> The *Testament of Solomon* is the most explicit document expressing Solomon's effective control over demons and his loss of the power, because of his disobedience to God.<sup>1294</sup> As Solomon constructs the temple, he subdues the demons and forces them to assist in the building process. The document begins:

Testament of Solomon, Son of David, who reigned in Jerusalem, and subdued all the spirits of the air, of the earth, and under the earth; through (them) he also accomplished all the magnificent works of the Temple (this tells) what their authorities are against men and by what angels these demons are thwarted.<sup>1295</sup>

We note also the specific identification of Solomon as 'Son of David' in this document.

Berger attempted to show that the Jewish tradition of Solomon's wisdom, which he believes includes Solomon's power over the demons, is the proper background for understanding the Son of David in the New Testament.<sup>1296</sup> Since in the NT those who address Jesus with this title are primarily those in need of exorcism or healing,<sup>1297</sup> and since the messianic king in Judaism was never identified as a wonder-worker, some scholars<sup>1298</sup> have suggest that the title "Son of David" in the synoptic gospels reflects rather traditions about Solomon, the healer and exorcist *par excellence*, than the political traditions of David's descendant.

The traditions about Solomon certainly existed in Palestine during the time of Jesus and seem to be well known among elements of diaspora Judaism. Jesus is acclaimed as 'Son of David' by those who seek his help for healing and release from demons. In some sense, Bartimaeus has known the traditions of Solomon's power and recognize that, if he is messianic in some sense, Jesus must possess

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<sup>1293</sup> Perkins, "Greater Than Solomon," 210.

<sup>1294</sup> D. C. Duling, "Testament of Solomon, Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol 2, ed. J. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 1.934-87.

<sup>1295</sup> Duling, "Testament of Solomon," 960.

<sup>1296</sup> K. Berger, "Die königlichen Messiastraditionen des Neuen Testaments," *NTS* 20 (1973): 1-44.

<sup>1297</sup> Duling, "Solomon," 235.

<sup>1298</sup> Fisher, "Can this be the Son of David," 82-97; F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London: Lutterworth, 1969), 253-53.

this same power, but perhaps to an even greater degree (cf. Matt. 12:42). By the title 'Son of David' the blind man is appealing to the "new Solomon" who is really much greater than Solomon. For in *Pss. Sol.* 17:34, the Davidic Messiah will have pity on the nations that stand respectfully before him.

This present story shows that as the new Solomon (Son of David) Jesus demonstrates his royal authority in works of healing and mercy for the despised outcast, not in nationalistic and militaristic actions.<sup>1299</sup> More significantly, he is confident that Jesus can restore his sight and give him new life. Jesus does more than heal part of a man: he can restore the whole person. Just as Jesus can heal physical blindness of Bartimaeus, he will heal the disciples' spiritual blindness, which causes their unbelieving attitudes, and will restore their faith.

In telling the blind man to keep quite (v. 48), the disciples show that they have not yet seen the meaning of service. But Bartimaeus is not to be thwarted by the disciples, whose spiritual eyes are blind. So he repeats the words "Son of David, have pity on me." When Peter identifies Jesus as 'Christ,' Jesus *rebukes* the disciples to tell no one (8:30). When Bartimaeus identifies Jesus as 'Son of David,' the disciples *rebuke* him (10:48), telling him to keep silent. "Unlike the disciples, who generally obey Jesus' commands to silence, in part because they do not understand the issue anyway (9:9-10), but like the ones healed and the proverbial prescription about the purpose of secrecy (4:22), Bartimaeus rejects silence and instead cries out 'all the more.' Secrets are meant to come to light."<sup>1300</sup> Like previous minor characters, Bartimaeus refuses to be silent (1:45; 7:36-37), but in contrast to these free-speaking members of the crowd, he is not disobedient to Jesus in the process.<sup>1301</sup> Bartimaeus' refusal to be silent reveals the extent of his faith, in that it is persistent and able to overcome obstacles.<sup>1302</sup>

Jesus stops and commands the crowds to call the blind man (10:49a). In contrast to their previous reaction to Bartimaeus, the people now give him encouragement with the words, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you" (10:49b). The action of Bartimaeus throughout this story marks him as one who already possesses

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<sup>1299</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 420.

<sup>1300</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 190. For the motif of secrecy, cf. the comment of 8:33 in the previous section.

<sup>1301</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 155.

<sup>1302</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 85, 94; Roads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 131.

courage, so that the crowd's encouragement is unnecessary. Nevertheless, the message of the crowd draws the reader's attention to Bartimaeus' fearless behaviour.<sup>1303</sup> In previous episodes, the haemorrhaging woman and Jairus both respond with a faith that overcomes fear (5:33-34, 36). Their faith and courage stood in contrast to the unbelief and fear of the disciples.

Although Bartimaeus is different from the disciples because of his faith, he is similar to them in that he receives a 'call.' Jesus' call of him is clearly important in the narrative, since the verb  $\text{ἔκλεω}$  is repeated three times in 10:49: by Jesus, by the narrator, by the crowd.<sup>1304</sup> The call of Jesus, mediated through the disciples, demands a faithful response if people are to find the light which Christ gives them. Although the disciples left their nets and followed when Jesus called them (cf. 1:16-18), on the way to cross they had followed him without faith (8:22-10:45). If they want to be true disciples of Jesus, they must show a faithful response.

In response to the call of Jesus, the blind man threw off his garment, leapt up and came to Jesus (10:50). According to the OT, a person's garment was one of his most valued and guarded possessions; so even a creditor could not take it away (Ex 22:26; Deut 24:12-13).<sup>1305</sup> Most beggars would have been sitting on their garment to collect alms by day and have used it as a source of warmth by night.<sup>1306</sup> The chain of references to 'garment' ( $\text{ἱμάτιον}$ ) in Mark also suggests that it has specific symbolic value. In the argument over fasting, Jesus says that if one has an old garment one does not attempt to patch it with new cloth (2:21).<sup>1307</sup> If one does, the new will tear from the old and there will be a worse tear. However, Jesus' garments mediate his healing power and are consequently thought to have magical power (5:27-30; 6:56).<sup>1308</sup> They too are transformed at his transformation (9:3). After Bartimaeus casts aside his garment to follow Jesus, others throw their garments on the colt for Jesus ride upon, and spread them in the way (11:7-8). Having left his garment behind, the disciple is not to go back for

<sup>1303</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 157.

<sup>1304</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 125, 141.

<sup>1305</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 141.

<sup>1306</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 449; Lane, *Mark*, 388; Cranfield, *Mark*, 345-46.

<sup>1307</sup> Malina & Rohrbaugh, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 247.

<sup>1308</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, "Mark 10:50: Why Mention the Garment?" *JBL* 101 (1982): 132 in 131-32.



get it when the eschatological crisis (or the war) comes, for to do so would be to risk destruction (13:16).<sup>1309</sup> This pattern seems to point out that, in Mark's Gospel, the old garment represents the fact that the disciple must leave behind everything to follow Jesus.<sup>1310</sup>

There are similar references elsewhere in the Gospel: Simon and Andrew left their nets (1:18); James and John left their fathers as well (1:20). Perhaps analogously, the widow gave all she had (12:44).<sup>1311</sup> The rich, by contrast, would not leave everything behind (10:17-22), and Peter called attention to everything the disciples had left (10:28-30). The garment then refers to another level of Bartimaeus' fundamental break with his past.<sup>1312</sup> According to Mark, the garment seems to be a narrative device, which represents the old order Bartimaeus leaves behind. Bartimaeus will not have encumbrances in following Jesus (com. 10:21-25).<sup>1313</sup> Although the disciples left their visible garment (their net), when Jesus called them (cf. 10:28), they would not have left without the hope that he would reward them with a position at his right and left hand (10:35-45) as they were following him on the way to Jerusalem. They are the same as the rich, who would not leave everything behind. If the disciples want to follow him, they must leave their old garment (a share in Jesus' messianic glory) behind to follow Jesus, like Bartimaeus.

When he came to Jesus, Jesus asks the question: "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:51 *ti, soi qe,leij poihswe*). This question reminds the attentive readers of the question Jesus put to John and James in the previous passage (v. 36; "What do you want me to do for you?").<sup>1314</sup> The request of James and John reveals their blindness, because they want to receive places of honour and privilege at the incoming of kingdom.<sup>1315</sup> They want to sit (*kaqi,swmen*) with Jesus,

<sup>1309</sup> E. L. Stoffel, "Mark 10:46-52," *Interpretation* 30 (1976): 289 in 288-92.

<sup>1310</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 156.

<sup>1311</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 152.

<sup>1312</sup> Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 152.

<sup>1313</sup> Hebrews might interpret the garment as "every encumbrance...the sin which might so easily entangle us" and prevent one from running "the race set before us" (12:1). Ephesians might interpret it as the "old man" that must be stripped off (4:22-24; cf. Col 3:9-10; Rom 6:60).

<sup>1314</sup> The disciples show their "hardness of heart" by requesting positions of prestige and power in the coming age (v. 37; cf. 15:27), which Jesus does not grant.

<sup>1315</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 158.

one at his right and one at his left when he comes into his glory (10:37). Jesus is unable to grant their request, because the places at his right and left have been prepared for others (10:40). When Jesus receives his glory at the cross, two thieves are crucified along with him, one at his right and one at his left (15:27). In other words, James and John do not know what they are requesting (10:38). In contrast to these disciples, Bartimaeus who has been sitting (εκαθῆτο) alongside the way, asks for the restoration of his sight.

Jesus' question is not intended to draw out information about the nature of the blind beggar's condition, because his need to be free of blindness would have been apparent to all people.<sup>1316</sup> But this question makes perfect sense in the context of Mark 10, where what other characters wanted provides a marked contrast.<sup>1317</sup> Due to hardness of heart, the Pharisees wanted to test Jesus and trap him (10:2); the disciples wanted to have the top positions in the kingdom (10:35-36). But, Bartimaeus wants to see again: "Rabbi, I want to see." To give sight to the blind was the chore of the servant of the Lord, as described in Isaiah 61:1 29:18; 35:5; 42:16.<sup>1318</sup> The blind man believes that Jesus is able to fulfil Isaiah 35:5 and give sight to the blind.<sup>1319</sup> The whole scene recalls Isaiah's promise in 42:16:<sup>1320</sup>

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

The word *anabl epein* ('to see') in the blind man's petition seems to be an echo of LXX Isaiah 61:1, where the noun *anableyij* is used as also in the quotation of the passage in Luke 4:18. Moreover, the word *anableyw* in 10:52 seem to be an echo of Isaiah 42:18 LXX, where it occurs in the promise to the blind.<sup>1321</sup> Bartimaeus' faith, as expressed by his petition is his recognition that Jesus, as the servant of Lord, is able to give sight. Bartimaeus believes in Jesus as "the

<sup>1316</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 130.

<sup>1317</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 423.

<sup>1318</sup> Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 292.

<sup>1319</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 421.

<sup>1320</sup> See, Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 34. He argues "The removal of blindness is linked to the picture of the holy highway upon which the redeemed of the Lord return to Zion with exultant singing. Thus the blooming wilderness, opening eyes of the blind, and the way of the Lord are interrelated themes."

<sup>1321</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News*, 225.

dispenser of the blessings of the eschatological age upon which he had set his heart.”<sup>1322</sup> Since their hearts and eyes are obdurate, the disciples did not recognize Jesus as the Suffering Messiah (cf. 8:33) and demanded the top positions in the kingdom (10:35). On the contrary, with spiritual eyes, the blind Bartimaeus recognized Jesus as the Son of David, who is able to give sight.

So Jesus assures him that his faith has saved him or brought him fullness of life: “Go, your faith (σου σεσωκεν) has saved you” (v. 52). His assertion reminds the reader to the healing story of the haemorrhaging woman (5:34): “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” The healing miracles in which faith is a key factor, are paradigmatic and are designed to warn and exhort Mark’s readers (or the disciples) who struggle with doubt and unbelief.<sup>1323</sup>

Mark’s understanding of σωζω in 10:52 becomes especially clear if the close relationship between salvation and sight in Jewish and Christian literature is considered. In the LXX and Qumran literature, the experience of salvation is frequently expressed in terms of seeing (Ps 49:23[LXX]; Ps 90:16 [LXX]; Ps 118:123 [LXX]; 1QS 11:2-3; CD 20:34; 1QH frg. 18:5).<sup>1324</sup> In the NT, visual perception is closely linked with God’s saving act in Christ (Luke 3:6; Acts 13:47; 26:18; Titus 2:11 Heb 2:3-4).<sup>1325</sup>

Jesus’ words reported in 10:52 indicate that the blind man has received his sight, but they go beyond an indication of physical restoration to a declaration of salvation in the spiritual realm as well.<sup>1326</sup> By recognising Bartimaeus’ faith and by healing him, Jesus accepts the title ‘Son of David.’<sup>1327</sup> Furthermore, the blind man repeats the address twice when calling on Jesus for mercy (10:47, 48). Thus, he shows true spiritual insight into the nature of Jesus’ identity through his address.<sup>1328</sup>

<sup>1322</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 130.

<sup>1323</sup> Richardson, *Miracle-Stories*, 74.

<sup>1324</sup> W. Michaelis, “oraw” *TDNT* 5, 347.

<sup>1325</sup> Johnson, “Mark 10:46-52,” 201.

<sup>1326</sup> Best, “Discipleship in Mark,” 336; Idem., *Following Jesus*, 141.

<sup>1327</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 162; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 105.

<sup>1328</sup> Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 46.

The Bartimaeus narrative serves to exhort the disciples to have spiritual insight for understanding Jesus as the suffering Messiah and to follow him with faith. It also serves as a prototype of true discipleship and provides a model for the reader who needs to know what it means to see and be saved.

### Following and Discipleship

After his healing, Bartimaeus follows Jesus in the way. After being healed, the supplicants are frequently dismissed without receiving any specific call to follow Jesus or to continue with him. However, in Mark 8:34 Jesus summons the crowd along with the disciples and opens up his commission to anyone who wants to follow after him.<sup>1329</sup> From this point in the narrative the opportunity to follow Jesus is open to anyone, including members of the crowd. Thus, while Bartimaeus is granted permission to depart, he is also given the opportunity to follow.<sup>1330</sup>

Some have interpreted this action in strictly literal terms as implying no more than that Bartimaeus joins the pilgrimage and walks behind Jesus on the road to Jerusalem.<sup>1331</sup> Although the verb ἀκολουθεῖν is sometimes used in a strictly literal sense in Mark's Gospel (3:7; 5:24; 11:9; 14:13), it always contains some metaphorical significance, indicating a personal allegiance to Jesus, when it is used of individuals following Jesus (1:18; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21, 28, 32; 14:54; 15:41).<sup>1332</sup> From that point on Bartimaeus not only walks behind Jesus on the way, but he also becomes a follower of Jesus, taking on his demands.

Jesus presents discipleship as a requirement, not an option (8:34). Mark 9:38-41, in which the disciples literally go behind Jesus to do his work, indicates that it is not necessary for everyone to be with Jesus in a physical sense (cf. 3:14) to be his disciple.<sup>1333</sup> The decision to follow Jesus may be costly. It may contain abandonment of vocation, family, and even one's own life (9:35-37).

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<sup>1329</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 159.

<sup>1330</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 143.

<sup>1331</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 595; Lane, *Mark*, 389.

<sup>1332</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 142.

<sup>1333</sup> Johnson, "Mark 10:46-52," 202.

When he states that Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way, Mark uses the word *òdoj*, that has also taken on symbolic significance in the Gospel.<sup>1334</sup> The *òdoj* which Bartimaeus takes (and Mark wants his reader to travel) leads straight to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die (10:32). According to Mark, this way is both the beginning and the end.<sup>1335</sup> Jesus begins to go “on the way” (*en th| òdw|*) which is prepared by John the Baptist (1:2-3), and which ends in Jerusalem.<sup>1336</sup> While Jesus has been taking the journey to Jerusalem with his disciples, “on the way” Jesus predicts his passion (8:27; 9:33; 10:32). Mark uses this journey to describe the destiny, which awaits Jesus in Jerusalem.<sup>1337</sup> Thus, in the narrative of the passion *h`òdoj* becomes symbolic for the way of suffering, rejection, and death that Jesus must travel.<sup>1338</sup> Mark also uses it in the story of the rich man who fails to follow Jesus (10:17) and the story of Bartimaeus, who does follow him (10:36, 52). Thus, Mark narrates that Bartimaeus does not choose to go off on his own way, but chooses the way of Jesus which leads necessarily to suffering, in contrast with the rich man. After Jesus restores his sight, Bartimaeus decides to follow Jesus. He abandons his former way of life and leaves everything. Hence, Bartimaeus exemplifies true discipleship, which is to follow Jesus with faith and spiritual perceptiveness.<sup>1339</sup> The disciples, who are following Jesus on the way, are instructed to get rid of unbelieving attitudes and have spiritual insight.

This healing of Bartimaeus is not simply a didactic symbol for discipleship. Marshall argues that in this healing there is “a conspicuous lack of emphasis on the course of the miracle itself...no healing word or gesture, no demonstration of the cure, and no choral acclamation.”<sup>1340</sup> The miracle takes on symbolic significance as it caps the discipleship theme in this section.<sup>1341</sup> In the

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<sup>1334</sup> Cf. Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 64-65.

<sup>1335</sup> The use of *òdoj* in 10:52 probably indicates that Mark thinks of the healing of Bartimaeus as a fulfilment of certain passages from Isaiah, like 42:16, 18-19; 61:1.

<sup>1336</sup> Best, *Following Jesus*, 16.

<sup>1337</sup> Cf. Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 161.

<sup>1338</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 142.

<sup>1339</sup> Painter, *Mark*, 152; Achtemeier, “He Followed Him,” 115.

<sup>1340</sup> Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 124.

<sup>1341</sup> H. C. Waetjen, *A Reading of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 178-79; Garland, *Mark*, 421.

Bartimaeus story, the christological perception and the response of discipleship, converge.<sup>1342</sup> The motifs are two sides of the same coin throughout Mark's Gospel. The disciples' failure to understand the true nature of Jesus as the Son of God, the Son of David, and the suffering Messiah leads them to unbelieving expectations followed by unrealistic demands (6:35-37; 8:4, 14-21, 32-33; 9:34; 10:35-37), and ultimately unbelieving discipleship activity (9:18, 28-29, 38-40; 10:13-14, 28-30; 14:32-42, 66-72).<sup>1343</sup> Therefore, those whose spiritual eyes are blind and whose hearts are hardened do not understand the true identity of Jesus. They cannot thus follow Jesus with faith on the way. Only by the gift of sight granted by Jesus, can people understand the meaning and significance of the death of the Messiah on a cross, and follow Jesus consistently.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In light of the theological perspective of the disciples' unbelief, this chapter presented two important observations: firstly, the continuing unbelief of the disciples throughout Mark's Gospel causes the readers to begin dissociating themselves from the disciples' unbelieving behaviour; secondly, some minor characters serve as foils for the disciples in that they unexpectedly exemplify genuine faith and true spiritual perceptiveness as prerequisites of discipleship.

In Mark 8:34 Jesus calls together his disciples and the crowd in order to instruct them about the demands of discipleship. Thus, following Jesus is not simply for the disciples, but it is also now open to others. What following goes out to a still broader readership, because it is directed at anyone who desires to follow him. Thus, the demands of following Jesus reach beyond the disciples and beyond the members of the crowd, to the reader.<sup>1344</sup> However, along with the demands concomitant with following Jesus comes the potential for failure. The disciples are the first to be called to follow Jesus and have a special relationship with him, and they are commissioned by Jesus to join with him in fulfilling the purpose of God (1:16-20). Yet the disciples failed to respond to Jesus' calling with faith.

Peter and Andrew left their possession and followed Jesus (1:16-17). Peter said

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<sup>1342</sup> Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 161.

<sup>1343</sup> Robbins, "The Healing of Blind Man," 226.

<sup>1344</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 204.

to Jesus again that they have left everything to follow him (10:28-30). They have been following him with incomplete understanding of Jesus' identity as suffering Messiah. Although they follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem (10:32), they do so hesitantly because they are unable to understand and believe his prediction about death and resurrection and the suffering of discipleship, on account of their hardness of heart, which prevents them from comprehending clearly. As a result, in the face of suffering and sacrifice, they either run away or deny any relationship with Jesus (Mark 14).

In the light of the continuing unbelief of the disciples in Mark's Gospel, Mark moves the reader to dissociate from their faithless behaviour. Jesus' two rhetorical questions "Why are you so afraid? Do you not yet have faith?"(4:41), which imply the absolute absence of faith, function as a shock strategy to distance the reader from falling into the unbelief. The nuance of two rhetorical questions is of appalled righteous anger that the insiders who have received so much are still unable to manifest faith. Mark encourages the reader not to fear, but only to have faith in times of plight.

The unique privilege of the disciples to follow Jesus is now made available to others. Minor characters may also follow Jesus and in this way show their faith and spiritual insight. In place of the disciples, the reader is given a series of minor characters who respond to Jesus' calling with faith, in contrast to the disciples.

The haemorrhaging woman (5:25-34) and Jairus (5:21-24), who both overcome unbelieving fear and respond with faith, stand in contrast to the disciples' lack of faith, and who fail to follow Jesus. The individuals serve as examples of following with faith. The reader, as well as Jairus and the woman, is challenged to hang on to seemingly fragile and shaky faith in Jesus as the story unfolds. In deed, the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30) exemplifies the necessity of confident and persistent faith. The woman finds herself in the place of rejection because of her status as Gentile. Yet, she takes the rejection as an opportunity to stress again her faith in the abundance of God's mercy. The healing of a deaf-mute man (7:31-37) and the healing of two blind men (8:22-26; 10:46-52) symbolize the need for spiritual perceptiveness. The deaf-mute man and the blind men signify the disciples' spiritual state, that of ever seeing but never perceiving and ever hearing,

but never understanding. And these episodes challenge the Twelve to follow Jesus with spiritual perceptiveness, which is a prerequisite of discipleship. Minor characters move the reader to recognise that anyone can be a follower of Jesus. Thus, the reader, like the minor characters, must respond to the general call to follow Jesus with faith and spiritual perceptiveness.

Mark's narrative is both a call and a caution.<sup>1345</sup> The call to follow Jesus is open to the reader, but it involves faith and spiritual perceptiveness as prerequisites of discipleship. Through the disciples' failure of faith, Mark warns the reader to distance himself from the disciples. Fear and unbelief are potential problems for any who choose to follow Jesus, including the reader. Mark's Gospel, including his portrayal of minor characters, carries a twofold message: "anyone can be a follower, no one finds it easy."<sup>1346</sup>

<sup>1345</sup> Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 205.

<sup>1346</sup> Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 46.