

UNBELIEF AS A THEME IN MARK'S GOSPEL

by

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SUMMARY

Title: Unbelief as a Theme in Mark's Gospel

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

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

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

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

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

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

<KEY TERMS>

Unbelief

Rejection

Hardness of Heart

Hostility

Blindness and Deafness

Failure to Believe

Incomprehension

Misunderstanding

Faith

Spiritual Perceptiveness

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A. General Abbreviations

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

B. Abbreviation of the Bible

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

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

C. Abbreviations of Reference Works

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

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

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Already for a long time scholars of Mark have been interested in the constituent themes of the Gospel as a tool for understanding Mark's unique theology. The concept 'unbelief' as a theme in Mark's Gospel is particularly important, when considered in relation to the response of the characters pertaining to the teaching and ministry of Jesus, the Christ.

In Mark 1:14-15, Jesus declares a prophetic message (repentance and faith) and encourages the people to accept a certain system of God's Kingdom in response to his message. Jesus' declaration is a truth claim that actually moulds the responses of audiences. The response may be positive, as amongst some minor characters (1:31; 2:1-5; 5:25-34; 10:46-52; 14:3-9), or it may be negative, as amongst the Jewish religious leaders, the disciples and the crowds generally.

Based on the description of the faithful actions of the minor characters, as well as the opposite, we may presume that unbelief could imply that certain concrete actions are expected of those who do not trust the demands of Jesus, but do understand the presence of God's ruling power in Jesus, for example the refusal of the Jewish religious leaders to accept the divine authority of Jesus (2:5-7; 3:5-6); the hostility of the relatives of Jesus (6:1-6); the fear (4:35-41), astonishment (6:45-52), worrying (8:14-21), betrayal (14:43-47), and denial (14:67-71) of the disciples.

Mark particularly takes the *apistia* / *apistoj* group of words, which is already a semi-technical term used in the primitive Christianity,¹ to give the existent unbelief prominence, perhaps for a theological reason, rather than merely noting the first Christians' usage of unbelief. Particularly, Mark 6:6 says that Jesus "marvelled, because of their unbelief." *Apistia* is here the rejection which Jesus experienced when the people of Nazareth refused to understand his claim, in view of his well-known origin (6:3).² Mark 6:5 describes that due to the unbelief of

¹ Cf. Acts 26:8; Romans 11:20; Hebrew 3:12; Philo *Ebr.* 25; Josephus *Ant.* xiv.31; xviii. 76 etc.

² G Barth, "Apistia, Apistoj," eds., Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical*

the people in the community, Jesus could do no mighty work there. As by faith these mighty works are received as an answer to prayer, so, by corollary, are these mighty works refused through unbelief.

The connection between faith and mighty work is also clearly evident in the cry of the father in Mark 9:24: “I believe; help my unbelief (apistia)!” This paradoxical saying about unbelieving faith reveals that the reflection on faith and doubt is beginning.³ It seeks to protect faith from the misunderstanding that what matters is an especially great faith, as though faith were an achievement.⁴ Faith always exists only in the struggle between unbelief and the accompanying doubt. According to Mark 9:19, Jesus complains about the “faithless generation” (+W genea. apistoj). The faithlessness consists then in mistrust, as well as in insufficient trust, with reference to the mission and authority of Jesus.

It will be argued that unbelief is a major theme in Mark's Gospel, because it serves as an organizing principle whereby Mark structures his Gospel. The aim of this study is to examine the literary-theological perspective of the theme “unbelief” within Mark's Gospel. Exploration of this problem begins with several key questions, which form the basis of this thesis: 1) *What is the nature of unbelief in Mark's Gospel?* 2) *What is Mark's perspective regarding the difference between the unbelief of the opponents of Jesus and the unbelief of his disciples?* 3) *What are the macro and the micro causes, as well as the consequent result of unbelief?* 4) *What is Mark's theological perspective on unbelief?* In an attempt to answer these questions, the literary-theological perspective on the theme of unbelief in Mark's Gospel will be investigated. For this purpose, particular attention will be paid to several passages (2:1-12; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 6:1-6; 8:14-21; 9:14-29; 10:46-52; 11:27-33; 15:27-32), which are purported as providing a hermeneutical key toward our understanding of the theme ‘unbelief.’ Furthermore, an attempt will be made to investigate the theological perspective on unbelief.

1.1 THE NEGLECT OF THE THEME ‘UNBELIEF’ BY THE MARKAN

Dictionary of the New Testament I (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 122.

³ J. F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus. Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 140.

⁴ C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University, 1989).

SCHOLARSHIP

In the previous three decades many significant books and articles have been published, which attempted to identify the purpose of Mark. Kee comments: “The history of recent research on the Gospel of Mark can be seen as the record of an attempt to discern the aim of the Evangelist and so to discover the perspective, which gives coherence to all the features of the Second Gospel.”⁵

Since the appearance of Marxsen’s *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of Gospel*,⁶ Markan scholars have produced numerous important studies on various themes, e.g., Christology,⁷ eschatology⁸ and discipleship.⁹ Recent surveys of Markan studies indicate a proliferation of research on the theology of Mark, especially in the areas of Christology and discipleship. The latter has been studied intensely during the past three decades.

In a seminal study, Wilhelm Wrede identified the so-called messianic secret and importance it plays in the revelation of Jesus’ identity in Mark.¹⁰ Quesnell finds the eucharistic concept of Mark 6:52 to be the important factor in understanding the Gospel of Mark.¹¹ Martin understands Mark as complementary to Paul’s theology.¹² Furthermore, Luz finds Mark to be written by way of correction of false messianic concepts.¹³ Weeden considers Mark to be a force against a false Christology.¹⁴ These studies contributed tremendously towards the proper understanding of Mark.

The centrality of the passion in the Gospel of Mark has been noted by a number

⁵ H. C. Kee, “Mark’s Gospel in Recent Research,” *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 353.

⁶ W Marxsen, *Mark The Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).

⁷ Norman Perrin, “The Christology of Mark A Study in Methodology,” *JR* 51(1971).

⁸ Rudolph Pesch. *Naherwartungen: Tradition und Redaktion in Mk 13* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1968).

⁹ Robert R. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).

¹⁰ Eng. Trans., by J.C.G. Greig, Wilhelm Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (London: James Clark, 1971).

¹¹ Quentin Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical institute, 1969).

¹² R. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973).

¹³ Ulrich Luz, “The Secrecy Motif and the Marcan Christology,” *ZNW* 56 (1965).

¹⁴ Theodore J. Weeden, “The Heresy that Necessitated Mark’s Gospel,” *ZNW* 59 (1968): 145-58.

of scholars. Achtemeier asserts that: “The hermeneutical key Mark chose, was the passion of Jesus, his death and resurrection.”¹⁵ Kazmierski argues that although ‘Son of Man’ fulfils an important function in the Gospel, Mark’s preferred title for Jesus is ‘Son of God’.

Whenever the title ‘Son of God’ is described, some would hypothesize a Jewish background as vital for its interpretation. For example, according to Lührmann, it indicates that Jesus stands in the tradition of the Jewish sage as a suffering righteous man, God’s royal servant, as depicted in Isaiah and the Wisdom Literature (Isa. 42:1; 52:7; 53; Wisd. 2:12-20).¹⁶ Others consider the term to be a Jewish messianic title, a synonym for the royal Messiah or eschatological king (Kee, Donahue, Kingsbury).¹⁷

Many scholars have dealt with the incomprehension of the disciples when they were faced with the question of Jesus’ identity and destiny, as well as the nature of true discipleship. Nevertheless, Markan scholars still disagree about the literary-theological function of the theme ‘incomprehension’ in Mark’s Gospel. Tyson,¹⁸ Weeden,¹⁹ and Kelber²⁰ understand the theme to be part of Mark’s polemic against the original disciples who were the founders of a Jerusalem-based Christianity that displayed hostility to Mark’s Galilean gentile church. Others (Peterson,²¹ Best,²² and Tannehill²³) perceive it as a literary device used by Mark for the pastoral purpose of creating an awareness in his readers the

¹⁵ P. Achtemeier, “Mark as Interpreter of the Jesus Tradition,” in J. L. Mays, ed., *Interpreting the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 115-29.

¹⁶ D. Lührmann, “Biographie des Gerechten als Evangelium. Vorstellungen zu einem Markus-Kommentar,” *Wort und Dienst* 14 (1977): 25-50.

¹⁷ H. C. Kee, *Understanding the Sacred Text*, ed., J. Reumann (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972); J. R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

¹⁸ Joseph Tyson, “The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 261-68.

¹⁹ Theodor J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

²⁰ Werner H. Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

²¹ Norman, R. Peterson, “The Composition of Mark 4:1-8:26,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 185-217.

²² E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JOST Press, 1981).

²³ Robert C. Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of Narrative Role,” *JR* 57 (1977): 392-33.

difficulties involved in discipleship.

In addition to Mark's description of the disciples, Malbon²⁴ and Williams²⁵ included a number of the so-called 'minor characters,' who followed Jesus and lived according to the principles of his teaching. They particularly argue that Mark presents the minor characters as suppliants, examples and negative examples. Furthermore, both Meye and Robbins have indicated the importance in Mark of the theme of Jesus as teacher.²⁶ And Marshall is interested in faith as an important theme in Mark's Gospel.²⁷

However, the diversity of opinion concerning the purpose of Mark seems to justify the comment of Kümmel that "a clear explanation of the aim of the evangelist has not yet been elicited from the text."²⁸ This remark does not, of course, stop scholarly research in pursuit of clarity regarding the purpose of Mark. On the contrary, it has stimulated further research towards achievement of this goal.

Although several studies have paid attention to a variety of themes in Mark's Gospel, the theme 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel has generally been neglected. In this section only a selection of those thematic titles will be addressed. The more significant contribution of this review involves furthering a clear understanding of the neglect of the theme 'unbelief' by scholars.

1.2 A STATEMENT REGARDING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

A number of scholars over a long period of time have investigated the themes of Mark's Gospel in order to attempt an understanding of Mark's unique theology. Numerous studies have been devoted to themes, such as the general concern of Mark regarding the Messianic Secret, Christology, Discipleship, Faith, Minor

²⁴ E.S. Malbon, "Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 29-48.

²⁵ Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* July-September (1996): 332-343.

²⁶ Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1968); Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

²⁷ C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University, 1989).

²⁸ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans., H. C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 92.

Characters, and many others besides. During the last three decades, several studies have paid special attention to the role of the disciples in Mark's Gospel. Nevertheless, Markan scholars have largely neglected the theme 'unbelief,' which is fundamental towards a proper understanding of Mark's theological work, with the result that it has, up to this stage, attracted comparatively little attention.

The reason for engaging in the study on the theme 'unbelief,' is due to the fact that relatively little material has been written on the theme of unbelief. It seems clear that the theme of unbelief has not yet received sufficient attention. In view of the consequent apparent lack of research in this field, a study exploring the theme of unbelief will provide a valuable contribution.

If indeed the theme of unbelief serves as organizing principle in both the narrative and the theology of Mark's Gospel, then this theme should be worked out systematically. As already indicated, the fact that it is a major theme also adds to the overall theological picture presented in this Gospel.

1.3 MAIN HYPOTHESIS AND INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURE

1.3.1 Main Hypothesis

The principal hypothesis of this study is that Mark distinguishes between two kinds of unbelief, namely the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders, and the unbelief of the disciples. Mark applies the same unbelieving characteristics used to describe opponents, to the disciples as well. Nevertheless Mark retains a distinction between the unbelief of both groups. This applies also to his description of the unbelief of both groups. The unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders is not primarily a lack of insight; it is rather a definite refusal to accept of Jesus' claims and demands, which they well recognize, because they fear the existential consequences of so doing. It is a problem of volition, rather than cognition.

The disciples, on the other hand, are those who have already accepted the claims and demands of Jesus and who now struggle to follow him in faith. Their unbelief is caused by a failure of recognition, a persistent inability to understand who Jesus is, as well as what his life is all about. Misunderstanding and fearful amazement are the hallmarks of their unbelief.

Unbelief literally functions as the shadow of faith that is a prerequisite towards discipleship. Through speech-acts concerning unbelief, Mark emphasizes the fact that those who are the true disciples must follow Jesus with faith, even under difficult circumstances.

1.3.2 Investigative Procedure

In chapter 1, the introductory matters of this dissertation will be outlined including a historical survey of research, a statement of the research problem and questions, consideration of the particular aim of this study, as well as the main hypothesis, together with the methodological argument.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to consider and clarify the development of the unbelief of the opponents of Jesus as a theme in Mark's Gospel. More specifically, interest in the following matters is explored: the nature of the opponents' unbelief, the major cause of the unbelief, the relationship between the language 'hardness of heart' and the motif of unbelief, as well as the predicted result of the unbelief. The answers to these issues provide a foundation for understanding the Markan Gospel's theological perspective on unbelief. Within the broad scope of this study, I intend to particularly examine the following passages (2:1-12; 3:1-6; 6:1-6; 11:27-33; 15:27-32), in which the unbelief of the opponents is prominent.

In chapter 3, the nature and cause of the disciples' unbelief will be examined, together with the dissimilarity between their unbelief and the opponents' unbelief. For this purpose, I intend to first of all, analyse the passages in Mark's Gospel, where unbelief applies to the disciples (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:14-29). Secondly, the question of unbelief of the disciples is the same as that of the opponents is discussed. Thirdly, the question of how the expression 'hardness of heart' functions with reference to the unbelief of the disciples is investigated.

In the next chapter (Chapter 4), I will attempt to integrate the exegetical materials of chapter two and three and draw together the main conceptual trends of Mark's understanding of unbelief. Ultimately this will indicate that unbelief functions as a shadow of faith, in the same way that spiritual perceptiveness acts as a prerequisite of discipleship.

The final chapter (Chapter 5) will summarize the result of each chapter in order to demonstrate that the research questions have been answered and the principal hypothesis has been confirmed.

1.4. THE METHOD FOLLOWED THROUGHOUT THE DISSERTATION

In order to obtain a clear understanding of the literary and theological dimensions of the unbelief statements in Mark's Gospel, the available exegetical materials,²⁹ which posit utilised an explanation of modern techniques and methods. In a wide variety of methods, the literary, social-scientific and theological perspectives will be prominent. Whilst there can be no claim to the use of these methods in totality, the endeavour is to follow the insights towards satisfactory answers to the research questions, which are stated in 'the aim of this study,' and to appreciate both the dramatic and conceptual aspects of Mark's presentation of unbelief.

PROCONDITION FOR THE THEMATIC STUDY

The starting point for any thematic study is actually arbitrary: in this stance it seems reasonable to begin with the assumption that Mark uses the *apistia/apisto* group words as the primary lexical signal for material relevant to the notion of unbelief. However, it would be unjustified to assume that the *apistia/apisto* material represents the sum-total of what Mark wants to describe about unbelief. It is a basic semantic fallacy to think there is a one-to-one

²⁹ W. Egger, *How to Read the New Testament. An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical-Critical Methodology* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); I. H. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997); D. A. Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995); G. D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); J. R. McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Hermeneutics. Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); S. D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); J. J. Pilch, ed., *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); N. R. Peterson, *Literary Criticism for New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); B. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); Moisés. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

correspondence between words and concepts.³⁰

Mark's stylistic preference is to overwork a limited range of important words rather than employ a variety of equivalents. Nevertheless, it is possible to extend our appreciation of Mark's concept of unbelief by attending to the narrative context, and by finding the wider usage of the more significant words that are associated with unbelief. For example, since Mark 11:23 identifies the heart as the seat of faith, the hardened heart is potentially brought within the semantic range of unbelief (3:5; 6:52; 8:17). Once again, the association between unawareness and unbelief in passages such as 4:13; 6:52; 8:19, would imply that a lack of understanding could become a significant metaphor for unbelief and may well function this way in passages that do not employ the *apistia/ apistoj* terminology.

It may also be the case that the unbelief is implied in the way Mark portrays certain stories. Most commentators think that Mark uses the story of the rich man (10:17-21) as an example of unbelief. The word itself is not used, but the man's concern betrays his faithfulness.

Although I will follow a verbal motif through the Gospel, I am engaged in a literary or thematic study, even although not a lexical perspective as such. Biblical lexicography is a specifically linguistic task concerned with determining the meaning of the words and their translation equivalents in different contexts. Obviously lexical and literary perspectives are interdependent, while each has a distinctive emphasis.

1.5. SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is the investigation of the literary-theological function of unbelief in Mark's Gospel. Traditionally, scholars have paid attention to the role of the disciples and various christological issues. Although Marshall dealt with the theme 'unbelief,' he overlooked its use in part as a supplementary measure to emphasize faith. There has been no literature published on the theme of unbelief.

³⁰ J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 21-37; Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 19, 26.

This indicates that the theme has not yet received sufficient attention by scholars. Since there is a lack of research in this field, this study of the theme 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel will offer a significant contribution.

The main hypothesis for this study is that although Mark applies the same battery of unbelieving terms used to describe Jesus' opponents to the disciples, he retains a distinction between two kinds or two groups creating different nuances of meaning. In this dissertation, an attempt will be made to show that the literary meaning of 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel is related to, indeed an extension of Mark's emphasis on faith as a prerequisite of discipleship.

The present dissertation is not focused as a methodological study, but departs frankly as an exegetical thematic study of the theme 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel. Thus, in the interests of a clear understanding regarding the literary and theological function of 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel, the currently available exegetical materials are employed, which set out the generally accented standard of modern literary methods.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNBELIEF OF JESUS' OPPONENTS

The character group that forms the most consistent and unified opposition to Jesus in Mark's narrative is, of course, the 'religious leaders,' a group which consists of several distinguishable subgroups corresponding to several of the better-known expressions of first century Judaism: scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, elders, Sadducees, as well as the so-called 'Herodians'³¹. More recent studies have supported this observation and have sought to examine and clarify the literary features of Mark's characterization of the Jewish religious leaders, together with the development of the theme 'unbelief' in the narrative.³² In general there is agreement among such studies that Mark's primary concern in his description of the religious leaders is to indicate that, in spite of their division over particulars of first-century Judaism,³³ "at the most elementary level, [he] leads the reader to look upon the various groups of authorities as forming a united front, responsible for effecting the death of Jesus."³⁴ Hanson argues that, as a single character group, they receive a broad-stroked, level characterization in the narrative and indicate the same basic, consistent traits, all of which set them at odds with Jesus' identity and mission.³⁵ As Rhoads and Michie illustrate them, they are:

Thoroughly untrustworthy characters.... The opponents have no faith, are blind to the rule of God and are hardened against Jesus. Ironically, they think of themselves as guardians of God's law, but unknowingly they are God's enemies, because their use of authority and their narrow legalism runs contrary to the way God rules. They are self-serving, pre-occupied with their own importance, afraid to lose their status and power and are willing to destroy to keep them. As those who "think the things of men," they echo Jesus' depiction of the gentiles, as great ones who "lord over" people. In the characterizations of the story, the authorities embody the opposite of Jesus and illuminate his character through contrast.³⁶

³¹ J. S. Hanson, *The Endangered Promises Conflict in Mark* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 156.

³² Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 73-100, 117-122; Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," 57-95; Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 127-299.

³³ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 159.

³⁴ Kingsbury, "The Religious Authorities," 44-45; Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders," 270-72; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 117.

³⁵ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 159.

³⁶ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 117-18.

From the very beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, his work was beset by potential rejection from various combinations of these religious leaders. The scribes form the basis for the initial comparison voiced by the crowd³⁷ in the synagogue upon hearing Jesus' teaching (1:22); they dispute with him and refuse to accept his identity in his Galilean ministry, on one occasion, alone (2:6), as well as with the Pharisees (2:16; 3:22; 7:1, 5) and once with Jesus' disciples (9:14).³⁸ Moreover, they are listed among the Jerusalem groups actively participating in the events which were to bring about Jesus' death, both in Jesus' predictions of the passion (8:31; 10:32-34), as well as in the passion narrative itself (11:18, 27; 14:1-2, 43, 53; 15:1, 31-32).

The Pharisees appear most frequently in the Galilean section of the Gospel. In the series of controversial stories in 2:1-3:6, they refuse to accept Jesus' authority and dispute with Jesus regarding the matter of the Jewish law (2:16-17, 18-20; 24-28; 3:1-6), leading them to conspire with the Herodians to 'destroy' Jesus (3:6), and by way of attacks in 7:1-13 and 10:2-9.³⁹ They also demand a sign from heaven to authenticate his ministry (8:11-13). In the Jerusalem section they are sent by other authorities with Herodians to trap Jesus with the question about taxes (12:13-17), but otherwise do not play a role in Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. The chief priests are almost always mentioned as part of the core group working to bring about the death of Jesus in Jerusalem, along with the elders and the Scribes (8:31; 11:27-33; 14:43, 53; 15:1), or with the scribes only (10:33; 11:18; 14:1-2; 15:31-32), instance being with the 'whole council' (14:55) and on two occasions alone (14:10-11; 15:3).⁴⁰

The hostility of Jesus' opponents appearing in Mark's composition of the events, demonstrates a clear motif of unbelief. In this chapter, several passages which deal with the theme of unbelief will be examined, in the following order: the

³⁷ Throughout the narrative, 'the crowd' plays a significant role as witness to the events that occur. The term is used in the Markan narrative some thirty-eight times and refers generally to the mass of the poor and dispossessed (Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 156). Crowds from audiences for his teaching and are the object of his compassion, but Mark never describes crowds turning to Jesus in repentance and belief, as the Gospel requires (1:15).

³⁸ Hultgren, *Jesus and His Adversaries*, 154-56.

³⁹ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 156.

⁴⁰ I. H. Marshall, *ST. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 9-12.

unbelief at Capernaum, underscoring the rejection of Jesus by the scribes (2:1-12); the hostility of Nazareth (6:1-6), which indicates the rejection of Jesus' family; the question of authority (11:27-33) that indicates the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders, as well as the mocking action (15:27-32) coincided with the rejection by them both, that is both the Jewish religious leaders, as well as the Jewish people in general. We do thus infer that, in the Markan narrative, Jesus was rejected by the whole nation of Israel. To be more specific, I am concerned with the following matters: What is the nature of the opponents' unbelief in Mark's Gospel? What is cause of the unbelief? What is the relation between the linguistic expression 'hardness of heart' and the motif of unbelief? Finally, what is the predicted result of the unbelief? The answers to these questions provide a foundation for perceiving the theme of unbelief.

2.1 UNBELIEF OF THE SCRIBES IN CAPERNAUM (2:1-12)

In Mark 2:1-12, the scribes are the first to appear in conflict with Jesus, and it is in connection with them that Mark first evaluates such opposition in terms of unbelief.

The issue in Mark 1:16-4:34 is how people respond to Jesus: who is for Jesus and who is against Jesus? First Mark defines the one pole: the wildly enthusiastic crowds who are for Jesus without reservation (1:16-45). Next, Mark defines the other pole (2:1-3:6): the dislike of Jesus on the part of the religious leaders who are against Jesus. This hatred is expressed in extreme terms (they want to kill Jesus in 3:6).⁴¹ Thus, Mark demonstrates the range within which responses to Jesus will fall. Having done this, Mark then differentiates the response more carefully.

In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus' healing by means of a forgiveness formula sparked the controversy with the scribes over Jesus' right to act on behalf of God. Jesus healed a paralytic, to demonstrate that he, as the Son of Man, did not only have authority to completely forgive sins upon earth, but indeed more particularly, the authority to forgive the paralytic. The scribes,⁴² however, rejected Jesus' words of

⁴¹ R. V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament. Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 128.

⁴² Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 139-40) draws attention to the fact that it is in this

forgiveness as blasphemy, because “Who, but God alone, can forgive sins?” The scribes’ words accurately reflect the Jewish conviction that forgiveness of sin was the exclusive prerogative of God. Whatever the purpose of the compositional pre-history, the present literary structure of 2:1-12 serves to contrast plainly the faith of the paralytic and his friends with the controversial unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

2.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

In 1:14-15, the passage ending the prologue and introducing Jesus’ ministry, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and called for the people to respond with ‘repentance and faith in the gospel.’ Mark 1:16-3:6 demonstrated the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus’ authoritative teachings and actions. This section also indicates the two general responses to Jesus’ assertion. The enthusiastic response of the disciples who left everything to follow (1:16-20; 2:14) and the crowd that searched Jesus out (1:32-33, 37, 45; 2:2; 3:7-8), was contrasted with the hostility of the Jewish authorities whose hearts were hardened toward Jesus (3:5-6). Mark has indicated in 2:1-3:6 that they did not want to believe in Jesus’ identity, which was evident from his divine actions. They did not understand the relationship between Jesus’ authority and his miracles. Thus, when Jesus announced the forgiveness of a paralytic’s sins, they assumed that Jesus was blaspheming (2:7). Due to the hardness of their hearts, the opponents failed to believe through the evidence of Jesus’ divine actions, that he was indeed the Son of God (cf. 2:10; 3:5), and they consequently refused him (3:6).

2.1.1.1 Literary Composition in Five Controversial Stories

Mark 1:40-45, where Jesus heals a man with leprosy, serves as an introduction for the passages that follow in 2:1-3:6. “The pericope’s specific content involving Jesus’ ministry and the Mosaic Law (1:44), helps set the thematic stage for following conflict narratives in 2:1-3:6 involving issues of the Law.”⁴³

scene that the scribes are first introduced into the Gospel. Their first response to Jesus is to accuse him of blasphemy in their hearts (2:6). It is the charge of blasphemy that the high priest and the Jewish leaders will later level at Jesus to condemn him to death (14:63-64). It is important to note the irony of the situation in 2:1-12. Here the scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy, because he dares to pronounce a man’s sins as forgiven, whereas they have assumed that their “authority” is from God by virtue of their acquired status within the society.

⁴³ R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34 A (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1989),

The section from Mark 2:1-3:6 contains five controversial stories (the healing of the paralytic, the eating with tax collectors and sinners, the question about fasting, plucking grain on the sabbath, and the man with the withered hand). Mark himself has gathered these stories in order to indicate how Jesus' authority was rejected by his opponents. His insistence on his authority leads to his rejection and ultimately to his death, a fate foreshadowed in 2:20 and 3:6.⁴⁴ Thus, this section is not simply a collection of conflicting stories, but an expression of Jesus' authority and the refusal of his antagonists to understand it.

In the *Markan Public Debate*, Dewey examines in detail how the rhetorical form of this section (2:1-3:6) serves to underscore the nature and shape of the authorities' unbelief. She indicates a "tight and well-worked-out concentric and chiasmic⁴⁵ structure,"⁴⁶ which she represents in the following way:⁴⁷

A 2:1-12 *The healing of the paralytic*

B 2:13-17 *The call of Levi/eating with sinners*

C 2:18-22 *The saying on fasting and on the old and the new*

B' 2:23-27 *Plucking grain on the sabbath*

A' 3:1-6 *The healing on the sabbath*

Dewey observes the following structure markers:

- 1) The first and last stories, A and A' (2:1-12; 3:1-6), both involve the unusual mixture of healing and unbelief. A restorative healing narrative is disrupted by controversy over Jesus' actions, and concludes with the completion of the healing and a reaction by those present.⁴⁸ They are introduced with an identical phrase: *Kai. eisel qwn pa| in eij* (2:1; 3:1); in each, Jesus takes

73.

⁴⁴ M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1991), 83.

⁴⁵ Some scholars believe that a chiasmic structure can be formed on different levels and principles. However, that debate is beyond the scope of this section. Here, I merely indicate how the order of motifs in the first part of an expression can be mirrored in the second. In other words, what is in A is the same in A' and what is in B is the same in B', placing C centrally.

⁴⁶ J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure, and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 110.

⁴⁷ J. Dewey, "The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1-3:6," *JBL* 92 (1973): 394-401. esp. 394.

⁴⁸ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 109; idem., "The Literary Structure," 394.

the initiative in the controversy (2:8; 3:4) and then turns to the person to be healed and speaks to him; each contains a reference to the hearts of the opponents (2:6; 3:5); while each healing is restorative in nature with overtones of resurrection.⁴⁹

- 2) B and B' are related, first, to A and A' in parallel ways: A and B both have to do with sin and sinners; B' and A' with violation of the sabbath. B and B' evince a close parallelism, especially in the central section of each, which concerns eating: Jesus eating with sinner violates Pharisaic law, as David also ate that which was not lawful. Moreover, each concludes with a logion in the form of a general proverb (2:17, 27-28).⁵⁰
- 3) Finally, C sets itself up as the central of the chiasm through its uniqueness in form and content among the stories. Unlike the others, it has just two halves, the question and answer concerning fasting (2:18-20) and the sayings on old and new (2:21-22); there is no indication of setting, and the opponents are not specified.⁵¹ Yet it relates to B and B' in its concern for eating, and to A and A' its suggestion of death and resurrection.

This section certainly clearly emphasizes the nature of the rejection to Jesus, which serves on the story level to generate tension and move the story forward, and on the discourse or rhetorical level to underscore the sharp distinction between Jesus and his opponents.⁵² As Dewey rightly suggests, viewing this series of controversies as an organic whole serves to impress on the reader that “the opponents objected to Jesus’ activity as a whole, as well as to the messianic claim, which was the basis of Jesus’ action.”⁵³

Marcus rightly indicates that even more important is a linear development of opposition in the controversial story in which the opponents first question Jesus silently (2:7), then question his disciples about him (2:16), then question Jesus

⁴⁹ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 111-12.

⁵⁰ Dewey, “The Literary Structure,” 398: Dewey notes that the story of David’s eating the bread of the presence may actually have more to do with the controversy over Jesus’ eating with sinner.

⁵¹ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 119.

⁵² Dewey expresses this in a nice analogy: “Mark 2:1-3:6 might perhaps be compared in musical terms to the statement, early in a musical work, of a major theme which then hangs ominously over the composition, but which comes to dominate the music much later in the piece” (*Markan Public Debate*, 119).

⁵³ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 119.

about his disciples' behaviour (2:18, 24), then seek a legal reason for condemning him (3:2), then plot his murder (3:6).⁵⁴ The final note of the Pharisees' intention to exempt Jesus from the increasing effect of his action emphasizes the close connection between Jesus' activity and his ultimate death.

Mark is probably using this collection, "to indicate how the authority of Jesus was rejected by the Jewish authorities.... [I]t is this refusal to accept Jesus' authority, which leads to his rejection and ultimately to his death, a fate foreshadowed in 2:20 and 3:6. This chapter, therefore, is not simply a collection of 'conflicting stories', but a demonstration of Jesus' authority and the refusal of Jewish religious authorities to recognize it."⁵⁵ From the first to the fifth controversial stories (2:1-3:6), the opponents' unbelief, stemming from the hardness of their hearts, appears as hostility toward Jesus, which gradually escalates and intensifies.⁵⁶

In the controversy stories, the authority and power of Jesus is actually illustrated. This being so, there is a sort of irony that these people did not want to accept Jesus' authority, although he carried out miracles, which should grant him authority, yet he received all the acknowledgement of the crowds on the basis of what he did. This fact confronts us with the question: Why could they not believe in his power? They are deaf, blind and hardened. Thus, "they may look and look, yet perceive nothing; they may listen and listen, yet understand nothing" (4:12).

2.1.1.2 Literary Composition in Mark 2:1-12

Mark 2:1 is clearly a new section of the Gospel. There is a distinct break between 1:45 and 2:1. In 1:45 Jesus is in the country unable to enter the city openly. Now at 2:1 Jesus returns to the city of Capernaum. The contrast emphasizes an entirely new beginning.⁵⁷ The chiasmic arrangement of hook-words between 1:45 and 2:1, serves to tie both narratives thematically together.⁵⁸

1:45 ton logon(w̄ste mhketi... eiselqeih(

⁵⁴ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 214.

⁵⁵ M. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 83.

⁵⁶ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 53.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. Weiss, *Das älteste Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 53-54.

⁵⁸ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 67.

2:1-2 eiselqwn... wšte mhkeṭi... ton Iogonā

Thus, 2:1-2 accomplishes two functions in terms of the narrative of Mark. “From the abrupt shift in settings from 1:45, from the hook words and other ties to Mark 1, the hearer knows that there has been a definite break in the narrative, together with a certain connection to what preceded.”⁵⁹ Like the previous chapter, 2:1-12 describes a notable healing. Now, however, as Jesus’ antagonists, the scribes entered the scene and along with them come controversy and polemic, which dog Jesus until the end of Mark’s narrative.

Regarding structure, this story has an approximate chiasmic structure. It has the structure of a miracle story: the account of the man’s complaint, his cure by Jesus, and finally the demonstration of his restoration as he walks, carrying his mat. However, in the middle of this we have a conflict about Jesus’ authority to forgive sins. The healing episode may be outlined in the following way:⁶⁰

- A Introduction: narrative setting (2:1-2)
- B Spiritual healing (2:3-5; airomenon / krabatton / Igei tw/ paralutikon)
- C Controversy (2:6-10a)
- B’ Physical healing (2:10b-12a; egeire / krabatton / Igei tw/ paralutikon)
- A’ Conclusion (2:12)

The Markan readers are familiar with Mark’s convention of breaking up a story by interweaving a second, seemingly unrelated, story into the middle of it.⁶¹ A good example is found in 2:1-12. There are two stories in this structure: the central controversial story and the surrounding healing story. This surrounding story may be used to stress the central story, to compare or contrast it with the surrounding

⁵⁹ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 68.

⁶⁰ Cf. N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942); J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (Doubleday: The Anchor Bible, 1999), 219-220.

⁶¹ Edwards refers to Mark’s A-B-A literary convention as a sandwich technique. This technique occurs some ten times in the Gospel: Mark begins story A, introduces story B, then returns to and completes story A (e.g. 2:1-12; 3:20-35; 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11, 17-31, 53-72; 15:40-16:8). Cf. J. R. Edwards, “Markan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narrative,” *NovT* 31 (1989): 193-216. It is possible that this middle section has been added to an original healing story in 2:1-5a and 11-12. However, since it is typical of the Markan style to place one story together with another, it is possible that he is responsible for this juxtaposition.

narrative, to hold opposite ideas in tension.⁶² On the other hand, it describes the parallel between physical healing and forgiveness of sins, on the other, it sharply contrasts the attitude of those seeking help and those questioning in their hearts. The paralytic and his friends display 'faith' (5a), while the attitude of the scribes is identified as 'unbelief.' "The frame-interposition technique in effect also brackets the theme of opposition to Jesus within the already established theme of his popularity."⁶³ The opposition is made known to the reader/hearer through objections of the scribes in 2:6-10.

To summarize: we may accordingly conclude that the analysis of the literary structure of 2:1-12 prove the judgment made by Hooker:

Even though it falls into two sections, it cannot be split in two as the form-critics demand, because its two themes are intertwined and the whole point of the stories is that we find forgiveness where we expect healing and vice versa. The faith of the paralytic's four friends and the words spoken of him by Jesus in response to that faith stand in contrast to the disbelief of the Scribes and the words of Jesus to the paralytic, which are occasioned by that disbelief.⁶⁴

The division is not as generic as between the miracle and controversy, or between healing and forgiveness; it represents a thematic one between faith and unbelief.

2.1.2 Exegetical Perspectives on the Portrayal of Unbelief

In previous discussion, we examined the literary structure of the passage as a whole and noted how the duplicate framing verses around the central controversy section (2:1-12) serve to establish a contrast between the faith of the paralytic and of the questioning scribes. We shall now look more closely at the unbelieving response of the scribes.

2.1.2.1 Honour and Shame

The basic model of honour and shame in the first-century Mediterranean can aid us in recognizing the controversy between Jesus and the unbelieving scribes in Mark 2:1-12. The episode describes Jesus together with the scribes in conflict

⁶² C. D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84.

⁶³ J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 73.

⁶⁴ M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark. A Study of the Background of the Term 'Son of Man' and Its Use in St. Mark's Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1967), 85.

that involve competition over honour. The immediate reason for the conflict is the act of healing by Jesus involving the paralytic.

In the ancient Jewish world, the honourable person was one who put in a great effort to stay within the boundaries of the law.⁶⁵ He was the person who always adhered strictly to different maps of purity, that is, he kept the fences around the law. Thus, the honourable man was the one who kept the proper attitude and behaviour as defined by purity rules in the society. According to this understanding of honour, to show courtesy to shameless persons makes him a fool, because it was foolish to show respect for boundaries when a person acknowledged no boundaries. In Mark 2:1-12, the scribes considered Jesus as a dishonourable man, because he showed courtesy to the paralytic who was regarded as a shameless person by the official guardians of the law in his day. Hence, they could not believe in the fact that Jesus, who was a shameful man, was acting with the divine authority

Furthermore, the scribes thought that God was dishonoured when Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive the paralytic's sin. In the eyes of the scribes, to claim divine authority implied a lessening of the authority of God, for in the Jewish context, the Messiah or any other eschatological figure could not have authority over forgiveness of sins. It was God's privilege. Therefore, because Jesus' deed was classified as first-degree dishonour, that is, blasphemy, the scribes rejected to believe in Jesus' authority.⁶⁶

In contrast to the viewpoint of the first century Mediterranean, in the kingdom of God the honourable man was not the one who had the proper attitude and behaviour in terms of society as defined by purity rules of the temple, but the person who repented his sins and believe in gospel (1:15). He no longer allows himself to adhere to the boundaries of the law. The shameful person in the new kingdom was evaluated in a radically different manner than in the society. He was the person who would always see Jesus through the eyes of the purity rule of the temple as interpreted by the official guardians of the temple, and refuse to believe

⁶⁵ B. J. Malina and J. H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 59.

⁶⁶ Malina and Neyrey, "Honor and Shame," 60.

in Jesus' divine authority. Anyone outside this new kingdom, who were ashamed of Jesus' word and deed, will be shamed by God (cf. 8:38)

2.1.2.2 The Scribes' Unbelieving Rejection

For the first time, the narrator tells the reader/hearer about the faith of those who came for healing.⁶⁷ While Jesus was teaching, the four men carrying the paralytic, having found that they were unable to enter the house, climbed onto the roof, dug through and lowered the paralytic down (2:3-4). Jesus saw their faith. It is not the faith of the paralytic alone, but that of his four companions as well, that mattered. The symbolic action of bringing the paralysed man into the midst of the crowd, into the very heart, means that this man who, because of his handicap would normally be regarded as an 'outsider'-that is a sinner, has now become an 'insider.'⁶⁸

Jesus' response is surprising; instead of the expected word of healing, he says, "My son, your sins are forgiven"(2:5).⁶⁹ In the synoptic gospels, the forgiveness of

⁶⁷ Cf. J. H. Donahue, S. J. and D. J. Harrington, S. J., *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 98. Mark relates faith to miracle in different ways. In 2:1-12; 5:34 ("your faith has made you well"); 9:23; and 10:52, faith precedes healing. But in 9:23 Jesus says that all things are possible to the one who believes, and in 11:23 he speaks of the faith that can move mountains. Conversely, when faith is absent, as at Nazareth, Jesus can do no mighty work apart from a few healings, and he marvels at the unbelief of the people there (6:5-6). In these Markan miracles faith is not so much a precondition for healing (see 1:34; 6:5-6), but rather it dramatizes the willingness of suffering people to break through physical and social boundaries in order to approach Jesus.

⁶⁸ Anne Dawson, *Freedom as Liberating Power. A Socio-Political Reading of "Authority" Texts in the Gospel of Mark* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz. 2000), 137.

⁶⁹ Sickness is the consequence of the sinful condition of all men. Mark does not tell us whether the paralytic was supposed to have led a particularly sinful life, but we do know that the common view regarded physical misfortune as the result of sin (cf. John 9:1-3). However, the point in our current story is not primarily the connection between sin and sickness; instead it is the inseparable connection between healing and forgiveness within the general ministry of Jesus. Consequently, in Mark 2:1-12 Jesus grants the paralytic something of both healing and forgiveness. The fact that the paralytic is healed and forgiven his sins implies that he will be accepted within his community, and that he therefore belongs to Jesus' new community, in other words, that he will inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. 1:15). The forgiveness of sins makes him stand in the right relationship with God in the Kingdom (cf. 1:14-15).

sin is very analogous to the forgiveness of debts (Matt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4).⁷⁰ Debt-making people were poor, that is, they could not defend their social status, because debt threatened loss of land, family, and livelihood. Thus forgiveness contained significance of restoration, a return to self-sufficiency and to one's position in the society.⁷¹ Jesus' response was surprising, apart from the omission of the expected word of healing, which intends to make it clear that Jesus' healing has gone beyond physical restoration alone, the response has at the same time also included the conveying of divine acceptance. Thus, physical recovery (new life) may be seen as evidence of the forging of a new relationship of the recipient with God in His kingdom.⁷² Nevertheless, the scribes, having formed the basis of their unbelief, did not want to be aware of his actions, even where the new life was given. Their unbelief was to refuse to acknowledge Jesus' authority as proved by his miracle.

The passive formulation of *afientai* in 2:5b, is ambiguous and leads the reader/hearers to a certain interpretive involvement: was Jesus making a declarative judgment about an act of God, or else personally exercising the divine prerogative? The passive voice of the verb allows one to conclude that the sins are forgiven either by God or by Jesus.⁷³ If the verb is interpreted as the divine passive,⁷⁴ the declaration would be very much like the task of the High Priest, who according to Lev 4:26-31, had power to declare God's forgiveness on the basis of repentance and sacrifice.

In this connection, some scholars interpret the scribes' response in 2:7 as a rejection to Jesus' violation of the cultic domain⁷⁵ or to his granting of forgiveness without demanding compensation for sins. However, even though Jesus'

⁷⁰ Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 188.

⁷¹ Cf. John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament. Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 57-73

⁷² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 89.

⁷³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 125.

⁷⁴ J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1971), 11.

⁷⁵ E. Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation Between Cult and Gospel* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 26; L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 77.

pronouncement was an encroachment of the cultic rule, Mark clearly states that through the scribes' question, "who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7; תִּיךְ דַּנְתַּי אֲפִיעַי אֲמַרְתִּיךְ עִימְהֵיךְ וְעֹשֵׂיךְ), what they are indeed responding to is Jesus' implicit claim to have the capability to forgive sins, for which the power belongs to God.⁷⁶

Since Jesus did not act as a priest and command the paralytic any sacrifice for the forgiveness of his sins, he was not proclaiming forgiveness based on the rule of the Law.⁷⁷ Furthermore, since Jesus he did not promise the man forgiveness at the end of time on the grounds of penitent action, but spoke of forgiveness as an event which has been fulfilled in the present (אֲפִיעַי) without ceremony, he was plainly not acting in a prophetic-symbolic capacity. And it was not expected that the Messiah, or any other eschatological figure would have authority to grant forgiveness of sins.⁷⁸ Therefore, the only conclusion left was that Jesus was himself exercising this divine power (cf. Ex 34:6f; Isa 43:25f; 44:22).⁷⁹

This is important, since where the scribes' unbelief becomes apparent is in their evaluation of Jesus' implied claim to act in God's stead. Given their own theological presuppositions, only two responses were open to them. They could either believe that Jesus' divine forgiveness was evidence of the present declaration of eschatological salvation, which was expected to bring in its train forgiveness of sins (Isa. 33:24; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 7:18),⁸⁰ or else they could regard his proclamation as a conceited act of blasphemy and thereby making him worthy of death (Lev. 24:11, Num 15:30; cf. Mk 3:6; 14:64). In selecting the later the scribes draw the wrong conclusion. Instead of recognizing Jesus' divine authority to forgive and instead of recognizing the in-breaking of God's reign in his healing of the lame (Isa. 35:6), they accused him of blasphemy, thus condemning

⁷⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 184.

⁷⁷ Apart from the act of absolution on the Day of Atonement, not even the chief priest could forgive sins, or give promise of such, whether individually or corporately (J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002]), 78). Only God can forgive sins (Ex. 34:6-7; Ps 103:3; Isa. 43:25; Mic 7:18).

⁷⁸ H. J. Klauck, "Die Frage der Sündenvergebung in der Perikope von der Heilung des Gelähmten (Mk 2:1-12 Par)," *BZ* 25 (1981): 223-48.

⁷⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 184.

⁸⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 185.

themselves.⁸¹

Jesus is accused of blaspheming because he declared the forgiveness of the paralytic's sin. In the Jewish tradition, even the Messiah, who would destroy the godless in Israel, crush demonic power, and protect his people from the reign of sin, could not forgive sins; but forgiveness of sins was God's option alone.⁸² Thus, they sensed in Jesus' announcement of forgiveness an affront to the majesty and authority of God, which was for them was in nature corresponding to blasphemy.

Through employing the word *blasphemei*(2:7),⁸³ Mark emphasizes the aggressive, and hence also the ironic, nature of the scribes' comment.⁸⁴ It is clear, then, that while they rightly conclude that God alone can forgive sins, they refuse to accept that Jesus to whom they are raising objection is the very one who has divine authority as God's own Son. Evidence of the authorial nature of the word here is provided in the observation that "the very charge with which the whole series of controversy stories begins is precisely that with which the long quest to condemn Jesus is concluded - blasphemy (cf. 14:61-62)."⁸⁵

Mark points out that the scribes' reaction is not motivated purely by a justifiable concern for the honour of God.⁸⁶ The use of the terms *outoj outwj* (2:7) is

⁸¹ S. Dowd, *Reading Mark. A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 24.

⁸² W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 75; W. Wessel, "Mark" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, Vol 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 633.

⁸³ See. L. W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1989), 41: "Blasphemy is mentioned in five Markan passages. Here and in 14:64 Jesus is accused of blasphemy by the scribes and the high priest respectively. In 7:22 blasphemy is blamed on of the evil things that come from human hearts. In 3:28-29, Jesus warns his critics about blasphemy 'against the Holy Spirit' (probably meaning the rejection of the gospel message, see note on these verses). And in 15:29, people blaspheme Jesus on the cross. So the reader is left to decide who is guilty of blasphemy—Jesus (twice accused) or those who opposed him (in 3:28 and 15:29)."

⁸⁴ S. H. Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 218.

⁸⁵ Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 218.

⁸⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Them*, 185.

probably meant to signal a deep-seated contempt for Jesus.⁸⁷ Similarly, the description of the scribes: *dialogizomenoi en taij kardiai j autw h* in 2:6 indicates not a spirit of genuine inquiry but “a volitional rejection to the truth because of their hardened heart (3:5).”⁸⁸

Although the word *dialogizontai* may denote a either positive, negative or neutral action in general Koine usage, Mark exploits only the verb’s negative potential by repeatedly contrasting those who discuss and the topic of discussion, with Jesus and his teachings and actions.⁸⁹ Thus, the scribes’ discussing that Jesus is blaspheming (2:6, 8) is countered by Jesus’ statement and action (2:8-12); the disciples’ discussing that they have no bread (8:16) is described by Jesus as lacking understanding and having a hardened heart (8:17); the disciples’ discussing who is greatest (9:33-34) is corrected by Jesus’ teaching to the twelve about being last and servant of all (9:35); and the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders’ discussing the origins of John’s baptism (11:31) is revealed as lacking faith and fearing the crowd (11:31-32) that esteems Jesus (11:18).⁹⁰ Thus, the word *dialogizontai* “is a bed word in Mark; it suggests doubt, lack of faith, even hostility (cf. 8:16f; 9:33; 11:31).”⁹¹

Also, in Mark 2:7, the scribes debate in their heart with two unspoken questions beginning *Ti*, and *Tij*: “Why does this fellow talk like that?” (*Ti, outoj outwj lal eij*); “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (*tij dunatai a fienai amartia j eiv mh. eij o` qeoj t*). These questions probably can be understood as indicating that “Jesus was not accused of claiming to be God, but of blaspheming against God by claiming to do what God alone could do.”⁹² In other words, Mark is describing Jesus in terms of Israel’s singular God, an appropriate highlighting for

⁸⁷ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 121; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1957), 195.

⁸⁸ Cf. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 116.

⁸⁹ B.M.F. Van Iersel, “Locality, Structure, and Meaning in Mark,” *LB 55* (1983): 44-54.

⁹⁰ P. Danove, “The Narrative Rhetoric of Mark’s Ambiguous Characterization of the Disciples,” *JSNT 70* (1998): 30 in 27-43.

⁹¹ P. Carrington, *According to Mark, A Running Commentary on the Oldest Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 167.

⁹² Guelich, *Mark*, 87.

this context, if the phrase, εἰς ὃ θεοῦ, reflects the wording of Deut, 6:4 LXX.⁹³ Mark intended the response of the scribes to Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness to be seen as a manifestation of unbelief and rejection, in contrast to the faith of the paralytic and his friends (v. 5). The scribes' silent accusation of blasphemy in 2:7 meant that for the first time in the story the death of Jesus came faintly into view.⁹⁴

Even though the scribes debated in their heart, Jesus knew that they were debating among themselves and responded with a riddle: "which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up! take your mat, and walk?'" (2:9) By means of this its sequel, Jesus confirm his fundamental assertion to divine authority and yet, by doing so insisted his divine authority and avoided immediate accusation for blasphemy. According to Marshall, the riddle was set as a trap for the scribes. He argues in the following way:

If they say forgiveness is easier, then Jesus' performance of the more difficult healing would automatically prove his capacity to do the lesser deed too. If alternatively they say healing is easier, then they must concede that Jesus has already done the more difficult thing, which the man's physical recovery would ratify. And if, in an attempt to avoid such a conclusion, they should say both works are of equal difficulty, they would then be unwittingly concurring with the fundamental truth Jesus is seeking to convey. For the question cannot be answered in the either/or terms in which it is framed. Since both the healing of lameness and the forgiveness of sins are eschatological works of God,⁹⁵ they are both as equally easy to God as they are equally impossible for humans (cf. 10:26f, note εὐκοπώτερον in v. 25).⁹⁶

In view of this, when Jesus declared a word of healing and a word of forgiveness with equal ease and when the legitimacy of both are confirmed by the healing of the paralytic, it was a clear demonstration that he had the prerogative to do what God alone could do.

In this sense, the healing is ordered as proof of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. Mark's logic seems to be that if Jesus' word of forgiveness was blasphemous, then the word of healing would ineffectual, because God would not honour the word of a blasphemer, and in any case the root of the man's condition, his sins,

⁹³ Guelich, *Mark*, 87.

⁹⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 186.

⁹⁵ Cf. Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8, 34; Zech 13:1; Ezek 36:25-27.

⁹⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 186.

would not be remedied. As a result, the effectiveness of the healing word may be used to validate the authority of the declaration of forgiveness. In this way the miracle serves as a refutation of unbelief and as a renewed summons to repentance and faith. If the charge of blasphemy is unjustified, then according to the scribes' own theology God must be enacting his prerogative in this Son of Man.

The scribes' unbelieving rejection must also be engaged at a deeper scriptural level, and Jesus did exactly this through his declaration that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:10).⁹⁷ In Mark, Jesus uses the term 'the Son of Man' as a self-descriptive title (especially see 9:41). The term 'Son of Man' occurs twelve times and offers the key of Jesus' self-disclosure to his disciples.⁹⁸ Most of them took place after the story at Caesarea Philippi (8:27-30), while both 2:10 and 2:28, in contrast to the other saying, portrayed the Son of Man's authority on the earth in matters of God's established prerogative.⁹⁹

The juxtaposition of the phrases 'on the earth,' 'Son of Man,' and 'authority' recalls Daniel 7 in the reader/hearer, in which God transferred divine power to 'one like a son of man,' that is, a human-like figure, who was given the authority to rule earthly nations at the eschaton.¹⁰⁰ In Mark's Gospel, the Son of Man is however, not described as a judge of sinners like Daniel 7 and *The Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 45:3; 46:4-6; 50:1-5 etc.), but as a forgiver of sins.¹⁰¹ According to Mark, the heavenly God remains the fundamental Forgiver, but at the climax of history he has handed his authority for forgiveness over to the 'Son of Man,' who carried out his gracious will on the earth. The healing story was not intending to

⁹⁷ The designation of the Son of Man raises a plethora of critical matters, which cannot be dealt with here. The origin and meaning of the phrase remains one of the most debated issues in gospel research, while there are many recent monographs devoted to it (Marshall, Faith, 187n. 1). On the special issues related to 2:10, 28, see C. M. Tuckett, "The Present Son of Man," *JSNT* 14 (1982): 58-81 and D. J. Doughty, "The Authority of the Son of Man (Mark 2:1-3:6)," *ZNW* 74 (1983): 161-81.

⁹⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 98: "Chs. 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33; 14:21 (twice); 14:41 refer to the necessity of suffering for the Son of Man; Chs. 8:38; 13:26; 14:62 focus upon the parousia glory of the Son of Man; Ch. 9:9 anticipates the resurrection of the Son of Man while Ch. 10:45 defines the redemptive purpose of his incarnate life."

⁹⁹ Guelich, *Mark*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 223.

¹⁰¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 223.

lawfully prove Jesus' position as Son of Man, but rather to set up that he, who calls himself the Son of Man, possessed the authority to forgive.

Jesus' healing of the paralytic was more than an exhibition of mercy to a miserable man. The restoration of the paralytic in his whole person was a sign of the kingdom of God having drawn near (cf. 1:15).¹⁰² The paralytic exemplified the accomplishment of God's promises, as declared in Isa. 35:6 and Jer. 31:8. The declaration that God's rule had come near his people was surprising. The crowds praised God (2:10). This did not imply that all people thanked God for sending Jesus. Even though they were astonished and said 'we have never seen anything like this,' they did not believe in Jesus as the Son of Man. Besides this, the scribes rejected Jesus who as the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins.

The narrator begins to develop the hint of controversy between Jesus and his opponents who are here the scribes, the official teachers and interpreters of Jewish law and traditions.¹⁰³ With the Judaic knowledge regarding the forgiveness of sin, Mark indicates that the authority of Jesus is greater than of the Messiah whom the Jewish people envisaged. Therefore, in Mark's intention, the rejection of Jesus by the scribes was portrayed as objection to the authority of God.¹⁰⁴ The issue lies at the centre of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in Mark's Gospel.¹⁰⁵ The reaction of the scribes does not imply that they have understood otherwise. They do not believe in Jesus' conviction that he can speak for God. Jesus was exercising the divine power, but in a veiled

¹⁰² H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Reiden: Brill, 1965), 262: "In his announcement and granting of remission of sins, Jesus indicates what man's essential distress is. This does not consist in his transient lot in life, with its many vicissitudes, but in his alienation from the living God, in his life in sin and guilt. It is from this that man must be redeemed, and it is from this that Jesus does in fact redeem him!"

¹⁰³ Guelich, *Mark*, 87: "Of all the charges levelled against Jesus in 2:1-3:6, this one is the most serious, because the Law pertaining to blasphemy called for the death penalty (Lev. 24:15-16) and it was invoked at Jesus' trial (cf. Mk 14:64). Yet the call for Jesus' death does not surface until 3:6 in the last of this series of conflict narratives. Thus the opening (2:1-12) and closing (3:1-6) narratives of this controversy section underscore the magnitude of the conflict."

¹⁰⁴ Guelich, *Mark*, 87; Gundry, *Mark*, 116; G. H. Twelftree, "Blasphemy" in *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot Mcknight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove & Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 76.

¹⁰⁵ Guelich, *Mark*, 86.

way that could be recognized unambiguously only after the resurrection.¹⁰⁶ By encouraging this retrospection to the exorcism at Capernaum in 1:22-28, the narrator invites the reader/hearer to understand the scribes' reaction to Jesus in 2:6-10 as exacerbated by opposition and unbelief.

2.1.3 Summary

The hermeneutical key to the healing story lies in the double-sided portrayal of faith and unbelief. Through his stylistic composition of 2:1-12, the implied author demonstrates a contrast between the faith of the paralytic and his companions, and the unbelief of the scribes. Faith receives pardon and healing, while unbelief leads to an overt clash with Jesus. Their faith consisted of a simple response with wondering like the crowd, but a profound conviction that if they can contact Jesus, the paralytic will recover. Through faith, the paralytic, who is labelled as a sinner and unclean man in his society, receives the forgiveness of his sins. By contrast, the unbelief of the scribes does not consist merely in failure to understand the significance of Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness; rather it resides in their attempt to avoid the full of Jesus' possession of divine authority with by accusing him with blasphemy.

In fact, Mark 2:1-12 introduces a series of controversy stories (2:1-3:6) in which the reader understands the depth and seriousness of the official objection to Jesus, despite his awesome reputation with the people in the flanking material (1:45; 3:7). In these controversy stories, there is both a concentrative collection of the five accounts, with the opening and ending stories reflecting each other in structure, content and theme, and an internal linear progress, in which there is steady accumulation of forces rejecting Jesus and intensification of objection from silent hostility (2:6) through to plotting his death (3:6).¹⁰⁷

The combination of 2:1-12 and 3:1-6 implies a direct link between the Jewish religious leaders' rejection of Jesus' divine authority and the plot to kill him. Their unbelief was more than mere doubt and a failure to understand Jesus. It is an active, even murderous, rejection to Jesus as a bearer of the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.

It is remarkable to observe that, in the line progression we find not so much a steadily deepening of hostility toward Jesus, as an increasingly overt expression of an hostility that appears at its most profound from the very beginning, in that it is the charge of blasphemy that finally seals the condemnation of Jesus (2:7, 14:64). From their first emergence (2:1-12), the unbelieving scribes harboured in their hearts the conviction that leads to Jesus' death.

According to 3:5, the ultimate cause of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus was their hardened heart. Due to the fact that their hearts are hardened, they may ever seeing Jesus' miracles and hearing his teachings, but never understanding (3:5; 4:12). The opponents who reject Jesus and kill him act, on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1). Thus, Jesus' remarkable words and deeds may not lead the scribes to faith, but to rejection of and unbelief in him. Nevertheless, Mark 4:11-12 mentions a divine hardening that ensures that the outsiders (which indicates the Jewish religious leaders in Mark's narrative) "may be ever seeing, but never perceiving, and ever hearing, but never understanding."¹⁰⁹

2.2 THE UNBELIEF AT NAZARETH (6:1-6)

In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus encounters unbelief in his own hometown. The implied author does not specifically choose the Jewish religious leaders for censure, but usually tells more about the response of the majority of people. However, it should be considered that the action occurred in the synagogue, which the implied author frequently associates with the religious leaders (1:21f; 3:1; 12:38 cf. 13:9), and their presence in the Nazareth synagogue is no doubt to be presumed.¹¹⁰ Even so, in this story Mark probably wants to describe a more on-going repudiation of Jesus than solely by the scribes and Pharisees. There are various indications that he felt that the response of Jesus' home-town as a whole would serve as an appropriate metaphor for the foreshadowing of the final rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem, by the entire nation.¹¹¹ The story at Nazareth

¹⁰⁹ I will deal with the relationship between "hardness of heart" and unbelief in next section.

¹¹⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 188.

¹¹¹ R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 188, 191; T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (New York: Cornell University, 1963), 138; R. P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1972), 117; W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish*

thus foreshadows what will happen to Jesus at the end of the Markan story, and portrays a source of unbelief.

2.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The literary composition indicates that the problem of faith versus unbelief is the essential point of the whole story.¹¹² Mark concludes his second major section of his story (3:7-6:6) with the rejection of Jesus, just as he ends the first major section (3:6).¹¹³ In 3:1-6, the reader/hearer encounters the first clear opposition to Jesus with a hint of a coming conflict (3:6). Here again, there is a rejection of him on the Sabbath in a synagogue (cf. 3:1-2; 6:1-2).

After the introductory verse, the description falls into two sections. The first section (6:2b-3) illustrates the unbelieving response of the people in synagogue and ends with the narrator's evaluative commentary: "and they took offence at him." The second section (6:4-6) deals conversely with the negative effect this reaction has on the action of Jesus, in that only a 'few' are healed, and it also ends with an evaluative commentary: 'and he marvelled at their unbelief.'¹¹⁴ The second section consists of two sets of rhetorical questions suggested by the people in the synagogue and a proverbial saying of Jesus. The rhetorical question is a dramatic device much used in the Markan narrative to emphasize the drama and engage the reader/hearer by putting responsibility on him to discover the answer,¹¹⁵ while proverbs include summarized knowledge with a challenging aptness to the situation in view.¹¹⁶

Mark makes two points of linkage with the previous narrative (Mark 5). First, the emphasis on the woman's faith in 5:25-34 and Jairus' faith in 5:35-43 provides a

Territorial Doctrine (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 239; D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (London: Pelican, 1963), 123; E. Best, *The Temptation and The Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965), 119.

¹¹² E. Grässer, "Jesus in Nazareth (Mk. VI 1-6a). Note on the Redaction and Theology of St. Mark," *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 1-23, esp. 16.

¹¹³ E. Schweizer, *The Good New according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971), 122.

¹¹⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 191.

¹¹⁵ Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as Story*, 49-51; H. C. Kee, *The Community of the New Age. Studies in Mark's Gospel* (London: SCM 1977), 117.

¹¹⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 191.

startling contrast regarding unbelief among Jesus' home-town people.¹¹⁷ Second, the unbelief of the mourners who laughed contemptuously at Jesus' perspective on the girl's difficulty (5:40) was quite similar to the rejection of Jesus by the town's people.¹¹⁸

Through the descriptive comment "Jesus left there" (6:1), the implied author establishes a tight link between the Nazareth story and the previous story (5:21-43). In the Jairus story, Jesus responds vehemently to a manifestation of unbelief from the mourners who laugh contemptuously at his perspective on the girl's difficulty. He expels them from the house (5:40). The use of the strong verb *ekba|l ein* which is sometimes translated in Mark's Gospel to describe driving out demons (cf. 1:12, 43; 11:15; 12:18), emphasizes the intensity of the rejection of Jesus, and of the unbelief, and implies that the banishment of unbelief is an important part of his offensive on Satan's kingdom.¹¹⁹ Immediately after, the motif of unbelief is repeated by the collectivity in the Nazareth.

It is not accidental that the following passage deals with the mission of the disciples (6:7-13), in which they rehearse their post-Easter task (13:10).¹²⁰ This mission is forestalled in 3:14, thus emerges as a result of the rejection of Jesus by his home-town people, and also follows an analogous path, combining both rejection (6:3, 11) and acceptance (6:5b, 13). It is also important that Mark sandwiches the story of the passion of the Baptist between the sending out and the return of the disciples (6:14-29).¹²¹ In the light of Mark's comment in 1:14, the audience can easily grasp the threatening parallel between John's destiny and the fate awaiting Jesus as opposition intensifies, as just foreshadowed in 6:1-6.

In 6:10-12, the motif of unbelief is mentioned again. These verses manifest that the disciples will experience hostility and their preaching will be rejected by the villagers. In this situation, the disciples were to shake the dust from their feet, as

¹¹⁷ Guelich, *Mark*, 307.

¹¹⁸ V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher. A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 34.

¹¹⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 179.

¹²⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 189.

¹²¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 189.

a testimony and warning to the villagers,¹²² after which they should go elsewhere. There are two kinds of rejection: the rejection of the disciples' message by the villagers and the rejection of the disciples themselves. In other words, the villagers' rejection is the rejection of the declaration of the good news (cf. 1:14-15). They are warned about the coming judgment as the result of such a rejection,¹²³ since the shaking off the dust from their feet (6:11) may be perceived in the light of the Jewish custom of carefully removing the dust from both clothes and feet before re-entering Jewish territory.¹²⁴ The importance of the act here is to emphasise the point that the village or town, which rejected them, is no longer to be regarded as part of the kingdom of God (cf. 1:15), to announce at those who do not accept the message must now answer for themselves to God.¹²⁵ By this action, they dissociate themselves from the pollution of those lands and their ultimate judgment.¹²⁶ The action is a gesture of judgment symbolizing the termination of any further contact and communication with the place, and denying any further opportunity to listen to the message of salvation or experience the ministry of healing and deliverance.¹²⁷ The action is also a prophetic act designed to judge the unbelieving villagers.¹²⁸

In Mark 6:12, the implied author concludes the passage with a brief statement of the disciples' actions. Their preaching was one of the two tasks they were sent to do at their calling (3:14). Their proclamation of repentance places them in line with both the Baptist's message and Jesus' message (1:14-15cf. 13:10) for salvation. Thus, in the first-century context, Jewish people who did not heed the disciples rejected the gospel of salvation, and the result was the warning of judgment, that is, shaking off the dust.

Consequently, Mark 6:1-6 echoes not only the unbelief of the mourners in 5:40, but also the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders at the end of the

¹²² Lane, *Mark*, 208; Hooker, *Mark*, 157; Taylor, *Mark*, 305.

¹²³ Lane, *Mark*, 209

¹²⁴ W. W. Wessel, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary VIII* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 667.

¹²⁵ Wessel, "Mark," 667.

¹²⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 209,

¹²⁷ J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zürich: Bensingel/ NeukirchenVluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978, 1979), 31.

¹²⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 209.

previous section (3:1-6).¹²⁹ Furthermore, the passage foreshadows not only the Jewish people's rejection of the disciples' message but also the opponents' rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem.

2.2.2 Exegetical Perspectives on the Portrayal of Unbelief

The Nazareth story demonstrates the inherent character of unbelief and its result. The portrayal of the Nazareth's rejection of Jesus would seem to be a literary device in service of the polemic against Jesus' antagonists, which is founded in the narrative that involves some intrinsic tensions. The rejection of Jesus by the synagogue congregation is described as conscious and deliberative, and therefore a culpable response to Jesus' teaching and healing activity.

2.2.2.1 Unbelieving Response of the Town's People

Jesus' teaching in 6:2 is probably meant to embrace both wisdom and power in 6:3. The narrator makes it clear that there is no real doubt among the people as to the objective virtue of Jesus' activity - it astonishes them. Nevertheless, the synagogue congregation failed to show a response of faith to Jesus' teaching and healing. Due to their usual familiarity with Jesus, and perceiving Jesus simply a local person like themselves, they were unable to accept his divine teaching and miracles. Their unbelief lies not in a failure to understand the quality of Jesus' word or the reality of his miracle; it lies rather in a refusal to admit the true source of this wisdom and power (6:2) and to accept the unique identity of the one who manifests them (6:3)

The people of Nazareth, surprised and antagonistic, ask five questions which display their opposition of Jesus. The five questions are framed in the following way:

Where did this man get all this? (6:2a)¹³⁰

¹²⁹ The rejection, here by family and friends, also echoes the earlier rejection by the religious leaders that concludes the first subsection of the gospel (3:6). Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 187.

¹³⁰ The early Jews educated their children at home. The father was responsible for his children's religious training and often taught his son domestic duties, such as tending sheep (1 Sam. 16:11) and working in the field (2 Kgs. 4:18), as well as a trade. Both parents (Prov. 1:8; 6:20) were obliged to instruct their children. In Jesus' time the synagogues were still the main educational centers for the Jews, though by then the scribes were being replaced by rabbis. The many local synagogues, both within and outside of Palestine, insured intimacy with the Law

(pogen toutw| tauta)

What is this wisdom that has been given to him? (6:2b)

(tij h` sofia h` doqeisa toutw|)

What deeds of power are being done by his hands! (6:2c)

(ai` dunameij toiautai dia. twh ceirwh autou/ ginomenaiE)

Is not this the carpenter? Is he not the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?(6:3a)

(ouc outoj estin o tektwn(o uiroj thj Mariaj kai. adel foj Vlakwbou kai. Vlwshtoj kai. Vlouda kai. SimwnojE)

Are not his sisters here with us? (6:3b)

(ouk eisin ai` adel fai. autou/wde proj hma|E)

The first three questions deal with Jesus' behaviours, and each one features a contemptuous outoj. The fourth question deals with Jesus' occupation and part of his family background, and features another contemptuous outoj. The fifth question deals with the rest of his family background. Dividing the questions in this way, Gundry argues that the first two questions confirm the origin of the authority of Jesus in Mark's intent, and the last three questions miss the point that Jesus has a new family over whom he presides (3:31-35).¹³¹ Guelich argues that this common knowledge of who Jesus really was led the town's people to reject the alternative that God might be using him in any special way.¹³²

The three interrogatory clauses in 6:2 all concern the source of Jesus' words and miracles. The question Pogen toutw| tauta represents the general question, while the next two questions define tauta as his wisdom¹³³ and power.¹³⁴

for those unable to travel to Jerusalem. Jesus, who was taught by the rabbis (Lk. 2:46) and in turn taught in the various synagogues (Matt. 4:23), often criticized the scribes according to the standard of the ideal scribe, who should disclose both old and new elements from his store of knowledge (Matt. 13:52)"-Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 307.

¹³¹ Gundry, *Mark*, 290-92.

¹³² Guelich, *Mark*, 310.

¹³³ J. Goetzmann, "Wisdom," *NIDNTT Vol 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 1029-30; Over all acquired and transmitted wisdom, however, stands the wisdom, which is given as a gift by God to Solomon (1 Ki. 3:5-14). Reflected here is not only the longing of a later generation for the splendour and security of Solomon's reign, but also Israel's conviction of the transcendence of Yahweh over the other gods. It is equally comprehensible that wisdom was expected in the hoped-for messianic king (Isa. 11:2). When "this generation is confronted with the Queen of the South who came from the ends of the earth in order to hear Solomon's wisdom, the implied rebuke is corroborated with the comment, "Behold, something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt 12:42; Lk. 11:31; cf. 1 Ki. 10:1-10;

According to Guelich, ‘wisdom and power,’ which characterize Jesus, are attributed to the future Davidic Messiah in Isa. 11:2.¹³⁵ Isaiah’s wisdom language is repeated in *Psalms of Solomon* 17:23. In the larger context of both Isaiah and the *Psalms of Solomon*, however, the Davidic Messiah’s wisdom was used not only to rescue Israel, but also to destroy its foes.¹³⁶ In fact, through characterizing his work as wisdom and power, which are epithets used of God and Messiah, Mark implies that they recognize a correspondence between Jesus’ actions and words, and those of God.

The Primitive Stereotypes in the First-Century Mediterranean

Yet, despite the evidence, they refuse to draw the logical corollary and admit God’s agency. What prevents them from accepting the conclusion suggested by the astonishing evidence emerges in 6:3: they cannot reconcile the extraordinariness of his wisdom and power with the unmistakable ordinariness of his vocational training and his local family origins.¹³⁷ Both of which amply imply humble background circumstances, which according to established standards of judgment, forbid the possibility that God is active in his ministry.

In the first-century Mediterranean, such a person would always perceive of himself/herself through the evaluation of others.¹³⁸ After all, honour needs a grant of reputation by others, and therefore what others tend to understand, is very important.¹³⁹ Furthermore, such a person requires others for any kind of

2 Chr. 9:1-12). This can be understood most easily by thinking of the heavenly Wisdom whom men despise: in Jesus this wisdom has finally appeared.

¹³⁴ Cf. O. Betz, “Might,” *NIDNTT Vol 2*, 603. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is powerful in speech and action (Lk. 24:19). His miracles are called *dunameis*, for in them God’s rule on earth begins to have a powerful effect, and the fight against the devil is carried out on the level of human existence (Matt. 12:22-30; Mk. 6:2). Jesus is the mightier one who, as God’s representative, subdues the strong man, i.e. the devil (cf. Mk. 1:8 with 3:22-30). Jesus’ miracles are worked by a power within himself (Mk. 5:30).

¹³⁵ Guelich, *Mark*, 309

¹³⁶ Marcus, *Mark*, 374.

¹³⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 192.

¹³⁸ G. M. Forster, “The Dyadic Contract: A Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Peasant Village,” *American Semantics* 4 (1961): 1184 in 1173-1792.

¹³⁹ J. H. Neyrey, “Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss Honor. The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms,” in *Modeling Early Christianity. Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context*, ed. P. F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995), 143; B. J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus. The Kingdom of*

significant being, since the impression he has about himself has to be indistinguishable from the self-perception held and portrayed through the significant others in his family or village.¹⁴⁰ According to Malina & Neyrey, the following can be seen to represent the primitive stereotypes whereby first-century Mediterranean people comprehend themselves or others.¹⁴¹

1) Family and clan

Such a person is not known individually, but in terms of his/her family (Mk. 2:15-19; 6:3). People know him/her through knowledge of the parents and clan.

2) Place of origin

People might be known in terms of their place of birth, and depending on the public perception of this place, they are either honourable or dishonourable (Mk. 2:24; 15:21).

The term *patria* used in 6:1 signifies literally 'fatherland,' and refers to the specific region where a person family lived, in Jesus' case Nazareth and its surrounding area.¹⁴² This comes from the first-century Mediterranean social norm that geographical origins and inheritance prospects determine who an individual is and what his abilities will be. Like many of the ostensible geographical references in the Gospel, Nazareth in this context is intended to signal social rather than geographical information.¹⁴³ Honourable people derive from and are rooted in honourable location, region, and poleis.¹⁴⁴ Thus a person's role and status in society should be considered in relation to a function of such noble regional connections. To know someone means to know his roots, ancestry, and genealogy. Honourable families, moreover, derive from honourable soil and live in honourable regions. The converse is equally true. Dishonourable persons

God in Mediterranean Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 126.

¹⁴⁰ B. J. Malina & J. H. Neyrey, "First-Century Personality: Dyadic, not Individualistic," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 73-74.

¹⁴¹ Malina & Neyrey, "First-Century Personality," 74-75.

¹⁴² The reader acknowledges that Nazareth was Jesus' hometown based on 1:9, 24.

¹⁴³ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 212.

¹⁴⁴ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul. An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 24.

indicate dishonourable families, low-quality locales, and disgraceful *poleis*. Nathanael's question in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out Nazareth?" (ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δυνάται, τί ἀγαθόν εἰσέλθῃ) demonstrates the first step in determining honourable or dishonourable origins.¹⁴⁵

On the other hand, when Paul presents himself as "a Judean, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem]" (Acts 22:3), he pulls out all the honourable stops, since Tarsus was no dishonourable region (Acts 21:39), and Jerusalem was the major city of Judea and site of Israel's temple. The people of Nazareth already knew Jesus' birth status and honour rating. Every family, village or city would therefore be quite predictable, and so would be the individuals who are embedded in and share the qualities of family, village or nation.¹⁴⁶ The people of Nazareth understood Jesus as someone who is not merely exceeding expectations but rather is overreaching himself.

3) Inherited craft-trade

Mediterranean people were known in terms of trade, craft or occupation. The people had fixed ideas of what it means to be a worker of leather, a landowner, a steward, or a carpenter (cf. Mk. 6:3). Since the persons have no control over ancestry and parentage, they tend to understand their responsibilities and the relative positions of clans and families, as well of individual members in them, as ordained by God.¹⁴⁷

The people's reflection on Jesus' status is as a local boy whose mother, brothers and sisters are present in their midst: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" (6:3). According to the people of Nazareth Jesus was a local boy and they knew no reason why he should have turned out to be any different from the rest of his family. The reference to Jesus' family by the home-town's people could mean that his relatives are contributing to the general unwillingness to

¹⁴⁵ Malina and Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul*, 24-25.

¹⁴⁶ Halvor Moxnes, "Kingdom Takes Place: Transformations of Place and Power in the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible*, ed. John J. Pilch (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 194.

¹⁴⁷ Malina & Neyrey, "First-Century Personality," 76.

acknowledge him as divinely sent (6:3).¹⁴⁸

The town's people are put off, because Jesus is a carpenter. In the first-century, the Jewish people had a high regard for manual labour, but some distinguished between the scribes, who devoted themselves to the study of the Law, and the labourer, who worked with his hands. "According to Sirach 38:24-34, the wisdom of the scribes depends upon the opportunity of leisure to study, while the artisan is too much engaged in business to become wise."¹⁴⁹ As a result, "the artisans did not sit in the judges' seat, nor did they see the determinations of the courts, but they work only at night, while during the day they only talk about their labours."¹⁵⁰ In first-century Mediterranean society, designating Jesus as a 'carpenter' was not particularly complimentary and could have been regarded as an attempt to discredit him.¹⁵¹ Accordingly, they were unable to accept that Jesus, as a carpenter, could perform divine works.

Son of Mary

The phrase 'son of Mary' (וִּיּוֹן תְּהִי מַרְיָא) ¹⁵² may reveal one reason why Jesus' words were not immediately accepted by the town's people. In a Jewish context, the father's name was usually used to identify the son, even when the father was dead (see e.g. the son of Joseph in *b. Yoma* 38b).¹⁵³ In contrast with the Jewish custom, Jesus was identified by his mother's name, rather than by his

¹⁴⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 89.

¹⁴⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 233.

¹⁵⁰ Garland, *Mark*, 233.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 171. The outspoken detractor of Christianity in the second century, Celsus, scoffed that the founder of the new religion was nothing but "a carpenter by trade" (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.34, 36). R. MacMullen, indicates that occupations such as weavers and carpenters betrayed plebeian origins and were grist for "the range of prejudice felt by the literate upper classes for the lower" (*Roman Social Relation: 50 B.C. to A.D. 384* [London: Yale University Press, 1974], 107-8, 138-41). This judgment should not be unduly pressed, however. The snobbery of the elite patrician minority cannot be assumed of the broader populace as a whole, most of whom, like Mark's readers presumably, were also working-class people.

¹⁵² The narrator uses many appositive comments to describe characters in the story. Many of these identification are prosaic, but some are noteworthy (R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 120. Mark 1:1, with its clear identification of Jesus as Christ and the Son of God, offers the reader vital information.

¹⁵³ T. Iran, "'Man born of Woman...'" (Job 14:1): The Phenomenon of Men Bearing Metronymes at the Time of Jesus," *NovT* 34 (1992): 23n. 3 in 23-45.

father's name.¹⁵⁴ What did the employment of the mother's name in this context imply? According to Stauffer, as the opponents identified Jesus as the son of his mother, that is, as being illegitimate, they were slandering him (cf. Jud. 11:1-2) and perhaps were harking back to rumours that the situation of Jesus' birth was doubtful.¹⁵⁵ This aspersion would correspond to the trend in later Jewish traditions to describe Jesus as a fatherless child (see. e.g. Origen *Against Celsus* 1. 28-32, 39, 69; b. *Sanh.* 67 a).¹⁵⁶ However, Meier provides strong arguments against any interpretation that this 'flip comment' suggests any moral scandal related with Jesus' birth.¹⁵⁷ According to him, it only conveys a meaning of familiarity. Klostermann's response to the charge of illegitimacy is the declaration of Jesus' virginal conception, so that God becomes, in a more or less literal meaning, his father (cf. Matt. 1:18-20; Luke 1:34-35).¹⁵⁸ However, Mark gives no explicit indication of knowing this tradition.¹⁵⁹

McArthur argues that 'son of Mary' represents 'an informal descriptive' rather than 'a formal genealogical' way of identifying Jesus by his well-known mother, because his father was presumably long since dead (e.g. Jud. 11:1-2; 1 Kgs 17:17; Luke 7:12; Acts 16:1; 23:16; Gal 4:21-31).¹⁶⁰ According to him, whatever the answer, 'son of Mary' need not be a cruel insult. However, Mark 6:3 comes closer to being a genealogical formula than the parallels quoted, because of the broad list of other male family members.¹⁶¹ In this context, the town's people refer to Jesus as Mary's son, because his father is no longer alive and they are articulating their familiarity with his mother, who remains there.¹⁶² This seems to be the most likely, because the allusions of his brothers and sisters insist that he is simply 'a local boy.'¹⁶³

¹⁵⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 244.

¹⁵⁵ E. Stauffer, "Jeschua ben Mirjam (Mk 6,3)," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, eds. E. Ellis & M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 124.

¹⁵⁶ Marcus, *Mark*, 375.

¹⁵⁷ J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 222-27.

¹⁵⁸ E. Klostermann, *Das Markuseuangelium* (Tübingen: Verlag J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 55.

¹⁵⁹ Marcus, *Mark*, 375.

¹⁶⁰ H. K. McArthur, "Son of Mary," *NovT* 15 (1973): 55 in 38-58.

¹⁶¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 375.

¹⁶² Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 225-26.

¹⁶³ D. E. Garland, *Mark. The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 232.

Kinship

In the ancient Mediterranean context, ascribed honour derived from kinship, that is, birth into a family. Progenies had the same honour as parents, for honour derived from birth (“like mother, like daughter,” Ezek 16:44; “like father, like son,” Matt 13:55).¹⁶⁴ They were made admirable by connection with equally commendable kinfolk and families. To know a person implied to know his roots and ancestry. Being born into an admirable family makes one honourable, because the family is the repository of the honour of past illustrious ancestors and their obtained honour. One of the most important purposes of genealogies in the New Testament is to describe a person’s honour line, and thus to locate them socially on a level of eminence (cf. Luke 3:23-38). The converse is equally true. A dishonourable person demonstrates a dishonourable family, low-quality region and *contemptible poleis*.¹⁶⁵

Jesus’ home-town people’s hostile questions about his family and origin point to the same thing: How can he insist on special honour as a prophet and a divine being, if he is but a carpenter and Mary’s son, if his family includes ordinary brothers and sisters in the village, and if his origins are in a peasant village in Galilee? (cf. John 7:40-42)¹⁶⁶ It is almost as if they confess on their own behalf that nothing this good can come out of Nazareth (cf. John 1:46).

The home-town people knew Jesus from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16), and their very familiarity with him was a hindrance to knowing him truly, for it made it all the more hard for them to see through the veil of his ordinariness.¹⁶⁷ Due to their ordinary knowledge that Jesus was only a local yokel the home-town people rejected the alternative that God might be using him in a particular way.

The last sentence of 6:3 demonstrates the rejection of Jesus by the town’s people along with his teaching; *kai. eskandalizonto en autw*. The term *eskandalizonto* translated as “they were offended” (NIV, NRSV) is reflected in

¹⁶⁴ Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 28.

¹⁶⁵ B. J. Malina & J. H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul. An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 24.

¹⁶⁶ Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame,” 28.

¹⁶⁷ C. E. B. Grandfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 193.

other versions: “are repelled” (Mof), “fall away” (RSV), “stumble” (ASV), “fell foul of him” (NEB). “The idea conveyed by the Greek verb is that of being offended and repelled to the point of abandoning (whether temporarily or permanently, the word does not specify) belief in the words (cf. Lk. 8:13) or one’s relationship with Jesus (14:27, 29).”¹⁶⁸ The verb is important in Mark, appearing in 4:17 and 9:42-47, where it translates as to be caused to commit apostasy—to abandon allegiance to Jesus after beginning as a disciple.¹⁶⁹ Here, however, it is used of outsiders, and is translated as means to be prevented from becoming a disciple. The Nazarenes are like the seed that fell beside the path; they never take root.

2.2.2.2 Jesus’ Reaction to Unbelief of the Nazareth

Jesus responded to the question of unbelief by aphorism, of which there were numerous parallels in the Jewish and Greek literature¹⁷⁰ that Jesus cited: “only in his home-town, among his relatives and in his own house, is a prophet without honour” (6:4). This indicates the unbelief of the Nazarenes but does not offer an excuse. Through comparing Jesus to the prophets who were dishonoured and rejected among their own nation, Mark elucidates that Jesus was also rejected among his family.¹⁷¹ Jesus has come like a prophet and was rejected like a prophet (e.g. 2 Chr 24:19; 36:15-16; Neh 9:26; Job 1:12). “The saying intimates that he will suffer the inevitable fate of a prophet, while the martyrdom of the prophet John the Baptist will soon be described (6:17-29).”¹⁷² Jesus’ rejection by his own home-town foreshadows his rejection by his nation, a rejection that will be concluded in Jerusalem.

¹⁶⁸ Wessel, “Mark,” 665.

¹⁶⁹ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 60; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 173.

¹⁷⁰ In the extra-canonical form, the Oxyrhynchus papyri say of Jesus: “A prophet is not acceptable in his own country, neither does a physician work cures on those who know him” (Translation by J. J. Jeremiah of Pap. Ox. I, 33-36 in E. Hen Necke & W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, vol. 2 [London: Lutterworth Press, 1963] I, 109). It also emerges in *the Gospel of Thomas*, “No prophet is acceptable in his village, no physician heals those who know him” (The translation of GT 31 is from A. Guillaumont et al., *The Gospel according to Thomas* [Leiden: Brill/New York: Harper, 1959], 21).

¹⁷¹ J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 133: “By announcing that his fate as a prophet is to be rejected by his people... [w]ith a rhetorically potent progression Jesus intensifies his rejection as a prophet: He has been dishonored not only by his ‘home town’ but also by his own ‘relatives’ and even by his own ‘house’ (family).”

¹⁷² Garland, *Mark*, 233.

Mark 6:4 is related to 3:21 and 31-35 in that both texts imply the fact that Jesus' physical relationship to his own *patris* proves to be a stumbling block for the family to understand Jesus for who he truly is.¹⁷³ In rhetorical terms, this scene is a recapitulation of previous scenes in which the inability of his family to comprehend is interconnected with the doubt of the town's people who observed his mighty works in the synagogue.¹⁷⁴ In 6:4, the addition of 'house' further indicates the irony of being rejected at home. Not only in his home-town, but also in his own home, Jesus was rejected. In doing this, Mark emphasizes Jesus' rejection not only by those who know him slightly, or knew about him, but also by those who knew him best, namely his family.¹⁷⁵

The word 'kinsmen' in 6:4 is perhaps to be taken as an allusion to a wider circle of Jesus' kin than those just known in 6:3. Accordingly we should understand the speaking in 6:4b as referring to groups of ever diminishing size—Jesus' wider kinship group and the members of his own household.¹⁷⁶ Mark insists that the rejection of Jesus contains not only his own home-town, but also the members of his own family.

Jesus' Usual Family

In first-century Mediterranean society, a person was known in terms of his/her family. For example, Simon is 'son of Jonah' and James and John are 'sons of Zebedee.' By knowing the parent or kin, one knows the person's identity. In Mark 6:3, the Nazarenes define Jesus' identity by reference to his physical family, while in Mark 3:31-35, Jesus identifies his family on the basis of response to his message rather than biological family. The rejection by those who have most reason to perceive Jesus correctly is contrasted with the call of those who are around him as his true family (3:31-34). This passage presents Jesus' view of a new family of faith in which spiritual kinship and not physical relationship

¹⁷³ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark. A Socio-Rhetoric Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 192. According to John 7:5, Jesus' own brother did not believe in him during his ministry, and we hear of only James coming to faith after his death and resurrection (Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 174). We saw in 3:19 that opposition to Jesus would infiltrate his chosen circle of apostles; here, too it infiltrates his own home. Once again (3:31-35) Jesus' family is outsider and he is a stranger in his own.

¹⁷⁴ Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 35.

¹⁷⁵ Gnllka, *Markus*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 195.

becomes the pivotal foundation of the family.¹⁷⁷ His physical family's alien relationship with him shows in their position 'outside' the house in contrast to the circle around him (3:32), as well as in his own identification of those around him as his spiritual mothers and his brothers (3:34).¹⁷⁸ At this point, Jesus' physical family had no part in his ministry and no special benefit in the Kingdom which was coming.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, this is not to say that Jesus sets out here to intentionally dishonour his natural family. The resolution of this narrative tension is found in the legitimating norm of 'doing God's will.' When he places the honour of God above that of his family, Jesus does not dishonour his family, which is indicated at the same time to be even more honourable.¹⁸⁰

Those around him whose action reflected acceptance of him and his message about the kingdom (1:14-15), had become members in the family of faith, in view of their new and bonding relationship of "doing the will of God." (3:35; cf. 10:29-30).¹⁸¹ God was calling persons to a new loyalty that could lead to the renunciation of the requests of their biological family, which failed to take account of "the will of God" (το. θεῶν ἡμα τού θεοῦ). One's ultimate loyalty is obligated to God, who is Father of a new divine family, and becoming a member of the new family is open to all persons regardless of physical family, social position, and place of birth.¹⁸² The faith forms a fellowship in which the common practice of the will of God unites a man closely to Jesus and allows him to know another as brother, sister or mother (cf. Ps. 22:22; Heb 2:11-12). Jesus creates a divine new community, which was usually called as the family of God. But, those whose hearts are hardened cannot understand and accept the identification of the new family.¹⁸³ To see the presence of God and enter his family, the people need faith.

¹⁷⁷ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 159.

¹⁷⁸ Marcus, *Mark*, 285.

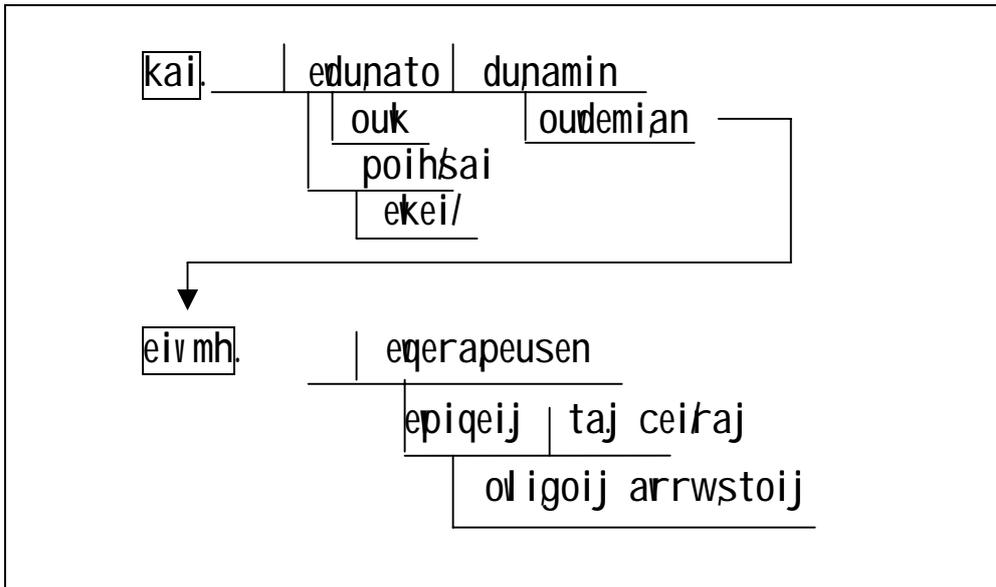
¹⁷⁹ Painter, *Mark*, 75.

¹⁸⁰ D. M. May, "Mark 3:20-35 from the Perspective of Shame/Honor," *BTB* 17, no 3 (1987): 86 in 83-87.

¹⁸¹ Guelich, *Mark*, 185.

¹⁸² Garland, *Mark*, 131.

¹⁸³ Cf. J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the king. Dynamic of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* [Leiden: Brill, 200], 191-362. Birth was, of course, the most important way of becoming a member of a family. The New Testament also uses this image to say how a believer becomes part of God's family (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; Jan van der Watt, G. Malina, and S. Joubert, *A Time Travel to the World of Jesus* [Halfway: Orion, 1996], 21). For more detail, see

The Nazarenes' UnbeliefThe Syntactic Structure of Mark 6:5

Mark concludes the episode by reporting that because of the unbelief in his home-town, Jesus cannot do anything there except lay hands on a few sick individuals and heal them. In 6:5-6 Mark uses the same dichotomy of a positive and negative picture as seen earlier between 6:2 and 6:3. The beginning declaration that, “He could not do any miracle there” (*ouk edunato ekei/pouh'sai oudemian dunamin*) in 6:5a is immediately followed with, “except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them” (*eiv mh. oligoij arrw'stoij epiqeij taj ceiraj epirapeusen*) in 6:5b. The construction *oudemij ... eiv mh.* is found frequently in New Testament Greek, including again in Mark 10:18, as a way of stating a limited exception to general rule which thereby adds emphasis to the rule (cf. Matt 11:27; 17:8; Jn 14:6; 1 Cor 1:14 8:4b; Rev 2:17).¹⁸⁴

With such a comparison, Mark 6:5 constitutes a very strong, though qualified, proclamation. The reason for the qualification is not to mitigate the implication of 6:5a that Jesus was rendered totally impotent by the Nazarenes' unbelief, but to emphasize forcefully the hampering effect of unbelief on Jesus' mission. At the same time the verse introduces the important fact that those few individuals who demonstrate real faith toward Jesus experienced healing even in the midst of

such hostility.¹⁸⁵ Jesus' inability to do any major healing in his home-town was not his responsibility, but due to the Nazarenes' unbelief.¹⁸⁶ Their antagonistic attitude and opposition was rooted in their unbelief. They saw only a son of Mary, only another one of the village children who has grown up and returned for a visit. Their unbelief lies not in a failure to understand the quality of Jesus' teaching or the realism of his healing, but in a refusal to accept the true source of wisdom and power.

Jesus worked and spoke according to God's will (cf. 3:35; 6:2). His words and deeds were declaring the salvation within the kingdom of God. Thus, those who do not believe in this intrinsic authority in his work could not experience God's redemptive work on their behalf.¹⁸⁷ The unbelief limits the reception of help readily available from Jesus.¹⁸⁸ Their unbelief meant not only their personal rejection of Jesus, but also prevented his providing them with what God was doing through him.¹⁸⁹ The greatest obstacle to faith is not the failure of God to act, but the unwillingness of the human heart to accept the God who condescends to us, only in the son of Mary.

2.2.3 Summary

The Nazarenes in Mark 6:1-6 are faced with crisis of identification crisis. Jesus' words and miracles astound them and point toward a mandate from God (6:2), but his biological origin, humble family circumstances and vocational background depart radically from conventional expectations of what a divine emissary should be like. Hence they refuse to respond in believing with proper confidence.

In spite of his teachings and miracles, his home-town people understood him as simply a son of Mary, whose brothers were known by name and whose sisters lived among them (6:2-3). His immediate family misinterpreted Jesus as a person possessed by Satan (3:20-22; 31-32), and now his town's people and kin's people rejected him outright. Their unbelief consists not in a failure to understand

¹⁸⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 194.

¹⁸⁶ A. Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospel* (London: SCM, 1941), 43; van der Loss, *The Miracles of Jesus*, 192; Lane, *Mark*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Guelich, *Mark*, 311.

¹⁸⁸ J. Painter, *Mark's Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1997), 97.

¹⁸⁹ Guelich, *Mark*, 312.

the potential implication of Jesus' ministry; it is not some kind of predetermined blindness. Rather, it consists in a conscious refusal to surrender established standards of judgment in the face of clear evidence that God's ruling power is demonstrated in Jesus' words and deeds.

Mark emphasizes the seriousness and fault of the Nazarenes in various ways. While not expecting ready acceptance in his family and kin (6:4), Jesus also does not expect such persistent hostility and he marvels at their unbelief (6:6). So powerful is this unbelief that it succeeds in upsetting Jesus' best intentions and he cannot expand kingdom power to the degree he has hoped to. This is not because God 'fails,' but happen when humans are limited by their own rigidity. "According to the self-same rule by which Jesus granted everything to faith, he also denied everything to unbelief."¹⁹⁰

This episode is not just the description of the rejection of Jesus in his hometown, it is also, as expressed in discussing 5:21-43, foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders that culminates in his crucifixion. In other words, this rejection by his own home-town and family anticipates the rejection by the larger group of his own people, his nation. The unbelief will ultimately lead to Jesus' death in Jerusalem. In the next section, we investigate the attempt of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem to convict him of death.

2.3 THE UNBELIEF OF THE AUTHORITIES IN JERUSALEM (11:27-33)

After cursing the fig tree, Jesus enters the temple and the court of the gentiles (11:15-19). There he drives out the sellers and buyers, overturns the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those selling doves, allows no one to carry anything through the area, and proclaims that God's house, which has been turned into a den of robbers, is meant to be a house of prayer for all the nations. With the cleansing of the temple still fresh in their mind, the authorities confront Jesus the following day.

Mark's description of this conflict focuses on a clash of authority.¹⁹¹ From the

¹⁹⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 195.

¹⁹¹ Most scholars have considered this pericope as a controversy story. E.g., Gundry, *Mark*, 656; E. P. Gould, *The Gospel according to St Mark. International*

outset Jesus is described as having authority unlike that of the scribes (1:21-28). His authority is announced in response to the scribes in 2:1-12, is reaffirm in 2:23-28, is questioned by the Pharisees in 8:11-13, and is finally questioned by the chief priests, elders, and scribes in 11:27-33. In 11:27 Jesus returns to the temple and he and his disciples walk around within its area. The members of Sanhedrin challenge him to declare the source of his authority, which gave him the right to do 'these things' (i.e. in the temple). Jesus does not answer their question. Rather, he counters with a question of his own. Jesus asks his challengers the source of John's authority. Faced with quandary, the Jewish religious leaders refuse to commit themselves: "We do not know." Recognising their response as side-stepping, Jesus concludes the discussion with the words: "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." In the conflict, the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus' authority is related with their failure to understand John the Baptist's authority. This statement implies that the Jerusalem authorities were the original, or at least the main source of the conflict.

2.3.1 Literary Composition and Structure

This is the first among a couple of other controversial stories, in which Jesus meets rejection from various sources.¹⁹² In this one, the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who make up the Sanhedrin, bluntly interrogate him about the source of his authority. Their challenge to Jesus' authority recalls readers to the issue, which was raised in 3:22-30 by the scribes who came from Jerusalem.¹⁹³ However, the story also connects with 11:1-10, in which Jesus first entered Jerusalem and the temple. By putting the incidents in this particular order, Mark implies that, had the religious leaders understood the significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, they would have had no need to ask about his authority as expressed in his action as he does in the temple.¹⁹⁴

This pericope has a number of literary features in common with 2:1-12. In both episodes, Jesus responds to the Jewish religious leaders' censure with riddling

Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 217; Hooker, *Mark*, 270; Lane, *Mark*, 412; Schweizer, *Mark*, 236; Taylor, *Mark*, 468; W. L. Knox, *The Sources of the Synoptic Gospel*, Vol I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 85.

¹⁹² Hooker, *St Mark*, 270.

¹⁹³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 451.

¹⁹⁴ Hooker, *The Gospel of Mark*, 271.

questions;¹⁹⁵ both record the religious leaders' reasoning (diel ogizonto) among themselves; in both narratives, Jesus' authority is the core issue. Both present a larger cycle of controversial stories, which further demonstrate the unbelief emphasized in the initial story.¹⁹⁶ In 2:1-12 and 11:27-33, Mark describes the antagonists' unbelief in their reaction to Jesus' authority. In 2:1-12, his authority is indicated in his forgiveness of sins, while in 11:27-33 his authority is indicated in his sovereignty over the temple. In both narratives, Mark demonstrates that their disbelief lies in their conscious refusal to accept the clear connotation of what they perceive rather than in misunderstanding of the truth.

Mark places the event after the cleansing of the temple (11:15-19) and before the parable of the vineyard (12:1-12).¹⁹⁷ Through this composition, Mark gives the true reason why God's judgment will come upon the Jewish religious authorities, which the symbolic action of the cleansing of the temple and the parable of the vineyard imply. If they persist in rejecting Jesus' authority, they are not able to avoid the imminent judgment.

Myers has noted a near identical five-step pattern to the two narratives, which surround the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:1-12.¹⁹⁸ The pattern is shared by the controversy narratives 11:27-33 and 12:13-17 and involves: 1) Jesus being approached by religious/political opponents; 2) They challenge him with a question concerning authority; 3) Jesus poses a counter question, challenging the opponents to reveal their own views and loyalties; 4) The opponents respond; 5) Jesus answer the original question accordingly.¹⁹⁹ Here, we have another example of Mark's sandwich technique in which parable is intended to help us

¹⁹⁵ "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? (2:8-9); "John's baptism was it from heaven, or from men?" (11:30).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Dewey, *Public Debate*, 55, 63f, 152-67; M. J. Cook, *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 34, 48f; Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as a Story*, 53.

¹⁹⁷ All of the synoptic gospels place the event at approximately the same location in the outline of their narrative. In Matthew and Mark, the cursing of the fig tree stands between the cleansing of the Temple and the question on authority. In Luke, the fig tree parable is absent. In Mark and Luke the parable of the vineyard immediately follows the question on authority. In Matthew, however, the parable of two sons appears between the two.

¹⁹⁸ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 305.

¹⁹⁹ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 160; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 306.

read each of the controversy dialogues that surround it and vice versa.²⁰⁰

2.3.2 Exegetical Perspective on the Portrayal of Unbelief

In view of 11:18, the interrogation of Jesus in this story has to be understood as an attempt by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders to secure grounds for action against Jesus. In 8:31 Mark presents the view that these three groups reject Jesus and put him to death. “This means that their coming to Jesus now is to be viewed as part of their malicious plot to eliminate him as a threat to their own authority (11:27).”²⁰¹ Jesus’ prediction of rejection by the entire official leadership of Israel is now beginning to be accomplished, and we should think of this as quasi-official delegation.²⁰² They challenge Jesus to present his credentials: “By what authority are you doing these things?” (11:28). Therefore, their emergence here, following the reaction of the opponents to Jesus’ activity in the temple (11:18), echoes of the passion prediction of 8:31 and foreshadows a threatening tone for the future development of Mark’s narrative.²⁰³

2.3.2.1 Two Questions (11:28)

The opponents implicitly recognize that Jesus has acted with authority in the temple, but their intention is to use this as means of incriminating him (cf. 12:13).²⁰⁴ The two questions that the religious leaders pose in 11:28 have a slightly different focus (kai. e| egon autw| en poi| exousi| tauta poi|ijē h' tij soi edwken thn exousi|an tau|thn i|ha tauta poi|h|ē|ā. The ‘what’ (poi|bj) question inquires as to the nature of Jesus’ authority (prophetic, messianic, etc.), and the ‘who’ (tij) question as to its ultimate source (human, divine, Satanic).²⁰⁵

Poi|bj| (11:28) here probably does not differ from tij (cf. 12:28); Gundry’s suggestion that we think of different types of authority which might have been claimed (prophetic, priestly, royal and messianic possibilities) is probably too

²⁰⁰ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 318.

²⁰¹ Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action*, 232.

²⁰² France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.

²⁰³ C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 199.

²⁰⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 197.

²⁰⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 197.

subtly theological for this context.²⁰⁶ BAGD 684b 2.a.g suggests that *poibj* should be read as the equivalent for *tinoj*: by whose authority? If so, the addition of a second question, *tij soi edwken thn exousian tauth*, draws out the implication of the first question more pointedly by its implied accusation—“We did not give it to you.”²⁰⁷

The term *exousia* mentioned in their question was also stated in 1:22 where it was used in contrast to the teaching of the scribes.²⁰⁸ Taylor argues that *exousia* is meant as divine authority not legal or political right.²⁰⁹ In the minds of the religious leaders, the reference is to the Rabbinical authority and their double questions about his authority means that Jesus is without authority, because Jesus is not ordained as a Rabbi.²¹⁰ Mark’s readers, of course, know the source of the authority, which “comes in the name of the Lord” (11:9). Gundry rightly interprets ‘these things’ and ‘them’ (*tauta*) to refer to Jesus’ action in temple.²¹¹ He quotes the forward position of the temple in the previous verse as evidence that Mark deliberately resolves to recall the temple event at this point in the narrative.²¹² The ‘these things’ about which Jesus is questioned are no doubt his attack on the temple business and his condemnation of the priestly leaders described in 11:15-19.²¹³ Obviously, the Sanhedrin had not authorized him to do

²⁰⁶ Gundry, *Mark*, 657.

²⁰⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.

²⁰⁸ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 334. The question of Jesus’ authority was raised at the very beginning of his public ministry (see 1:22, 27; 2:10), with the implication that his authority is from God and transcends the authority of other Jewish teachers and leaders as well as that of Roman officials (even the emperor). For Jesus sharing his authority with his disciples, see 3:15 and 6:7.

²⁰⁹ V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 469.

²¹⁰ Taylor, *Mark*, 469. Lane argues that the Sanhedrin was concerned to learn why Jesus performed what appears to be an official act if he possesses no official status (*Mark*, 413). Gundry in contrast argues that the Sanhedrin did not need to be told that Jesus lacks the kind of authority that rabbinic ordination confers (*Mark*, 657).

²¹¹ Gundry, *Mark*, 657. Kingsbury agrees with his view, pointing out telling that the Sanhedrin confronts Jesus in this text with “the cleansing of the temple still fresh in their minds” (*Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authority, Disciples* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 79). Cf. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 454.

²¹² Gundry, *Mark*, 666.

²¹³ Hurtado, *Mark*, 189; Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 161. It is possible that the questions posed here originally had a wider reference and were asked of Jesus’ activity of preaching and healing in general (Hooker, *Mark*, 271).

these things. Thus, they objected to his actions and questioned his authority.

The question follows logically and naturally from the incident. The ruling priests have authorized the activities of the buyers, sellers and money-changers. The ruling priests possessed ultimate authority on the Temple Mount, an authority to which in many honours even the Romans deferred to (cf. *Babylonian Talmud. Roš Hoššanah*.31a; *Babylonian Talmud. Šabbat*. 15a; *Babylonian Talmud. Sanhedrin*. 41a).²¹⁴ In light of this the Jewish religious leaders were inquiring as to Jesus' authority, in order for them to arrogate their authority in matters of temple polity. In the present case, the Jewish religious leaders' questions function as a challenge to Jesus' honour. The questions are not designed to draw out any information in return, but only to humiliate Jesus and expose him as a deceiver.²¹⁵

The religious authorities did not want to believe in Jesus' authority, demonstrated by his cleansing temple, for according to their understanding of scripture and law, what Jesus claimed to be and to do, which included authority over the temple, was blasphemy, and hence Jesus, because of his temple action, was regarded as a dishonourable person.²¹⁶ The authorities could not accept Jesus' purifying temple, as this authority belonged exclusively to God (they thought of themselves as agents of God).²¹⁷ The authorities perceived his attitude as a challenge to God's honour. Since Jesus' attitude was classified as a first-degree dishonour, that is blasphemy, by the authorities, they refused to believe in Jesus' authority. This unbelief of the opponents of Jesus implied their denial to acknowledge God's presence in and through the personal life of Jesus.

2.3.2.2 Jesus' Luminous Response (11: 29-30)

Jesus does not directly interrelate with the content of the Sanhedrin's questions. Instead, he agrees to answer the religious leaders' questions if they are prepared to proclaim whether John's baptism was of divine or human origin: "Jesus said to them. 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human

²¹⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 200.

²¹⁵ Gundry, *Mark*, 657.

²¹⁶ Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 69.

²¹⁷ Rhoads & Michie, *Mark as Story*, 117-19.

origin?” (11:29-30).²¹⁸ He thereby turns the tables on his challengers.

The way on which a question is answered by counter-question also mirrors a Semitic teaching style, which indicates that Jesus expects an unequivocal answer.²¹⁹ Answering a question by another question was a common rabbinic custom, especially in the context of debate (cf. 10:2-3). What is distinctive here is that Jesus makes his answer depend entirely on theirs.²²⁰ If they admit John’s divine commission, they must then acknowledge their own disregard for his message. If they deny John’s prophetic authority, they will discredit themselves in the eyes of the crowd, whose animosity they plainly fear (11:18, 32). They are therefore forced to proclaim themselves agnostic on the issues, which Jesus then uses to deny them the explicit proclamation they seek concerning his own authority.²²¹ If the Jewish religious leaders correctly answered the counter-question about the divine origin of John’s authority, they should also confess the divine authority of Jesus.

The dilemma of the Sanhedrin does not mean simply that they are unable to answer to his question. More to the point, their options have been so limited by Jesus’ brilliant response that they have no way to publicly defend their own honour. They recognized their dilemma: if they recognize John’s divine authority, they would expose themselves to the charge of unbelief.²²² They also understand that they would be forced to recognize that Jesus’ authority comes from God. Just as John’s authority may derive from God, so Jesus’ authority may be traced directly to God. However, in order to maintain their public honour, they could not admit Jesus’ authority.

²¹⁸ This style has frequently been compared to parallels in rabbinic discourse (cf. 10:2-3). In these parallels, one addresses an arguable point to a colleague who opposes with a question on which both the interlocutor and his colleague agree (Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 203). This approach offers not only the basis for the questioner’s response but also the basis for his colleague’s climatic response (G. S. Shae, “The question on the Authority of Jesus,” *NovT* 16 [1974]: 13-14 in 1-29; cf. *Babylonian Talmud. Sanh.* 65b).

²¹⁹ H. Strack & P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrash*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (München: C. H. Beck, 1961), 860; Schweizer, *The Good News*, 237.

²²⁰ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 413.

²²¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 198.

²²² Lane, *Mark*, 414.

Jesus' counter-question functions rhetorically to direct attention back to John's baptism at the initiation of the Markan story.²²³ Mark's Gospel begins with the Baptist's appearance in the wilderness, declaring a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins (1:4). In first-century Jewish context, the locale for forgiveness of sins was not the Jordan River, but the Jerusalem temple.²²⁴ The important points for the understanding of our text are found in John's rejection of the temple system of forgiveness. That the religious leaders acknowledge the divine authority of John to preserve their honour among the people, means that they acknowledge John's critical assessment of the sacrificial system of the temple, along with his promise of forgiveness apart from the temple through the vehicle a "stronger one" still to come (1:7).²²⁵ The Markan reader recognizes that Jesus is the stronger one whom John baptized and whom God honoured with an announcement of his sonship from heaven.²²⁶ By evoking John's baptism in connection with Jesus' authority, Mark is able simultaneously to expose, diagnose, and answer the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

2.3.2.3. The Opponents' Unbelief (11:31-33)

The opponents' unbelief is exposed to the reader their private discussion (diologizonto) over how to answer to Jesus' counter-question (11:31). In his reference to John's baptism they clearly understand an implicit application to John's witness to himself, otherwise they could have freely acknowledged John's divine authority. Their stumbling block is in the situation of Jesus asking them: *ἡ ἀποκρίσις αὐτῶν* that is, admit his declaration of a coming stronger one.²²⁷ This would have posed no threat to them. They have not acknowledged Jesus' implied assertion to be the stronger one. Once again, Mark

²²³ John and Jesus are intertwined in the first Jerusalem controversy (11:27-33). For both John and Jesus, the source of their authority is God and what they do is done by them as God's agents. Just as the controversies early in Jesus' Galilean ministry establish that his authority is from God (see 1:22, 27; 2:10), so early in his Jerusalem ministry it becomes clear that Jesus' authority is from God (Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 336).

²²⁴ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 53-56.

²²⁵ Marshall, *Faith*, 198.

²²⁶ Iersel understands Jesus' baptism by John as the key referent for the question in Mark 11:30: "Jesus has the right to act the way he does because of what the voice from heaven said to him. He, more than the authorities, is more at home in the temple, because God has called him his dear son" (*Reading Mark* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989], 148).

²²⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 198.

demonstrates that the unbelief of Jesus' opponents is not in failure to understand his authority, but in a stubborn refusal to accept in it.

Now, the verb πιστεῦειν with the dative (αὐτῷ) in 11:31 is the common style in secular Greek to describe belief in the truth of what someone declares.²²⁸ This is used once in our text, and the primary sense is to give credibility to John's declaration, "in a somewhat pregnant sense."²²⁹ John's declaration exhorted obedience to a baptism of repentance. "Moreover, inasmuch as Mark portrays John as a prophet (v.32), the belief directed towards him was, in accordance with Old Testament-Jewish thought (Ex. 4:1-9; 14:30; 19:9; 2 Chron 20:20; Jn 5:46; Acts 8:12), ultimately placed in God."²³⁰ To believe in him (=John), inevitably meant not only accepting John and his baptism as ordained of God, but also involved demonstrating the faith by obediently submitting to his baptism of repentance.²³¹ To believe in John's message means to accept eschatological conversion as a demand of God, and to respond in obedience. In contrast, to disbelieve means to reject the divine command, and to regard the prediction of a stronger one as groundless.

Mark parallels and differentiates the faith evoked by John and the faith vested in Jesus. They are distinguished by their content. In the case of John, faith is the inner dynamic of repentance in view of a future act of God. In the case of Jesus, it is a trustful reliance on the present action of God's kingly power.²³² With John, faith is implicit in the act of repentant baptism. With Jesus, however, faith emerges as a distinct demand, and is the on-going condition appropriate to the new reality he brings.

At the same time, 11:30-32 implies a close link between belief in John and faith in Jesus. Mark in fact suggests that the opponents refused to perceive in Jesus is a continuation and consequence of their rejection of John's baptism of repentance. The Jewish leaders' unbelief had already consolidated with respect to John (cf.

²²⁸ M. J. Harris, "Preposition and Theology in the Greek New Testament," *Appendix to NIDNTT* 3 1213.

²²⁹ B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: OUP, 1929), 475.

²³⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 199.

²³¹ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 206. Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 18-20.

²³² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 199.

12:1-5), which is why they are portrayed as hostile to Jesus from their very first emergence in Mark's narrative (2:6; cf. 1:22). This association at the level of unbelief is part of a larger theme in the Gospel in which Mark parallels the careers of John and Jesus, detailed consideration of which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.²³³ It suffices to note here that John and Jesus, as God's messengers, produce fear in the ruling authorities (6:20; 11:18, 32; 12:12), both are rejected, and both suffer a violent fate. Unbelief in John's message leads ultimately to the rejection of Jesus. We have noted earlier (1:14; 6:14-29; 9:9-13)²³⁴ that Mark understands the fate of John and the fate of Jesus to be interwoven. The implication here is not only that the authority of both was from heaven, but also that the divine authority of both was rejected by the authorities.²³⁵

Part of the apodosis of v. 32, "John really was a prophet," gives another meaning of rejection nuance. Jesus' antagonists assert that John's authority was from God, not from men. "Both John and Jesus were regarded by the people as genuine prophets, and for this reason the authorities 'feared' the people in both instances (11:18, 32; 12:12).²³⁶ The Markan reader understands that the opponents' action against Jesus links to Israel's rejecting action against the prophets in the OT to

²³³ See. W. H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 13, 34; F. J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 98-100; W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist. Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1969), 42f.

²³⁴ The first hint of the rejection of Jesus because of their lack of understanding occurs in 1:14. The arrest of John is described in the following way: Meta de to paradoqhhai ("handed over" or "delivered up") ton Iwannhn. In Mark's Gospel, this verb is developed as a technical term to be used in the parallel between the rejection of John and Jesus. Mark uses the same word later when he speaks of Jesus who is delivered up by the power of evil men. The use of the term corresponds to a similar use with allusion to the Son of Man, i.e. Jesus (9:31; 10:33). John declares Jesus' coming for salvation (1:7) and John is put in prison (1:14); then Jesus announces the gospel of God (1:14) and he also is handed over to his adversaries (9:31; 10:33). The passive in 14:21 follows at the end of Jesus' statement to the disciples, "One of you will hand me over" (14:18), and it is modified by the clause "he man (Judas) through whom the Son of Man is being handed over." Furthermore, in 10:33 Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed to the chief priest and scribes, i.e. they will scorn him and will hand him over to the Gentile. The prediction is fulfilled as Judas Iscariot delivers Jesus up to them (14:10-11, 41b-47). The handing over of John and Jesus is attributed to the hardness hearts of their opponents (3:6).

²³⁵ Hooker, *Mark*, 272.

²³⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 414.

reject them. By not allowing them to know the origin of his authority, Jesus refuses to answer their question (11:33). “Jesus has thus masterfully exercised and demonstrated his own superior, divine authority over the Jewish leaders who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge and believe in the divine origin of John’s baptism and hence of Jesus’ authority” (11:33).²³⁷

The Opponents’ Failure to Answer

The authorities are irretrievably trapped, and they are finally reduced to uttering a falsehood, which ironically becomes true in a most profound sense. They answer Jesus’ brilliant riposte with the statement, “we do not know” (οὐκ οἶδμεν 11:33). Through giving an elusive answer and failing to answer Jesus’ challenge, the religious leaders forfeit their opportunity to force Jesus to indict himself, and are shamed before the crowd. Ostensibly, there to protect the temple as God’s house from arbitrary acts of unauthorized persons and to take action against just such persons, these representatives of the Sanhedrin and the ranking priests indicate their true colours.²³⁸ Rather than defend the temple, they elected to protect themselves. In doing so, they exposed their own selfish concerns and betrayed their ability to respond to and for God, who confronted them in the persons of John and Jesus.²³⁹ The result is that their answer demonstrates their unbelief.

Mark’s explanation of their discussion points to the fact that he believed them to be intentionally refusing to recognize the truth. Jesus’ refusal to answer is typical of the way in which he asserts authority throughout Mark’s Gospel.²⁴⁰ The use of historical present tense, *legousin* in 11:33 may indicate Mark’s interpretive style in his own style to emphasize the embarrassment evident in the Sanhedrin’s answer,²⁴¹ because he believed them to be deliberately refusing to acknowledge the truth.²⁴² By the same token, the matching present historical tense (*legw* ‘I say’) plus the emphatic personal pronoun (*egw*) emphasizes Jesus’ authority in refusing to answer them.²⁴³

²³⁷ Hooker, *Mark*, 233.

²³⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 207.

²³⁹ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 207.

²⁴⁰ Hooker, *Mark*, 272.

²⁴¹ Gundry, *Mark*, 658.

²⁴² Hooker, *Mark*, 272.

²⁴³ Gundry, *Mark*, 658.

“By what authority I am doing these things” brings us back to the original question of Jesus’ authority to do “these things,” in the temple precincts. The dialogue has indicated Jesus to have an implied authority in the way he counters and responds to the temple authorities.²⁴⁴ This is the same authority implied in Jesus’ ministry to sinners, the sick, and the possessed, which Mark emphasizes at the outset of his Gospel in 1:22, 27; 2:10. Therefore, the readers know that this implied authority gives Jesus the right to do “these things.”²⁴⁵ But Jesus refused to respond the opponents’ question about his authority posed by the ruling priests, scribes, and elders. They say, “we do not know,” implying unbelief; Jesus says, “I won’t tell,” implying that he has the authority to refuse the temple authorities. The one question, the question of Jesus’ authority to do these things, is bound up with the more fundamental question, namely what is the nature of the authority that marks Jesus’ ministry? Mark moves to this broader question by adding the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants (12:1-12), which emphasizes who Jesus is, and who the religious authorities are, from the divine perspective (12:12b).²⁴⁶

In reducing Jesus’ opponents to silence by means of the counter-question and its dilemma, the narrative demonstrates Jesus’ superior wit and suggests that, just as John’s baptism was surely from God, so Jesus’ authority to do ‘these things’ also was from God. Thus, Jesus evades a direct confrontation with his powerful opponents (yet wins the debate), and still indicates that God is the real source of his authority.²⁴⁷ Thus, the one who walks imperiously around the temple, who declares himself having authority to cleanse it, who proclaims the foundation of a new community of faith, and whom the Jewish religious leaders seek to destroy, is none other than the Son of God.

2.3.3 Summary

In 2:1-12 and 11:27-33, Mark depicts the antagonists’ unbelief in their reaction to Jesus’ authority. In 2:1-12, the scribes refuse to accept Jesus’ authority indicated in his forgiving of sins, while in 11:27-33 the priestly leaders refuse to accept his authority revealed in his sovereignty over the temple. In both narratives Mark demonstrates that their disbelief lies in their conscious refusal to accept the clear

²⁴⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208.

²⁴⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208.

²⁴⁶ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 208-9.

²⁴⁷ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 335.

implication of what they perceive, rather than in a failure to perceive the truth.

The authorities of the temple do not accept Jesus' authority, proved by his action because, according to their recognition of the law, what Jesus declares himself to be and to do, which includes authority over the temple, was to them blasphemy. Jesus, because of his action in the temple courts, was regarded as a dishonourable person. They refuse to believe in Jesus' authority over the temple, as this authority belongs exclusively to God.

In 11:27-33, the reason why official hostility to Jesus comes into full-blown view right at the beginning of his ministry (2:6-10) becomes evident: eschatological initiative had already taken root before Jesus' work began. A rejection by the Jewish religious leaders to believe John and his message of repentance was the first step on the way to the passion of Jesus (11:30-32). And it is at the last moment of his passion that we find the crudest exhibition of unbelief within Mark's Gospel.

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities eventually leads to his death. In the first passion prediction (8:31), Jesus says that he will be rejected by the Jewish religious authorities. This episode dramatically fulfils Jesus' prediction. The Jewish religious leaders fully understand the implications of Jesus' teaching and deeds. Nevertheless, due to their hardened hearts originating from 3:5, they do not believe his divine authority and look for a way to kill him (11:18). Earlier they took council how they might kill Jesus (3:6), now it is only a question of deciding the convenient situation.

2. 4 UNBELIEF BENETH THE CROSS (15:27-32)

Jesus begins his ministry in Mark by calling people to repentant faith in view of the dawning the Kingdom (1:14-15). He ends his ministry, however, with his opponents assembled beneath the cross deridingly offering faith in the Kingdom in return for a distorted display of divine power (Mark 15). The scene at the cross represents for Mark both the ultimate repudiation of the gospel proclaimed in 1:14-15 and the clearest demonstration of the paradoxical relationship that exists

between faith, power, and powerlessness.²⁴⁸

What Jesus predicted finally takes place in Mark 15. Several times he had foretold his passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) to uncomprehending disciples. Now he is crucified, the most terrible, painful, shameful form of execution practiced in late antiquity. Mark's description of the crucifixion concentrates on the mockery of Jesus. In this pericope, this is followed by threefold mocking of Jesus at the cross, by bystanders, the chief priests with the scribes, and by those who were crucified with him. In the dramatic scene of the crucified King on the cross, Mark offers a vignette of unbelief.

2.4.1 Literary Composition and Structure

The passion narrative has two thematically connected high points: the trial scene in 14:53-65 and the crucifixion description in 15:20b-41, both of which the unbelief reference we are interested in occurs.²⁴⁹ The crucifixion account is part of the larger rhetorical unit of chapter 15,²⁵⁰ which is arranged into the temporal format of a single day divided into three one-hour three-hour periods (15:1, 25, 33, 34, 42).

In Mark 15, each of the described incidents leading up to the death of Jesus is followed by a mockery,²⁵¹ representing a kind of 'anti-confession' of Jesus' true messianic identity: trial (15:1-15)/ soldiers' mockery (15:16-20a); crucifixion (15:20b-27)/ the religious leaders' mockery (15:29-32); darkness and cry of

²⁴⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.

²⁴⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.

²⁵⁰ F. J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 21-34.

²⁵¹ LXX Isaiah 50:6 indicates a mockery scene by using the terms, *rapisma* and *emptusa,twn*, which language demonstrates a great deal of similarity to the figure used in the Markan narratives (14:65)—Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 139. That Isa. 50:6 influenced the mockery motif in Mark 14-15 is suggested by the use of familiar terms that link this verse with the mockery of Christ—C. H. Dood, *Historical Tradition in the Forth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 40. The term *rapisma* occurs only in Isa. 50:6 in the LXX and only in contexts related to the mockery of Christ in the New Testament (Mk. 14:65; Mt. 26:67; Jn. 18:22; 19:3). The word *emptusa,twn* in Isa. 50:6 is used in the NT when Jesus is mocked, especially in Mark (Mk. 10:34; 14:56; 15:19; cf. Mt 26:67; Lk. 18:32)—Dood, *Historical Tradition*, 88, 139.

dereliction (15:33-34)/ bystanders mockery (15:35-36).²⁵² Our principle interest is with the second mockery scene, which Mark locates between the third and sixth hours (15:25, 33). The scene is bracketed by two allusions to those crucified with Jesus (15:27, 32), and like the rest of the crucifixion story, is highly formalized to bring out the primitive fulfilment of the Scripture in what happens Jesus. Allusions to Psalm 22 especially contribute to the Markan characterization of Jesus here as the suffering righteous one.²⁵³

Beneath the cross there are three groups of characters whose mockery rehearses the main issue of the trial scene, and indeed the outstanding features of Jesus' ministry as a whole. The first group is simply depicted as spectators. They scorned Jesus as temple-destroyer. Their appearance in the same scene as chief priests and scribes is strongly evocative of the false witness at Jesus' trial (14:56-9), and their function here may be similar (Cf. Pss 27:12; 35:11).²⁵⁴ Their scornful words and actions end with a challenge to Jesus to save himself and descend from the cross. The second group is identified as the chief priests and the scribes (15:31). They denied that the crucified one could save himself, in contrast to his saving of others. They also made witnessing his descent from the cross a condition for their faith in him as messianic king. The third group had no part in the dialogue. However the fact that Jesus' two fellow victims relinquished gave up their unity in pain with him, also to insult him, expresses the extent of his aloneness.²⁵⁵

Now, the derisory offer of faith in the dying messiah is placed only the mouths of the chief priests and scribes, and thus represents the climax of the theme of unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders. However, because the implied author expressly likens the mockery of the first and second groups of ridiculers, and they both require the same self-serving miracle, we may consider the dialogue as a whole as constitutive of Mark's representation of unbelief in this crucifixion scene.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 201.

²⁵³ J. Reumann, "Psalm 22 at the Cross. Lament Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ," *Int* 28 (1974): 39-58; Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 129.

²⁵⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.

²⁵⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.

²⁵⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 202.

2.4.2 Exegetical Perspective on the Portrayal of Unbelief

2.4.2.1 Crucifixion in Terms of Honour and Shame

Some scholars argue that Jesus' hostility against the temple caused his subsequent arrest, trials and crucifixion.²⁵⁷ However, we should not overlook Mark's reference to the fact that the crowd, who honoured Jesus in the Galilee mission, now was honouring him again in the Jerusalem mission (11:8-11, 18; 12:12, 37; 14:1-2). This, of course, was a major threat to the honour of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. In order to protect their honour, they sent some messengers to question Jesus regarding the payment of taxes to the emperor (Mk 12:13-17), the resurrection (12:18-27) and the first commandment (12:28-34).

In order to protect their honour, through crucifixion, the opponents attempted to establish Jesus as shame. The shaming embraces of social, judicial and political areas of society, of which political shaming is of importance for our pericope. From the point of view of political shaming, Bechtel notes that it was especially shameful to be captured by the enemy, or for that matter, by anybody.²⁵⁸ To shame captured people further, they were stripped of their clothes; nakedness exposed people's sexual parts publicly. Their nakedness was also symbolic of the defencelessness of their nation and demonstrative of its failure to achieve victory. Other common shaming techniques used to disgrace captives further were to make them a laughingstock, or by insulting, mocking, and scorning them.²⁵⁹ At this point, for the protection of their own honour, the opponents refuse to accept Jesus, but rather shame him through the crucifixion and verbal abuse.

The people, who initially gave Jesus honour when he moved into Jerusalem, turned against him, because Jesus' honour was removed the crucifixion (11:9-10). It was a disappointment for them, because they have actually believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he would change everything when he moved into Jerusalem. That is the reason for why they sang for him. But, when he was

²⁵⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 339; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 360; J. S. McLaren, *Power and Politics in Palestine: The Jews and the Governing of their Land 100 BC-AD 70* (Sheffield: JOST Press, 1991), 99.

²⁵⁸ L. N. Bechtel, "Shame as Sanction of Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *JSOT* 49 (1991): 54-70.

²⁵⁹ Bechtel, "Shame," 72.

captured, his honour, which they gave him, was lost. Therefore, they could not accept him as the Messiah and advocated that he should be crucified as a blasphemer.

The most obvious biblical quotation in Mark's crucifixion narrative is from Psalm 22, which is customarily classified as a lament. Psalm 22 is the prayer of a righteous person who has suffered greatly, but has been vindicated, all the while retaining and being sustained by trust in God's power and care.²⁶⁰ Its first part (22:1-21a) alternates between complaints about various sufferings and confessions of trust in God.²⁶¹ The second part (22:21b-31) presumes a mood of vindication, thanksgiving, and celebration.²⁶² The use of Psalm 22 reminds us that for Mark and early Christians Jesus suffered and died "according to the Scripture" (1 Cor 15:3). Recourse to the OT Scriptures (Lev 24:14 and Num 15:35-36) enabled them to make sense out of the cruel and shameful death Jesus suffered on the cross.²⁶³

The physical sufferings of a crucified person were intense and indeed horrible. Perhaps Mark's literary strategy of sparse and 'objective' reporting together with understatement serve to make the point more effectively than a detailed and graphic description of Jesus physical suffering (exposure to the hot sun, pain from the nails, the gradual and progressive suffocation, and so on) would have achieved.²⁶⁴ However, Mark also helps the reader to move beyond the physical sufferings of Jesus to recognize what was perhaps an even greater suffering that Jesus endured: misunderstanding and dismissed by practically everyone.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ J. A. Fitzmyer, "Crucifixion in ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament," *CBQ* 40 (1979): 493-513.

²⁶¹ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.

²⁶² Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.

²⁶³ B. K. Blount, "A Social-Rhetorical Analysis of Simon of Cyrene: Mark 15:21 and Its Parallels," *Semeia* 64 (1994): 171-98. The Roman orator Cicero referred to crucifixion as a "most cruel and disgusting penalty" and "the extreme and ultimate penalty for a slave" (*In Verrem* 2.5.64.66). Josephus called it "the most pitiable of deaths" (*War* 7. 203). Even Paul conceded that proclaiming Christ crucified was "a stumbling block to Jew and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23), and the author of Hebrews celebrated Jesus as the one who "endured the cross, disregarding its shame (Heb 12:2).

²⁶⁴ K. E. Bailey, "The Fall of Jerusalem and Mark's Account of the Cross," *ExpTim* 102 (1991): 102-5.

²⁶⁵ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 446.

scoffers in 15:27-32 has two aspects: their implied denial of the eschatological implications, which they know Jesus lays claim to, and their demand for compelling proof as a ground for accepting his claim.

Rejection of Eschatological Significance

The words of the scoffers serve to confirm, albeit with ironic intent, that they clearly apprehend the eschatological status, which Jesus has claimed for himself during the course of his ministry.²⁶⁹ They scorned him as a messianic pretender (15:32) because they knew from the trial that he considered himself to be the royal Messiah. The scoffers' denunciation of Jesus as one who would destroy and rebuild the temple (15:29) recalls of course, the charge brought against Jesus in the trial before the Sanhedrin (14:58). The point to note is that behind the accusation lies in an implicit recognition of Jesus scandalous claim to sovereignty over the temple (11:28) and to the right to establish a new temple order (11:17).²⁷⁰ The scornful reference to Jesus' saving others (15:30) discloses an apprehension of his therapeutic power (3:4; 5:23, 28; 6:56; 10:52) and of the intended role in attesting his message of the beneficiaries of ultimate salvation.²⁷¹

The verb *blasphēmō* echoes the charge brought against Jesus by his adversaries (3:28, 29; 7:22; 14:64. cf. 2:7). In these contexts, the word "blasphemy" is used loosely to refer to inappropriate and offensive speech.²⁷² This word is used almost exclusively in both Greek and biblical literature to express evil speech against God; by implication the derision hurled at Jesus was blasphemy against God—making the chief priests and Scribes guilty of the very thing Jesus was condemned for by the Sanhedrin (14:64).²⁷³ Mark may use this

God's justification (Hurtado, *Mark*, 275). The Psalmist accounts for the sufferer's physical affliction that is made worse by mockery from his opponents, who are probably to be regarded as the ungodly, in general. After mockery the sufferer, the opponents divide his garments (22:18). The widespread custom of dividing the condemned criminal's clothes would suggest the possibility that an execution scene is envisaged here and that the sufferer sees his enemies already distributing his clothes in anticipation of his death (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 [London: Purnell & Sons Ltd., 1972], 191).

²⁶⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.

²⁷⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.

²⁷¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 204.

²⁷² Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 443.

²⁷³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 473.

word to mean simply ‘to deride,’ but he may also intend an ironic contrast with the blasphemy charge levelled by the high priest against Jesus at the ending of his initial questioning (14:64). The high priest reviled Jesus for making a ridicule of God’s power by claiming to be God’s Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, when, in his view, Jesus was only a disgraceful wretch.²⁷⁴ Just as the Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus’ authority in synagogue and during his trial, now the bystanders also refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah prior to the cross.²⁷⁵

The insult, “save yourself, and come down from the cross” (*katabaj*²⁷⁶ *apo. tou/ staurou*), reaches deeper into the centre of Mark’s Gospel. There is a promptly obvious surface logic to the ridiculers’ words. In ancient philosophy, words were proven true if they became visible through deeds, which means whenever Jesus said something, he should have been able to prove his words through his deeds.²⁷⁷ Thus, it is expected of the Messiah who claims to destroy and restore the temple, to save his own life. For the mockers the fact of Jesus’ crucifixion was definitive proof that his prophecies about the temple (see 11:15-17; 13:2; 14:58) were false.²⁷⁸

However, the surface logic is of a deep misunderstanding of Jesus and his message confronted before in Mark’s narrative.²⁷⁹ When Peter heard Jesus’ first

²⁷⁴ Garland, *Mark*, 590.

²⁷⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:26-16:20*, 505.

²⁷⁶ Some verbs compounded with the preposition *kata* run throughout the central portion of the crucifixion story to contrast Jesus’ view of salvation and his opponents’ view (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 282). In 15:29-30 the bystanders insult Jesus by insisting that as one who could tear *down* (*kata* *uwn*) the temple, he ought to be able to save himself by coming *down* (*katabaj*) from the cross. Similarly, in 15:32 the chief priests and scribes mock him to come *down* (*katabatw*) from the cross so they can see and believe. Even later, after Jesus’ cry from the cross, spectators expect to see divine aid in the form of Elijah take Jesus down (*kata* *eiñ*) off the cross (15:36). In the blind view of the opponents, what is required of Jesus to save himself would be that he come down from the cross to rejoin the human world (Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 282). However, Jesus’ cry in 15:36 means that his sincere desire is to rejoin God in the divine realm instead of being left down in the human world.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 275-76; Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 197-209.

²⁷⁸ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 443.

²⁷⁹ D. Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc, 1984), 119.

passion prediction, he had tried to restrain him (8:32). So, Jesus gathered the disciples and taught them the fact that “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s, will save it” (οἱ γὰρ ἐὰν σῶσιν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν/σώσονται αὐτὴν\ οἱ δὲ ἂν ἀπολέσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν/ἐφῆκεν ἐμοῦ/καὶ. τοῦ/εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτὴν 8:35]. This kind of logic, take up the cross and lose life to save it, directly contradicts the demand of the scoffers: “save yourself and come down from the cross.”

The mocking challenge for Jesus to come down from the cross is in essence the same temptation that he faced in Gethsemane, that is, to avoid ‘the cup’ of suffering.²⁸⁰ At Gethsemane Jesus made the costly decision, which he now fulfils, to do the will of God rather than his own will. As Senior argues, the effort to separate Jesus from his cross through a different perception of his authority and mission is an alien spirit against which the whole Gospel of Mark is mobilized.²⁸¹

The chief priests and the scribes come next in the procession of scorn (15:31-32). The alliance against Jesus has systematically identified with the chief priests, firstly with the leading role of the high priest at the trial (14:53-65). Then, before Pilate, it was the chief priests who blamed him (15:3). At the cross, the chief priests with the scribes, mock him to one another in the same way as the bystanders (15:31).²⁸² Their objective is made to publicly shame Jesus. Likewise, the mockery is the centre of Mark’s description of Jesus’ crucifixion.²⁸³ The first articulation of their mockery is similar to the logic of the foregoing mockery of the bystanders, but moves from Jesus’ threat against the temple to his power to save: “He saved others, he cannot save himself” (αὐτὸς ἑσώσεν ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι\ 15:31). While the mockery of the bystanders concludes with the challenge to Jesus to save himself, the mockery of the religious leaders begins with the taunt that he cannot do this. Both scoffers conclude with the same taunt, “Come down from the cross.” The religious leaders’ taunt casts doubt on the actuality and worth of Jesus’ previous actions for saving other.²⁸⁴ Since he is

²⁸⁰ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 474.

²⁸¹ Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 119.

²⁸² Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 473.

²⁸³ Painter, *Mark*, 204.

²⁸⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 505. The verb “save” used here is linked to healing

unable to save himself, he probably has saved no one else, no matter what is rumoured about him. Now, his opponents refuse to accept his power as Messiah. His incapacity to save himself thus cancels the legitimacy of his mission, which was to save Israel.²⁸⁵

However, the Jewish religious leaders' taunt is, in the eyes of the reader, a profound ironic truth. If Jesus was to accomplish his redemptive mission for people, he could not save himself from the crucifixion appointed by God (cf. 8:31). Jesus' death is a ransom for others (10:45), and exactly in order to save these others he must not and cannot save himself. If he wanted to save others, then it was true, he had to give up his own life as substitute. The action and words at the Passover meal had concentrated Jesus' whole mission of salvation in a similar way and had bound them to his death: "this is my body...this is my blood...poured out for many" (cf. 14:22-25).²⁸⁶ The actuality of salvation is not directed toward Jesus himself, but toward others.

Their unbelief then lies not in a failure or inability to discern Jesus' potential significance, but in a conscious rejection of him and of his work. For this reason Mark portrays their diatribe as blasphemy (15:29), a culpable violation of God's honour. Ironically, they are thus doing the very thing for which they condemned Jesus (2:7; 14:64), and so bring condemnation on themselves (3:28).

Unbelieving Demand for Compelling Proof

The other aspect of the description of unbelief beneath the cross is the demand for immediate, visible, irrefutable proof as the condition of faith. In Mark 15:32, the religious leaders suggested that if Jesus would come down from the cross, then they would 'see and believe.'²⁸⁷ Mark's Gospel lays a special emphasis on

in the Gospel, expressing the liberating transformation effected by Jesus' power (Lane, *Mark*, 569-70). Several individuals - the haemorrhaging woman (5:23, 28), the sick in the villages around Gennesaret (6:56), and blind Bartimaeus (10:52) - are saved by Jesus. These salvation experiences are only a few of the many other expressions of compassionate strength in the Gospel where, although the word is not used, Jesus saves broken humanity (Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 120).

²⁸⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 505.

²⁸⁶ Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 120.

²⁸⁷ The logic of seeing and believing echoes the description in Wis. 2:17-18: "Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;

faith (which implies both to understand and to obey) by means of repeated use of visual reference and terminology. Such references were evidently made possible by an abundance of material, like healing, the sea episodes, and teachings related to the motif of 'seeing' (6:45-52; 8:14-21; 7:31-37; 8:22-26; 9:14-29; 10:46-52; ch.13). 'Seeing' introduced in Mk 4:12 is considered to be a 'grand metaphor,' which repeatedly appeared in the Gospel that followed.²⁸⁸ The references to 'seeing' in either story or discourse, have more than mere literary meanings, as Fowler argues: "In 4:12, the reader can surely figure out minimally that this comment is suggesting that someone who thinks that he 'sees', really does not perceive anything at all..."²⁸⁹ The metaphor is an essential part of the language Mark uses for faith in Jesus. The parables, as veiled speech, are mysterious to those who reject Jesus, so that they may see, but not understand (cf. 4:11-12).

They will never be able to see and believe in Jesus as he truly is, unless they perceive him on the cross. The turn of phrase in this scorn, "that we may see and believe," is unique to Mark and is a direct preparation for the explosion of events, which will occur on the other side of Jesus 'death.'²⁹⁰ What the religious leaders did not see, a Roman centurion will see (15:39).

Because the Jewish religious leaders could not recognise Jesus as the King of Israel, their next demand was that a miracle should be performed. The demand that he should "come down ...from the cross, so that we may see and believe" (15:32) indicates a false conception of the nature of faith, which is not dependent on miracles, but indeed an essential condition for the people.²⁹¹

Their demand would recall to the reader/hearer the Pharisees' demand for a sign in 8:11-13. In both cases, the demand for a particular sign is itself an expression of their unbelief. In Mark 8, the implied author emphasizes this through placing the Pharisees' words immediately after the second feeding of the crowd: they

for it the righteous man is God's son, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries" (See. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506).

²⁸⁸ R. M. Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Direction and in the Gospel of Mark," *Semeia* 48 (1989) 127 in 115-34.

²⁸⁹ Fowler, "The Rhetoric of Direction," 127; Cf. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 206.

²⁹⁰ Senior, *The Passion of Jesus*, 121.

²⁹¹ Hooker, *Mark*, 374.

refuse to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and demand special signs continually. "They demand a miracle, a sign, upon which to found their faith, but faith is not something an action of Jesus can give to them."²⁹² Faith is not the result of signs and miracles, but a condition for them.²⁹³ The faith Mark wills for his readers is not compelled by sight, but evoked by the person of Jesus, especially in his sacrifice on the cross.²⁹⁴ In their request, they expose their profound ignorance of the nature of faith. If the people could not understand and accept the fact that Jesus was crucified for others, they could accordingly not believe and accept Jesus to be the Messiah.

The taunt of the Jewish religious leaders assumes that salvation of self is the greatest good.²⁹⁵ However, according to Mark it is on the cross that Jesus is claimed to be the King of Israel and that he is confirmed as Messiah. To come down to save himself in fact is to deny the principle established by Jesus in 8:35 that it is by losing one's life that one gains it. Although the crucifixion seems to contradict the Jewish expectation about what the way of the Messiah would be when he appeared, Mark wants his readers to realize that Jesus truly is the king of Israel, the Son of God (cf. 1:1). The motif that the Son of God would experience crucifixion was repulsive and difficult to recognize (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25).²⁹⁶

The Jewish religious leaders would not realize that Jesus would die as a ransom for many people (10:45) or that his body would be broken and his blood poured for the many (14:22-25). Thus, they unbelievably demanded a visible proof that Jesus comes down from the cross. If one does not really understand the irony of what Jesus has done, one would not be able to understand who Jesus is. He is actually everything upside down, the observe of what ordinary people would expect to be the way in which one should respond to things by an approach of service and sacrifice as being the way in which God illustrates his power. If a person cannot understand or accept this irony, they cannot become a Christian, and consequently, they continue their unbelief.

²⁹² Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 182.

²⁹³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 474.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 61-74.

²⁹⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506.

²⁹⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 266-67.

The unbelief of the religious leaders, therefore, is a combination of correctly seeing Jesus' implied claims to messianic dignity and yet failing to see God's own validation of them.²⁹⁷ The cross itself is not the primary stumbling block, because it is their unbelief that put Jesus there in the first place. However, the cross is a dramatic symbol of the mainspring of their denial of Jesus as Messiah.²⁹⁸

2.4.3 Summary

The whole picture beneath the cross turns on the issue of power - Jesus' power to destroy the temple, and his power to save others, yet not to save himself. At the heart of official unbelief, as Mark treats it here is a scorn for the ethically and soteriologically qualified use of power by Jesus. Jesus' opponents can neither accept that God's rule is evidenced in his works of restoration, his saving of others (cf. 2:1-12; 3:1-6), nor in his inability to save himself. They consider his voluntary self-giving (10:45; 15:4), his powerless dependence on God (14:36), as a fatal weakness and they appeal to his apparent importance to discredit his claims. They thus evaluate divine power purely in human, self-serving terms, according to their own standards of practice (e.g. 11:18; 12:1-9; 14:43, 48f; cf. 14:65 and 15:19).²⁹⁹ They are therefore closed to faith, since Mark describes faith as the possession solely of those who recognize their own powerlessness and who accept the demand it brings to relinquish conventional notions of rule and power (e.g. 10:42-45).³⁰⁰

In relation to this kind of 'observation,' due to their hardened hearts, the opponents never saw God's redemption as becoming a reality through Jesus' death (cf. 3:5; 4:11-12). Accordingly they thought of Jesus' implied declaration as blasphemy (15:29), a culpable infringement of God's honour. Thus, they refused to accept his claim when on trial, and mocked him when on the cross. Since their eyes and ears were closed, and their hearts were hardened, the opponents did not accept that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. They consequently refused to acknowledge the passion and death of Jesus what it truly was.

2.5 HARDNESS OF HEART AMONG THE OPPONENT OF JESUS

²⁹⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 205.

²⁹⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 205.

²⁹⁹ Matera, *Kingship of Jesus*, 96.

³⁰⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 206.

All characters in Mark's narrative have the opportunity to respond to Jesus' message (1:15). Mark describes the Jewish religious leaders in a consistently negative light. He builds his characterization on their unbelief toward Jesus. They refuse to believe in his authority (1:22; 2:10; 11:28) and accuse him of blasphemy (2:7; 14:64). Due to their hardness of heart (3:5), they cannot believe in Jesus' identity as Son of God in spite of his many miracles. Consequently, the opponents are 'blind' to the proclamation of Jesus.

The language of 'hardness of heart'³⁰¹ in Jesus' teaching was not a creation of either Mark or Jesus. When Mark employed the concept of 'hardness of heart,' based on Jesus' sayings, for his unique purpose, not only was the concept already known in first century Palestine, but also it had extended past history. The language originating from the OT has been repeatedly echoed in the process of the transmission or actualisation of the biblical or the Jewish traditions. Through an ongoing interpretive process of development of the Jewish Christian tradition, the language has echoes in the Jewish literature of the first century. In his Gospel, Mark seems to emphasize the language of 'hardness of heart,' which was commonly known within the larger Jewish context in the first century, to indicate the problem of unbelief (3:6; 6:52; 10:5; 8:17-18). The language was used in Mark's Gospel in order to attribute a reason for the opponents' disbelief. The language of 'hardness of heart' as applied to the opponents may also be signalling their presumed end, namely divine judgment. In this section we will

³⁰¹ The terms in the NT, such as *sklhrothj*, *pwrsij*, and *pacunw* express obduracy when linked with the word *kardia*. These terms are comparatively rare in the NT. Nevertheless, they occur throughout the Synoptic Gospels (10 times out of the 26 occurrences in the NT), particularly in Mark (5 times). They occur 4 times in Acts, 6 times in Paul, 4 times in Hebrews, and once each in Jude and James; *sklhrokardia* (Mt 19:8; Mk 10:5; 16:14), *sklhrothj* (Rom 2:5), *sklhrotachloi* (Ac 7:51), *sklhroj* (Jas 3:4; Ju 15; Jn 6:60; Mt 25:24; Ac 26:14), *sklhrunw* (Ac 19:9; Rom 9:18 Heb 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7), *pwrow* (Mk 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; Jn 12:40; Rom 11:7, 25; 2 Co 3:14; Eph 4:18), *pacunw* (Mt 13:15; Ac 28:27). In Rom 2:5, *sklhrothj* denotes hardness as a human quality, in this example describing self-righteous and stubborn Jews. The word *pwrow* is used in Mark's Gospel to refer to the hardening of Jesus' disciples (Mk. 6:52; 8:17), while the verbal noun *pwrsij* is applied to the Jews (Mk. 3:5; 10:5). Concerning the disciples, the terminology warns against a relapse into Jewish modes of thought. Figuratively, *pacunw* denotes "to make impervious, insensitive, dull" (Mt. 13:15; Ac. 28:27). In both passages, the terminology is quoted from Isa. 6:10 (here the quotation is used as in the LXX).

examine the idea of hardness of heart in other gospels, some passages in Mark's Gospel that deal with the issues of hardness of heart among Jesus' opponents, and the allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:11-12.

2.5.1 The Idea of Hardness of Heart in Other Gospels³⁰²

In Matthew's Gospel, as an answer for the disciples' question concerning the parables, Jesus says: "he answered and said to them, 'because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'" (13:11). In Matthew's view, Jesus has a positive view of the disciples.³⁰³ In contrast, because of dullness of heart (επακούη γὰρ ἡ καρδιά του/ τῶν/ τούτων), those who are not Jesus' disciples are further bewildered further by Jesus' parables, and so fall deeper into a lack of knowledge (13:13,15).³⁰⁴ In order to expose the outsider's unbelief and punishment, Matthew formally quotes Isa. 6:9-10 of the LXX. The quotation corroborates the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the people will hear and see, but never perceive, because their hearts have become dull (13:14). However, unlike LXX Isaiah 6:9-10, the prophecy is fulfilled in them who are not Jesus' disciples, i.e. the outsider (13:11, 14), but not the disciples like Israel in LXX Isaiah 6:9-10. In Mark's context the outsider's hardening is an already existing condition, not one brought on by Jesus. Accordingly, in Matthew, the disciples are not the subjects of the hardening, but the author describes Jesus' opponents as the subjects of the

³⁰² During the last century and a half, the two-document hypothesis has come to dominate synoptic studies. The theory argues that "Mark was the first Gospel written and that it was used independently by Matthew and Luke" (R. H. Stein, "Synoptic Problem," *Dictionary of Jesus*, 787). It was argued that along with Mark, Matthew and Luke used another common source which has been called "Q." According to the theory, the materials in Matthew and Luke are developed theologically. "Mark, for example, uses the term "Lord" for Jesus six times, but in Matthew it is used not only in the same six instances, but in an additional twenty-four. Mark lacks this term" (Stein, "Synoptic Problem," 789). However, the term "hardness of heart" is used four times in Mark's narrative, but in Matthew and Luke it is never used. The authorship of synoptic gospels lies in the creation of something, which did not previously exist, a single, co-ordinated, written narrative about the earthly Jesus, indeed the gospels form themselves (R. Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in Stuhlmacher, P., ed., *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, WUNT 28 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983], 213).

³⁰³ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 109

³⁰⁴ B. van Elderen, 'The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17,' *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 185-86

hardening, especially the Pharisees and the scribes.³⁰⁵ Hence, because of dullness of heart the opponents will see, but never understand the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, they never enter the kingdom.

In Luke's Gospel, although the distinctive vocabulary of hardness is not used, the author assumes the general idea of hardness. The opponents of Jesus, as the scribes and the Pharisees who plot his death, are delineated as being filled with folly (6:11; ἀνομία).³⁰⁶ Thus, they oppose Jesus' saying about what is lawful on the Sabbath (6:9), and his miraculous power (6:10). Accordingly, the 'rest' who are not Jesus' disciples (which includes the scribes and the Pharisees), are not privileged with comprehension of kingdom truths (8:5-8). Unlike Mark, in Luke's gospel only a softened version of the hardening idea is applied to the disciples.³⁰⁷ They are unable to understand fully until the resurrected Jesus explains the scripture to them.³⁰⁸ In 24:11, the disciples do not believe the report of the woman who had returned from the empty tomb. The two on the road to Emmaus do not perceive the raised Jesus because 'their eyes are kept from recognizing him' (24:16). Thus, after breaking bread, Jesus said them "how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (24:25). Then, Jesus explains the scriptures (24:25-26) and opens their hearts to understand the scriptures (24:45-47). In Luke's Gospel, the disciples' spiritual incomprehension is described as temporary, and primarily on account of their disappointment and puzzlement following Jesus' death (see 24:19-24).³⁰⁹ According to Luke, Jesus does not rebuke the disciples for their hardness but he opens their minds (τὸν νοῦν) to be able to understand the Scriptures.

In John's Gospel, an extensive theme of incomprehension³¹⁰ is facilitated by the hardness of heart. The world and its own did not recognize and accept the Word,

³⁰⁵ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 112: "That the Scribes and Pharisees are considered obdurate elsewhere in Matthew is plainly evident by their castigation as 'blind guides of the blind' (see 15:14; 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26).

³⁰⁶ The frenzy and loss of reason which is caused by extreme excitement (A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1975], 170).

³⁰⁷ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 120.

³⁰⁸ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 120.

³⁰⁹ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.

³¹⁰ For full discussion of this theme see H. Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1968).

although it was in the world (1:10-11). The Jews did not believe Jesus' declaration about raising up his 'temple' in three days (2:19-21). Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, did not understand Jesus' saying about being born again (3:1-5). Jesus' opponents did not believe that he was telling them about his Father (8:27). Despite his confirming signs that attended it, the people did not believe in Jesus' ministry (12:37-43). In 12:40, John quotes Isa. 6:10, "He [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts..." (12:40; Tetu,flwken autwh touj ofqal mouj kai. epwrwsen autwh thn kardian), in order to explain the people's failure to believe in Jesus. They fail to believe in Jesus because God hardens their heart as Isaiah says. In contrast with the synoptic gospels, in 12:40 God is expressly called an ultimate agent of the hardening. The evangelist never applies the concept of the hardness of heart to the disciples.

In the other gospels except Mark's Gospel, the concept of hardness of heart is used in order to indicate the opponent's unbelieving rejection of Jesus and to predict a punishment for it. The concept appears in the gospels as an explanation of why the people have not understood the parables of the kingdom (in the synoptic gospels) and Jesus' signs (in John's Gospel). However, in contrast to the other evangelists Mark uniquely applies the concept of hardness of heart to the disciples in relation to their unbelief (6:52; 8:17-18).³¹¹ Hence, this concept is very significant as a theme in Mark's Gospel, especially with regard to the unbelief of the disciples.

2.5.2 The Withered Hand and the Withered Heart (Mark 3:1-6)

³¹¹ In particular, Mark employs *pepwrwmenh* and *pepwrwmenhn* in order to describe the hardening. It should be noted that in the passive voice there is an agent. These passive words are probably 'divine or theological passive.' The theological passive is a name given to the passive used in order to avoid directly naming God as the unexpressed agent (cf. Mark 1:11-12)—See Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 76. On the other hand, "Jesus speaks openly to his disciples and explains his action; thus the disciples are responsible and blameworthy for not understanding (6:52; 7:14-18; 8:17-21, 32a; 9:10, 32; 10:26-27). And those who reject Jesus and kill him act on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1)—Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 120. Further, Mark 4:15 hints that the agent of the hardening is Satan. Some combination of these agents acts in God's redemptive plan (we will consider this matter in detail in chapter 5)

The healing on the Sabbath day of the man with the withered hand (3:1-6) is the last story among five controversy stories (2:1-3:6). It is positioned logically by topical association with previous stories, and demonstrates that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.³¹² Further, it indicates the differences between the standard that Jesus brings and convention established by the Jewish leaders.

2.5.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

Mark 3:1-6 concludes the first major section of the Gospel in which the subjects' Jesus taught on or the matters he dealt with caused controversy or conflict. For the reader/hearer, the linear progression of the controversial stories in 2:1-3:6 combines with 'the circular progression' to increase the tension and to constitute a climax in the final story.³¹³ Furthermore, the fact that the hostility in 3:1-6 is information given to the reader/hearer alone and not to the internal actor of Mark's narrative,³¹⁴ indicates that a major function of 3:1-6 is to make the reader/hearer aware of the opponent's insensitivity and incredulity.³¹⁵ The conclusion in 3:5-6 is used as an ending of the story of the withered hand, the total controversy section, and the first stage of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Thus, Mark employed the controversial stories theologically to indicate that Jesus and his opponents are on a collision course that will culminate in Jesus' death.³¹⁶

Despite its wide-ranging structural parallels with the first story in the section 2:1-12, our concluding narrative is more thoroughly saturated with the element of conflict, by virtue of its position at the end of the controversy section.³¹⁷ In the course of the passage one sees, from the side of Jesus, provocative behaviour (3:3), anger, and sorrow (3:5); from the side of the Pharisees, a desire to condemn Jesus (3:2), hostile silence (3:4), hardness of heart (3:5), and the instigation of a murder plot (3:6).³¹⁸ It is symptomatic of the difference between 3:1-6 and 2:1-12 that the

³¹² Lane, *Mark*, 121.

³¹³ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 53.

³¹⁴ Dan O. Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 149.

³¹⁵ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 118.

³¹⁶ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 119.

³¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 250.

³¹⁸ J. Kiilunen, *Die Vollmacht im Widerstreit. Untersuchungen zum Werdegang von Mk 2:1-3:6* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1985), 222, 239-44.

latter begins and ends with reference to hostile opponents.³¹⁹ Atypically for a miracle story, there is no acclamation of the miracle from the audience; instead its Pharisaic observers go out and begin to plot Jesus' murder (cf. John 11:45-54).³²⁰ Corresponding to this emphasis on conflict, the man who is healed plays a relatively minor role in the story, serving primarily as a spotlight to focus attention on the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees.³²¹

2.5.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Hardness of Heart

This controversy story indicates that when Jesus entered again into the synagogue (Kai. eishl qen pa| in³²² eij thn sunagwghn), there was a man with a withered hand (v. 1b), and Jesus' activity being was monitored by Jewish leaders in an attempt to catch him in an act of breaking the Sabbath Law (v. 2). As the narrator intentionally uses the word pa| in, he intends to establish a connection with a place Jesus has already been in Mark 1, in this case a synagogue (1:21).³²³ In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' first teaching and miracle, which was to heal a man who was possessed by an evil spirit, occurred in the synagogue of Capernaum (1:21-28). In response to Jesus' ministry generally, the people were amazed but the parties concerned with the synagogue, i.e., the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 2:6, 16, 24; 3:6) were silent. They refuse to believe in Jesus as Son of God through silent (cf. 3:4). Hence, Mark, in the fifth controversy story, does not simply echo the incident: he draws a conclusion about the opponents' unbelief and rejection of Jesus, which perhaps began in 1:21-28 and has escalated through other controversy stories.

The Meaning of "Watching"

³¹⁹ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 104.

³²⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 250.

³²¹ Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 133.

³²² In Mark, pa| in is used with two meanings: 'back' or 'again, once more.' This word in the report of Jesus' journey, is used with the second meaning, i.e., it is used when such an action is repeated. Mark uses this word when Jesus again visits a place, which he has previously visited (com. 2:1 with 1:21, 2:13 with 1:16-20, 3:1 with 1:21, 4:1 with 2:13, 5:21 with 4:36, 7:31 with 7:24, 11:27 with 11:7,15). The word pa| in calls the reader's attention to a previous place or action. Hence, the word in 3:1 ("he entered again into a synagogue") could be a reminder of Jesus' first entrance into the synagogue of Capernaum in 1:21.

³²³ Lane, *Mark*, 133.

Furthermore, the opponents demonstrate their unbelief of Jesus; “they were watching (parethroun) closely”(3:2).³²⁴ The verb *parethroun* has no expressed subject (as in 2:18), but the preceding passage, and the specification that it was the Pharisees and Herodians (3:6) against Jesus, indicates that the nucleus of the hostile attention was Pharisaic, even though no doubt the whole congregation was aware of the tension of the situation.³²⁵ If we see this story as a sequel to the Capernaum synagogue episode (cf. 1:21 and 3:1) and to the story found at the end of Mark 2, then Dewey is right that 2:24 can be seen as the caution before actual legal trial that an accusation would be set in motion; and at 3:2 the adversaries are observing so that if Jesus acts illegally again on the Sabbath, he is likely to be arrested.³²⁶ “The claim of Jesus in 2:28 prepares the reader for the higher level of hostility and greater stakes involved in 3:1-6.”³²⁷

The imperfect tense of *parethroun* is probably iterative: they kept on watching.³²⁸ Apparently, the meaning is not that Jesus was watched by the common people, but has kept under surveillance by his antagonists. What the Pharisees are trying to find is legal evidence for accusing Jesus. This implies that they refuse to believe Jesus’ claim that he is the Lord of the Sabbath and Son of God. This same verb is used in Ps. 36:12 (one of only two LXX usages), in which it is sinner who lie in wait for the pious, to slay him (cf. Ps. 129:3).³²⁹ This is similar to the account of the Pharisees’ plot at the end of our passage (3:6). They wish to accuse him, that is, bring legal charges against him because the violation of the Sabbath would be a serious offence and could be punishable by death

³²⁴ “There is no subject expressed here, but it is easily supplied from our knowledge of the class who insisted on these rigours of Sabbath observance. And 3:6 tells us that it was the Pharisees who went out and conspired with the Herodians against him.” (Ezra P. Gould, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1975], 52). The Pharisees appear always in Mark as antagonists (2:16, 18, 24; 3:6; 7:3; 8:11, 15; 10:2; 12:13). Jesus called them “hypocrites” (7:6), refuses to grant their request for a sign (8:11), and warns his disciples against the “leaven of the Pharisees” (8:15).

³²⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 149.

³²⁶ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 99-100.

³²⁷ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 100.

³²⁸ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The American Commentary Vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 68.

³²⁹ Marcus, *Mark*, 252.

(Exod. 31:14-15; M. Sanhedrin 7:4).³³⁰

It is important to note that Mark's explanation suggests that the real issue is not whether or not the Sabbath should be kept, but how it should be kept. Throughout his Gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as faithful upholder of Torah (1:44; 3:4; 7:8-13; 10:3-9; 12:29-31), who attacks not the Torah itself, but the interpretation given to its demands by the religious leaders of his day.³³¹ It is not, then, Torah which is at fault but those who misinterpret it; the purpose is to bring life, but when it is wrongly applied, it could become an instrument of evil and the bearer of death.³³²

The Unbelieving Silence

Although the reader is not here told explicitly as he was in 2:8, that Jesus is aware of the silent questioning of the Pharisees, i.e., violation of the Sabbath,³³³ the question is answered by Jesus' ironic double counter-questions, as in 2:23-26.³³⁴ Before the questions, Jesus commands the man with the shrivelled hand "stand up³³⁵ in front of everyone" (3:3).³³⁶ Then, he poses the question: which is lawful, to preserve life by healing or to destroy life by refusing to heal on the Sabbath? (3:4). It was not normally permissible to heal on the Sabbath, since

³³⁰ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 101; cf. Eduard Lohse, "Jesu worte über den Sabbat," *Judentum Urchristentum Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias*, ed. Walther Eltester (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1960), 79-89.

³³¹ Hooker, *Mark*, 106.

³³² Com. Rom. 7.

³³³ Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 102; "This may be an indication of the interdependence of the narrative of 2:1-3:6. The reader already knows that Jesus can read the minds of his opponents." (231n 143).

³³⁴ Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, 222.

³³⁵ The verb *egeire* is associated with healing in 1:31; 2:9, 11, 12; 5:41; 10:49; 16:6, and carries overtones of the restoration of health and even of life itself (resurrection)—Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 115. Mark's reader may well have been aware of this insinuation of the verb, which proposes that the man is being offered new life (Hooker, *Mark*, 87).

³³⁶ J. D. M. Derrett, "Christ and the Power of Choice (Mark 3:1-6)," *Bib* 65 (1984): 172, contends that this man would have stood out when the congregation stood for prayer and raised both hands to shoulder height, palms outward, in prayer. A withered hand is frequently the punishment for stretching out one's hand to reach for something sinful (Ps. 137:5; Zech 11:17). Jeroboam's hand "dried up" when he tried to take action against the rebellion prophets (1Kings 13:4-6). His condition would have been regarded as proof of un-confessed sin that had not escaped God's notice (Ps. 32:1-5).

healing was classified as work but, if life was threatened, then emergency treatment was allowed.³³⁷ It is to this principle that Jesus appeals and which he extends, because, in this instance, the man's life is not in danger.³³⁸ In describing a sharp converse between doing good and doing evil, and between attitudes which either save life or kill, Jesus refuses to describe a distinction between saving life in the narrowest sense, and the offer of full life, which characterizes his whole ministry.³³⁹ To postpone healing for a day is to disagree with the Sabbath's true intention, which is to glorify of God and for the benefit of man. Through their neglect of opportunities to do good things, the Pharisees destroy life rather than save it, and do harm. While Jesus was ready to heal, the Pharisees were plotting to put him to death. It is obvious who really was guilty of breaking the Sabbath (3:4a), but they refused to answer the question and remained silent (3:4b).³⁴⁰

This silence does not reflect, "the casuistic persuasiveness of Jesus' answer" (3:4).³⁴¹ The opponents' silence and subsequent response (cf. 3:6) indicate "their perception of a much deeper issue that challenged far more than their interpretation of the Law."³⁴² The Pharisees can neither deny their principle of saving life on the Sabbath nor go along with Jesus new principle.

The Opponents' Hardness of Heart

The Pharisees said nothing, being incapable of response, because of their hardness of heart. Jesus' reaction to the silent Pharisees is narrated in 3:5a, which reflects Jesus' anger and grief³⁴³ over the hardening of the Pharisees' hearts (th/pwrwsei thj kardiaj autwh).³⁴⁴ The verb pwrōw means 'to harden

³³⁷ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 99.

³³⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 149.

³³⁹ Hooker, *Mark*, 107.

³⁴⁰ Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 115.

³⁴¹ Guelich, *Mark*, 137.

³⁴² Guelich, *Mark*, 137.

³⁴³ 'Anger' used here and in the verbal form in 1:41, is virtually synonymous with 'wrath' (see Isa, 63:3, 6; Rom 2:8; Col 3:8). When used by humans, anger and wrath are vices (Gal 5:20; Col 3:8; Eph. 4:31). The wrath of God describes God's displeasure at human evil, every often as a summons to change or reform (Deut 9:7, 8, 22; Isa. 60:10; Pss 6:1; 38:1), and with reference to the disclosure of divine wrath that will characterize the eschatological day of the Lord (Zech 1:15; Matt 3:7; Luke 3:7)-Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 116.

³⁴⁴ In the Greek literature, the 'tuff-stone' derived from ο pwrōj was used medically in order to describe "the hardened swelling of the bone" (Aristotle [384-

a broken bone' for healing.' The word is always used figuratively in the NT. If the *kardia*, the seat of mental discernment and spiritual insight, is hardened, it cannot function properly to accept new insight.³⁴⁵ Jesus' critics are 'set in their ways,' and in their insensitivity (or 'obdurate stupidity'). The phrase 'hardness of heart' is almost a stock expression in the NT for those who cannot will or will not perceive the truth, used most commonly with reference to Israel's failure to recognize Jesus as their Messiah (Rom. 11:7, 25; 2 Cor 3:14; Jn 12:40, citing Isa. 6:10), but on two other occasions by Mark to describe the disciples' failure to appreciate the significance of Jesus miracles (6:53; 8:17).³⁴⁶

Mark considers 'hardness of heart' as the highest cause of unbelief and an utter insensitivity to man's needs and problems.³⁴⁷ Throughout Mark's Gospel, refusal to believe in Jesus is described by this language (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up human opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Since their hearts are hardened, the opponents have not believed that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death.³⁴⁸ As Mark recounts Jesus' anger and deep sorrow over the hardness of their hearts and their murderous plan, he wants the readers to avoid the way of the opponents. The motif of the hardening of the opponents' hearts indicates not only that the Jewish religious leaders *did not*, as a matter of course, understand Jesus' true significance, but that they *could not* understand it.³⁴⁹

The biblical motif of 'hardness of heart' signifies human resistance to God's

322 B.C.]. Hist. An., III, 19, 521a, 21)-Schmidt, "p̄wrow, p̄w̄rwsij," 1025. Hippocrates (460?-377? B. C.) transferred it to mean "to make dull or insensitive" physically or mentally (Nymphis Fr., 16 [FHG, III 16])-Schmidt, "p̄wrow, p̄w̄rwsij," 1026.

³⁴⁵ J. A. Robinson, *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan & Co, Limited, 1903), 267-74.

³⁴⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 151.

³⁴⁷ Edward J. Mally, "The Gospel According to Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol 2, eds. Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 236. Cf. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.

³⁴⁸ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 134.

³⁴⁹ John Paul Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Function of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, and John 6:15b-21*, *Analecta Biblica* 87 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981), 74.

revelation. The concept carries with a mixture of divine and human responsibility. “The hardening by God is also a self-hardening of the unbeliever who does not obey God. Though in this mystery man cannot escape the sovereignty of the divine action, this does not absolve him from personal responsibility.”³⁵⁰ The Jewish religious leaders who refuse to believe in Jesus and kill him, act on their own volition (3:6; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:1). The religious leaders’ hardness of heart (3:5) was caused not by withholding instruction but by their own unwillingness to receive it. Their hardness of heart was the basis of their rejecting him, not the result of his rejecting them.³⁵¹ In the parable in 12:1-10 the wicked tenants intentionally kill the owner’s son in order to seize the inheritance (12:7). In the parable of the Sower (4:1-10), the negative fates of the seeds are an allegorical allusion to people who fail to believe in Jesus throughout Mark’s Gospel.³⁵² The first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. The earth is so hard that the seed stays on the surface which rejects its fruitfulness. Similarly, from first to last the opponents refuse to accept Jesus’ healings and forgiving words and to believe in him. Instead they kill him. The language highlights the inability to understand divine revelation. Rather than upsetting God’s redemptive plan, the “hardness of heart” is part of it.

On the other hand, in Isaiah 6:9-10 alluded to in Mark 4:12 God, through the prophet, hardens the hearts of those who do not repent of their sins. Unless the opponents repent of their sins and believe in Jesus, God, through parabolic words, hardens their hearts so that they do not understand the secret of the Kingdom and believe in his teachings and works. “That the evangelist seems to be saying that it was God’s will that few believe in Jesus because of hardened hearts, seems to be unavoidable.”³⁵³

At the end of this story, the Pharisees and Herodians³⁵⁴ began to plot against him

³⁵⁰ Schmidt, “*pwrow, pwrwsij*,” 1026.

³⁵¹ Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 74.

³⁵² Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 151-60.

³⁵³ C. A. Evans, “Obduracy and the Lord’s Servant,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, eds. C. A. Evans & W. F. Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 228.

³⁵⁴ They were the supporters of Herod Antipas (Josephus, J.W. 1.16.6 § 319; Ant. 14.15.10 § 450), who had arrested John and eventually beheaded him.

looking for a way to kill him (3:6). It is perhaps significant that the phrase *sumbou|ion edidoun* is echoed in 15:1, in which *sumbou|ion* occurs again, either in the sense of ‘decision,’ or with the meaning ‘consultation.’ The verb *apolumi* is picked up 11:18, in which it is the chief priests and scribes who plot Jesus’ death. Their pact to destroy him will conclude in 15:1, when another group of power brokers take council to destroy him and successfully, or so they think (Ps 37:31-33; Isa. 29:20-21; Jer. 20:10-11).³⁵⁵ Thus, the reader is enabled to put more substance into Jesus’ enigmatic hint about the ‘removal’ of the bridegroom (2:20), and to envisage more concretely the two contrasting reactions to Jesus which will form the framework for the narrative and discourse of chapter 3-4, the rejoicing of the wedding guests and the plotting of those who are determined to destroy the bridegroom.³⁵⁶

Pharaoh’s Hardness of Heart

The language of “hardness of heart” in Mark’s Gospel echoes³⁵⁷ the OT texts,

³⁵⁵ Garland, *Mark*, 109.

³⁵⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 153; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 102.

³⁵⁷ Previous studies of reference to the OT in the New have often distinguished between forms of citation, viz., quotation, allusion and echo. There is no agreed definition, but generally, a quotation involves a self-conscious break from the author’s style to introduce words from another context (Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 18). There is frequently an introductory formula like “it is written” or “Moses says.” Next comes allusion, usually woven into the text rather than ‘quoted,’ and often rather less precise in terms of wording (Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality,” 18). Naturally, there is considerable debate as to how much verbal agreement is necessary to establish the presence of an allusion. Hays proposes seven tests: availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, historical interpretation and satisfaction (R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Heaven/London: Yale University Press, 1989], 155). Lastly, comes echo, faint traces of texts that are probably quite unconscious but emerge from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel. The figure of echo concerns both the means by which texts relate and a more general theory of intertextuality. Texts echo other texts, and as such can be understood as ‘echo chambers.’ In an echo chamber—that is, in a literary context for echoing—any text being echoed will sound differently to what it sounded elsewhere. One virtue of this theory is that it expresses the intertextual character of all writing while maintaining, in metaphor at least, a sense of closure (walls) around the text’s structure (Timothy K. Beal, “Glossary,” in *Reading between Texts. Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. N. Fewell [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992], 21).

and this provokes a question, whether this OT usage had an influence on Mark's story. The most famous biblical example of hardness of heart³⁵⁸ is the Pharaoh of

³⁵⁸ In the OT, the word 'heart' (לֵב) has a dominant metaphorical use in reference to the centre of human psychical and spiritual life, to the entire inner life of a person (Alex Luc, לֵב, *NIDOTTE Vol 2*, 749). "The heart is the seat of emotion, whether of joy (Deut 19:6; 1 Sam 2:1) or pain (Jer 4:19), of tranquillity (Prov. 14:30) or enthusiasm (Deut. 28:47), etc; man's creative and wicked thoughts are attributed to the heart (2 Sam 18:32; Gen 6:5)"-H. J. Fabry, לֵב, *TDOT Vol VII*, 414. Furthermore, planning and volition are attributed to the heart; a decision may be described as 'setting' the heart (2 Chr. 12:14); restriction of the decision-making ability is depicted as 'hardness of heart' (Ex. 10:1; Josh. 11:20). The heart demonstrates spiritual activity through which people determine their religious and ethical relationship to God -- W. Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 2* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 142-44. E.g. Deut 5:29; 29:4; 1 Sam 16:7; Prov 4:23; 5:12; 6:21; Ezek 11:10; 36:26; Joel 2:13. The heart combines these faculties—the emotional, intellectual, volitional -- rather than isolates them. Consequently, the heart in the OT is often seen as the inner and spiritual totality of a person's relationship to God. When the heart is hardened, made obdurate, made fat, people become insensitive and unwilling to act, and they are no longer able to believe and obey God's call and command. In Ex. 9:7 and Isa. 59:1 the Qal of כָּבַד is used with 'heart' or 'ear' to express stubbornness (C. Dohmen, כָּבַד, *TDOT Vol VII*, 16). The Hiphil of the word functions primarily as the causative of the Qal, so that its meanings are closely related to those of the qal: "make someone's heart hard" (Dohmen, כָּבַד, 16. Cf. Ex. 7:14. 8:15, 32: 9:7, 34; 10:1). When חִזַּק appears with heart as its subject, the fundamental meaning 'become strong' is not the point of departure, but the derived meaning 'become hard' (F. Hesse, חִזַּק, *TDOT Vol IV*, 308). In the OT, the heart is also the seat of 'wisdom,' 'understanding,' or 'will' (Ex. 7:23; Deut. 6:5; 1 Kgs. 3:12; Prov. 16:23). When the heart is softened, people receive God's commandments and obey His will, but a hard heart is not receptive. In the OT, when the language of כָּבַד, קָשָׁה, חִזַּק, and שִׁמְן occurs with 'heart,' it is to express the obstinacy of one's heart (Cf. Deut. 11:10). In the light of OT usage, the basic meaning of חִזַּק is that of 'having power to accomplish a function' or it may secondly refer to a desire which is prerequisite for accomplishing something. It means also 'to be firm or strong,' which generally emphasizes the power of something to continue to perform its function (Cf. 2 King 14:5; Isa. 28:22; Ezra. 9:12 etc.). The use of חִזַּק with respect to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8, 17) is probably similar to that in Josh. 11:20, where God gives the Canaanites a strong determination to fight and actually to execute a military campaign against Israel, which resulted in the Canaanites' destruction. Likewise, Pharaoh indicates his strong desire in refusing to let Israel go, and this leads to his destruction. The word כָּבַד has the meaning of 'heaviness, weightiness.' When this word is used with reference to bodily organs, it indicates that the organ is not functioning normally (W. Caspari, *Die Bedeutungen des Wortsippe Kabed im Hebraischen* [Leipzig: Deichert, 1908], 8-10). Thus the heavy eyes no longer see (Gen 48:10), and the heavy ears no longer hear (Isa. 6:10). Furthermore, when the heart is called 'heavy,' it is unresponsive to obey God, especially Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 7:14; 8:15; 9:7, 34; 10:1 etc.). The basic meaning of קָשָׁה in the OT is 'being difficult' (G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14

Exodus (Ex. 7:3, 13, 22; 8:15).³⁵⁹ According to Marcus, “Mark intends his readers to link the Pharisees with the Egyptian king, especially since the Greek words, *Farisaibj* and *Faraw*, are so close to each other.”³⁶⁰

Pharaoh had begun hardening his own heart long before God stepped in. He delighted in exploiting the people of Israel for profit (Ex. 1:14; 2:23; 3:7, 9) and had no respect for the One true God (Ex. 5:2). He not only flatly refused to listen to Moses and Aaron when they first came to him, but also he used their appeal as justification to treat the Israelites more cruelly than before (Ex. 5:5-18).

God, who knows the hearts of all men (Jer. 17:10), knew that Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and Aaron except under extreme compulsion. He predicted this to Moses (Ex. 3:19).³⁶¹ And indeed, the first six times that Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, the writer says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, or that he “hardened his heart” (Ex. 7:13, 7:22; 8:15; 8:19; 8:32; 9:7). Pharaoh had seen many miracles, but was not prepared to let the Israelites go. He made it clear in the sight of God and Moses that he had set himself in rebellion against the Lord.³⁶² Pharaoh indicated numerous times that he was determined to harden his heart. There came a point where God said, in effect, “Very well, if you want to harden your heart continually, then I'm going to let you harden your heart” (cf. Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).³⁶³

Despite the many plagues brought against him through Moses, Pharaoh (or God) hardened his heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32, 35; 9:7, 12, 34; 10:1, 20,

and Romans 9,” *Trinity Journal* (1984): 131 in 129-154). It is sometimes used to refer to strong activity, which is cruel or fierce (Gen 49:7). It is also used in the meaning of stiff-necked (Deut 10:16; 2 Kgs. 17:14; 2 Chron 30:8; 36:13; Neh. 9:16, 17, 29; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15; Prov. 28:14; 29:1)-Larry Walker and I. Swart, “קשה” *NIDOTTE*, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 578. Like other ‘hardening’ words, this word is also used in relation to Pharaoh’s heart; e.g., Ex. 7:3, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart”; 13: 15, “When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go.”

³⁵⁹ Cf. S. H. Lee, *Hardness of Heart as a Theme in Mark’s Gospel*, Unpublished MTH Dissertation (Trinity Western University, 2002), 24-29.

³⁶⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 253.

³⁶¹ Robert B. Chisholm Jr, “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 411-12 in 410-34

³⁶² Moshe Greenberg, “The Thematic Unity of Exodus 3-11,” *WCJS* 1 (1967): 156.

³⁶³ Cf. W Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 191.

27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) and refused to believe in God's work in Moses and to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.³⁶⁴ Yet, the continued hardenings, disbelieving, and refusals provoked great acts of judgment, such as the tenth plague (7:4).³⁶⁵ In particular, God destroys the firstborn sons of Pharaoh and the Egyptians just as they are seeking to destroy God's firstborn, i.e. Israel (cf. 4:22-24).³⁶⁶ This sounds very much like the law of 'tooth for tooth', i.e. an act of judgment or punishment in kind. What is more, in Ex. 15 as Moses praises God for his deliverance, God is cast in the role of the Israelites' champion who destroys their enemies - those who oppose God. They experience his 'burning anger' (vs. 6-7).

Although some Exodus texts (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27, 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) tell us that Pharaoh's heart is hardened by the Lord, and Paul's great example of God's sovereign right is to dispose of human affairs as he pleases (Rom. 9:14-18), Mark's narrative emphasizes the Pharisees' responsibility for their attitude (Mk. 3:5-6).³⁶⁷ This is notable in the 'inside view' the writer gives the reader/audience of Jesus' emotional reaction to the Pharisees' question: he is 'angered' and 'grieved' at their hardened hearts (3:5).³⁶⁸ The implication is that better behaviour might be expected from the Jewish religious leaders, not that God has predestined that they act unmercifully. Similarly, in Mark 10:5, Jesus calls the Pharisees hard-hearted for they need Moses' concession to divorce.³⁶⁹

Hardness of Heart in Sam. 6:6

The connection with the Exodus narrative made in 1 Sam. 6:6 indicates that the Philistines' hardening attitude echoes Pharaoh's hardness of heart and its result: "Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he

³⁶⁴ Just as we discussed in the previous section, the unbelief of Jesus' opponents implied the refusal to understand and obey Jesus' prophetic messages and miracles.

³⁶⁵ In relation to the phrase in v. 21 "I will kill the firstborn in Egypt," we can assume that "these great acts of judgment" constitute the tenth plague.

³⁶⁶ R. R. Willson "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 23.

³⁶⁷ Marry Ann Beavis, *Mark's Audience. The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11-12* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 89-90.

³⁶⁸ Hurtado, Mark, 40; H. Räisänen, *The Idea of Divine Hardening: Comparative Study of the Notion of Divine Hardening, Leading Astray and Inviting to Evil in the Bible and the Qumran* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 1976), 81-82.

³⁶⁹ Dale Miller & Patricia Miller, *The Gospel of Mark as Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 140.

treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?”(NIV).³⁷⁰ Due to hardness of heart, Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, when that was God’s intention. Then, God punished him for his hard-hearted rejection. This discourse is argument that as the Philistines harden their hearts and refuse to let the ark of God go back to Israel, they replicate the terrible destructiveness that Pharaoh brought on himself by his hard-heartedness and refusal to release the Israelites.

Hardness of Heart in the Jewish Literature

The author of *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, in Sirach 16:15-16,³⁷¹ quotes the ‘hardening of Pharaoh’ as an instance illustrating God’s righteous wrath against the wicked, “the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh who knew Him not, whose works were manifest under the heaven” (Sir 16:15). God judges the Wicked Pharaoh, because of his hardness of heart.

The final chapters (17-19) of *Wisdom of Solomon* contrast the treatment of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who suffered plagues and the Israelites who were delivered from bondage by the wisdom of God. The deliverance of the righteous is contrasted with the destruction of their enemies. Pharaoh and the Egyptians are described as the wicked, the uninstructed, and the lawless (17:1). Because of the hardness of their hearts, Pharaoh and the Egyptians become captives of darkness and prisoners of long night (17:2). God destroys them totally by righteous anger, i.e. a mighty flood (18:5). Although Pharaoh and the Egyptians permit the Israelites to depart and hastily send them out, they change their minds³⁷² and pursue them. God exiles the Egyptians from eternal providence (19:2).

In the Book of Jubilees (chapters 46-50) the plagues that Moses performs in Egypt against Pharaoh and the Egyptians are God’s judgment and vengeance on

³⁷⁰ Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 30.

³⁷¹ “Verses 15-16 (in the footnote) appear in one Hebrew manuscript and a few witnesses in Greek and Syriac. Verse 15 was added by a copyist who felt Pharaoh should have been included among the sinners who were destroyed, and verse 16 introduces a reference to God’s mercy in creation” (John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], 83.

³⁷² “I [God] will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them” (Ex. 14:4).

them (48:5-7). God hardened their hearts and made them stubborn in order to destroy the Egyptians and to cast them into the sea (48:17-18). But God delivers Israel out of Pharaoh's hand and he brings them through the midst of the sea as if it is dry land (48:13-14). Therefore, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart is an important element of judgment contained in the actions of God. This story inspires the readers to trust in God and to worship him.

In *Antiquities* II,³⁷³ Josephus retells the Exodus narrative. Josephus does not use the term "Pharaoh's hardness of heart." Instead he interprets the hardening attitude as the characteristic of the wicked. When Moses asks Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave, Pharaoh is very angry that Moses should have thought that he could have influenced Pharaoh by the deceitful tricks and magical acts with his staff (*Ant.* 2. XIII. 3, 4). When, after the plague of the blood, Pharaoh is called stubborn in refusing to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, Josephus remarks that Pharaoh is no longer willing to be wise (*Ant.* 2. XIV. 2). Accordingly God punishes his falseness with another plague. Despite the continued plagues that Moses brings to Pharaoh as signs, Pharaoh consistently refuses to release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, because Pharaoh saw the signs, but he did not understand their meanings (*Ant.* 2. XIV.2).³⁷⁴ Thus, "God presently resolves to punish his wickedness with several sorts of calamities" (*Ant.* 2. XIV. 4)³⁷⁵ Pharaoh loses reason and is matching himself against God as a deliberate traitor (*Ant.* 2. XV. 1).

Pharaoh's continued refusals provoke great judicial action in the tenth plague (*Ant.* 2. XIV. 6). As a result, after the tenth plague, the Egyptians permitted the Israelites to leave Egypt (*Ant.* 2. XV. 1). But as soon as the Israelites depart, Pharaoh decides to pursue the Israelites who are marching out, because he

³⁷³ *Antiquities* is a long work of twenty books, beginning with creation and extending to the outbreak of war with the Romans. The first part of the work, to the end of the exile, follows closely the biblical stories; the second part, postexilic, is compiled from various sources--R. C. Stone, "Josephus," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* Volume 3, ed. M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977). 345.

³⁷⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, the cause of Pharaoh's refusal is because God hardens his heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 etc).

³⁷⁵ Trans, William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), 61.

forgets all the signs that have been sent by God (*Ant.* 2. XV. 3).³⁷⁶ God in the Red Sea finally destroys the Egyptians:

As soon as even the whole Egyptian army was within it, the sea flowed to its own place, and came down with torrents raised by storms of wind, and encompassed the Egyptians. Indicators of rain also came down from the sky, and dreadful thunders and lighting, with flashes of fire. Thunderbolts were also darted upon them; nor was there anything which used to be sent by God upon men as indication of his wrath which did not happen at this time, for a dark and dismal night oppressed them. And thus did all these men perish, so that there was not one man left to be a messenger of this calamity to the rest of the Egyptians (*Antiq.* 2.XVI.3).³⁷⁷

Due to the ignorance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians concerning God's mighty actions, God acted to punish them. By contrast, through this judgment the Israelites realized that God is their protector and worshiped him (*Ant.* 2. XVI. 4). The destruction of the Egyptians admonishes the Israelites against wickedness and disobedience (cf. Ex. 32-34). Consequently, the narrative of the plagues illustrates God's righteous wrath against the wicked (cf. *Ant.* 2. XVI. 5; Sir 16:15; Rom 9).

In *De vita Mosis* I, Philo retells that Pharaoh and the Egyptians whose hearts are hardened are described as the wicked, the foolish men and the impious (95, 96). Moses asked Pharaoh and the Egyptians to send the Israelites from Egypt. However, these impious men refused, "clinging to their original inhumanity and impiety as to some inalienable virtue" (95).³⁷⁸ After they had recovered somewhat from these punishments, they again returned to their original wickedness and forgot the evils that they had already experienced (102,106, 120). Thus, ten punishments were inflicted upon the land so that it was destroyed. The purpose was to exhibit the extent of the authority that God wields (96). Philo is stressing the punishment upon 'the land of these impious men' rather than upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians themselves (97-98). Thus, the ten plagues admonish the Egyptians to obey God's command and to understand God's powerful identity:

God was desirous rather to admonish the Egyptians than to destroy them: for if he had designed to destroy them utterly once for all, he would not have employed animals to be, as it were, his coadjutors in the work of destruction,

³⁷⁶ In Hebrew, God hardens their heart (Ex.14:4, 8, 14).

³⁷⁷ Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, 64.

³⁷⁸ Trans. C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 1993), 468.

but rather such heaven-sent afflictions as famine and pestilence (110).³⁷⁹

Thus, if after experiencing the plagues they obeyed God's command, they could avoid God's final judgment. But, because the Egyptians disregarded the warning, God finally destroyed them through the catastrophe at the sea (179). In the story of Moses the hardened attitudes of the Egyptians exemplify the characteristic of the wicked. However, God provided them with an opportunity to repent of their disobedience.

In the early Jewish sources, the concept 'hardness of heart' qualified the wicked, like Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Due to their hardness of heart, they did not believe in God and obey his commands. The consequent result was God's judgment. In the writings of early Jewish writers (Josephus and Philo), the hardening of the wicked was used as an instance to illustrate God' righteous wrath and to warn the righteous against disobedience. Pharaoh's hardening of heart was consequently used as an example on behalf of the wickedness of the unbelievers. However, when used for the covenanters and the righteous, it fulfilled the function of warning and exhortation to deter them from engaging in any form of disobedience.

The usage of Pharaoh's hardening in early Jewish literature provides the appropriate context for properly assessing the function of its echo in Mark 3:1-6. Mark took the idea known broadly in the Jewish context of the first century A.D. in order to describe the unbelief of Jesus' opponents. Just as Pharaoh had, due to his hardened heart, refused to believe and obey God's message, so due to the hardness of their hearts, the opponents did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but rather rejected him. However, God would judge them, because of their persistent unbelief, due to their hardness of heart.³⁸⁰

To summarize: Mark, in 3:1-6, recapitulates the first section of Jesus' Galilean ministry (1:16- 3:6). Although Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom through his authoritative teachings and miracles, the Jewish leaders refused to respond to Jesus' message, because their hearts were hardened. Mark describes 'hardness of heart' as the ultimate cause of the opponents' unbelief. Since their hearts are

³⁷⁹ Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 469.

³⁸⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 253.

hardened, the opponents have not believed in the teaching that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus has brought forward the conditions pertaining to the eschatological Sabbath, when there will be a continual and progressive relief from death. Thus, with regard to Jesus' opponents the concept of 'hardness of heart,' the conscious refusal to believe in Jesus, delineated the opponents' unbelief and hostility. Mark described 'hardness of heart' as the ultimate cause of the opponents' unbelief.

The various negative fates of the seeds mentioned in Mark 4:1-10 allude allegorically to those who refuse to believe in Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel. The first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. The earth is so hard that the seed remains on the surface and fails to bear its fruits. Similarly, from the beginning to the end the unbelievers refused to accept Jesus' healings and forgiving words, as well as to sincerely believe in him. Instead, they began to plot how they could kill him.

Just as heart-hardening caused Pharaoh to refuse to believe and obey God's message, so hardness of heart caused the opponents not to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but rather to reject him. Just as Pharaoh's refusal determined the plagues as a great judgment (Ex. 7:3) and the catastrophe at the sea (Ex. 14:4, 8, 14), in a similar way the opponents' refusal would determine for God's consequent judgment (cf. Mark 12:1-12).

2.5.3 Jesus' Teachings in Parables (4:10-12)

Mark and the early church faced the conundrum, as to why the Jews did not believe in and accept Jesus to be the Son of God. Mark 4:10-12 addresses this riddle. The vital observation in these verses is the distinction between insiders and outsiders (v. 11). When the disciples asked Jesus about the parables, his answer set them apart from the outsiders. To them the secret of the Kingdom has been given, while to outsiders, everything came in riddles. Isaiah 6:9-10 is then cited to justify this enigmatic teaching.

2.5.3.1 Insider and Outsiders

In 3:20-35, the hostility of the Jewish leaders to Jesus is highlighted strongly and their attitudes are associated with that of Jesus' family. This becomes the basis

for some very positive statements about Jesus' followers. In 3:31-35 'those around'³⁸¹ Jesus are contrasted with his natural family.³⁸² Those around Jesus are his true family. Members of Jesus' spiritual family do God's will. This contrast stood in contrast with the opponent's refusal to accept Jesus, i.e. the hardness of their hearts. It is another way of emphasizing close association with Jesus. The phrase 'those around him' then appears in 4:10, while the disciples are plainly related to this group.

The kingdom of God, parables, knowledge, insiders and outsiders - these elements are interrelated. Knowledge belongs to the kingdom of God. Thus, to the insider group this empowers them to understand the parables correctly within a commonly accepted framework of insiders' interpretation. The outsiders do not understand this interpretation. The knowledge belonged to the insider group. The others did not converse in riddles: because this was characteristic of the insider group. Jesus said that the parable would make sense to the insider group, because they belong to the kingdom. The outsider group did not accept that the kingdom of God would come through Jesus. Therefore, they would not try and would not be able to interpret the parables correctly. This knowledge has a close relationship to faith. The kingdom will be revealed to those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God. However, the eyes of the unbelievers would be closed regarding pertaining a valid understanding of the kingdom of God.

The disciples have been given privileged access to the secret (to. musthriou)³⁸³ of the kingdom of God, which would be coming in a veiled way in the person, words and works of Jesus.³⁸⁴ The disciples were insiders nevertheless, even

³⁸¹ They may be members of the crowd described in 4:1-2 who have been stimulated by Jesus' parable to inquire further and become his disciples (Marcus, *Mark*, 302).

³⁸² Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1975), 40-41.

³⁸³ "The Qumran scrolls are especially rich in such 'mystery' language. At Qumran, as in our passage, the mysteries include the notion that God forgives the sins of the members of the elect community (CD 3:18) while at the same time allowing, and even causing, outsiders to be led astray (1QH 5:36)."-Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 298.

³⁸⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1966), 153.

though they were misunderstanding insiders (8:14-21).³⁸⁵ Nowhere in Mark were they called ‘outsiders.’ The secret of the Kingdom was that people could not see and believe that his sowing of word, which would lead to his crucifixion and resurrection, was the culmination of God’s decisive eschatological action.³⁸⁶ However for ‘the outsider’³⁸⁷ all things were in ‘riddles’ (parabolaij)³⁸⁸ so that they looked and looked, but did not see, heard and heard, but did not understand (4:11-12). Namely, those who have ears to hear perceive the real meaning of the kingdom, while those whose hearts are hardened and whose ears are dulled understand nothing, but a disturbing riddle.³⁸⁹ Revelation becomes a riddle to the hardened, shallow, and indifferent mind, and the end result is puzzlement and unbelief. “The parables were designed so that no response meant no perception, no understanding, no forgiveness.”³⁹⁰ The parables give insight to the open-minded, but come as judgment on the obdurate.

³⁸⁵ J. R. Edwards, “Markan Sandwiches. The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives,” *NovT* 31 (1989): 215 in 194-216.

³⁸⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 158.

³⁸⁷ Those outside are, in the larger Markan context, not just people who are outside of the house where Jesus is presently closeted with his disciples, but Jesus’ opponents who have excluded themselves from the circle of salvation by their refusal to believe in Jesus (Marcus, *Mark*, 306).

³⁸⁸ As Jeremias and others have indicated, in such a context parables must be understood as riddles, since the word apparently stands in contrast to the unfolding of a ‘secret’-- J. Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner’s, 1971), 16-18; Schweizer, *Good News*, 93; R. Pesch, *Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1976), 239; B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus’ Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984), 96. Furthermore, Mark’s word parabolaij for ‘parable’ is the Hebrew word מִטְלָה, which means enigma or riddle (Prov. 1:6 [LXX]).

³⁸⁹ The motif of concealment from the outsiders and revelation to a few insiders is a commonplace in Jewish apocalyptic. In 2 Bar 48:2-3, Baruch says to God, “You do not reveal your mysteries to many,” and in Ezra 12:36-37 Ezra is instructed to teach his mysteries only to those who can understand (R. E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery,”* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968], 35. Similarly, just as the insiders in Mark 4:11 are given the revelation, at Qumran the members of the community receive secrets which are hidden from outsiders. The Lord “shall hide the counsel of the law in the midst of the man of sin. He should reproach with true knowledge and with just judgment those who chose the path” (1QS 9:17)-Wilfred G. E. Watson, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14. Although none of the things hidden from Israel are to be concealed from the Qumran community (1QS 8:11-12), to the outsiders, the ‘men of perdition,’ the proper attitude is “everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy” (1QS 9:21-22)-J. Marcus. “Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology,” *JBL* 103 (1984), 560.

³⁹⁰ Painter, *Mark*, 80-81.

The same division is mentioned in 4:33-34, in which the disciples are given explanations, but the crowd is not. For those who have been given the kingdom, the parables should further elucidate the reality of the kingdom.³⁹¹ However, for those whose ears and eyes are closed and hearts are hardened the parables only obscure matters further.³⁹²

And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (NRSV; 4:24-25).

Hence, the purpose of the parable is not simply to be a riddle but to draw out awareness of whether one is responding in faith or not. The parables reveal the truth of the Kingdom to those who accept Jesus, while they conceal its mysteries from the unworthy, who reject his messages.

The parables are therefore a ‘two-edged sword’ that reveal the secret of the Kingdom to insiders who understand, but cause blindness in others.³⁹³ Edwards comments that they are

Like the cloud which separated the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. It brought “darkness to the one side and light to the other” (Exod 14:20). The same cloud which condemned the Egyptians to their hardness of heart also protected Israel and made a way for her through the sea. That which was blindness to Egypt was revelation to Israel.³⁹⁴

Outsiders see no revelation of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ miracles, teachings, and his crucifixion. Only insiders, although they are sometimes somewhat confused by its enigmatic concealment, are enabled ultimately to see the truth.³⁹⁵

2.5.3.2 The Allusion³⁹⁶ of Isaiah 6:9-10 at Mark 4:12³⁹⁷

³⁹¹ In the Greco-Roman world, the writers and readers treated parables as comparisons or comparative illustrations that could be used for rhetorical purposes and for the purpose of persuading someone about something (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20.1ff)—M. H. McCall, *Ancient Rhetorical Theories of Similes and Comparison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 1-22.

³⁹² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, 65.

³⁹³ J. Marcus, “Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 566.

³⁹⁴ Edwards, “Markan Sandwiches,” 215.

³⁹⁵ Garland, *Mark*, 159.

³⁹⁶ An allusion exists when one text shares enough with another text, even without reproducing several consecutive words from it, to establish the latter as a subtext to which an audience is being implicitly directed (D. C. Allison, Jr., *The Intertextual Jesus Scripture in Q* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000], x.

Mark alludes to Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 to explain why the outsiders cannot comprehend the parables of Jesus and believe in his teachings. The Isaiah 6:9-10 allusion or quotation occurs always in the NT, as here, in a context of unbelief and hardness of heart (Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40, etc.). This leads us to favour the text as it stands. In the OT usage, the hardening language is often used for Israel itself. Just as the pagans' hearts are hardened by God for the particular purpose that God will punish them because their rejection of God's commandment, the Israelites are hardened by God for punishment, because of their sinful actions, that is, their disobedience. This is expressed most strongly in the book of Isaiah (6:9-10; 29:9-10; 42:18-20; 43:8; 44:18). God's words had come to the Israelites through the prophets, but they refused to listen to them. Thus, God, lest they perceive the words and repent their sins (unbelief), hardened their hearts in order to punish them. Among the obduracy passages in the OT, Isaiah 6:9-10 is only alluded to in Mk 4: 12 in relation to the 'hardening' language. Isaiah 6:9-10 is the most important OT hardness of heart passage for researching the usage of 'hardness of heart' in Mark's Gospel.

Isaiah 6:9-10 has an interesting history of textual transmission and interpretation. The textual diversity to be found in the various text traditions raises some questions with respect to the Massoretic pointing of the Hebrew text.³⁹⁸ The following section is concerned not only with the original meaning of the Hebrew, but aims to provide a sketch of the early interpretation in the Jewish context, and the textual transmission of this significant prophetic text.

Isaiah 6:9-10

The theme of spiritual blindness and deafness, which is so prominent in the book of Isaiah (29:9-10; 44:18; 63:17 etc), is derived from the 'hardening' motif in 6:9-10. The text of Massoretic text reads in the following way:

Isaiah 6:9
וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לָעָם הַזֶּה
שְׁמַעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ וְאַל-תִּבְיִנוּ

The allusion of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12 seem to correspond more closely to the *Tg. Isa* 6:9, rather than the MT or to 1QIsaiah or to the LXX.

³⁹⁷ There is no doubt concerning the importance of the allusion of Isa. 6:9-10 in the gospel tradition. All writers of four gospels employ this text at a vital place in their gospel (Mk. 4:12; Matt. 13:14-15; Lk 8:10; Acts 28:26-27; John 12:40).

³⁹⁸ C. A. Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," *ZAW* 92 (1982): 415 in 415- 418.

the land (about B.C 701; cf. 1:2-20, esp. vv. 4-9).⁴⁰⁴ As a result, in this context, the term “hardness of heart” is used in order to express the appropriateness of God’s judgment upon the Israelites’ disobedience and unfaithfulness.

In the various text traditions, however, much of severity of Isa. 6:9-10 is absent. Indeed, the tradition is so diverse as to appear confused. In the following discussion we shall examine these various traditions: 1QIsaiah^a, the LXX, and the Targum.

1QIsaiah^a

The biblical texts of Qumran provide a very interesting perspective. Not only do they indicate the inaccuracy of the present OT as reflected in the MT, they also inform us about the interpretation of it by the Qumran community. Their apocalyptic-eschatological perspective led the community to believe that every prophetic assertion in Jewish scripture spoke directly to them, because they identified themselves as the ‘righteous remnant’⁴⁰⁵ in distinction to other Jewish groups (Sadducees and Pharisees). Unlike the Massoretic text (MT), in 1QIsaiah^a the passage of Isa. 6:9-10 no longer describes the nuance of judgment.

1QIsaiah^a were discovered among the contents of Cave 1.⁴⁰⁶ 1QIsaiah^a, known as the Great Isaiah Scroll, preserves the full sixty-six chapters of the biblical book in their entirety.⁴⁰⁷ One interesting example in 1QIsaiah^a is its rendering of Isaiah

⁴⁰⁴ Chisholm, “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,” 432.

⁴⁰⁵ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 53; For ‘remnant’ idea see 1QH6:8-10; 14:1-7; 1QM 14:7-9; 1QS 8:5; 11:8; CD 1:7. Here, the community calls itself ‘an everlasting planting.’ Also 1Qs 8:7 the community calls itself the ‘precious cornerstone,’ alluding to Isa. 28:16; in 1QH6:25-27 we have a midrash on Isa. 28:16-17 in which the community sees itself as a solid building made of tested stones. In 4QpIsa[a] 1:26-29, Isa. 10:21-22 (‘a remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God’) is interpreted” (53n. 3). T. H. Gaster restores the peshar in the following way: “[This remnant of Is]rael denotes [the congregation of the elect,] the godly champions of righteousness” (*The Dead Sea Scriptures* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1976³], 305). Also in 1QH 6:8: “Thou wilt raise a reviving for Thy people and grant to Thine inheritance a remnant, and refine them, to purge them of guilt” (Ibid., 167). Cf. Ezra 9:8-9; 1QH 14:1.

⁴⁰⁶ 4QpIsa^b 3:8-9 appears to contain a commentary on Isa. 6:9, but the text is not preserved well enough to be of much help (cf. M. P. Morgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books* [Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1979], 89, 93).

⁴⁰⁷ E. Ulrich, “Isaiah Scrolls,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 552.

6:9-10 and 13, where the prophet's word no longer is to bring about further hardening, but is transformed into an exhortation to guard against impiety⁴⁰⁸. Some variations in 1QIsaiah^a are of such a constrained character that they are explicable only as deliberate emendations. Isa 6:9-10 in 1QIsaiah^a may be rendered in the following way:

1Q Isaiah^a Column 6, ll. 2-5

v. 9 ויאמר לך ואמרתה לעם הזה
 שמעו שמוע ועל תבינו
 ראו ראו ועל תרעו
 v. 10 השמ לב העם הזה
 ואוזניו הכבד
 ועיניו השע
 פן יראה בעיניו
 ובאוזניו ישעו
 בלבבו יבין
 ושב ורפא לו⁴⁰⁹

9 And he said. 'Go, and say to this people:
 "Listen continually,⁴¹⁰ and you may understand;
 See unceasingly, and you may perceive!"
 10 Make the heart of this people appalled [dull]⁴¹¹
 and its ears dull
 and its eyes closed
 lest it see with its eyes
 and hear with its ears.
 Let it understand in its heart
 and return and be healed' (my translation).

1QIsaiah^a 6:9-10 contains a whole series of textual variations. Although a few of them may be attributed to spelling (e.g. the insertion of ך for certain vowels) and so are incidental, there appear to be several deliberate alterations.⁴¹² Brownlee suspects that "this could have arisen through accidental misspelling (especially likely if the manuscript were copied from dictation), but it is remarkable that the

⁴⁰⁸ C. A. Evans, "1QIsaiah^a and the Absence of Prophetic Critique at Qumran," *RevQ* 11 (1984): 560-70.

⁴⁰⁹ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 53.

⁴¹⁰ Both 'hear' and 'see' are imperative followed by their respective infinitive absolute forms, a construction that usually implies emphasis of continual action (E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Vol I: I-XVIII* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 256, n. 42).

⁴¹¹ Generally, in the OT this word is rendered as 'to appall' or 'to desolate' (e.g. Isa. 52:14 Jer 2:12-13; 18:16; 19:8; 49:17; Ezek. 26:16; 27:35; 28:19).

⁴¹² Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," 418.

same error occurs twice in immediate sequence.”⁴¹³ The combination of these particular alternatives goes beyond mere misspelling. Rather, the scribe uses these words for his technical terms, which have a similar sound, in order to validate a new understanding of the Isaianic text.⁴¹⁴

In the second and third lines of 6:9 (what the prophet is to say) the text reads ועל ('and') instead of ואל ('but...not') of the MT.⁴¹⁵ As the text now stands the meaning is completely transformed. The prophet is to urge the people to listen, *because* [על] they may understand, and to look *because* [על] they may perceive. In 6:10 the final ן of השמן of the MT⁴¹⁶ has been omitted, and in the last line of the verse בלבבו has become בלבבו.⁴¹⁷ The scribe did not change the medial מ of השמ into the final ם according to Hebrew standard orthography. If it is assumed to be the intended reading, how השמ should be pointed? Is it השם (qal participle of שימ, “established”) or השם? Morrow prefers the *Hiphil* imperative pointing (*Hiphil* imperative of שמם ‘make appalled’), because השמ so pointed in 1QH 7:2-3 makes the most contextual and grammatical sense.⁴¹⁸ For similar reasons, and because

⁴¹³ W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1964), 186.

⁴¹⁴ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 55.

⁴¹⁵ In the OT, when ועל is followed by subject and verb, the meaning of the preposition is often omitted, and only the meaning of the conjunction is rendered by ‘and’ (e.g. Gen 27:40; 41:40; Ex. 3:22 Deut. 4:39; 11:18; Jos. 22:20; Jdg 6:37; 1 Kings 7:35; 2Ch. 19:10; Isa. 9:6; 10:6; 11:8, etc).

⁴¹⁶ As a *Hiphil* verb, this word carries an opposed meaning in Isa. 6:10. In this verse, God commends the prophet Isaiah to ‘make fat’ (NIV. “calloused”) the hearts of Israelites. According to God’s commandment, Isaiah will desensitise their hearts and so predispose them for the judgment (W. A. VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE Vol. 4*; Michigan: Zondervan, 1997, p. 172). In Isa. 6:9-10, the term is employed as God’s judgment.

⁴¹⁷ Evans, “The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10,” 416.

⁴¹⁸ F. J. Morrow, *The Text of Isaiah at Qumran* (Washington: Catholic University of American, 1973), 27. Cf. G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls In English* (New York: Penquim, 1975), 172. Brownlee notes the similar text of 1QH7:2-3 in which ‘evil’ and ‘murder’ are the expressed objects. In 1QIsa^a 6:10 they are the unexpressed, but understood, objects (*The Meaning of the Qumran*, 187). In 1QH 7:1-5, the evil have insulted and laid their hands on the poet. Thus, his whole being is shaken to its core; his bones are out of joint and he is like a ship that is assailed by a stormy sea. His heart is utterly distraught at the threat of a sin. Hence, he warns himself against evil things, voices, and thoughts to protect himself, and encourages himself to remain in God’s covenant. In this literary context, just as the poet’s eyes are closed, and his ears are deafened to the evil

of his understanding of the 1QIsaiah^a passage as a whole, Brownlee also prefers the *Hiphil* imperative pointing.⁴¹⁹ I am inclined to agree with Brownlee and Morrow: “*Make the heart of this people appalled.*”

1QH7:2-3

Brownlee notes the similar text of 1QH7:2-3 in which “evil” and “murder” are the expressed objects, which in 1QIsa^a 6:10 are the unexpressed, but understood, object:

Shut my eyes from seeing *evil*,
[Dull] my ears from hearing of plots of *murder*.⁴²⁰
Make my heart appalled (השמ) at *evil thoughts*.⁴²¹

The occurrence of the words ‘eyes,’ ‘ears,’ ‘heart,’ and especially השם should be noted. In 1QH 7:1-5, evil persons have insulted and laid their hands on the poet. Thus, his whole being is shaken to its base; his bones are out of joint and he is like a ship that is assailed by a stormy sea. His heart is utterly distraught at the threat of sin. Hence, he warns himself against evil things, voices, and thoughts to protect himself, and encourages himself to remain in God’s covenant. In this literary context, just as the poet’s eyes are closed, and his ears deafened to the evil voice, his heart also is dull so that he rejects temptation of evil.

Furthermore, the caution in the hymnic passage is also enriched by allusion to Isa. 33:15, where the righteous person is delineated as one “who stops his ears against plots of *murder* and shuts his eyes against contemplating *evil*.”⁴²² Here, the blindness and the deafness function to warn the righteous against evil ways, rather than as divine judgment. “The use of השם in Jer. 2:12-13 is instructive: ‘Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me...’ Here השם is used in the context of being appalled at Israel’s sin, which is quite similar to its

voice, so his heart also is dull so that he rejects evil’s temptation.

⁴¹⁹ Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 186-87.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Isa. 33: 15.

⁴²¹ Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 187. Cf. M. Wallenstein, “A Striking Hymn from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BJRL*, Vol. 38 (1955): 241-65, esp. 264.

⁴²² M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 148n 7.

meaning in 1QIsaiah^{an} 423 The purpose is to make the heart of the people appalled (השמ) at evil, lest they see evil with their eyes and hear of murder with their ears.

In the last line of v, 10, the conjunction ו is omitted and actually replaced with כ (a sound-alike).⁴²⁴ The final lines now take on imperative force: *Let* the people understand in their heart and return and be healed.⁴²⁵

Hence, when the scribe of 1QIsaiah^a transcribed the hardening passage, he might have kept in mind the warning function of the concept. He may have understood that Isaiah 6:9-10 warned the Qumran covenanters against evil thoughts. Thus, the text 1QIsaiah^a 6:10 is to be read:

Make the heart of this people appalled [at evil thoughts]
and make its ears dull,
and its eyes shut,
lest it see [evil] with its eyes,
and hear [plots of murder] with its ears.
Let them understand in their heart,
and return and be healed.

The variants in 1QIsaiah^a 6:9-10 redirect the usage of the hardening in the MT. Its usage is not divine judgment, but to warn the people against evil thoughts and hence to protect them. In the MT, the role of the prophet is to make the Israelites' heart dull lest they understand in their heart and repent and be healed. However, in Qumran his role is to make their hearts, ears and eyes dull lest they see evil things, hear evil voices, to empower them to understand God's words in their heart, repent and be healed. Thus, according to the Qumran version the prophet is no longer speaking an oracle of judgment in order to promote obduracy.⁴²⁶ Rather the prophet admonishes the righteous (i.e. the Qumran covenanters) to take heed lest they fall prey to evil.⁴²⁷

The LXX text of Isaiah 6:9-10

In the LXX there is significant grammatical change in the message the prophet is

⁴²³ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 189, n. 9.

⁴²⁴ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 55.

⁴²⁵ Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible*, 186.

⁴²⁶ C. A. Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10", *ZAW* 92 (1982): 418.

⁴²⁷ Cf. M. P. Morgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretation of Biblical Books*, 93.

to speak. The LXX text of Isaiah 6:9-10 reads in the following way:

9 kai. eipen poreughti kai. eipon tw| law| toutw| akoh| akousete kai. ouv mh. sunhte kai. blepontej bleyete kai. ouv mh. idhte 10 epacunqh gar h kardia tou/ laou/ toutou kai. toij wsin autwh barewj hkousan kai. touj ofqalmouj autwh ekammusan mh pote idwsin toij ofqalmoij kai. toij wsin akouswsin kai. th| kardia| sunwsin kai. epistreywsin kai. iasomai autouj (Rahlfs' text).

9 And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'You shall hear with the ability to hear but you shall not understand;
and with seeing you shall see but you shall not perceive.'

10 For the heart of this people has been made dull [by God],
and with their ears they have heard heavily,
and they have closed their eyes;

lest they should see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,

and understand with their heart,

and turn [to me]

and [that consequence] I would heal them"(my translation)

Although the Greek translator employed the respective cognates (akoh| akousete and blepontej bleyete) for rendering of שְׁמַעוּ וְרִאוּ and שְׁמַעוּ וְרִאוּ in Isa. 6:9-10, the Greek version (the LXX) shows a significant grammatical alteration. Whereas in the MT, the verbs 'listen' (שְׁמַעוּ Qal imperative) and 'see' (רִאוּ Qal imperative) are used as imperatives, in the LXX these are used as the future - 'you will listen' (akousete) and 'you will see' (bleyete).⁴²⁸ The prophet is preaching that the people will remain obdurate according to God's judgment.

In 6:10 the LXX translates הכבד ("make heavy") with epacunqh (aor. Pass. Ind. 3rd sing. from pacunw), inserts the causal gar, and translates השמן and השע with indicative hkousan and ekammusan respectively. Isaiah 6:10 answers to the reason for the judicial appearance announced in 6:9. Although the people will listen with the ability to hear, they will not understand *because* (gar) the people has been made dull by God *lest* (mh pote) they should understand. Because of the people's sin (Isaiah. 1-5), God makes its heart dull so that the people will never understand the warning message of the judgment and thus they will not repent of

⁴²⁸ The future tense frequently has the imperative force with prohibition (e.g. Jas. 2:8; cf. Ernest De Witt. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1973], 73). "However, in view of alteration in v. 10 akousete and bleyete are probably no more than predictive futures and not imperatival futures" (Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 62).

their sins. Ultimately, they will be destroyed (cf. 6:11-12).⁴²⁹

In the MT, God commands Isaiah to make the Israelites' hearts hard in order to accomplish the penalty. To them, there is no room for repentance, just judgment. But in the LXX the hardening is *God's* work. Now, through the prediction of the impending judgment the prophet warns the people against disobedience. Hence, if the people persist in the disobedience, God's judgment is coming soon through the hardening of its heart.

The Text of Isa. 6:9-10 in Targum

The text of Isa. 6:9-10 in Targum reads in the following way:

v. 9 ואמר איזיל ותימר לעמא הדין
 דשמעין משמע ולא מסתכלין
 וחזן מחזא ולא ידעין
 v. 10 שפיש לביה דעמא חדין
 ואודנוהי יקר
 ועינוהי טמטים
 דלמא יחזון בעיניהון
 ובאודנהון ישעון
 ובליבהון יסתכלון
 ויתובון וישתביק להון

9 And he said, "Go and speak to this people who hear indeed, but do not understand, and see indeed, but do not perceive. 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and repent and it be forgiven them."⁴³⁰

In Isaiah 6:9 of the Targum the imperative mood in the MT is changed into the indicative mood.⁴³¹ This is achieved by prefixing שמעין with the relative pronoun ד.⁴³² With this addition the whole tenor of the verse is changed. The prophet is to "speak to this people *who* (ד) indeed hear, but do not comprehend." In the Targum the prophet speaks to those who are obdurate, who stand in contrast to the righteous, and it is these who are to be hardened and punished.

The targumic text of Isaiah 6:9-10 preserves the judgmental nuance of the

⁴²⁹ In Isaiah 6 (LXX) God announces his punishment on Israel in the future.

⁴³⁰ Cf. B. D. Chilton, *Isaiah Targum* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1987), 91.

⁴³¹ Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 68.

⁴³² Evans, "The Text of Isaiah 6:9-10," 417.

hardening. But the targumist does not apply it to all the Israelites.⁴³³ In the Targum, God does not harden all the people of Israel and calls his servant Israel 'the blind.' There is a tendency to distinguish between those who were wicked and unfaithful and those who were righteous and faithful. Thus, the hearts of the wicked are hardened and they are called the deaf and the blind. "Since there is indeed no longer a nation of Israel [as the targumist writes], but a Jewish people scattered throughout the world, the way of forgiveness and righteousness is always open to those who return."⁴³⁴ In the Aramaic text, God does not judge Israel as a whole. Now, it underscores an individualistic hardening rather than the collective hardening.

2.5.3.3 Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12

Isaiah 6:9-10 is found in Mark 4:12, and is the OT text's earliest appearance in the NT. It reads:

iħa blepontej blepwsin kai. mh. idwsin(kai. akouontej akouwsin kai. mh. suniwsin(mhpotē epistreywsin kai. afeqh/ autoi/Ā

In order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.' " (NRSV)

Mark's allusion is an abbreviation of the Isaianic text.⁴³⁵ Although most of his vocabulary is found in the LXX, Mark's allusion differs from the LXX in four major ways:⁴³⁶ 1) Mark has placed the part that derives from Isaiah 6:9bc in the third person, while the LXX follows the second person (but not the imperative) of the Hebrew. 2) The causes of Isaiah 6:9bc are reversed in Mark's allusion, with the 'seeing' clause occurring first and the 'hearing' clause second. 3) Mark truncates the Isaianic text by leaving out the portions describing the blindness of the eyes, the deafness of the ears, and hardness of the heart. It is probable that this abbreviation has been made out of grammatical concerns. As Black argues, the purpose for such abridgment was "to complete the main thought of the iħa

⁴³³ Lee, *Hardness of Heart*, 70.

⁴³⁴ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 76.

⁴³⁵ Matthew's formal citation of the LXX is evidence that Mark's allusion was understood as indeed a specific reference to Isaiah 6:10 by at least an early Christian.

⁴³⁶ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 92; Richard Schneck, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark I-VIII* (Vallejo: Bibal Press, 1994), 104-105.

clause” which introduced the allusion.⁴³⁷ 4) as his last clause in the allusion (i.e. Isa. 6:10), Mark has kai. aʔeqh/ autoiʔj rather than the LXX’s kai. iʔsomai autoiʔj.

When we compare Mark’s allusion with the text of the Targum, we find three important similarities.⁴³⁸ 1) The Targum also has shifted v. 9 into the third person in order to accommodate the syntactical alteration from direct speech to a relative clause. 2) Like the Targum’s rendering of v. 9, Mark’s verbs are indicative, not imperative. 3) The Targum has the equivalent of Mark’s phrase, “to be forgiven.” In view of these similarities, the allusion of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark 4:12 seems to correspond to Tg. Isa 6:9-10, rather than to the MT, 1QIsaiah, or the LXX.

According to Mark 4:12, Jesus alluded to Isaiah 6:9-10 to explain in part why some did not understand or believe in his teachings: “in order that those who see will not perceive and those who hear will not understand, lest they repent and be forgiven.” Jesus has alluded to a version of Isaiah that approximates what we now find in the Isaiah Targum. Seemingly, he stated that the purpose of his parables was to keep ‘outsiders’ in the dark. This seems to be the basic idea of the Isaiah Targum as well. There the prophet is to speak to those “people who hear but do not listen, and see but do not understand.” The prophet is to “make dull their heart and make heavy their ear.” In other word, according to the Targum, the prophet is to harden only those who do not listen (i.e., the outsiders). In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites, but the wicked and unfaithful who do not obey God’s command. This differs from the way it reads in the MT, in which the prophet is to harden the whole people. In the Aramaic text, the language suggests individualistic hardening rather than collective hardening. In Mark 4, hardening by the parables is not applied to all Israelites, but the outsiders, who refuse to accept Jesus consciously.

Although influenced by the Aramaic version of Isa. 6:9-10, the Markan allusion retains the telic, or final, sense of Isaiah’s terrible word of prophetic judgment.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967³), 214.

⁴³⁸ Schneck, *Isaiah in the Gospel of Mark*, 105.

⁴³⁹ C. A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 129.

Those whose eyes and ears God closes and whose hearts he hardens are the enemies of Israel, such as Pharaoh and King Sihon, or Israel's foolish leaders, and even Israel herself (Isa. 6:9-10; 29:9-10; 63:17). God is ultimate cause for Israel's hardness of heart just as he is of the pagan individuals. Through the prophet's declaration, God hardens the Israelites' hearts so that they do not cease their unfaithful actions. Yet, they become liable to be punished by God.

Mark has understood the judgmental feature of Jesus' parables in terms of the word of judgment God commanded Isaiah to speak, which was designed to render Israel obdurate.⁴⁴⁰ Just as Isaiah's parabolic words were to produce hardness and blindness and to bring about Israel's judgment, so the parables of Jesus would have a similar effect.⁴⁴¹ The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose for giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from understanding, belief, repentance, and forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate those who refuse to understand and believe his message so that they cannot perceive, nor repent and be forgiven. Jesus works in the context into which John the Baptist had already come and warned that judgment would fall on the people unless they repented of their sins (1:4-8. cf. 12:1-12). The outsiders are excluded from the opportunity of being further instructed in the mysteries of the Kingdom so long as their unbelief continues.⁴⁴² Just as their rejection (or unbelief) of his messages matches the concealment of the secret of the Kingdom, so the judgment on their hardening entails the divine rejection of the outsiders. In the Markan account Jesus regarded himself and his rejected message as parallel to the rejection of Isaiah and his message centuries earlier. But the parallel may extend even further. Just as Isaiah's word of judgment would result in actual judgment⁴⁴³ and the appearance of a holy seed (Isa. 6:13c), so Jesus' words of judgment would result in actual judgment, which might be seen as the second destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the

⁴⁴⁰ C. A. Evans, "A Note on the Function of Isaiah VI, 9-10 in Mark, IV," *RB* 88 (1981): 234-35; M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Story: A Literary Study* (Washington: CBA, 1977), 43-44; F. Eakin, "Spiritual Obduracy and Parable Purpose," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. J. M. Efrid (Durham: Duke University, 1972), 87-107.

⁴⁴¹ See 1 Enoch 68:1-2, where parables and judgment are linked.

⁴⁴² Lane, *Mark*, 159.

⁴⁴³ Isaiah 6:11-13b, originally in reference the Assyrian invasion, but later probably understood in reference to Jerusalem's first destruction at the hands of the Babylonians).

Romans, and the appearance of a fruitful seed (i.e., his followers).⁴⁴⁴ Since Jesus' parables produce obduracy the outsiders, they do not understand and believe in Jesus' words of the secret of the kingdom. Thus, divine judgment on them is pending.

It would appear then that the allusion of Isa. 6:9-10 serves the purpose of clarifying the nature of Jesus' parables (4:13). Mark demonstrates that at the centre of Jesus' parables is the word (4:14-20), that is, the good news (cf. 1:1, 1:14-15), which is proclaimed through Jesus, the disciples and Christians. Some believe in it and others reject it. Those who do not believe and reject the good news, do so because they are hardened to its divine truth (4:11-12).

To summarize: As for the agent of the hardness of heart, God demands the obedience of the Israelites in terms of the Covenant, but they reject his claim. Thus, God hardens their hearts so that they do not cease from their sinful actions and so become liable to be punished by God. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God gives Isaiah the mission to harden the heart of Israel in order to carry out the penalty for her because she rejected God's command. The object of the judgment is never the righteous or neutral, but the rebel against God's authority.

However, the Isaiah text of Qumran softens the judicial meaning of the MT. It no longer has the prophet speaking an oracle in order to promote obduracy. Instead the prophet admonishes the righteous (the Qumran members) to take heed during the troubled times that lie ahead. In Isaiah of the LXX, through prediction of the impending judgment (future tense) the prophet warns the Israelites against disobedience. According to the Targum, the prophet is to harden only those who do not listen. In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites; only the wicked and unfaithful who do not obey God's command.

The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose of giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from obtaining knowledge, faith, repentance, forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate

⁴⁴⁴ C. A. Evans, "A Note on the Function of Isaiah VI 9-10 in Mark," *RB* 88 (1981); 234-35; idem, "The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John," *NovT* 24 (1982), 124-38.

those who refuse to understand and believe his message so that they cannot perceive, repent and be forgiven.

2.5.4 Legalism and Hardness of Heart (10:1-5)

This passage containing Jesus' teaching on the subject of divorce is placed in the block of material devoted to teaching on discipleship (8:27-10:52), because it concerns one of the most important areas of responsibility (marriage) for disciples, or for anyone for that matter.⁴⁴⁵ It is possible that this passage is placed immediately after the preceding material that urges peace among disciples (9:50), because marriage proves to be of the most common areas of strife, though it should be noted that 10:1 is a transitional statement, indicating that a new unit of material is being presented.⁴⁴⁶

2.5.4.1 Exegetical Perspective on Hardness of Heart

The narrative begins in 10:2 with Jesus confronted by a group of Pharisees who are seeking his opinion on whether it is legally permitted for a man to divorce his wife: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"(10:2). A woman was legally the property of her husband and had no power to end the marriage.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, there was never any question about whether a man might be free to end his marriage by divorce, but the only interest reflected in the ancient rabbinic tradition is that a man should give proper official certification of the divorce to his wife (cf. Mal. 2:13-16; Damascus Rule 4).⁴⁴⁸ The callous attitude which could be taken concerning divorce, is well illustrated by the counsel of a respected teacher, Joshua ben Sira (ca. 200B.C.): "If she go out not as you would have her go, cut her off and give her a bill of divorce" (Ecclus 25:26).⁴⁴⁹

In Jewish society, there was a difference of view between two major ancient traditions of rabbinic thought concerning what were the legitimate causes for a man to divorce his wife. The school of Hillel allowed the husband to divorce his wife on trivial grounds, while the school of Shammai insisted that only adultery

⁴⁴⁵ Hurtado, *Mark*, 159.

⁴⁴⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 159; Cf. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 140.

⁴⁴⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 159.

⁴⁴⁸ Hooker, *St Mark*, 235.

⁴⁴⁹ Lane, *Mark*, 355.

was a sufficient cause.⁴⁵⁰ It seems likely, however, that far more than this rabbinic argument was at issue in the context of the question suggested in 10:2. The question of the Pharisees carried an antagonistic motive with the aim of trapping him, as Mark reveals by the word ‘test,’ and this larger context of entrapment is very important to the passage as a whole.

Like the Sadducees questioning Jesus about the woman who married a bevy of brothers in sequence (Mark 7), they raised a legal question to ‘test’ (peirazontej) Jesus (10:2). The question was oppositional and intended as a trap. If Jesus said “no,” he would seem to speak against the Law of Moses. If he said “yes,” he would apparently contradict his own commitment to a permanent relationship. It is implied that they sought to lead Jesus into a contradiction of the law.⁴⁵¹ The Pharisees did not wish to approve Jesus; they wished to discredit Him.

The question of the lawfulness of divorce had been the immediate occasion for John the Baptist’s condemnation of the conduct of Herod Antipas and Herodias (cf. 6:14-29).⁴⁵² And it had led to his violent death. Josephus refers to Herod’s marriage to Herodias: “Herodias, taking it into her head to flout the way of our father, married Herod, her husband’s brother by the same father, who was tetrarch of Galilee; to do this she parted from a living husband” (*Ant.* 18.5.4 § 136).⁴⁵³ This suggests that the divorce itself, even apart from the additional offence of marrying the wife of one’s brother, was a serious violation of the law.⁴⁵⁴ As Guelich indicates, “the Baptist charged Herod with an illegal marriage based on the law of forbidden marriage that specifically excluded marrying one’s brother’s wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except for the occasion of a levirate marriage to raise children to an older brother.”⁴⁵⁵ The Pharisees hoped that as Jesus said something on the subject of divorce that would reflect unfavourably upon divorce

⁴⁵⁰ M. Gittin IX 10: TB Gittin 90a; TJ Sotah I. 1. 16b; Num. R. IX. 30. For treatments of the Jewish legislation on divorce see M. R. Lehmann, “Gen. 2:24 as the Basis for Divorce in Halakhah and New Testament,” *ZAW* 72 (1960), 263-267; T. V. Fleming, “Christ and Divorce,” *JThS* 24 (1963): 541-554; Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 300.

⁴⁵¹ Painter, *Mark*, 140.

⁴⁵² Garland, *Mark*, 378.

⁴⁵³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 300.

⁴⁵⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 80.

⁴⁵⁵ Guelich, *Mark*, 331.

and remarriage, he would meet the same fate at the hands of Herod as John did.⁴⁵⁶ Thus, the question was hostile and had Jesus' entrapment as its object.

When the Pharisees ask whether divorce is lawful, instead of a direct answer, Jesus refers them back to Moses' command: "What did Moses *command* you?" (10:3). In the OT it is usually God who commands Israel, although on occasion Moses does the commanding (Ex. 4:28; 7:6, 10, 20; 12:28; Lev 9:5; Num 34:13; Deut 31:23 etc).⁴⁵⁷ Pharisees needed to discover that what God commanded was not what Moses permitted.⁴⁵⁸ Jesus shifts "the ground of discussion from what Moses wrote (vv. 3-4) to what God made and meant (vv. 6-7); from loopholes that may be permitted to the intention of what is commanded; from divorce to marriage."⁴⁵⁹

The Pharisees respond to Jesus' counter-question by quoting of Deut 24:1-4, where Moses' regulation covers the divorce process: "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away" (10:4). By using the word "command" in 10:3 Jesus has put his opponents on the defensive and forced them to use the more correct term "allowed." Their admission that Moses allowed divorce leaves the question of "commanding" open and prepares for Jesus' contention that Moses did so because of the people's hardness of heart.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 354; Brooks, *Mark*, 157; Hurtado, *Mark*, 160; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 82. Perhaps due to the cooperation between the Herodians and the Pharisees, the Pharisees have known that Herod wants to kill Jesus (cf. Luke 19:11-27) and fears that Jesus might actually be John raised from the dead (Mk. 6:16).

⁴⁵⁷ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 83.

⁴⁵⁸ The Qumran text offers a significant parallel to Jesus' thought. Expanding on Deut 17:17, the Temple Scroll instructs "He is not to take another wife in addition to her; no, she alone will be with him as long as she lives. If she dies, then he may take himself another wife from his father's house, that is, his family" (11QTemple 57:17-19)-M. Wise, M Abegg, and E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996], 485). According to the Damascus Document, "They (Qumran's opponents) are caught in two traps: fornication, by taking two wives in their lifetimes although the principle of creation is 'male and female he created them' [Gen 1:27] and those who went into the ark 'went into the ark two by two' [Gen 7:9]. Concerning the David had not read the sealed book of the Law..." (CD 4:20-5:2)-Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, 197-226.

⁴⁵⁹ Williamson, *Mark*, 176.

⁴⁶⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 293.

On the question of the lawfulness of divorce, the Pharisees understood that divorce was permitted according to the provision of Deut 24:1-4, since the passage constituted the legitimate grounds for divorce among various authorities within the Pharisaic movement (cf. Aqiba: *Gittin* IX, 10).⁴⁶¹ But, in Deut 24:1-3, the husband wrote a document declaring that he had divorced his wife and her sent away. Possession of this certificate provided the woman with legal proof that the marriage had ended and made it possible for her to marry someone else.⁴⁶² In this sense the certificate offered the woman legal protection against any claims of the former husband, and the possibility of starting a new life.⁴⁶³

In the light of the background, it appears that Jesus views Moses' permission as not a reflection of God's will, but instead a reflection the Israelites' hardness of heart (thn skl hrokardian umwh). Jesus' powerful retort is a condemnation of human sinfulness, which elucidates the intention of the Law of Moses. Through his retort, Jesus wanted to make clear that the purpose of Deut. 24:1 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to limit sinfulness and to control its result. To most Jews Jesus' statement would have seemed to be an attack upon the holiness and perfection of the Law of Moses. However, it is certainly an attack upon the use of Deut 24:1-4 to justify the divorcement of wives whenever husbands wished to do so.⁴⁶⁴

In the early chapters of Exodus, Pharaoh is described as an example of hardness of heart. In Ps 95:7, the people of Israel are urged not to follow the bad example of their ancestors as they wandered in wilderness: "Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the days of Massah in the desert." In Mark 3:5 Jesus' opponents in the synagogue are accused of hardness of heart and in 4:10-12 the general public's failure to understand the parables is explained in terms of the prophecy about hardness of heart in Isaiah 6:9-10. In Mark 6:52 the failure of Jesus' own disciples to understand him and his deeds is attributed to their hardened hearts. In the context of the debate about marriage and divorce in Mark 10:1-12 Jesus interprets Deut 24:1-4 as temporary concession by God to the spiritual weakness

⁴⁶¹ Williamson, *Mark*, 175.

⁴⁶² Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 293.

⁴⁶³ Garland, *Mark*, 379.

⁴⁶⁴ Hurtado, *Mark*, 160.

of the people.⁴⁶⁵

The term *sklhrokardia* was used in the LXX (Deut 10:16, Jer 4:4, and Ezek 3:7),⁴⁶⁶ where the prophets rebuke the Israelites for their refusal to listen to God's commands. Jesus' use of personalizing language intentionally connects the current religious leaders and their Jewish ancestors in a rebellious attitude to God. Just as their ancestors were disobedient to God's words, because of their hardness of heart, so due to their hardened hearts the current Jewish religious leaders are insensitive to Jesus, blind to his action and deaf to his words (4:10-12; 3:5-6). In Mark 12:1-12, Jesus retells a story of Israel's historical disobedience of God's plan in order to rebuke the opponents for their refusal to believe in Jesus' prophetic message and predict the impending judgment upon them. With the concept of hardness of heart, Jesus' retort is an assertion of the Pharisees' sinfulness. The hardness of heart is the source of their unbelief and rejection of the divine decree.⁴⁶⁷ Due to the hardness of their hearts, Jesus' opponents indicate persistent incomprehension, unbelief, rejection, when faced with Jesus' prophetic message in his teachings and deeds. With regard to Jesus' opponents, hardness of heart is used to indicate their hostility towards him.

Jesus indicates that the provision for divorce was due to human rebellion against the divine command. He uses the language of 'hardness of heart' rhetorically to reject the Israelites who had refused to obey God's commandments:

Jesus acknowledges the "commandment" written by Moses but relativizes it with the proclamation that it was "because of your hardness of heart," that is, because of the obstinate refusal and rebellion against the salvific ways and will of God that was characteristic of the people of Israel and that Pharisees continue to manifest in their opposition of Jesus (see 3:5), that Moses permitted divorce (10:5).⁴⁶⁸

Jesus' purpose is to make clear that "the intention of Deut 24:1 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to limit sinfulness, and to control its consequence."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁵ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 294.

⁴⁶⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 391.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Mark 7:1-20 where their adherence to human tradition causes them to nullify the law of God.

⁴⁶⁸ John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 204.

⁴⁶⁹ Lane, *Mark*, 355.

Defiance against God's ordinance is the essence of hardness of heart.

2.5.5 Summary

This section has studied the literary and rhetorical functions of the term 'hardness of heart' in relation to unbelief. Throughout Mark's Gospel the opponents refused to believe in his authority (1:22; 2:10; 11:28) and accused him of blasphemy (2:7; 14:64). The opponents' disbelief is described by the language 'hardness of heart' (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up human opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Since their hearts are hardened, the opponents have not believed in that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor do they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death (3:5-6).

The image of Pharaoh's hardness of heart in the OT provides the appropriate context for properly assessing the function of its echo in Mark 3:1-6. Even though Jesus declares the arrival of the kingdom in his authoritative teachings and deeds, the unbelievers refuse to believe to Jesus' message, because their hearts are hardened, as due to hardness of heart Pharaoh refuses to release Israel from Egypt. In particular, the hardness of heart produces the opponents' conscious refusal to accept Jesus as the Son of God and his prophetic message - repentance and belief.

On the other hand, in Isaiah 6:9-10 alluded in Mark 4:12 God, through the prophet, hardens the hearts of those who do not repent of their sins. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God gives Isaiah the mission to harden the heart of Israel in order to carry out the penalty for her because she rejected God's command. The object of the judgment is never the righteous or neutral people, but the rebels against God's authority. In Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 God does not harden all Israelites, but the wicked and the unfaithful who do not obey God's command. The allusion of Tg. Isa. 6:9-10 in 4:12 seems to be saying that the purpose for giving 'outsiders' all things 'in riddles' is to prevent them from knowledge, faith, repentance, forgiveness. In the riddles Jesus makes obdurate those who refuse to accept his message, so that they cannot perceive, nor repent and be forgiven. Unless the opponents accept Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus, through his parabolic words, hardens their hearts so that they do not understand the secret of the Kingdom.

In the context of the debate about marriage and divorce in this passage (10:1-12),

Jesus interprets Deut 24:1-4 as temporary concession by God to the spiritual weakness of the people. It was because the Israelites' hearts were hardened that Moses wrote a certificate of divorce. Since their hearts were hardened, they rebelled against God's command of marriage. Just as their ancestors disobeyed God's commands because of their hardness of heart, so due to their hardened hearts the current Jewish religious leaders are insensitive to Jesus, blind to his action and deaf to his words.

In Mark's Gospel, the outsiders are Jesus' opponents who have deliberately excluded themselves from the circle of salvation (the kingdom of God), because of their unbelief in Jesus (cf. 1:22, 39; 2:1-3:6; 7:1-23; 8:11-12 etc.). In Mark's Gospel, the language 'hardness of heart' is used as a cause of the opponent's refusal to believe in and acknowledge Jesus' authority as the Son of God. In Mark's Gospel their plot, which is caused by the heart-hardening is repeated (11:18; 12:9) and expanded in the following way: seizing, beating, striking, and killing him, since their hearts are hardened (3:5; 10:5). Accordingly, the opponents' hardness of heart will cause God to judge them. However, if they believe in Jesus' prophetic message in 1:14-15 and repent of their sins, they will obtain the forgiveness of God as a benefit in the Kingdom. Through this description, Mark's readers are required to decide whether they will opt for belief in Jesus and the kingdom, or for the unbelief of the opponent whose hearts are hardened. The readers are constantly admonished not to slip back into the pattern of the hardness of heart.

2.6. SYMBOLIC ACTIONS AND PARABLE ABOUT JUDGMENT ON THE UNBELIEVERS

Mark illustrates the unbelief of Jesus' opponents as refusal to understand Jesus' implied claim to a unique identity. They are amazed that Jesus dares to act in God's stead (2:7), and like God, possesses wisdom and remarkable healing powers (6:2; 15:31), claims authority over the Temple (11:28), and regards himself to be the messianic king (15:32). Nevertheless, their unbelief becomes apparent in their refusal to understand the divine authority of Jesus' teaching and deeds, instead preferring to accuse Jesus of blasphemy (2:7) and demonic loyalty (6:3; cf. 3:22, 28).

Due to the impertinence of the alleged blasphemy by Jesus (2:1-12), his humble

family and social career (6:1-6), his public honour, and his apparent powerlessness (15:29-32), they are unable to accept Jesus as a divine messiah, the Son of God, despite his obvious authority including forgiveness of sins (2:5, 10) and even power over the temple system (11:28). The king of Israel who merely saves others, but will not save himself is not worthy of faith. The Jewish religious leaders are violently opposed to his new principles because, to accept it, would mean a termination of the kind of rule which they had worked out, and from which they benefited.

However, the ultimate cause of unbelief of the opponents is their hardness of heart (3:5; 4:12; 10:5). In Mark's Gospel, the hardening language is used in order to indicate the opponents' persistent refusal to understand and believe Jesus' prophetic message (1:14-15) in his teachings and deeds. Furthermore, the language forecasts the imminent divine judgment on the unbelievers. In Mark 11-12, the opponents refuse also to accept Jesus' teaching in the parable of the wicked tenants, and his action in the Temple. Instead, they plot how to put him to death (11:18; 14:1). The opponents' unbelief in Jesus and his message is a step on the way to their own destruction (11:20; 12:1-9; 13:1-2).

2.6.1 The Cleansing of the Temple (11:15-17) and the Cursing of the Fig Tree (11:12-14, 20-26)

We are clearly meant to observe a connection between the fate of the barren fig tree and Jesus' action in the Temple. But this section (11:12-26) has been placed within two paragraphs dealing with the Jewish religious leaders' unbelief in Jesus' identity and authority (vv. 1-11, 27-33), so building up another, more complex sandwich. The judgment announced on Israel in vv. 12-26 is thus firmly connected with the Jewish religious leaders' refusal to believe in Jesus and his prophetic message. In this section, we once again find one incident sandwiched within another:

- A. The cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14)
- B. The cleansing of the Temple (11:15-19)
- A. The cursed fig tree (11:20-26)

Both the bracketing episodes, as well as the central episode have the form of symbolic prophetic actions. Some symbolic actions carry meaning and feeling

and always produce what they symbolize.⁴⁷⁰ For example, in Ezekiel 5 God commands the prophet to cut off and divide some of the hair on his head and face. The destiny of the hair will be the destiny of the Israelites. Both the cursing of the fig tree and the action in the Temple are symbolic in that they figure the forth coming judgment of God on the heart of Israel. “That which is appealing from a distance (cf. 11:13 to 13:1), on closer inspection has no real fruit to offer up to Jesus or God.”⁴⁷¹

In central episode, Jesus singles out the people who performed a legitimate function in the Temple, allowing for the performance of proper sacrifice commanded by God. To drive them out amounts to interrupting such divinely willed Temple sacrifice. It represents serious challenge to the to the Temple authorities.

One story is used as a frame for another, and both stories interpret each other. We should not expect to see here some actual chronological sequence. Here more than elsewhere the bracketing episodes patently interpret the central episode, because the cursing and withering of the fig tree foreshadows the destruction of the Temple. But on a deeper level the central episode remains the key, since without the episode of clearing the Temple, the cursing and withering fig tree remain a riddle.⁴⁷² In other words, the event of the cursing and withering of the fig tree is a symbolic or enacted prophecy.⁴⁷³

2.6.1.1 The Exegetical Perspective on the Cursing of the Fig Tree

This event involving the fig tree occurred on the day following on the Temple cleansing when Jesus and his disciples were returning from Bethany to Jerusalem. Jesus inspects the fig tree, going to see if he could find anything on it, just as on the previous day he inspects the Temple. The tree could not provide Jesus with figs to eat, because it was not the season for figs,⁴⁷⁴ but despite the

⁴⁷⁰ Malina & Rohrbaugh, *Synoptic Gospels*, 249.

⁴⁷¹ Witherington III, *Mark*, 312.

⁴⁷² Edwards, *Markan Sandwiches*, 208.

⁴⁷³ Isa. 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-5.

⁴⁷⁴ For more explanation see Lane, *Mark*, 401; Hooker, *Mark*, 262; W. J. Cotter, “For It was not the Season for Figs,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 62-66.

season, the tree should have been covered with fruit to greet the Messiah.⁴⁷⁵ Jesus' disappointment with the fig tree is like his disappointment with Israel and the Temple, especially the Temple authorities.

Fig Tree in the OT

In the context of the story, the statement, "he found nothing except leaves" (11:13; *ouden euren eivmh. fu|l a*), simply indicates that the tree was completely barren and Jesus' quest was in vain. The tree apparently did not even have immature figs on it. Barrenness occurs in the OT as a description of Israel's failure to bear appropriate fruit for God, that is, belief and obedience (e.g. Jer. 8:13; Mic 1:7), as well as an expression of God's judgment (e.g. Jer 7:20; Hos. 9:16).⁴⁷⁶ Consequently, Jesus' request for fruit from the barren fig tree has been seen as a parable of his request for those who believe in his prophetic message to Israel.⁴⁷⁷ The close connection between this parable and the Temple demonstration, however, suggests that this quest for faith was specifically within the centre of Israel's religious life (the Temple).⁴⁷⁸

The fig tree would indeed have been understood as a symbol for Israel, which has failed to produce the appropriate fruits when her Messiah looked for them. The background of the imagery is found in passages of the OT, which speak of the Lord looking in vain for grapes on his vine or figs on his fig tree and of the judgment which necessarily follows.⁴⁷⁹ This, then, is why Jesus curses the fig tree: not out pique, but because it represents the Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus. They have fallen under the judgment of God.

The fig tree that has not borne fruit is cursed (11:14): "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (*mhketi eij ton aiwha ek sou/ mhdeij karpon fagoi*). The

⁴⁷⁵ Hooker, *Mark*, 262. In the Messianic age the fig tree will bear fruit (e.g. Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; Hag. 2:19).

⁴⁷⁶ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 158.

⁴⁷⁷ J. N. Birdshall, "The Withering of the Fig-Tree (Mark xi. 12-14, 20-22)," *ExpTim* 73 (1962): 191; Lane, *Mark*, 401; G. Müderlein, "Die Verfluchung des Feigenbaumes (Mk 11:12-14)," *NTS* 10 (1963): 100-101 in 89-104.

⁴⁷⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 155.

⁴⁷⁹ Isa. 34:4; Jer 5:17; 29:17; Hos 2:12; 9:10; Joel 1:7; Mic 7:1-6. See. W. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1980), 193-96.

question must be raised whether 11:14 should be seen as a curse or a prophetic utterance. Mark has understood the declaration as an emphatic curse. Peter seems to take it in the former meaning later in 11:21. Why curse a fig tree for not bearing figs out of season? Jesus surely knows it is not fig season. This detail is cue for the reader to look beyond the surface meaning and to see its symbolic meaning.⁴⁸⁰ This action is not about a particular unfruitful fig tree; it has to do with the Temple. The word ‘season’ (kairoj) in 11:13 is not botanical term for the growing season but the religious term found in 1:15 (Pepl hrwtai o` kairoj; “the time has come”) denoting the time of the kingdom of God (cf. 13:33).⁴⁸¹ The barren fig tree represents the barrenness of the Temple authorities who refuse to accept Jesus’ messianic reign. Thus, Mark is describing a symbolic act of judgment like the action in the Temple, which foreshadows what is to come.⁴⁸²

The tree is condemned, because of its failure to produce fruit. Hooker comments on this in the following way:

In the declaring judgment and carrying it out, Jesus exercises the authority of God himself to condemn and destroy, but since the fig tree is a symbol for the nation, it is possible that Mark sees this action as symbol for future divine action, and supposes that God himself—rather than Jesus—will carry out the final, eschatological judgment of Israel.⁴⁸³

In context, Mark 11:14 is equivalent in function to Mark 12:9, in which the figure of the vineyard is parallel to the symbolism of the fig tree.⁴⁸⁴ As Jesus seeks fruit from the fig tree, so God seeks fruit from the vineyard. When the tree does not produce anything or it is withheld, destruction follows. The absence of figs or fruit on the tree leads to the future inability of the tree to produce fruit. Therefore, the focus is on the failure of the fig tree and Jesus’ judgment on it.⁴⁸⁵

Telford argues that the fig tree would indeed serve as a symbol for Israel which

⁴⁸⁰ Garland, *Mark*, 440.

⁴⁸¹ Garland, *Mark*, 440.

⁴⁸² Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 312.

⁴⁸³ Hooker, *Mark*, 267.

⁴⁸⁴ Lane, *Mark*, 402; Hurtado, *Mark*, 180. The cursing of the tree is familiar to the readers of the OT (e.g., Isa. 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-15).

⁴⁸⁵ In the parable there is allusion to such passages as Jeremiah 8:8-17 or Micah 7:1-6, which predict the destruction of Jerusalem and judgment upon Israel for the failure of her leaders to demonstrate faithlessness to God (Hurtado, *Mark*, 180).

was meant to bear fruit at the end time.⁴⁸⁶ The point is that Jesus has come and is ready to gather in God's people, who repent their sins and believe in the good news (1:14-15).⁴⁸⁷ But, they are bearing no fruits at all (cf. Mark 4). At this point, the story of the 'withered' fig tree reflects the impending judgment upon the unbelievers. Thus, the opponents who reject Jesus' teaching and action will be destroyed due to their rejection of Jesus, just as the fig tree does by not bearing fruit, and is withered from the roots up. In the succeeding story we see parallel judgment on the Temple priests and the teachers of the law who turn the Temple into a den of robbers.⁴⁸⁸

Withering of the Tree

The phrase *exhrammenhn ek rizwh* ("withered from the roots up") in 11:20 is very similar to Hos 9:10-10:2 (the LXX), in which the expression is used as a metaphor to indicate the destruction of the Jewish leaders (cf. Job 18:16; 31:12; Ezek 17:9). In the Jewish context the concept of 'withering of the tree' has been used as a vivid warning of imminent judgment (cf. Mk 13:2; Ps 90:6; Joel 1:12; Hos. 9:16). Within the context of a number of passages, indeed, the reason given for God's wrathful visitation particularly concerns cultic deviation on the part of Israel, her running after false gods, or her censure for a corrupt Temple cult and sacrificial system (e.g. Jer. 5:17-18; 8:12-23; Hos 2:11-13; 9:10-17; Am. 4:4-13).⁴⁸⁹

In particular, the word *exhrammenhn* sends the Markan readers back to 3:1-6 where the word is used in order to describe a paralytic. This passage signals a contrast between a man with a 'withered' hand and the opponents, in response to Jesus' divine authority. According to the OT (Lev. 21:16-24) the paralytic was forbidden to enter the Temple because it was a result of the divine judgment due to his sins. As the man believes in Jesus' divine authority, his withered hand is healed. By contrast, as the opponents whose hearts are hardened reject his authority as the Son of God, they place themselves under divine judgment.

⁴⁸⁶ Telford, *The Barren Temple*, 195-96.

⁴⁸⁷ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 313.

⁴⁸⁸ Myers, *Blinding the Strong Man*, 297-99.

⁴⁸⁹ Telford, *The Barren Temple*, 135.

2.6.1.2 The Exegetical Perspective on the Cleansing of the Temple

Jesus goes into the Temple and immediately begins throwing out those selling and buying, and also overturns the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who selling doves. Jesus' action would have perhaps been an expression of divine righteous anger against this insensitive act, which prevented true worship from going on in the Court of the Gentiles.⁴⁹⁰ Perhaps the Court of the Gentiles is not really the issue here. Jesus is interrupting sacrifices being made in the courts further within the Temple than the Court of the Gentiles. Then the issue will be whether or not all such activities and acts of worshiping God within the Temple have become farcical deception, in which case we are dealing here with a symbolic action in the Temple.⁴⁹¹

His actions did not signify the destruction and replacement of the Temple;⁴⁹² they were meant to demonstrate disapprobation with respect to certain aspects of the trading.⁴⁹³ His criticism was not directed against the purchase of animals as such and certainly was not directed against the practice of sacrifice; nor was it directed against money-changing. All of these things were necessary for Israel's religion to be practiced according to the Law of Moses. It is important that although Jesus' actions were directed against the animal vendor and money-changers, his criticism applied to the Temple establishment in general.⁴⁹⁴ For it was by the authority of the ruling priests, especially the high priest himself, that these commercial activities took place in the precincts of the Temple. In attacking the vendors and money-changers, Jesus had attacked the priestly authorities.

Jesus expressed deep disappointment in the failure of the Temple establishment and issued a prophetic challenge.⁴⁹⁵ The Temple had to function as the place of

⁴⁹⁰ See. D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 172.

⁴⁹¹ Hooker, *Mark*, 264.

⁴⁹² Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*. 73-74. Sanders, argues that Jesus' action was a symbolic action or prophetic gesture (e.g., the breaking of the pot in Jer 19:10), foreshadowing the impending destruction of the Herodian temple and its replacement with one that God would build through Jesus (cf. 14:58).

⁴⁹³ C. A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 (1989): 237-70; idem, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

⁴⁹⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 180.

⁴⁹⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

prayer for the nations in accomplishment of its God-given purpose.⁴⁹⁶ But instead, it had become a den of robbers and stood in danger of destruction. In what way the Temple functioned as a den of robbers will be discovered in several actions of the opponents' rejection in Mark 12-14.

The interpretation that Jesus gives to his action is crucial for understanding what he intended. This teaching transforms a simple display of protest into an announcement of divine judgment (see 12:9). The disciples, and the readers of Mark's Gospel also, have added advantage for understanding this incident, because they saw the cursing of the fig tree.⁴⁹⁷

The Cleansing of the Temple as a Symbolic Action

It was a symbolic action, not power play, to take over or do away with the Temple.⁴⁹⁸ Rather it foreshadows such judgment. Perhaps, Mal 3:1-5 provides a background of this event, where the purging action of God is the prelude to the Judgment. From at least the time of Malachi there had been protests about the priests, whose corruption meant that the sacrifices offered in the Temple were not purely pleasing to the Lord (Mal. 3:5). Similar complaints are found in the Psalms of Solomon (2.3-5; 8.11-13) and in the Talmud (B. Pes. 57 a), while Josephus portrays the way in which the servants of the priestly aristocracy stole tithes from the ordinary priests (*Ant.* XX. 8.8; 9.2).⁴⁹⁹ He tells the bribery of the high priests (*Ant.* 20.9.4 § 213; *Life* 39 §§ 195-96), and violence (*Ant.* 20.8.8 § 179-81). In some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the high priest is called as the 'Wicked Priest' (1QHab 1:13; 8:9; 9:9; 11:4), who has robbed the poor (1QpHab 8:12; 9:5; 10:1; 12:10), has accumulated wealth (1QpHab 8:8-12; 9:4-5), and has defiled the "Sanctuary of God (1QpHab 12:8-9).⁵⁰⁰ In 2 *Baruch* the priests confess in the wake of the Temple's destruction that they have been 'false stewards' (2 *Bar.* 10:18).⁵⁰¹ In Mark 11:15-18 the chief priests in fact represent the Temple. Thus,

⁴⁹⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 181.

⁴⁹⁷ Garland, *Mark*, 437.

⁴⁹⁸ P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), 111-14; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 171.

⁴⁹⁹ Hooker, *Mark*, 264.

⁵⁰⁰ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 168.

⁵⁰¹ C. A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption," in *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. D. J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 531-34. The

Jesus is condemning the Temple establishment rather than Temple itself.⁵⁰² There is good reason to think that Jesus may have been aiming his protests at the priests, and though Sanders objects that there is no indication that Jesus attacked them,⁵⁰³ this episode is perhaps sufficient evidence that he did so. There is also significant evidence in the Markan tradition to indicate that Jesus was critical of the Temple authorities. The parable of the wicked vineyard Tenants (Mark 12:1-9) incriminates the priestly aristocracy and threatens them with the loss of their position and power.

Undoubtedly, Mark sees Jesus' actions as much more than a mere gesture of protest. They are to be understood as prophetic actions, symbolizing a divine judgment, which will be accomplished in a future incident.⁵⁰⁴ Mark, by inserting the event in the story of the fig tree, demonstrates clearly that he understands it as sign of God's criticism of Israel, because of her unbelief and failure to bear true fruit. This presupposes that he sees it as symbol of future destruction of the Temple and final cessation of worship. Jesus' words and actions are condemnation of the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders, for her failure to bear fruit, and in the context of the story of the barren fig tree, they imply judgment and destruction.

Jesus, like the Baptist, comes as the precursor trying to cleanse the heart of the people before the great and terrible judgment begins. This description might be supported by *Pss. Sol.* 17:30-32, in which the Messiah is to come and to cleanse the land, making possible the conditions for redemption (cf. 13:4-9. 12-13).⁵⁰⁵ When God sent his Messiah, the Messiah was expected to cleanse Jerusalem, so that it would again be holy. According to Buchanan, Jesus himself saw his action as a messianic action fulfilling the prediction of Zech. 14:21 regarding the Temple: "And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of armies

scene is fictional, of course, but it articulates the view of the author at the end of the first century.

⁵⁰² The condemnation of the Scribes who devour widows' houses is probably in reference to efforts to collect gifts for the temple (12:38-40).

⁵⁰³ Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 61-76.

⁵⁰⁴ Garland, *Mark*, 436.

⁵⁰⁵ C. Roth, "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah," *NovT* 4 (1960): 174-81; Cf. Evans, Mark 8:27-16:20,

on that day.”⁵⁰⁶ But, although Jesus indicates their sins and warns of the impending judgment, because of blindness, deafness and hardness of heart, the Temple authorities do not understand his prophetic actions, do not repent of their sins, but reject him. Thus, the divine judgment is not far behind. At this point, the purging is a prelude to the coming judgment, and therefore a prophetic sign of that coming judgment.⁵⁰⁷ When Jesus performs the symbolic purging in the Temple, the judgment cannot be far behind, much like the prediction in Mark 13:28-29 with regard to the fig tree.

Jesus’ action of one trying to reform the corruption in the Temple indicates to us a dramatic demonstration regarding the coming judgment. What is the reason then for the judgment of the Temple? Jesus says they have made the house of God into a den of robbers or brigands (11:17). The perfect tense of the verb here *pepoiḥkate* (“you have made”) indicates the irremediable character of the action of the priestly authorities, who are Jesus’ opponents in Mark’s Gospel, and points forward to the warning in Mark 13:2 (the Temple’s destruction).⁵⁰⁸ Like the fig tree, the Temple’s functional vitality is now “withered from the root” (cf. Hos 9:16).

Quotation of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11

The mixed quotation in 11:17, which is drawn from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, probably following the LXX may have known to Mark’s audience⁵⁰⁹ clarified Jesus’ action in the Temple. Isaiah 56 begins the final section of the entire book. Most scholars believe this to be written after the Babylonian exile, when the exiles were returning to their homeland.⁵¹⁰ After the exile, the manifest theological question was: “who are the people of God?” The answer is, the righteous people who follow the ethical demands of covenant. In Isaiah 56-66, the Temple worship is condemned. God’s presence is not limited to the Temple, but exists in the righteous (Isa. 66:2).⁵¹¹ The Temple represents defective covenant faithfulness,

⁵⁰⁶ G. W. Buchanan, “Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?” *NTS* 37 (1991): 283 in 280-90.

⁵⁰⁷ Witherington III, *Mark*, 315.

⁵⁰⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 407.

⁵⁰⁹ Isaiah 56:7 (LXX) *en tw| oi kw| thj proseuchj mou*; Jeremiah 7:11 (LXX) *mh. sph|aion I hstwl*

⁵¹⁰ P. F. Qualls, “Mark 11:15-18: A Prophetic Challenge,” *Review and Exposition* 93 (1996): 398 in 395-402.

⁵¹¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 445.

without faithfulness the Temple and cult are void of meaning.

Isaiah 56 begins with a call to justice (vv. 1-2) and to covenant (vv. 3-8), which is followed by condemnation against the wicked rulers (vv. 9-12). Those who follow the covenant are the recipients of the promise of 56:7: “these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (NIV). In the quotation of Isaiah 56:7 all the righteous had a right to pray in the Temple.⁵¹² It is thus possible to conclude that the evangelist wants his reader to understand Jesus not as eliminating the Temple, but rather permitting the believers to worship God.⁵¹³ However, this underplays the strong allusion to Jeremiah.

Mark alone, of the four evangelists includes the words *for all the nations* (LXX παῖν τοῖς ἐθνεσίν) in the quotation from Isaiah 56:7. This recalls for us that the words were originally a promise about the future.⁵¹⁴ Mark was probably aware of the eschatological dimension of the words. If so, he included them because he saw Jesus’ action in the Temple as a symbol of the phenomenon that through his coming death, the believers were to be brought to worship God. Surely, this would correspond to Mark 12:9 and 15:39 (cf. John 12:32). Perhaps, the evangelist sees Jesus’ action as a ‘messianic act’ - not merely a condemnation of Israel for her failure, but a claim that the time has come for the purpose of God to be fulfilled - though this will be via the paradoxical way of rejection.⁵¹⁵

Jesus indicates that the people change the house of God into a den of robbers.

⁵¹² Cf. Witherington III, *Mark*, 313: “For some it was precisely Herod’s association with the temple and its building that made this temple problematic, for Herod was an Idumean by family heritage, which is to say his family descended from the Edomites. This, coupled with his immorality, violent actions, and self-aggrandizing activities (especially the building projects) made him an objectionable figure to many....In the Enochian and Qumran literature we find views that this temple is hopelessly corrupt and will be judged or destroyed (cf. 1 Enoch 89:73-90:29; 4QFlor 1.1-12; cf. for similar complaints about temple or the priests, Pss. Sol 2:3-5; 8:11-13; 1QpHab 8.8-13; 12:1-10; CD 5.6-8; 6.12-17; *b. Pesah. 57a*.)”

⁵¹³ Witherington III, *Mark*, 316.

⁵¹⁴ By omitting them, Matthew and Luke make Jesus’ words a straightforward contrast between what the temple should have been and what it had become.

⁵¹⁵ Hooker, *Mark*, 266.

This is probably saying not that the Temple is a haven for Zealots,⁵¹⁶ but is rather a reference to Jeremiah 7:11, which cautions that God is about to lay waste the Jerusalem Temple (7:14).⁵¹⁷ The “den of robbers” in this verse is not a reference to persons who steal. In the OT, a “den” or “cave” is a place of refuge from animals or persons,⁵¹⁸ and “a robber can be understood as a brigand, not a thief, but a person of violence who will kill to rob.”⁵¹⁹ It is the place where those congregate who commit such terrible acts against the covenant as described in 7:9.

The quotation from Jeremiah 7:11 attributed to Jesus in v. 17 does not refer in its original context to commercial transactions in the Temple. The people are there depicted as ‘robbers’ or ‘brigands’ because their behaviour outside the Temple means that when they enter the Temple they cannot worship God sincerely. They rob God in the Temple as surely as they have robbed the poor outside. Since by driving out the buyers and sellers, and by overturning the table of the money-changers Jesus prevents worshippers from buying sacrifices or of offering the half-shekel tax, this suggests that he is protesting that their worship without faith is shame but more than simply attacking the malpractices of the Temple authorities.⁵²⁰

The tradition of Zion had considerable popular appeal and was preached by those whom Jeremiah considers to be false prophets.⁵²¹ Jeremiah warns the

⁵¹⁶ Mark may have deliberately chosen the term *Ihsthj*, because he is writing as the Jewish War is going on and knows that in the winter of A. D. 67-68 a group of Zealotic brigands had moved into Jerusalem, setting up headquarters in the inner part of the temple, in which they remained until A. D. 70 (cf. Jos. War 4.151-57; 5.5)—J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992), 117-18.

⁵¹⁷ Lane, *Mark*, 407.

⁵¹⁸ The temple literally became a refuge for bandits during the war with Rome when the Zealots retreated to it. According to Josephus, they committed all manner of vile acts: “For this reason, I think, even God Himself, hating their impiety, turned away from our city, and no longer judging the temple to be a clean house for Him, brought the Romans upon us and a cleansing fire on the city” (Ant 20.8.5. § 166)—cf. Garland, *Mark*, 439. If the original readers were aware of this fact, the reference to the “den of robbers” would have a double meaning.

⁵¹⁹ William L. Holladay, “Jeremiah 1,” *A Commentary on the Book the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 246.

⁵²⁰ Hooker, *Mark*, 264.

⁵²¹ Neils Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelites Society*

Israelites in his sermon of chapter 7, “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” (7:4, NIV). He follows the statement with the demands of the covenant. But the people continually affirm their trust in Zion. After declaring the corruption of the people, Jeremiah continues with a word from the Lord in 7:10-11. The people were putting their trust in the Temple and the tradition of Zion as a substitute for trust in God.⁵²² This attitude excluded faithful actions toward God by teaching that proper ritual would bring protection and safety. The attitude of the heart had been distorted and the faithful attitude to God was missing.

When Jesus quotes the OT in Mark, new meaning is given to the Scriptures. It is very possible that in Mark 11:17 Jesus cites Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 in order to uncover the parallels between the post-exilic people and the people of his day.⁵²³ Just like those in Jeremiah’s day, the religious adherents of Jesus’ day had the moral character of robbers in a den. They had neglected the faithful actions of the covenant and become corrupt. As did Jeremiah, Jesus brings a powerful accusation against the religious leaders. “In Jesus’ lament for Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-38=Luke 13:34-35) there are significant parallels to Jeremiah, the prophet who had severely criticized Jerusalem’s first Temple (Jer 7:14, 34; 12:7; 22:5; 26:9), whose criticism Jesus may have had in mind when he took action in Jerusalem’s second Temple (Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:7).”⁵²⁴

Jesus is condemning the entire religious action in the Temple as being without faith in his prophetic message. His action of overturning the tables and chairs and driving out the buyers and sellers can be understood as prophetic symbolic actions of inevitable and imminent judgment.

It is important, of course, to grasp the nature of such prophetic signs.⁵²⁵ As Painter says, a “prophetic sign of impending destruction should be understood as

(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 172.

⁵²² Qualls, “Mark 11:15-18,” 399.

⁵²³ Qualls, “Mark 11:15-18,” 400.

⁵²⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 168.

⁵²⁵ For more understanding, cf. Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

warning of disaster that may be averted by responding positively to the sign.”⁵²⁶ But the Temple authorities’ response to Jesus’ action in the Temple was hardly positive. The ruling priests and Scribes in 11:18 “were seeking how they might destroy him.”⁵²⁷ God is not rejecting the whole of Israel, but rather their corrupt leaders. His rejection and judgment is emphasized by the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12. Thus, the Temple under the religious leaders of the Temple establishment, especially the chief priests, who do not believe in Jesus and his message and who reject him, stood now under God’s judgment as prophesied by Jeremiah (11:17c and Jer 7:11-14; cf. 11:12-14, 20).⁵²⁸

Since the story of the Temple is enclosed by the story of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-21), there is little doubt about what connection the implied author is trying to make between them. Indeed the setting of the temple story within that of the barren fig tree, suggests that Mark may have seen it in terms of the accomplishment of eschatological hopes. The Temple establishment faces ruin if it does not change its ways. The fig tree could not produce anything and so fell under judgment. If the Temple establishment cannot, or will not, do better, then it too will fall under judgment. When Jesus comes to Jerusalem, he expects the promises to be fulfilled, that is, that the fig tree should provide fruit, and that the temple of God should be holy. But the tree does not provide its fruit, and the Temple is a den of robbers rather than the house of prayer for all nations. Therefore, eschatological hopes involve judgment. No doubt Jesus’ protest in the Temple implied that his opponents have not repented and believed in Jesus’ prophetic messages and actions, so that the divine judgment would follow them. How serious this judgment would be is emphasized in the parable of the vineyard tenants (12:1-12), and in Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the Temple (13:1-2). His action in the Temple is consistent with the typical of Israel’s prophets.⁵²⁹ His condemnation was directed emphatically against the religious leaders,

⁵²⁶ Painter, *Mark*, 158.

⁵²⁷ In 3:6 the scribes begin seeking to destroy Jesus. In 12:12 they seek to arrest him. In 14:1 they seek for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth. In 14:1 Judas, having reached a bargain with the ruling priests, begins seeking an opportune time to betray Jesus. After his arrest, the Sanhedrin in 14:55 begins seeking damning testimony against Jesus.

⁵²⁸ R. A. Guelich, “Anti-Semitism and/or Anti-Judaism in Mark,” in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, eds. C. A. Evans & Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 92.

⁵²⁹ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 182.

especially the Temple authorities. Therefore, if the Jewish religious leaders, who have not believed in Jesus and his prophetic message and had rejected him, now do not repent their sins and accept him, they will fall under judgment as well.

Consequently, the implied author intends the reader to perceive Jesus' action as a sign of imminent judgment on the Temple establishment. A prophetic sign of impending punishment should be understood as a warning of tragedy that may be prevented by responding positively to the sign.⁵³⁰ The sign is then to be seen as a correction to the Temple situation. The crowds saw Jesus' action in the Temple and were amazed at that. While the chief priests and scribes saw his action, they then rejected the correction and sought to destroy him (11:18), because their hearts are hardened, their eyes are blind, and their ears are deaf. Therefore, they cannot avoid the impending divine judgment.

2.6.2 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard (12:1-12)

In the rhetorical structure of Mark 12:1-12, Mark strengthens the hostility on the unbelief and rejection of the Jewish religious leaders toward Jesus.⁵³¹ Although some scholars resist seeing the parable as an allegory,⁵³² most interpreters read the parable of the wicked tenants allegorically⁵³³ and understand it as a representation of Israel's continued unbelief and rejection of God's message.⁵³⁴ "The allegorical features have transformed the parable into an allegory of God's dealing with stubborn Israel, Israel's persecution and murder of the prophets, the final killing of God's Son Jesus, and judgment on Israel and vindication of Jesus."⁵³⁵ The primary purpose of this section is to study the motif of judgment on unbelievers in the allegorical parable.

⁵³⁰ Painter, *Mark*, 158-59.

⁵³¹ H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1952), 150.

⁵³² C. H. Dodd, *The Story of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1936), 124-132; J. Jeremiahs, *The Parable of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 70-77. Both felt that in its main lines, the history is natural and realistic in the political and economical situation of first-century Palestine. Both Dodd and Jeremiahs, therefore, felt that the entrance of the son was demanded by logical rather than theological motivation.

⁵³³ Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, vol 1 (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr 1888), 65-85.

⁵³⁴ K. R. Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 73.

⁵³⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 216.

2.6.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

Jesus' parable of the Wicked Tenants is transparently an account of the religious leaders in Israel as unwilling to receive God's word sent to them by the prophets, as 12:12 demonstrates.⁵³⁶ In the previous section (11:27-33), they indicated their unbelieving rejection Jesus' authority over the Temple. The parable says that in these actions they are guilty of rejecting those sent to them by God and are like their ancestors who had rejected the ministry of earlier prophets. But the parable not only interprets the previous encounter between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, it also provides the background for the incidents that follow. There, the religious leaders debate with Jesus in attempts to trap him into making an incriminating statement (12:13-34), and Jesus rebukes them (12:35-44).⁵³⁷

According to Blomberg, the form of the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants is triadic: 1) God, who is described as a 'Man' in this passage, is patient and tolerant, even in the face of unbelief and rejection; 2) the day will come, however, when God will punish those who do not believe in his will and are rejecting that; and 3) despite the rejection by Israel, God's purpose will be fully fulfilled; that which his tenants tried to oppose and destroy, God has affirmed.⁵³⁸

The structure of 12:10b-11 appears in a chiastic (ABBA) pattern:

12:10b The stone the builders rejected	A
12:10c This has become the capstone;	B
12:11a The Lord has done this,	B'
12:11b it is marvelous in our eyes'?"	A'

This form of an ABB'A' pattern indicates two characters' action: God's divine action framed by human responses (part B and B'), and human action to cause God to act (parts A and A'): the rejection of the stone by the builders and the finding of the stone's vindication to be marvellous by 'us.'⁵³⁹

2.6.2.2 The Exegetical Perspective on Judgment

The vineyard was a well-known metaphor for Israel and here it again symbolizes

⁵³⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 190.

⁵³⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 190.

⁵³⁸ C. L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 247-51.

⁵³⁹ Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 112.

Israel (cf. Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:7; Jer. 2:21).⁵⁴⁰ Thus, the symbol of the tenants in the vineyard can be interpreted to mean the representatives of Israel who have responsibility to keep the vineyard according to the owner's plan.⁵⁴¹ Whereas the vineyard is critiqued in Isa. 5, the criticism in the Markan text is directed towards the tenants, the Jewish leaders, not the vineyard itself.

The Biblical Theme in Isaiah 5

As in some other parables, Jesus was taking a well-known biblical theme, in this case from Isaiah 5:1-7⁵⁴² and developing it further.⁵⁴³ Outside of these opening lines, Isaiah's parable contrasts sharply with Mark's insofar as it introduces no tenants. Jesus' parable does not develop the image in the same way: in Isaiah it is the vineyard which has failed, in Mark the vineyard will be entrusted to new tenants.⁵⁴⁴ After detailing the careful preparation made by "my beloved," God's expectation immediately follows: "He expected it to yield [good] grapes, but sour grapes were all that it gave" (Isa. 5:2, 4). A few lines later, Isaiah explains this to mean, "He [God] expected justice, but found [unlawful] bloodshed; [expected] integrity, but only [found] a cry of distress" (Isa. 5:7). What follows from this? The prophet registers God's complaint (Isa, 5:3-4) and delivers God's judgment:

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it (Isa.

⁵⁴⁰ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 456.

⁵⁴¹ John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press 1992), 235.

⁵⁴² Willis argues that Isaiah 5:1-7 must be understood as a parable since the passage possesses the elements which are regarded necessary to the parable genre: 1) a simple lesson is intended; 2) correspondence between parabolic figures and real characters is present; 3) legal elements often found in other parables are present (e.g., 2 Sam 12:1-7; 14:1-24; 1 Kgs 20:35-42), and 4) a specific situation is depicted rather than a typical condition; J. T. Willis, "The Genre of Isaiah 5:1-7," *JBL* 96 (1977): 360-62 in 337-62. Sheppard has proposed that Isa. 5:1-7 is indeed an instance of the juridical parable; G. T. Sheppard, "More on Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Juridical Parable," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 45-47. He has concluded that the parable is not incomplete when it is understood that Isa. 3:13-15 "contains the missing parts of an original, juridical parable preserved mostly in Isa. 5:1-7" (Sheppard, "Isaiah 5:1-7," 46). Thus it would appear that a consensus has emerged in which Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard is understood as an instance of the genre juridical parable.

⁵⁴³ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 74-76.

⁵⁴⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 456.

5:5-6 NIV).

When one investigates the mood transitions within Isaiah's extended parable, the following three movements are evident: expectation-disappointment-judgment.⁵⁴⁵

When the parable of the wicked tenants in Mark's Gospel begins with a recitation of the deeds of a man building a vineyard, the reader/hearer might be disposed to expect a parable in which the same mood transitions flow.⁵⁴⁶ By using and noticeably modifying a familiar opening, the narrator evokes the mood and theme of a familiar parable, while at the same time signalling that a new version (Mk. 12:1-12) of the old parable (Isa. 5:1-7) is about to begin.⁵⁴⁷ Thus, in Mark's Gospel, continuity evokes the familiar mood transitions, while discontinuity signals that a novel production is about to unfold.

The Markan Gospel provides the point of departure from which the new parable may be constructed. In this version of the parable there is concern with the vineyard tenants rather than with the quality of the fruit.⁵⁴⁸ God expects the fruit from the tenants in the vineyard. But, the wicked tenants refuse to hand over the fruit of the vineyard to its owner, committing a series of murderous offences against his servants and son, the result of which is divine judgment and destruction. That this parable functions as a juridical parable is suggested by the by the question of 12:9a: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (τί, ἰουάν ποιήσει ὁ κυρίος του ἀμπελῶντος) Although Mark supplies Jesus' answer (v. 9b), the answer is obvious and would be acknowledged by his audience.⁵⁴⁹ The juridical nature of the parable becomes unmistakably clear from the Markan conclusion: "And they tried to arrest him...for they perceived that he had told the parable against them..." (12:12)

Even though the evangelist does not denote who this group (αὐτοῖς) is in the introduction of the parable (12:1), it is clear from Ch. 11 that he is thinking of

⁵⁴⁵ Milavec, "Mark's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," 294.

⁵⁴⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 191.

⁵⁴⁷ Milavec, "Mark's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," 295.

⁵⁴⁸ C. A. Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12," *BZ* 28 (1984): 83 in 82-86.

⁵⁴⁹ Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables," 83.

Jesus' opponents, the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem (the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders, 11:27; cf. 12:12).⁵⁵⁰ In 11:27 they have refused to accept that Jesus' authority is from in heaven.⁵⁵¹

The absentee landlord sends his servants⁵⁵² to collect the payment from the tenants (12:2). The word 'servant' (doul oj) is a frequent designation in the OT for the prophets whom God sent to the peoples (1 Kings 14:18; 15:19; 18:36; 2 Kings 9:36; 10:10; 14:25; and the phrase "my servants the prophets" in Jer. 7:25; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7). The treatment of the servants in the parable surely called to mind the ill-treatment of the prophets.⁵⁵³ The first is beaten and sent away (12:3), the next is struck on the head and treated shamefully (12:4), and the last is killed (12:5). Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:2), but in later apocryphal legends about prophets, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Habakkuk had been killed. Popular wisdom in the time of Jesus believed that prophets inevitably were rejected and suffered a martyr's fate (Matt 5:12; 23:31-39; Luke 13:31-33; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess. 2:15; Heb 11:36-38).⁵⁵⁴

Lane comments on 12:5 as rejection:

The detail in verse 5b, however, that the owner sent many others, was intended by Jesus to force his listeners beyond the framework of the parable to the history of Israel. In the OT the prophets are frequently designated "the servants" of God (cf. Jer 7:25f; 25:4; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6) and it is natural to find a reference to their rejection in the words "beating some, and killing others."⁵⁵⁵

The Markan account has three successive servants (doul on, a|lon doul on, a|lon) who are, respectively, beaten, wounded in the head (ekefal iwsan) and treated shamefully, and killed (cf. 12:3-5). "This begins to characterize how in the biblical tradition the past leaders of Israel continually rejected, abused and killed

⁵⁵⁰ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 320.

⁵⁵¹ Hooker, *Mark*, 273. Gundry treats 11:27-33 and 12:1-12 together as a single section (*Mark*, 656).

⁵⁵² The Jewish leaders were like their ancestors who, when they had authority, killed the prophets and wise men God sent to Israel (cf. Mt. 23:28-29). In this generation's rejection of Jesus, the blood-guilt of the ages was coming to rest on them.

⁵⁵³ Garland, *Mark*, 452.

⁵⁵⁴ Garland, *Mark*, 452.

⁵⁵⁵ Lane, *Mark*, 418.

God's prophets (1Kgs. 18:13; 2Chr. 36:15-16; Neh 9:26), who were often referred to as 'servants' sent by God (Jer 7:25f; 25:4; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6).⁵⁵⁶ It is natural, therefore, to consider that in the parable, Jesus is referring to the prophets as the fore-runners of himself.⁵⁵⁷ Obviously, the metaphor has been shaped by the traditional idea of Mark and represents the persecution of the prophets and the slaying of Jesus.⁵⁵⁸ Thus, the servants are interpreted allegorically as the prophets, and it is historically appropriate natural to speak of a long succession of servants.

Beloved Son

The landlord "had one left to send, a son, whom he loved" (12:6a). He sent his son to them expecting that they would respect him. However, they seized, killed, and threw him out of the vineyard (12:7-8). The son is on a different level from the servants, and the owner sends him, because he assumes that the tenants will "respect him" (12:6b).⁵⁵⁹ The son's mission is the same as that of the servants before him. The owner gives the tenants every opportunity to repent and to pay their rent—to give him the required fruits in due season (see Ps 1:3).⁵⁶⁰ Two other instances of the adjective 'beloved' (*agaphtoj*) in Mark involve the identification of Jesus as God's beloved son⁵⁶¹: the heavenly voice ("my beloved son") at the baptism (1:11) and at the transfiguration (9:7).⁵⁶² At least at the Markan level of the parable's history, the beloved son is Jesus. Matera points out

⁵⁵⁶ Hurtado, *Mark*, 191; Heil, *Mark*, 235. The term *doulōj Kuriu* is used of Moses (LXX Jos 14:7, Ps 104: 26), Joshua (LXX Jos 24:29), and David (LXX 2 Kgs 3:18), and then regularly of the prophets (Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6 Jer 7:25 etc.). Snodgrass holds that the killing of the prophets is a frequent New Testament theme. Since this view of the prophets' fate was that held by the early Church, it is sometimes suggested that this feature is an argument for the origin of the parable in the early church; *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 78.

⁵⁵⁷ Taylor, *Mark*, 474; E. P. Gould, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 221.

⁵⁵⁸ Schweizer, *The Good News*, 240-41.

⁵⁵⁹ The verb "respect" is used in the LXX to refer to people "humbling themselves" before messengers of God (see Ex. 10:3; Lev 26:41; 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron 7:14; 12:7, 12; 36:12).

⁵⁶⁰ Garland, *Mark*, 453.

⁵⁶¹ There is no *agaphtoj* in Matt. 21:37. Mark and Luke uses it by each supplying his own introduction and drawing out the Christological implications; J. A. T. Robinson, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: A Test of Synoptic Relationship," *NTS* 21 (1974-75): 454 in 443-61.

⁵⁶² Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 338.

that the exact form of the title that appear in 1:11,⁵⁶³ “beloved son,” re-surfaces in the parable of the vineyard (12:1-12), a parable that emphasizes the opposition to Jesus and echoes Psalm 2, also in the use of the term ‘inheritance’ (Ps. 2:8 LXX).⁵⁶⁴ Though in this specific case the human opposition to Jesus is the centre of focus, in Mark’s Gospel as a whole, it is clear that the opposition reflects a supernatural one.⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, the son represents Jesus himself. In the NT and later Christian writings *en tw| hgaphmenw|* (Eph. 1:6) and *o` agaphtoj* become Messianic designations.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, just as their ancestors had rejected God’s servants, that is, the prophets, so the religious leaders will put to death the Son himself, the Messianic king.⁵⁶⁷ “The point of the parable is the obduracy and criminal irresponsibility to the tenants.”⁵⁶⁸

The Unbelieving Plot

In Mark 12:7 the sentence, “Come, let us kill him,” (*deute apokteinwmen auton*) is the same as the LXX version of Gen 37:20. It expresses what Joseph’s brothers planned to do to him prior to deciding to sell him into slavery. “There may be hint of Joseph/Jesus typology here, especially with regard to the theme of both as innocent suffers. A more promising motif is the jealousy or envy that motivated Joseph’s brothers as a type of what motivated the tenant farmers (who in the parable represent Jesus’ opponents; see 12:1a, 12; 15:10).”⁵⁶⁹

The tenant farmers threw the beloved son out of the vineyard (12:8). At the most basic level this implies that the tenant farmers refused to give the beloved son a decent burial (cf. 15:42-47)—an indignity even beyond what they did to the servants. Heb 13:12-13 provides a possible parallel with 12:8: “Jesus also suffered outside the city gate.... Let us, then, go to him outside the camp...”⁵⁷⁰ Both Mark 12:8 and Heb 13:12-13 may reflect that Jesus was crucified outside

⁵⁶³ Hurtado, *Mark*, 191.

⁵⁶⁴ Matera, *Kingship of Jesus*, 176.

⁵⁶⁵ Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 71.

⁵⁶⁶ Taylor, *Mark*, 475.

⁵⁶⁷ Gould, *Mark*, 221.

⁵⁶⁸ Hooker, *Mark*, 276.

⁵⁶⁹ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.

⁵⁷⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.

the walls of Jerusalem.

The conclusion of the parable is intentionally eschatological—the landlord will return and put to death the tenants (12:9). Thus, whoever has rejected the owner's son has rejected the owner. The owner will in turn destroy (*apolesei*)⁵⁷¹ them and give the vineyard to others, “among whom Mark's audience would have presumably seen themselves.”⁵⁷² The word *apolesei* echoes 3:6 and 11:18, where the aim of the religious leaders is to eliminate (*apoleswsin*) Jesus: the tables will be turned,⁵⁷³ but the destruction of the tenants does not mean the end of the vineyard (contrast Isa. 5:5-6); new tenants will be installed.

The Judgment of the Tenants

In 12:9, the punishment of the tenants is indicated by the rhetorical question and answer form, which, in itself, is quite common as a parabolic conclusion. According to Mark, he answered his own question by saying that the tenants would be destroyed and the vineyard given to others. In other words, the punishment in the parable is an allegorization of the opponents' destiny. Mark describes the religious leaders, who are rejecting the final messenger, the Son of the God, who will not let them escape from the imminent disaster.

There is a theological dimension to the canonical context of the vineyard parable that is quite important. Israel is God's choice vineyard. But their election was no guarantee that God would not bring destruction and take away the institution (e.g. the Temple and altar) he had given them.⁵⁷⁴ The Israelites would have to learn that God is sovereign, and is free to destroy and recreate.⁵⁷⁵ It is this same theology that finds expression in Mark's vineyard parable; the point is being made that God has the right to destroy the Temple establishment and to bring a new

⁵⁷¹ What then will God do? The question is answered by Jesus' prediction of the temple destruction in Mark 13. It is not hard to understand “...why, on the basis of a parable like this and the teaching in Mark 13, the early church concluded that the judgment that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was God's response to the rejection and death of Jesus by the Jewish leaders (see Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.7. 7-9)”-- Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 321.

⁵⁷² Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 321.

⁵⁷³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 461.

⁵⁷⁴ Evans, “On the Vineyard Parables,” 86.

⁵⁷⁵ J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon*(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 54-55.

community through faith.⁵⁷⁶ Thus, not only does the vineyard parable in Mark parallel the form and function of Isaiah's juridical parable, but also, more significantly, it has caught the essence of the prophetic critique against unwarranted supposition about God's election.⁵⁷⁷

Quotation of Psalm 118:22-23

The author of Mark's Gospel also knew of the resurrection of Jesus. Thus Jesus asks, "Haven't you this scripture?" quoting from Psalm 118:22-23.⁵⁷⁸ The early Christians understood and used this text as referring to the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Rom 9:32; Eph 2:20).⁵⁷⁹ Here the themes of rejection, reversal, supremacy, the work of God, and amazement, all contribute to the understanding of the preceding parable of the rejected son and his vindication and the subsequent turning of the tables by the intervention of his father.⁵⁸⁰ What the parable did not contain was any concept of the vindicating rejected son himself being and taking the supreme place; indeed, the imagery of the parable did not allow any event outside the parable situation to include the possibility of resurrection after death.⁵⁸¹ In the present context, the quotation serves to complete the parable of the son, who has been killed by the tenants. This figure was understood to represent Jesus: it seemed unnecessary to refer to the resurrection.

Marcus argues that the link between the two parts is strengthened by a series of verbal and thematic correspondence:

[T]he rejection of the stone corresponds to the rejection of the servants and the son in the parable, its vindication by the Lord corresponds generally to the action of 'the lord of vineyard' in 12:9, and the words "builders" and "head" are reminiscent of the building of the tower (12:1) and the wounding of one of the servants in the head (12:4). The link between 12:1-9 and 12:10-12 makes it probable that in Mark's mind the main characters in the two parts are to be unidentified: the wicked tenants are the rejecters of the stone, the stone itself is the son, and the 'Lord of the vineyard' is God.⁵⁸²

In this form of rejection and vindication the stone functions as a continuation and epilogue of the parable by predicting the transformed status of the "son," who is

⁵⁷⁶ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 162.

⁵⁷⁷ Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables," 86.

⁵⁷⁸ Hooker, *Mark*, 277; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 339.

⁵⁷⁹ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 162; Hooker, *Mark*, 277.

⁵⁸⁰ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.

⁵⁸¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.

⁵⁸² Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 111.

rejected and slain: the Liqon, represents Jesus as the one whose humiliation is turned into exaltation.⁵⁸³ In rabbinic literature the rejected stone (אֶבֶן) of Ps. 118:22 was understood as referring to individuals (e. g. Abraham, David or the Messiah).⁵⁸⁴ Josephus uses the wordplay between אֶבֶן and בֵּן in the Jewish Wars 5.6.3. §272:

[A]ccordingly the watchmen that sat upon the tower gave them notice when the engine was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out aloud in their own country language, "THE SON COMETH:" so those that were in its way stood off, and threw themselves down upon the ground; by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm.⁵⁸⁵

"The phrase οὐκ εἰς τὴν γῆν in the 'native tongue' has prompted some discussion, but regardless of whether Hebrew and Aramaic was meant, the warning obviously contained a corruption of אֶבֶן and בֵּן."⁵⁸⁶ The wordplay between the words is also reflected in the NT. The occurrence of the words for 'stone' and 'son' in close proximity may be due to coincidence in some cases;⁵⁸⁷ "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham (Mt 3:9; cf. Mt 4:3;

⁵⁸³ Kefal hn gwniaj probably refers to the keystone of the arch, not the foundation stone (cf. J. Jeremiah, "Iiqon Iiqonj," *TDNT* IV, 174).

⁵⁸⁴ Lane, *Mark*, 420; Taylor, *Mark*, 477. See LmR IV.1; ExR XX. 9; XLVI. 2; and EsR VII. 10. In the OT passages אֶבֶן is found in connection with בֵּן, e.g., יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָנֵי זְכָרִין לְבָנֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ (memorial stones for the sons of Israel) in Exodus 28:12. Similar wordplay between אֶבֶן and בֵּן is also found in the OT (Ex 28:17, 21; 39:6, 7, 14; Jos. 4:6-7; Lam. 4:1-2; Zech. 9:16). The talmudic literature, likewise, confirms the link between אֶבֶן and בֵּן: "This is an argument from minor to major: if with the stones of the altar which do not see and speak, eat or drink, because they make peace between Israel and their Father in heaven as the Torah declared, 'Thou shalt lift no iron tool upon them' (Deut 27:5), the children (בְּנֵי) of the Torah, who are an atonement for the world, how much more [should they not lift up an iron tool against each other!] Similarly Scripture declares 'Thou shalt build the altar of the Lord thy God of whole stones (Deut 27:6)...if with stones which do not see or hear, speak or eat or drink...must be 'whole' before the Holy [blessed be He], how much more the children of the Torah...must be 'whole' before the Holy One, blessed be He" (*b Semahoth* 47b-48a); Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 114-15.

⁵⁸⁵ Translation is based on William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Edition* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 1987), 710.

⁵⁸⁶ Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 115.

⁵⁸⁷ Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants*, 117.

7:9; Lk 19-39-40).⁵⁸⁸

The appropriateness of the quotation must have been as obvious to Jesus as it was to the apostles,⁵⁸⁹ while the use of *anegnwte* has a dominical flavour.⁵⁹⁰

Mark claims that Jesus' utilization of the text has the purpose of stimulating repentance on the part of the Jewish leaders by identifying his rejection with the rejection of the stone that was subsequently vindicated by God's own hand.⁵⁹¹

Marcus describes the correspondence between the parable and the quotation from the Psalm:

The rejection of the stone must represent the murder of the son, that is, the execution of Jesus. This identification is cemented by the fact that the verb *apodocimazein* (to reject) occurs in only one other place in Mark, in 8:31, where Jesus uses it to prophesy his own rejection by the Jewish leaders. The raising of the stone to the head of the corner, then, must correspond to the resurrection of Jesus, since resurrection is represented in the three passion predictions as the reversal of the humiliation of the crucifixion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In Mark 12:10-11, therefore, Jesus uses Ps. 118:22-23 to prophesy his death and resurrection.⁵⁹²

By this scripture, Mark constructs a bridge between the Son of Man (8:31; 9:12) and the rejected only Son in the parable (12:6, 10-11).⁵⁹³ Mark makes an explicit Christological claim in the citation of Ps. 118:22.

Jesus' parable is directed against the religious leaders and predicts their future destruction, but it is of course, their rejection of Jesus (and his teaching) which leads to their own rejection by God.⁵⁹⁴ The authorities recognize that the parable is spoken against them; they are the wicked tenants.

⁵⁸⁸ Thus the wordplay in Mark 12:10 is evidence of the early existence of Messianic proof-texts, and "serves as a warning that God will reverse the judgment of men with regard to his final messenger in a startling display of his power, turning apparent defeat into triumph (cf. Acts 4:11; I Peter 2:7)"; Lane, *Mark*, 420.

⁵⁸⁹ Taylor plausibly suggests that the church's widespread use of the verse goes back to the memory of Jesus' own teaching (Taylor, *Mark*, 477).

⁵⁹⁰ E. Earle Ellis, "Midrash, Targum and New Testament Quotation" in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, eds. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 67.

⁵⁹¹ Jeremiah, "Iiqon Iiqonj," 275.

⁵⁹² Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 114.

⁵⁹³ Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 94.

⁵⁹⁴ J. D. Crossan, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen," *JBL* 90 (1973): 455 in 451-65.

The pericope is clearly an allegory; God's vineyard will be taken from the evil authorities of Israel and will be given to the Gentiles (cf. 21:43); these authorities have rejected the OT prophets and will kill Jesus whom God has now made the corner stone. For Mark, the reference to the beloved son must have seemed a clear messianic claim.⁵⁹⁵ What Mark emphasizes here is what the Sanhedrin does not understand about Jesus, as the Son of God, because of their hardness, deafness, and blindness.⁵⁹⁶ In other words, placing this parable following the incident of the Sanhedrin's failure to understand Jesus, Mark continues the theme in the parable of the rejection of Jesus by the wicked tenants.

As an allegorical representation of Israel's continued rejection of God's message and as the climax of her rejection of Jesus, Mark uses the parable of the wicked tenants for his theological purpose:

The citation of Ps. 118:22 at the end of this parable confirms the eschatological prospect by stating the fact of rejection and vindication and proclaims the establishment of the messianic foundation stone. By indirectly identifying himself as the rejected stone (i.e., son of the vineyard owner), Jesus views his impending rejection as a step toward the establishment of a new messianic rule. Despite (and we might add "through") rejection God will establish his Messiah.⁵⁹⁷

Through this parable Mark expresses his theological view that a new messianic rule will be established in the eschatological sense.

Mark 12:12 makes very clear that the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Jesus for using this illustration because they realized he was pointing at them - they were the wicked farmers in his story. But they were afraid to touch him because of the crowds. Mark's description of the events leading to the passion is full of dramatic irony: Jesus' parable is directed against the religious leaders and predicts their future destruction, but it is, of course, their rejection of Jesus which leads to their own rejection by God.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 463.

⁵⁹⁶ Gundry, *Mark*, 691.

⁵⁹⁷ H. F. Bayer, "Prediction of Jesus' Passion and Resurrection" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel*, eds. J. B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 631-632.

⁵⁹⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 277.

2.6.3 Summary

Mark may well have combined the stories about the fig tree and the Temple's cleansing to emphasize the opponent's rejection and their destruction. Jesus enunciates the opponents' sins with the incident of the Temple cleansing. However, they refused to accept Jesus' warning of the impending judgment, and they looked for a way to arrest and kill him (11:18; 12:12; 14:1). Thus, they will not avoid God's punishment (Mark 13). What the fig tree, as withered all the way from the root (cf. 4:6) foreshadows, would happen to the Temple and Jerusalem, (in A. D. 70, perhaps). This termination is likely paralleled by 13:28-32, in which the fig tree is described again as a symbol of the end time.

The parable in 12:1-12 defines 'unbelief' as the wicked tenants' consistent rejection of God's servants, i.e. the Jewish ancestors' rejection of prophets. Its climax is rejection by the current Jewish leaders, i.e. the death of the son (Jesus). Although the Jewish leaders know he has spoken the parable against them, they do not repent of their sins, but they continually reject Jesus (12:12; cf. 3:5-6), because their hearts are hardened. And they hand him over to death. Therefore, Jesus' opponents who have rejected Jesus, Son of God, will not escape from imminent judgment. Their wilful rebellion necessarily excludes them from obtaining the forgiveness of God, and from the kingdom of God (cf. 3:29).

However, significantly, in the midst of Mark 12 there is hope—even for a scribe, because 12:28-34 tells the story of one person who agrees with Jesus about the two greatest commandments. And while the Jewish leaders in general are roundly denounced (12:12-21; 12:1-12, 38-40), Jesus speaks of this one member of the group, "You are not far from the kingdom of God (12:34). "The opponents as a group are hopeless outsiders, yet to the individual with an open heart—even a scribe—the kingdom beckons."⁵⁹⁹

2.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of chapter 2 was to consider and clarify the development of Jesus' opponents' unbelief in Mark's Gospel. To be more specific, I was interested in the following matters: the nature of the opponents' unbelief, the major cause of the

⁵⁹⁹ S. H. Smith, "Inside and Outside in Mark's Gospel," *The Expository Times* 102 (1991): 365 in 363-367.

unbelief, the relationship between the language 'hardness of heart' and the motif of unbelief, and the eschatological judgment as a predicted result of the unbelief.

In the 'conflict episodes,' Mark describes various groups, and the different ways in which they do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God. In 2:1-12 Mark indicates that the scribes rejected Jesus' authority over the forgiveness of sins. In 6:1-6, Mark emphasizes that Jesus' hometown people (even his family) refused to accept Him as the Messiah. Further, the opponents' unbelief lies in their rejection of the Baptist' call to repentance and his message of the coming Stronger One (11:30), with the consequence that they exhibit opposition toward Jesus from the very beginning of his mission (cf. 2:6-10). Due to Jesus' arrogance of blasphemy (2:1-12), his humble family and social position (6:1-6), his public honour, and his apparent powerlessness (15:29-32), they are unable to accept Jesus as a divine messiah, the Son of God, despite his evident authority over sin (2:5, 10), sickness (2:11; 6:2; 15:31), and even the Temple system (11:28).

The opponents' unbelief is understood as the rejection of Jesus and his salvation message. Jesus' response against the antagonists' unbelief was their exclusion from the kingdom of God. Their unbelief, which is refusal to accept Jesus' prophetic claim in 1:14-15, contrasts with the centurion's faithful confession (15:39). Jesus indicated the definition of the new covenant family, that is "whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (3:35), as God's eschatological community.

The opponents' unbelief is illustrated by the language of hardness of heart (3:5; 10:5; cf. 6:52; 8:17-18), which sums up the people's opposition to the power of God at work in Jesus. Due to their hardened hearts, the opponents have not believed that the Sabbath is for the refreshment and restoration of humanity, nor did they accept that Jesus is bringing in the eschatological Sabbath conditions, when there will be ongoing relief from death (3:5-6). Their plot, which is caused by their hardened hearts, is repeated (11:18; 12:9) and expanded in the following way: seizing, beating, striking, and killing him (12:1-12). Accordingly, the opponents' hardness will cause God to judge them. Even though the opponents know he has spoken the parable of the wicked tenants in 12:1-12 against them,

they do not repent of their sins, but they continually reject Jesus (12:12; cf. 3:5-6), because their hearts are hardened. And they hand Jesus over to death. Therefore, the opponents who have rejected Jesus, the Son of God, will not escape from impending judgment. Their wilful rebellion necessarily excludes them from obtaining the forgiveness of God, and from the kingdom of God (cf. 3:29).

Mark considers 'hardness of heart' as the highest expression of unbelief and an utter insensitivity to man's needs and problems.⁶⁰⁰ Although the people had seen many instances of God's work revealed in Jesus' teachings and miracles, they did not want to accept it. They regarded it impossible to open up and accept the new principle in the kingdom of God. The reason is that they have shut down the possibility, through resisting the willingness and the ability to open up and think about what is going on. Human volition does not want to open up to what God wants to do, and does not want to realize that God is in Jesus' works (3:6; 12:1-10; 14:1-2; 15:1). Human volition wants a spectacular sign from God, or like the devil, a great display of divine power (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). However, it does not want God to become a human being, to be like one of us (cf. John 1:11).⁶⁰¹ The greatest obstacle to faith is the unwillingness of the human heart to accept the God who condescends to us simply in only the son of Mary.

Nevertheless, Satan stands behind human volition. In Jewish literature, the wicked who are ruled by the spirit of darkness (1QS 3:18-21) walk in the way of darkness with blindness of eyes, deafness of ears, stiffness of neck, and hardness of heart (1QS 4:11), so that they will never understand God's word. Hence, they will not escape from the imminent judgment (1QS 2:25-26).⁶⁰²

The depiction of the wicked in the Qumran texts is attributed quite similarly to those described as 'the one outside' in 4:12. In Mark's Gospel the outsiders are

⁶⁰⁰ Edward J. Mally, "The Gospel According to Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol 2, eds. Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 236. Cf. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 119.

⁶⁰¹ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 175.

⁶⁰² A Dupont-Sommer, A. *The Essene Writing from Qumran* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1976), 82-83.

Jesus' opponents who have deliberately excluded themselves from the circle of salvation (the kingdom of God) by their attitudes of hostility to Jesus (cf. 1:22, 39; 2:1-3:6; 7:1-23; 8:11-12 etc.).⁶⁰³ Similar to 1QS 3:18-21, in Mark 4:15 the opponents' refusal to understand Jesus' message of the Kingdom is the result of Satan-inspired opposition. In the parable of the sower, the first ground on which the seed is sown is that of the path. There the earth is so hard that the seed stays on the surface and birds come and eat it (4:4). Jesus interprets this action as Satan's coming to take away the Word (4:15). Since Satan prevented the opponents from listening to Jesus' message, they did not understand it and rejected him and eventually brought about his death (3:6).

Through the portrayal of the unbelief of the opponents and the judgment on them, Mark warns those who reject Jesus' teachings and vilify Jesus' ministry. In Mark's Gospel, the motif of unbelief is a negation. It would seem that Mark was, indeed, using the negative motif to force the reader/hearer to seek the positive counter-balance.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 306.

⁶⁰⁴ Wolfgang. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 12.

CHAPTER THREE

EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNBELIEF OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

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

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

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

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

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

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

this movement to a climax.⁶⁰⁸

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

3.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

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

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

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

⁶⁰⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 213.

⁶¹⁰ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 164.

⁶¹¹ Garland, *Mark*, 189.

⁶¹² Hurtado, *Mark*, 81; Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 175.

⁶¹³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

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

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

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

⁶¹⁴ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 340.

⁶¹⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 213.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶¹⁹ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 49.

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

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

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

v. 37 *kai. ginetai lai| ay mega| h anemou* ("and a furious squall came up")

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

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

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

3.1.2 Exegetical Perspective on The Text

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

⁶²¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 215.

⁶²² Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 175.

⁶²³ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 87.

⁶²⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 215.

⁶²⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216.

⁶²⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 222.

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

3.1.2.1 The Meaning of Jesus' Sleep

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

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

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

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

⁶²⁷ Guelich, *Mark*, 266; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

⁶²⁸ Taylor, *Mark*, 276; Garland, *Mark*, 191; Painter, *Mark*, 87.

⁶²⁹ Gnlika, *Markus* 1: 195; Guelich, *Mark*, 266.

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

⁶³¹ See also Ps 44:23-24

⁶³² Garland, *Mark*, 192.

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

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

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

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

⁶³³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 338; Edwards, *Mark*, 149.

⁶³⁴ Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 266; Witherington III, *Mark*, 175.

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

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

⁶³⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 337.

⁶³⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224.

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

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

⁶³⁹ Cope, *Matthew*, 97; Gundry, *Mark*, 245-46.

⁶⁴⁰ Edwards, *Mark*, 149.

⁶⁴¹ Batto "The Sleeping God," 153-77.

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

⁶⁴³ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

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

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 266.

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

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

3.1.2.2 Jesus' Rebuking the Wind

Jesus answers their anxious cries by rebuking the wind with a word (4:39). As we observed in the previous section, in ancient society the sea was seen as a malicious deity, but in the Jewish context it was seen as the natural dwelling place for demons and spirits (2 Enoch 40:9; 43:1-3; 69:22; 4 Ezra 6:41-42; Job 2:2).⁶⁵⁰ Jesus' response to the storm is expressed in terms similar to his first encounter with the man with an unclean spirit in 1:12-28. The verb *epetimhsen* ('to rebuke') in 4:39 reminds the reader of the use of the same term in 1:25. Also the verb *upakouēi autw̄* ('to obey him') is like the verb *upakousin autw̄* in 1:27.⁶⁵¹ Based on these observations, the calming of the storm is described in

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

⁶⁴⁷ Guelich, *Mark*, 267

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

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

⁶⁵⁰ Witherington III, *Mark*, 176.

⁶⁵¹ Edwards, *Mark*, 150.

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

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

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

⁶⁵⁴ Hamilton "Rebuking the Sea," 230.

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

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

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

⁶⁵⁸ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 194.

⁶⁵⁹ Kee, "Terminology," 244.

wilderness, and concludes with the triumph of the cross.⁶⁶⁰

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

The Markan Jesus is also similar to the OT God in other ways. Like God in Psalm 46, he is Israel's helper, who is in their midst and works wonders through his word and, because of whom, they should not fear though the waters of the sea be troubled. The event of the Exodus is sometimes described with similar imagery: "He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry" (Ps. 106: 9; cf. Ps. 114:3-4).⁶⁶³ Moreover, Zech 2:10-3:2 speaks of God dwelling in the midst of his people, rousing himself, and rebuking Satan, all of which correspond to elements in Mark 4:35-41.⁶⁶⁴

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

⁶⁶⁰ John, *The Meaning in the Miracles*, 73.

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

⁶⁶² France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 224-45.

⁶⁶³ Juel, *Mark*, 78.

⁶⁶⁴ Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells*, 25, 52, 177.

⁶⁶⁵ Witherington III, *Mark*, 176.

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

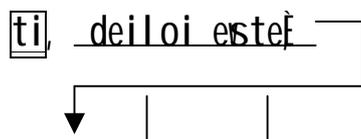
over the sea, the place of chaos, and evil, as God does. God was uniquely at work in Jesus. The description of the stilling of the storm in the language of exorcism is intended not simply to demonstrate that Jesus possesses power over nature as well as over illness and demon possession. Its ultimate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

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

3.1.2.3 Fear and Unbelief

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

The syntactic structure of this verse is as follows:



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

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

ecete pistinē

oupw

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

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

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

⁶⁶⁸ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 166.

⁶⁶⁹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 225.

⁶⁷⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 339.

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

⁶⁷² Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 71.

⁶⁷³ Guelich, *Mark*, 267.

⁶⁷⁴ Lane, *Mark*, 177; Cranfield, *Mark*, 175; Garland, *Mark*, 193.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 276.

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

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

In 4:13⁶⁸⁰ Mark begins 'the progressive double-step question' that shows a serious lack in the disciples' response to Jesus' teachings and deeds. In Mark's narrative, Jesus sometimes hurls 'the progressive double-step question,' revealing his surprise and irritation at the disciples' failures (cf. 4:40; 7:18; 8:17, 21). This phraseology has a pedagogical purpose, namely, to call the disciples to attention. Still, there is an undertone of warning to them. Even though they are

⁶⁷⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 193.

⁶⁷⁷ Neiryck, *Duality in Mark*, 54-63, 125-26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁸¹ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 310-11.

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

⁶⁸³ Hooker, *Mark*, 140.

⁶⁸⁴ Guelich, *Mark*, 268.

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

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

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

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

⁶⁸⁷ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 109

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

⁶⁸⁹ R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 273.

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

⁶⁹¹ Edwards, *Mark*, 152.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁹² France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 225.

⁶⁹³ Gnllka, *Markus*, 1:197.

⁶⁹⁴ Garland, *Mark*, 193.

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁹⁸ Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 133.

⁶⁹⁹ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 110.

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

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

3.1.3 The Depiction of Unbelief

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

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

⁷⁰⁰ Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 88.

⁷⁰¹ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 111.

⁷⁰² Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 270.

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

⁷⁰⁴ Gnilka, *Markus*, 197.

⁷⁰⁵ Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 270.

⁷⁰⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

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

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

⁷⁰⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 216-17.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷¹¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 218.

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

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

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

3.1.4 Summary

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

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

⁷¹⁴ Kelber, *Kingdom*, 47-50.

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

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

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

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

The tranquillity of Jesus' sleep in the face of storm (4:38a), the sovereignty with which he rebuked the chaotic and demonic powers of nature (4:39 cf. Ps 107:28-29) and the wonder caused in the disciples (4:41a; cf. John 1:10, 16) testify to the reader of one greater than Jonah, an epiphany of God's power and presence in Jesus and his action. Jesus commands the sea to be calm, in addition to rebuking the wind. The response to Jesus' commands was immediate—the wind dropped and a great calm came over the sea. What Jesus in his ability to transform a furious storm into a calm with just a word reveals is that he has power to do what only the God who created the sea can do (see Job 26:12). Jesus has power over the sea, the place of chaos and evil, as God does. God was uniquely at work in Jesus. Nevertheless, the disciples did not understand that they had met with one who has divine power, so they had to show their fear⁷¹⁸ as a proof of faithlessness (4:40).

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷¹⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 111.

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

⁷²¹ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 267.

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

3.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

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

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

⁷²² Rhoads and Michie, *Mark As Story*, 124.

⁷²³ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 231.

⁷²⁴ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark As Story*, 125.

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

⁷²⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 362.

⁷²⁷ Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 398.

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

Perhaps, the important question regarding the composition of this episode is why it is placed here in Mark's narrative. The answer to this question puts in the observation made earlier that almost the entire of 8:27-10:52 is interested in the two themes of the coming passion of Jesus and the disciples' failure to understand Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.⁷²⁸ This is why the disciples are prominent in the episode; they are quarrelling with scribes in 9:14-15, are described as unable to cast out a demon in v. 18, are evaluated as an "unbelieving generation," and are instructed as to the cause of their failure to exorcise in 9:28-29.⁷²⁹ Moreover, he uses the minor character (the petitioner's faith) as an exhortative tool in order to urge the disciples to recognize their own unbelief (cf. 9:20-24). The disciples' unbelief means that they are concerned with a specific miracle like exorcism, rather than accepting Jesus' passion and death.

The sequential link between this miracle story and the Transfiguration story⁷³⁰ is kept by portraying Mark 9:14-29 as an event which occurred just after they came down from the mountain (9:9) and rejoined the other disciples (9:14).⁷³¹ Through

⁷²⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 147.

⁷²⁹ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 48.

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

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

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

3.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief

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

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

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

⁷³³ Witherington III, *Mark*, 433.

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

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

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

3.2.2.1 Patron-Client

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

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

⁷³⁵ Lane, *Mark*, 331.

⁷³⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 331.

⁷³⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 363.

⁷³⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 332.

⁷³⁹ Malina, *The New Testament World*, 80.

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

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

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

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

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

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

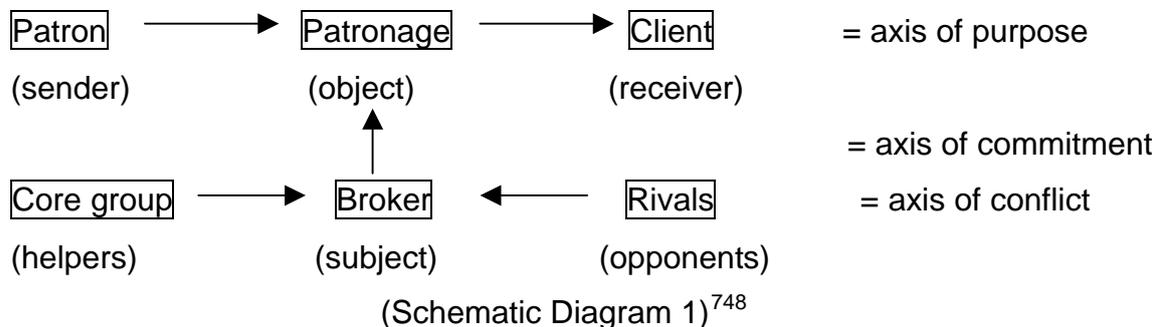
⁷⁴² S. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 36. "Patron-client relationship took on many shapes, ranging from long-term, even hereditary, responsibilities toward each other and each other's families, to groups of people who organized themselves in solidarity around certain powerful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

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

⁷⁴⁴ Malina, "Patron and Client," 8-9.

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

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



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

⁷⁴⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 236

⁷⁴⁶ Malina, "Patron and Client," 12.

⁷⁴⁷ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 236-37.

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

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

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

3.2.2.2 Unbelieving Generation

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

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

⁷⁵⁰ Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relation," 261.

⁷⁵¹ Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relation," 261.

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

⁷⁵³ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 139.

identification with the unbelieving generation.

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

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

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

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

⁷⁵⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 50,

⁷⁵⁵ Lane, *Mark*, 333.

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

⁷⁵⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 365.

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

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

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

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

⁷⁵⁹ “A perverse generation (LXX: *genea*), children in whom there is no faithfulness (*pisti*).

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

⁷⁶¹ Lane, *Mark*, 332.

3.2.2.3 The Double Rhetorical Question

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

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus hurls rhetorical questions in pairs, revealing his surprise and aggravation at the disciples' unbelief.⁷⁶⁴ The two preliminary questions in 4:13 indicate the fact that the disciples are duplicating the unbelieving incomprehension of the outsiders: "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" In 8:17, Jesus uses the double question in order to indicate the disciples' spiritual ignorance: "Do you still not understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (cf. 7:18). Schenke thinks that the "how long" formulation may by intention, be allusion to the same phrase in Isaiah 6:11, to recall the account of the 'outsiders' in Mark 4:11 which draws on Isaiah 6:10.⁷⁶⁵ Indeed the language in 9:19 as a whole calls to mind a complex of negative associations from the OT which are here attributed here, by implication, to the shamed disciples (Deut 32:5, 20; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2; Isa 65:2).⁷⁶⁶

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

⁷⁶² Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 51.

⁷⁶³ Lane, *Mark*, 332.

⁷⁶⁴ Rhoads and Michie, *Mark, as Story*, 49.

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

⁷⁶⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 221.

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

3.2.2.4 A Stage of Reciprocal Question and Answer

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

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

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

⁷⁶⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

⁷⁶⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

⁷⁶⁹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 364.

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

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

interpretative commentary on the charge of faithlessness in 9:19.⁷⁷² In Mark 11:23f, faith and prayer form a tight unity.⁷⁷³ Mark understands prayer as the source of faith's power and the expression of its presence. It is not a particular technique, but the end of all technique (cf. 12:40), since prayer is simply the verbal expression of faith, which looks wholly to God for the release of his power.⁷⁷⁴ Therefore, in the exorcism scene, it is not simply a matter of whether Jesus' words are framed as a petition, but whether Mark conceives of his authority to act as being received and exercised in prayerful dependence on God (cf. 1:35; 6:41, 46; 14:32).⁷⁷⁵

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁷³ Marshall, *Faith as Theme*, 222,

⁷⁷⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 222.

⁷⁷⁵ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 222.

⁷⁷⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 358.

⁷⁷⁷ See, Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 214-15.

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

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

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

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

⁷⁷⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 357.

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

⁷⁸¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁸³ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

⁷⁸⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 367; Garland, *Mark*, 355.

⁷⁸⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 367.

⁷⁸⁶ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 140.

⁷⁸⁷ Witherington III, *Mark*, 267; Hooker, *Mark*, 224.

⁷⁸⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 52.

⁷⁸⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 120.

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

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

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

⁷⁹¹ Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 185.

⁷⁹² Achtemeier, "Miracles and Historical Jesus," 480; Gould, *Mark*, 169.

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

⁷⁹⁴ Swete, *Mark*, 200; Lane, *Mark*, 334.

⁷⁹⁵ Taylor, *Mark*, 161; Johnson, *Mark*, 400.

⁷⁹⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 121.

⁷⁹⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 121.

⁷⁹⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 368.

⁷⁹⁹ Porter, *Idioms of the Greek*, 53, 225.

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

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

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

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

3.2.3 Summary

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

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

⁸⁰¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

⁸⁰² Hurtado, *Mark*, 148.

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

⁸⁰⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 223.

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

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

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

3.3 HARDNESS OF HEART AMONG THE DISCIPLES

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

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

disciples in order to understand the function of the language.

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

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

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

⁸⁰⁶ Kelber, "The Blindness of the Disciples," 30-31.

⁸⁰⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 268.

⁸⁰⁸ In 4:35-41 these concepts are associated with unbelief.

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

⁸¹⁰ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises Conflict in Mark*, 233.

⁸¹¹ Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 155.

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

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

3.3.1.1 Literary Composition and Structure

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

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

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

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

⁸¹⁵ Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 107.

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

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

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

⁸¹⁷ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 129.

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

⁸¹⁹ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 107.

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

⁸²¹ Hooker, *Mark*, 169; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 430.

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

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

⁸²⁴ Hurtado, *Mark*, 103.

3.3.1.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief and 'Hardness of Heart'

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

Narrative Settings Based on Unbelief

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

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

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

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

⁸²⁷ Gundry, *Mark*, 335.

⁸²⁸ Gundry, *Mark*, 335.

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

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

Jesus' Divine Action and The Disciples' Incomprehension

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

⁸³⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 423, 427.

⁸³¹ Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 107.

⁸³² Woodroof, "The Church as Boat in Mark," 242.

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

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

⁸³⁵ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 423.

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

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

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

⁸³⁶ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 350.

⁸³⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 90-91.

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

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

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

the sea, and was going to pass by them.⁸⁴¹ In addition, both these are followed by proclamations of identity (Ex. 34:6; Mark 6:50). Thus, after Jesus comes, walking on the sea, he intends to show himself fully to the disciples in his salvific⁸⁴² and epiphanic action.

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

ותהיי) תי כמלח באוניה בזעף ימים
[I am] as a sailor in a ship amid furious seas;⁸⁴⁴
גליהם וכול משבריהם עלי המו
their waves and all their billows roar against me.

רוח ערעיים (לאין) דממה להשיב נפש
[There is no] calm in the whirlwind that I may restore my soul,
ואין נתיבת לישר דרך על פני מים
no path that I may straighten my way on the face of the waters.
ויה תהום לאנחתי ונפשי תגיע עד שערי מות

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

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

⁸⁴¹ Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 69.

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

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

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

⁸⁴⁵ The Markan Jesus removes the obstacles of the disciples' voyage.

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

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

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

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

⁸⁴⁷ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 221; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 236.

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

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

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

⁸⁵¹ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 236; Hurtado, *Mark*, 103; Hooker, *Mark*, 170.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁵⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 273.

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

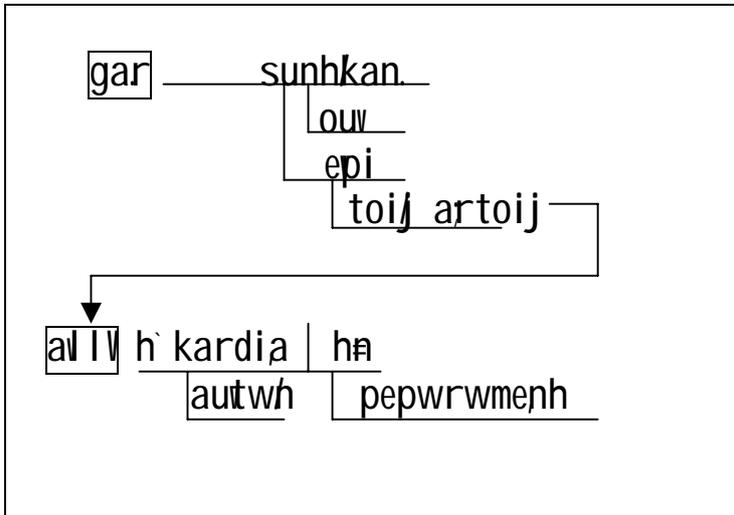
⁸⁵⁶ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 351.

⁸⁵⁷ Fleddermann, "Passed by Them," 394.

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

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

The Syntactic Analysis of 6:52



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

Sheffield Academy, 1981), 232.

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, Magness has argued that in 6:52 Mark may intend to connect the misunderstanding with the failure of perceiving during the storm, rather than a failure to appreciate the miracle and reverence the miracle-worker after the storm.⁸⁶⁴ However, if 6:52 is an explanation for what he has recounted in the whole episode, it may contain even the amazement of the disciples in 6:51. Thus, we can believe that the amazement in v. 51 is an expression of unbelief when understood in connection with v. 52.⁸⁶⁵ Therefore, I would conclude that Mark 6:52 gives a reason of the lack of recognition regarding Jesus and failure to act in faith during the storm, and after the storm. Mark comments that the disciples' unfaithful response in the whole pericope is, *because* (γαρ) they have not understood about the bread; their hearts are hardened.

Failure to perceive the Shepherd Messiah

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

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

⁸⁶³ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 133.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁶⁸ Guelich, *Mark*, 344.

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

⁸⁷⁰ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, 179.

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

is no indication in 6:30-44 that they do not comprehend Jesus' identity in the feeding action, Mark describes explicitly their lack of understanding and hardened hearts in a somewhat conspicuous parenthetical comment in 6:52.⁸⁷² Thus, if they had recognized the truth, they might have understood Jesus' identity and acted in faith when he revealed himself walking on the sea. But because the hearts of the disciples are hardened, they did not perceive the importance of the feeding (6:52), and Jesus' identity. Thus, they fail to exercise faith.

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

The Disciples' Hardness of Heart

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

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

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

⁸⁷³ Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 105.

⁸⁷⁴ Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 157.

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

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

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

⁸⁷⁵ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 434.

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

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

⁸⁷⁸ Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 331.

⁸⁷⁹ Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples," 158-59.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁸² Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciple in Mark," 263.

⁸⁸³ Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*, 134.

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

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

After the two miracles of the feeding, Jesus returns by boat, with his disciples, to Dalmanutha (8:10). There the Pharisees seek a sign (8:11-12), despite what Jesus has shown them in several miracles, to which they are seemingly oblivious. Jesus and the disciples depart by boat to the district of Dalmanutha (8:10). In the boat, the disciples only have a single loaf of bread with them (8:14). When Jesus warns them against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15), they misunderstand; they think that he is referring to the fact that they only have a single loaf of bread with them (8:16). They failed to exercise faith, and were worried about the fact that they had insufficient bread because they did not perceive the significance of the second feeding miracle in 8:1-10.⁸⁸⁵ There follows a conversation in which Jesus exposes the disciples' incomprehension and unbelief with a series, of rhetorical questions (8:17-20). Finally, Jesus asks whether this dialogue has left them still blind (8:21). As a result, this passage functions as the climax of the boat scenes illustrating the theme of the disciples' unbelief, which is associated with the language 'hardness of heart.'

3.3.2.1 Literary Composition and Structure

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

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

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

⁸⁸⁷ Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 100-105.

⁸⁸⁸ Garland, *Mark*, 309.

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

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

Kai - Structure

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

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

⁸⁸⁹ Hooker, *St Mark*, 193.

⁸⁹⁰ Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 121.

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

⁸⁹² France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 314.

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

⁸⁹⁴ Countryman, “How many Baskets Full?” 645-46.

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

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

3.3.2.2 Exegetical Perspective on Unbelief and 'Hardness of Heart'

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

The Leaven of the Pharisees and The Leaven of Herod.

⁸⁹⁵ Countryman, "How many Baskets Full?" 645-46.

⁸⁹⁶ Quesnell, *Mind of Mark*, 108-10.

⁸⁹⁷ Countryman, "How Many Baskets Full," 652.

Jesus' saying in 8:15 warns the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.⁸⁹⁸ Leaven is used metaphorically in a number of ways. Leaven was to be maintained by keeping a small portion of leavened dough on hand in the household so that, when placed in a new batch of dough, it would leaven the whole for baking (e.g., Matt 13:33).⁸⁹⁹ Its property of gradually pervading the dough serves as a negative here (e.g. 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:9) though more often as a positive (e.g. Matt 13:33; Luke 13:31).⁹⁰⁰ Leaven was a common metaphor in various contexts for a corrupting element (Matt 16:6, 11, 12; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6, 7, 8⁹⁰¹; Gal 5:9; in Greco-Roman authors such as Plutarch, *Quaestiones Romanae* 109, and Persius, *Satires*, 1. 24).⁹⁰² Its main metaphorical force in the NT seems to be in terms of powerful growth and influence. Here Jesus seems to be referring to the subtle corrupting influence of the Pharisees and Herod.⁹⁰³ Jesus indicates that the influence of the Jewish religious leaders' unbelief, which is caused by their hardened hearts, penetrates in the lives of the disciples.

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

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

⁸⁹⁹ Hurtado, *Mark*, 131-32.

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

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

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

⁹⁰³ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 237.

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

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

the leaven of the Pharisees in Mark?⁹⁰⁶ Mark does not give an exact answer to the question. However, we are able to assume its meaning through examination of its wider and narrow contexts. In Mark's Gospel, the Pharisees are described not primarily as false teachers, but as those who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and has the power to speak and act for God (e.g., 2:1-3:6; 3:22-30).⁹⁰⁷ When the Pharisees and Herodians witnessed the healing of the man with the withered arm, they refused to believe Jesus' identity in the miracle, but rather to plot against Jesus' life (3:6).⁹⁰⁸ The same remarkable combination takes place in 12:13, where again Pharisees and Herodians join forces in trying to trick Jesus. The unbelieving attitude of Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus is therefore consistently one of hostility.⁹⁰⁹ Moreover, the warning against the 'leaven' reflects back on the Pharisees' request for a sign in 8:11-13, which in turn must be read in the light of the feeding miracle in 8:1-10.⁹¹⁰ The Pharisees had asked for a "sign from heaven" (8:12b) despite having experienced the feeding miracle (8:1-9). They had failed to recognize Jesus' ministry, but sought a confirming indication from God to validate his ministry.⁹¹¹ They witness miracles but remain in an unbelieving position. Jesus rejects their demand: "No sign will be given to this generation" (8:12).

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

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

⁹⁰⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 126; cf. Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 122.

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

⁹⁰⁹ Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

⁹¹⁰ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 131-32.

⁹¹¹ Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423.

⁹¹² Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 122.

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

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

On this interpretation, the ‘leaven’ of the Pharisees and of Herod (zumhj twh Farisaiwn kai. thj zumhj -Hrwpdou) represent their refusal to accept the messianic implication of Jesus’ mighty actions, which have been clearly demonstrated in 8:11-13.⁹¹⁶ The applicability of this image to our passage is confirmed by the continuation, in which the ‘leaven’ is associated with a hardened heart (8:17).⁹¹⁷ Accordingly, Jesus warns his disciples against the ‘leaven’ of both since it leads to unbelief in his deeds and a concomitant failure to recognize who he really is.⁹¹⁸ In 8:15, the disciples are being warned lest they follow along the

⁹¹³ Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26*, 423.

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

⁹¹⁵ Petersen, “The Composition of Mark,” 209-10.

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

⁹¹⁷ Bennett, “The Herodians of Mark’s Gospel,” 234.

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

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

The Disciples' Failure to Understand

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

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

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

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

⁹¹⁹ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 70.

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

⁹²¹ Hurtado, *Mark*, 126.

⁹²² Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 227.

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

⁹²⁴ Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 147.

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

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

This rebuke is the harshest comment on the disciples' hardness of heart thus far in Mark (cf. 4:13, 40; 6:52), and portrays them in language borrowed from the OT where rebellious Israel is condemned for disobedience of God's command and unwillingness to hear his prophetic word (e.g., Ps 95:8; Isaiah 63:17).⁹²⁷ The verb *dialogizomai* ('to discuss' or 'argue') is used of Jesus' opponents in 2:6 and 8, where it is translated by 'to think,' and in 11:31.⁹²⁸ In Mark 9:33, it is used of the disciples when they are again clearly failing to understand Jesus. This demonstrates that Mark has duplicated it here deliberately to indicate the kind of discussion, which stems from unbelief.⁹²⁹

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

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

⁹²⁶ Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

⁹²⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 126; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 511.

⁹²⁸ Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

⁹²⁹ Hooker, *St Mark*, 195.

⁹³⁰ Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples," 36.

In Jeremiah 5:21-23, the prophet is told to declare that blindness and deafness have prevented Israel from understanding her dangerous state. This kind of language is related to her rejection (v. 23) in Isa. 6:10 and to the idols in Ps. 115:4-7.⁹³⁶ Here, the language points out that Israel had become like the idols they worship, that is, senseless. Due to hardness of heart, Israel does not see the supervision of God's almighty power in nature (v. 22), or hear the voice of God in his words.⁹³⁷ Because of a 'stubborn and rebellious heart' Israel had turned aside and gone astray that is to say, Israel had rejected God's dominion (v. 23).

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

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

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

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

⁹³⁷ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 44-45.

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

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

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

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

⁹⁴² Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 225.

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

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

Spiritual Perceptiveness

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

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

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

⁹⁴³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513.

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

⁹⁴⁵ Hurtado, *Mark*, 126-27.

⁹⁴⁶ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 425.

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

To stress the importance of the spiritual perceptiveness, in 8:14-21 Mark repeatedly uses the key words of $\beta\lambda\epsilon\pi\omega$ (“to see”), $\alpha\kappa\omicron\upsilon\omega$ (“to hear”), and $\nu\omicron\epsilon\omega$ (“to understand”) appeared in 4:12.⁹⁵⁰ According to Geddert, every usage of these terms in Mark’s Gospel appears intended by the author to contribute to a carefully devised call for discernment concerning realities, which lie beyond the observations of the physical sense data.⁹⁵¹ The people can see and hear Jesus’ words and deeds, but if their hearts are hardened they cannot understand them. The disciples saw the miracles of the feeding, just as they had heard Jesus’ teachings and explanation in 4:1-34, and as they had seen his wondrous miracles in the first two boat episodes, but they did not understand anything, because their hearts were hardened.⁹⁵²

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

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

⁹⁴⁸ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 512.

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

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

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

⁹⁵² Petersen, “The Composition of Mark,” 209.

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵³ Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 212.

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 212

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

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

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

⁹⁵⁹ Lane, *Mark*, 282-83.

⁹⁶⁰ Countryman, “How many Baskets Full?” 654.

⁹⁶¹ Cf. Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in Mark,” 259-81.

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

⁹⁶³ Donahue, “Windows and Mirrors,” 12.

⁹⁶⁴ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 317.

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

Failure to Understand the Feeding Miracle

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

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

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

⁹⁶⁵ O. Michel, "mimnhskomai, ktI," *TDNT*, IV 675.

⁹⁶⁶ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513.

⁹⁶⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 513-14.

⁹⁶⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.

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

⁹⁷⁰ Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.

understand the messianic secret hidden in the miracles of the feeding. If Jesus could feed vast crowds on two separate occasions, the disciples ought not to be concerned as to whether or not they have bread.⁹⁷¹ These questions of the feeding remind the readers of the narrator's comment in 6:52, "they had not understood about the loaves; but their hearts were hardened." Scholars like Quesnell and Beavis have argued the similarity in terminology and theme between Mark 8:17-21 and 6:45-52.⁹⁷² At Mark 8:17-21, Jesus, being with the disciples in the boat, indicates their hardness of heart. They do not recognize the messianic implication of Jesus' mighty deed, which has been clearly illustrated in the second feeding miracle. Thus, they cannot understand Jesus' warning about the yeast of the Pharisees. Then, at 6:45-52, the disciples are with Jesus in the boat. The disciples' unbelieving attitude at Jesus' walking on the sea at 6:52 takes place after the first miracle of the feeding (6:34-44). As a result, the disciples' hardness should be understood in the light of the hidden meaning of the miracles of the feeding.⁹⁷³

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

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

⁹⁷¹ Countryman, "How Many Baskets," 645.

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

⁹⁷³ Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters," 335.

⁹⁷⁴ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 231.

⁹⁷⁵ Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 230.

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁷⁶ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 337.

⁹⁷⁷ Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark," 147-48.

⁹⁷⁸ Hurtado, *Mark*, 128.

⁹⁷⁹ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

⁹⁸⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

⁹⁸¹ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 153.

⁹⁸² Cf. Gibson, "The Rebuke of the Disciples," 32.

⁹⁸³ Garland, *Mark*, 312.

⁹⁸⁴ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 69.

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

3.3.3 The Removal of Hardness of Heart (Blindness)

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

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

3.3.3.1 The Disciples as Fishers of Men

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

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

⁹⁸⁶ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

⁹⁸⁷ Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 243-44.

⁹⁸⁸ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

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

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

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

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

3.3.3.2 The Disciples’ Preaching and Suffering in the Future

Eerdmans, 1998), 143.

⁹⁹⁰ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 51.

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

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

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

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

⁹⁹⁵ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 185.

⁹⁹⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 69.

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

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

⁹⁹⁷ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 141.

⁹⁹⁸ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 287.

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

¹⁰⁰⁰ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 309.

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

¹⁰⁰² Garland, *Mark*, 493.

¹⁰⁰³ Hurtado, *Mark*, 23.

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

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

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

Jesus' Promise in Mark 14:27-28

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

¹⁰⁰⁴ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Kingsbury, *Christology of Mark's Gospel*, 133-37.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 141-42.

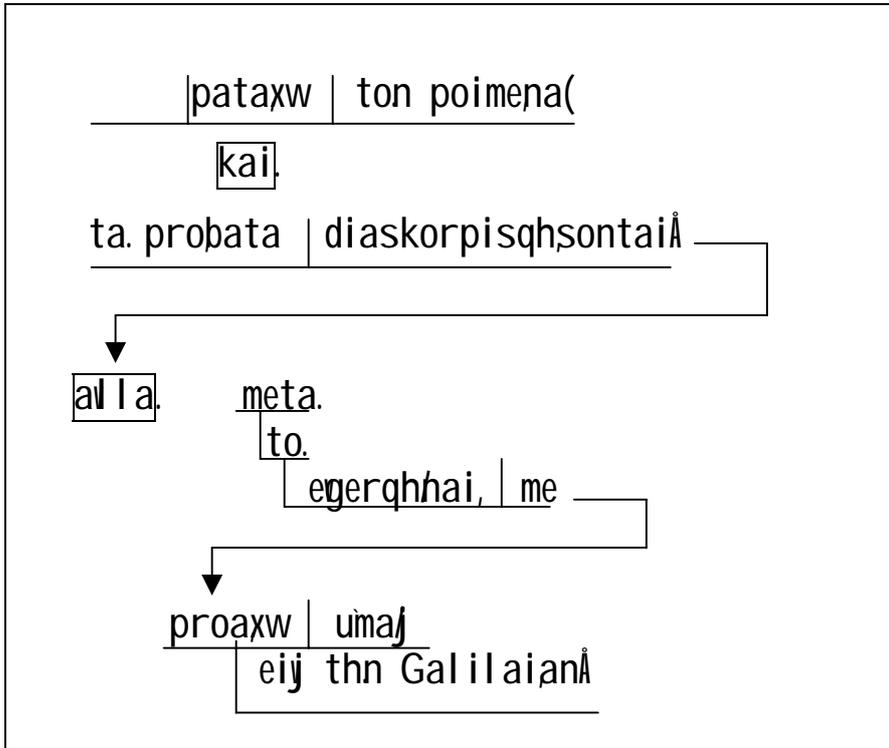
¹⁰⁰⁷ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 142.

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

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

¹⁰¹⁰ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 188.

Syntactic Structure of Mark 14:27b-28



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

¹⁰¹¹ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

¹⁰¹² Hooker, *St Mark*, 345.

¹⁰¹³ Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 161.

¹⁰¹⁴ Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 157-59.

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

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

When their shepherd is stricken, the sheep will be scattered (kai. ta. probata diaskorpisqhsontai). Mark reverses the order of verb and noun (cf. LXX kai. diaskorpisqhsontai ta. probata [Qumran]) to focus attention on the sheep, who will be scattered without their shepherd.¹⁰¹⁷ In a Jewish context, the scattering of the sheep is a temporary undoing of the messianic task of gathering the sheep, the lost, and the exiles of Israel (cf. Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Ezek 34:8, 12, 15; Zech 10:2; Bar 4:26; *Pss. Sol.* 17:4, 21, 26-28; *Tg. Isa* 6:13; 8:18; 35:6; 53:8: “From chastisements and punishments he [the Messiah] will bring our exiles near”; *Tg. Hos* 14:8: “They will be gather from among their exiles, they shall dwell in the shade of their Messiah”; *Tg. Mic* 5:1-3).¹⁰¹⁸ The scattering of the sheep in Mark 14:27 and gathering the scattered is related with the striking of the shepherd and the denial of Peter. The scattering of the sheep must therefore refer to the unbelieving flight of the disciples in Mark 14:50-52 and the unbelieving denial of Peter in Mark 14:66-72.¹⁰¹⁹

The quoted passage goes on to prophesy the restoration of a remnant, amounting to one-third of the ‘sheep’ that have been scattered. Significantly, Zechariah informs us that this remnant will be restored (Zech 13:9). Although Mark cites only Zechariah 13:7, and not vv.8-9, he seems to assume the full passage¹⁰²⁰ because the promise of restoration in the Zechariah passage seems to underlie Jesus’ promise in Mark 14:28: “But after I have risen, I will go before you *in Galilee*” (NIV).¹⁰²¹ According to van Iersel, the phrase *eij thn Galilajan*

(Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 31.

¹⁰¹⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 511.

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

¹⁰¹⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 401.

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

¹⁰²⁰ Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel*, 144.

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

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

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

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

¹⁰²³ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 401.

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

¹⁰²⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 402.

¹⁰²⁶ Gundry, *Mark*, 845: Jesus will arrive before they do.

¹⁰²⁷ Garland, *Mark*, 530.

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

¹⁰²⁹ This word denotes that the situation of the disciples will be changed after the resurrection.

¹⁰³⁰ Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark,” 151.

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

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

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

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

¹⁰³¹ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 377.

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

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

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

¹⁰³⁵ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

¹⁰³⁶ Cf. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 259.

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

Jesus' Promise in Mark 16:7

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

¹⁰³⁷ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 143.

¹⁰³⁸ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 114.

¹⁰³⁹ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 245.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 144.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁴⁴ Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 212.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, 211.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 40.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Best, *Following Jesus*, 201.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Garland, *Mark*, 615.

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

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

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

¹⁰⁴⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 620

¹⁰⁵⁰ Painter, *Mark*, 256.

¹⁰⁵¹ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 538.

¹⁰⁵² Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 258-59.

¹⁰⁵³ Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure," 286-87.

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

¹⁰⁵⁵ Petersen, "When is the End not an End?" 157.

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 217.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Lincoln, "The Promise and Failure," 292.

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

¹⁰⁶¹ Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 217.

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

spiritual perceptiveness.¹⁰⁶³

3.3.4 Summary

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

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

¹⁰⁶³ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 113-14.

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

3.4 CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

In Mark's Gospel, the disciples' unbelief does not mean the intentional rejection of Jesus, like the opponents' unbelief, but it means their persistent inability to understand who Jesus is and what he is about (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:14-29 etc.). Nevertheless, the disciples are in danger of being the outsiders whose hearts were hardened, having eyes but not seeing, and ears but not hearing (8:17-18; cf. 3:5; 4:11-12).

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

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

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

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

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.

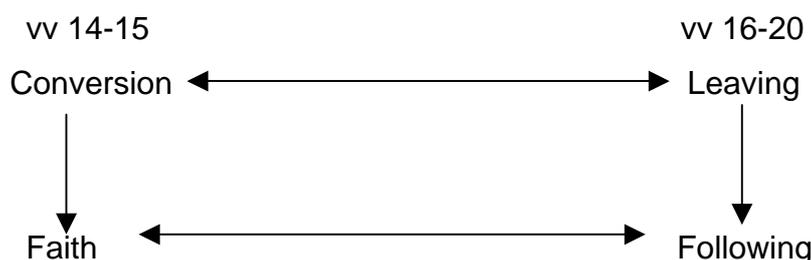
When the Markan reader is confronted with the portrayal of the disciples' unbelief, the effect of this portrayal upon the reader is two-fold. Firstly, their unbelieving story causes the reader to distance himself (herself) from the disciples' faithlessness, that is, to choose not to identify with the disciples at that particular regard.¹⁰⁶⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶⁶

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

¹⁰⁶⁶ 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:¹⁰⁶⁷



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.¹⁰⁶⁸

Mark considers discipleship-faith as a condition pregnant with practical consequences.¹⁰⁶⁹ 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.¹⁰⁷⁰

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

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

¹⁰⁶⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 135.

¹⁰⁶⁸ 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.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 137.

¹⁰⁷⁰ 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).¹⁰⁷¹ 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).¹⁰⁷²

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).¹⁰⁷³

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'

¹⁰⁷¹ 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.

¹⁰⁷² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 138.

¹⁰⁷³ 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.¹⁰⁷⁴

At this point, Mark portrays some individuals (like the haemorrhaging woman, Jairus, the Syrophenician 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.¹⁰⁷⁵ 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).¹⁰⁷⁶ 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).¹⁰⁷⁷ 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 Syrophenician woman, the deaf man) begin to serve as foils for the disciples who fail to trust in Jesus.¹⁰⁷⁸ Their response to Jesus is portrayed as a contrast to the response of the disciples, since these

¹⁰⁷⁴ William, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 89.

¹⁰⁷⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Cf. Malbon, "Echoes and Foreshadowing," 214.

¹⁰⁷⁷ See. Peterson, "Composition," 206-207.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 36-37

minor characters exemplify faith and understanding.¹⁰⁷⁹

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).¹⁰⁸⁰

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.¹⁰⁸¹ 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

¹⁰⁷⁹ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 109.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Williams, *Other Follower of Jesus*, 110.

¹⁰⁸¹ 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.¹⁰⁸²

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).¹⁰⁸³ 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.¹⁰⁸⁴ They become frightened after they learn of the miracle, and, like the disciples, their fear is directed at Jesus.¹⁰⁸⁵ 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).¹⁰⁸⁶ 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.¹⁰⁸⁷ 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

¹⁰⁸² Guelich, *Mark*, 282; Lane, *Mark*, 186.

¹⁰⁸³ Guelich, *Mark*, 281; Hurtado, *Mark*, 69.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 110.

¹⁰⁸⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁸⁶ 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.

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

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

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 5:21-43.¹⁰⁹⁰ 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.¹⁰⁹¹ 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.¹⁰⁹² Mark uses intercalation, at least in part, to elucidate the meaning and significance of two stories that have been

¹⁰⁸⁸ Peterson, "Composition," 213-14.

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

¹⁰⁹⁰ 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.

¹⁰⁹¹ 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.

¹⁰⁹² Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 113.

brought together.¹⁰⁹³ 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.¹⁰⁹⁴ 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,¹⁰⁹⁵ 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.¹⁰⁹⁶

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).¹⁰⁹⁷ She suffers much under many physicians,¹⁰⁹⁸ spends all she has, and does not

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

¹⁰⁹⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 104.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Derrett, "Mark Technique," 476.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 115.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 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).

¹⁰⁹⁸ 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."¹⁰⁹⁹

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.¹¹⁰⁰

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/ ocIw/ opisqen)

5:27c "and touched his cloak." (h/yato tou/ imatiou autou%)¹¹⁰¹

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 5:34.¹¹⁰² 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."¹¹⁰³ Jesus regards her austere faith and unlimited confidence in Jesus' healing power to be effective just by

she went through under various treatments by various physicians.

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

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

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

¹¹⁰² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 105.

¹¹⁰³ Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 134.

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

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."¹¹⁰⁶ 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.¹¹⁰⁷

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.¹¹⁰⁸

"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.¹¹⁰⁹ In addition, this proclamation emphasizes the individualism faith. "Faith is no communal system

¹¹⁰⁴ Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 134.

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

¹¹⁰⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 106.

¹¹⁰⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 106.

¹¹⁰⁸ 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.

¹¹⁰⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 108.

of belief or practice, but an immediate personal involvement: your (SOU) faith.”¹¹¹⁰

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’ (σεσωκεν) 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).¹¹¹¹ 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.¹¹¹²

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).¹¹¹³ He is clearly a man of

¹¹¹⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 107.

¹¹¹¹ Werner Foerster and G. Fohrer, “swζw,” *TDNT* 7 (1964), 400-20.

¹¹¹² Cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 299.

¹¹¹³ 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.¹¹¹⁴

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.¹¹¹⁵ 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.¹¹¹⁶ 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."¹¹¹⁷

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

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.

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

¹¹¹⁵ Marshall, *Faith*, 95; Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 114.

¹¹¹⁶ Marshall, *Faith*, 97.

¹¹¹⁷ Marshall, *Faith*, 97.

Jesus' ability to confront a crisis situation even in raising the dead girl.¹¹¹⁸ 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.¹¹¹⁹ 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.¹¹²⁰

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 πιστεue* is primarily a call for continuing trust in Jesus more than for a particular belief in his capacity to raise the dead."¹¹²¹

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

¹¹¹⁸ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 196.

¹¹¹⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 97.

¹¹²⁰ Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, 76.

¹¹²¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 97.

his introduction of both Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman. The Syrophoenician 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).¹¹²²

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.¹¹²³ Elsewhere in Mark's Gospel, Jesus often ascribes healing to people's persistent faith (2:5; 5:34; 10:52).¹¹²⁴

She accepts Jesus' assertion that the children are to be fed first before the dogs get anything.¹¹²⁵ 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).¹¹²⁶ 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.¹¹²⁷ Some stated contempt for unclean, idolatrous Gentiles by the use of the denigrating term 'dog'.¹¹²⁸

The Syrophoenician 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

¹¹²² 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).

¹¹²³ 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.

¹¹²⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 468.

¹¹²⁵ Garland, *Mark*, 288.

¹¹²⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 288.

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

¹¹²⁸ Garland, *Mark*, 289.

daughter.¹¹²⁹ She indicates that the dog under the table can eat what the children waste.¹¹³⁰ The woman's answer demonstrates her more adequate comprehension more about the bread that Jesus provides than even the disciples have.¹¹³¹ 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.¹¹³² 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.¹¹³³

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).¹¹³⁴

¹¹²⁹ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 120.

¹¹³⁰ "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).

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

¹¹³² Garland, *Mark*, 289.

¹¹³³ Garland, *Mark*, 289.

¹¹³⁴ 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.¹¹³⁵ With this structure, Mark intends

¹¹³⁵ 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 in his ears, symbolic of opening them.¹¹³⁶ Next, he spits and touches his tongue, symbolic of loosening his tongue.¹¹³⁷ 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.¹¹³⁸ 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."¹¹³⁹ 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).¹¹⁴⁰

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

¹¹³⁶ 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.

¹¹³⁷ 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.

¹¹³⁸ Garland, *Mark*, 299.

¹¹³⁹ Cranfield, *Mark*, 252.

¹¹⁴⁰ 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.¹¹⁴¹ 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.'¹¹⁴²

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).¹¹⁴³ 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.¹¹⁴⁴ 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.¹¹⁴⁵ 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.¹¹⁴⁶ 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).¹¹⁴⁷ Those who do not hear are those who do not perceive.

¹¹⁴¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 478.

¹¹⁴² Marcus, *Mark*, 478.

¹¹⁴³ Garland, *Mark*, 299.

¹¹⁴⁴ Marcus, *Mark*, 479.

¹¹⁴⁵ Anderson, *Mark*, 192; Hooker, *Mark*, 186.

¹¹⁴⁶ Williams, *Other Follower of Jesus*, 123.

¹¹⁴⁷ 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.¹¹⁴⁸ 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.'¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴⁸ Cf. Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," 399-400.

¹¹⁴⁹ 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)¹¹⁵⁰

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).¹¹⁵¹ 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.¹¹⁵² 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.¹¹⁵³ 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.¹¹⁵⁴ To open the eyes of the disciples and make them see is the overriding purpose of the journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem.¹¹⁵⁵ 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

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

¹¹⁵⁰ Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 43.

¹¹⁵¹ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 290.

¹¹⁵² Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 43.

¹¹⁵³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 515.

¹¹⁵⁴ Guelich, *Mark*, 426; Marcus, *Mark*, 515.

¹¹⁵⁵ 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.¹¹⁵⁶ 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.¹¹⁵⁷ 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

¹¹⁵⁶ Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 44-45.

¹¹⁵⁷ 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.¹¹⁵⁸

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).¹¹⁵⁹ 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 (επετιμῆσεν)¹¹⁶⁰ him and instructs him to keep silent, because Peter's understanding of what ὁ Χριστός means is wrong, and needs correction (8:30).¹¹⁶¹ Jesus did not want it published abroad to all and sundry, lest it lead to gross misunderstanding.¹¹⁶² 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.¹¹⁶³ The general theme of secrecy has

¹¹⁵⁸ 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).

¹¹⁵⁹ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 124; Garland, *Mark*, 324.

¹¹⁶⁰ 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).

¹¹⁶¹ Garland, *Mark*, 324-25.

¹¹⁶² Garland, *Mark*, 325.

¹¹⁶³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

been prominent throughout Mark's Gospel.¹¹⁶⁴ 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).¹¹⁶⁵ 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).¹¹⁶⁶ 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).¹¹⁶⁷ 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.¹¹⁶⁸ 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).¹¹⁶⁹

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).¹¹⁷⁰ 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.¹¹⁷¹ According to popular belief, he would be descended from king David.

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

¹¹⁶⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, lxx.

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

¹¹⁶⁷ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, lxx.

¹¹⁶⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

¹¹⁶⁹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

¹¹⁷⁰ Hurtado, *Mark*, 135.

¹¹⁷¹ 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.¹¹⁷²

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).¹¹⁷³ 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).¹¹⁷⁴ Jesus has not yet accomplished any of these hopes, but Peter expects with confidence that he will nonetheless.¹¹⁷⁵ Jesus has been declaring the kingdom of God, but Peter is now convinced that he has learned the name of the king.¹¹⁷⁶ 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

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).

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

¹¹⁷³ Garland, *Mark*, 324.

¹¹⁷⁴ 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.

¹¹⁷⁵ Cf. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 144.

¹¹⁷⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 324.

manner.”¹¹⁷⁷ 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.¹¹⁷⁸

Jesus’ hesitancy in accepting the title of Messiah suggests that he was anxious to make clear his non-political role (cf. Jn 18:36).¹¹⁷⁹ 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).¹¹⁸⁰ 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.”¹¹⁸¹ 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

¹¹⁷⁷ Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, 145.

¹¹⁷⁸ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

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

¹¹⁸⁰ 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.

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

filled it with new meaning.¹¹⁸² The true Messianic role, in other words, was one that demanded suffering and death in a spirit of sacrificial love.¹¹⁸³

It would be dangerous to reveal his identity before the fullness of time had come.¹¹⁸⁴ But, the time would come for what has been hidden to reveal (4:21-22); Jesus himself will declare that he is Messiah and Son of God (14:61-62 ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ), and the prohibition on talking about the transfiguration is valid only until after the resurrection has taken place (9:9).¹¹⁸⁵ The mission given to Jesus by the Father was completed only through the sacrifice of the Cross and the resurrection. Until that glorious time, no man fully acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah. Until the sacrifice of Golgotha takes place, Mark keeps the fact that Jesus is the Messiah a secret (15:39). Mark's purpose is to teach that only in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection, and through the eyes of faith the disciples can perceive the secret of Jesus' identity (cf. Mark 9:9; Acts 2:36).¹¹⁸⁶

Peter's Unbelieving Attitude

Jesus' instructing the disciples to be silent (8:30) touches upon a second aspect of Mark's presentation of Jesus, that is, the secret instructions given to his disciples: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (8:31; NIV).¹¹⁸⁷ Like an efficient teacher, Jesus reveals to his disciples only stage by stage that he is the Messiah who has to suffer very much. A sudden revelation about the suffering Messiah would only create a scandal among the disciples.¹¹⁸⁸ That Peter could not even think of Jesus as suffering Messiah is a case in point (cf. 8:32). Jesus predicts that his messianic mission as the Son of Man is one that involves

¹¹⁸² Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 44.

¹¹⁸³ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 44.

¹¹⁸⁴ R. Martin, "The Messianic Secret in Mark," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 11 (1984): 350-52.

¹¹⁸⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 330.

¹¹⁸⁶ J. J. Kilgallen, "The Messianic Secret and Mark's Purpose," *BTB* 7 (1977): 62 in 60-65.

¹¹⁸⁷ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 42.

¹¹⁸⁸ J. Coutts, "The Messianic Secret and the Enemies of Jesus," *Studia Biblica* 2 (1978): 39 in 37-46.

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.¹¹⁸⁹ They fail to understand, indeed they misunderstood, the true significance of his person, message and mission, and their conduct in the story reflects this.¹¹⁹⁰

Peter indeed confesses or declares Jesus as the Messiah, but he fails to understand his teaching, particularly those relating to the suffering Messiah.¹¹⁹¹ 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).¹¹⁹² 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.¹¹⁹³ 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."¹¹⁹⁴ 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'¹¹⁹⁵ The conflict between Jesus and Peter is all the more dramatic

¹¹⁸⁹ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 53.

¹¹⁹⁰ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 53.

¹¹⁹¹ 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).

¹¹⁹² Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 125.

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

¹¹⁹⁴ Cf. Hooker, *St Mark*, 206-7; Gundry, *Mark*, 433.

¹¹⁹⁵ 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'.¹¹⁹⁶ 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."¹¹⁹⁷

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.¹¹⁹⁸ "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."¹¹⁹⁹ 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.¹²⁰⁰

"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."¹²⁰¹ 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.¹²⁰² 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).¹²⁰³

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

¹¹⁹⁶ Garland, *Mark*, 324.

¹¹⁹⁷ Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 48.

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

¹¹⁹⁹ Hooker, *St Mark*, 205.

¹²⁰⁰ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 241.

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

¹²⁰² Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus*, 78.

¹²⁰³ 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.¹²⁰⁴ 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.¹²⁰⁵ 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).¹²⁰⁶ 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.¹²⁰⁷ 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 vindication¹²⁰⁸ 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

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

¹²⁰⁵ Tolbert, "How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character," 353.

¹²⁰⁶ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 130.

¹²⁰⁷ Kingsbury, *Christology*, 156.

¹²⁰⁸ Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 130.

regarding the passion is made for the second time.¹²⁰⁹ 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.¹²¹⁰ 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.¹²¹¹ Personal power and status is the disciples' favourite topic of discussion.¹²¹² 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).¹²¹³ These two motifs, lack of understanding and fearful inhibition, reinforce the disciples' failure to accept in Jesus as the Son of Man.¹²¹⁴ 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.¹²¹⁵ 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).¹²¹⁶ These sons of Zebedee ask for future 'cabinet' positions in the face of Jesus' third and last passion-resurrection prediction on the threshold of

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

¹²¹⁰ Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 106.

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

¹²¹² Hurtado, *Mark*, 152-53.

¹²¹³ Cf. The comment on 4:41.

¹²¹⁴ Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 49.

¹²¹⁵ Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus*, 84.

¹²¹⁶ Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 238.

Jerusalem.¹²¹⁷ 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.¹²¹⁸

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.¹²¹⁹ 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).¹²²⁰ 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).¹²²¹

¹²¹⁷ Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 51.

¹²¹⁸ 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.”

¹²¹⁹ Hurtado, *Mark*, 154.

¹²²⁰ Hanson, *The Endangered Promise*, 238.

¹²²¹ 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).¹²²²

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).¹²²³ 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).¹²²⁴ 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")¹²²⁵ will be healed.¹²²⁶ Further, the repetition of οἱ φαλμοῖ, βλεπω, wεα,

¹²²² 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."

¹²²³ Garland, *Mark*, 498.

¹²²⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 378.

¹²²⁵ 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.¹²²⁷ The words ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ introduced in 4:12 are considered as ‘grand metaphors’ that appear again and again in Mark’s narrative.¹²²⁸ 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.¹²²⁹

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

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

¹²²⁶ For more detail, cf. the comment of 8:22-26.

¹²²⁷ Cf. Marcus, *Mark 4:10-12*, 557-74.

¹²²⁸ Fowler, *Let the reader understand*, 127.

¹²²⁹ Fowler, *Let the reader understand*, 127.

disciples' future restoration.¹²³⁰

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 4:1-34.¹²³¹ 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.¹²³² The position of the story is particularly important because it appears at a crucial point in the Gospel.¹²³³ 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.¹²³⁴ 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.¹²³⁵ 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 8:27.¹²³⁶

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 35:5-6.¹²³⁷ The extensive similarities between these two passages may be seen in a synopsis of Mark 7:31-

¹²³⁰ Smith, *A Lion with Wings*, 106.

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

¹²³² Hurtado, *Mark*, 133.

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

¹²³⁴ 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."

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

¹²³⁶ Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 375.

¹²³⁷ 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. Fowler¹²³⁸ and Taylor¹²³⁹ 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.¹²⁴⁰ 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).¹²⁴¹ At this point, the narrative diverges from the pattern found in the healing of the deaf man.¹²⁴²

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 8:14-21.¹²⁴³ Briefly, the former has been strategically placed before he rebukes them for their lack of spiritual insight (7:31-37).

¹²³⁸ Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 105-106.

¹²³⁹ Taylor, *Mark*, 368-69.

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

¹²⁴¹ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 128.

¹²⁴² 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.

¹²⁴³ 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).¹²⁴⁴ Many commentators have argued for a symbolic reading of the healing of the blind man¹²⁴⁵ and the deaf man.¹²⁴⁶ 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.¹²⁴⁷ 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.¹²⁴⁸ 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

¹²⁴⁴ 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)

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

¹²⁴⁶ Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 105-14.

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

¹²⁴⁸ 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).¹²⁴⁹ In this passage, the function of this verb is very different from its function in 7:34.¹²⁵⁰ 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.’¹²⁵¹ 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).¹²⁵² 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).¹²⁵³ In 8:25, the verb dieþleyen (‘to see’) contrasts the perfect sight of the man after the second healing to his initial imperfect sight.¹²⁵⁴ 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.¹²⁵⁵

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.¹²⁵⁶ 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

¹²⁴⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 312.

¹²⁵⁰ Hooker, *St Mark*, 199.

¹²⁵¹ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 154.

¹²⁵² 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).

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

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

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

¹²⁵⁶ 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.¹²⁵⁷

This analysis makes it clear, then, that the verb *eneblepen* is not merely a repetition of the verb *dieblepen*. 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.¹²⁵⁸ 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.¹²⁵⁹

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.¹²⁶⁰ 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.¹²⁶¹ 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

¹²⁵⁷ Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 378.

¹²⁵⁸ Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 379.

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

¹²⁶⁰ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 130.

¹²⁶¹ 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.¹²⁶² 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).¹²⁶³

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.¹²⁶⁴ 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).¹²⁶⁵ 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).¹²⁶⁶

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

¹²⁶² Johnson, "Mark viii. 22-26," 379.

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

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

¹²⁶⁵ 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.

¹²⁶⁶ Hooker, *St Mark*, 199.

understand Jesus' identity as suffering Messiah.¹²⁶⁷ In 8:1-21 the disciples have never understood Jesus' divine power, which is implied in the feeding miracle,¹²⁶⁸ 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.¹²⁶⁹ However, it was only half sight, because they failed to understand Jesus as the suffering Messiah (cf. 8:33).¹²⁷⁰ 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).¹²⁷¹ 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).¹²⁷²

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).¹²⁷³

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.¹²⁷⁴

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

¹²⁶⁷ 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.

¹²⁶⁸ See "The Sea-Walking Story."

¹²⁶⁹ Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea*, 144.

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

¹²⁷¹ 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.

¹²⁷² Like the opponents, Judas never repented of his sin.

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

¹²⁷⁴ Guelich, *Mark*, 436.

unbelief, will be healed after resurrection.¹²⁷⁵ 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.¹²⁷⁶ 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 Bartimaeus¹²⁷⁷ 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).

¹²⁷⁵ Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 157-58.

¹²⁷⁶ Johnson, “Mark viii. 22-26,” 380.

¹²⁷⁷ 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).¹²⁷⁸

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.¹²⁷⁹ 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."¹²⁸⁰ 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.¹²⁸¹ 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.¹²⁸²

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

¹²⁷⁹ 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).

¹²⁸⁰ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 191.

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

¹²⁸² 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.¹²⁸³ 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 sitting by the side of the road (Para. thn òdon). The word òdoj is equivalent to the Hebrew דָרֶכַךְ (Ps 1:1).¹²⁸⁴ 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).¹²⁸⁵ 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.¹²⁸⁶ 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

¹²⁸³ 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.

¹²⁸⁴ Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 58-59.

¹²⁸⁵ Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation,” 59.

¹²⁸⁶ 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.¹²⁸⁷ 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.¹²⁸⁸

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.¹²⁸⁹ 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."¹²⁹⁰ 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.¹²⁹¹ 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).¹²⁹² 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

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

¹²⁸⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 130-32.

¹²⁸⁹ 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.

¹²⁹⁰ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 132.

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

¹²⁹² 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).¹²⁹³ 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.¹²⁹⁴ 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.¹²⁹⁵

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.¹²⁹⁶ Since in the NT those who address Jesus with this title are primarily those in need of exorcism or healing,¹²⁹⁷ and since the messianic king in Judaism was never identified as a wonder-worker, some scholars¹²⁹⁸ 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

¹²⁹³ Perkins, "Greater Than Solomon," 210.

¹²⁹⁴ 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.

¹²⁹⁵ Duling, "Testament of Solomon," 960.

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

¹²⁹⁷ Duling, "Solomon," 235.

¹²⁹⁸ 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.¹²⁹⁹ 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."¹³⁰⁰ 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.¹³⁰¹ Bartimaeus' refusal to be silent¹³⁰² reveals the extent of his faith, in that it is persistent and able to overcome obstacles.

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

¹²⁹⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 420.

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

¹³⁰¹ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 155.

¹³⁰² 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.¹³⁰³ 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 ἔκλεω is repeated three times in 10:49: by Jesus, by the narrator, by the crowd.¹³⁰⁴ 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).¹³⁰⁵ 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.¹³⁰⁶ The chain of references to 'garment' (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).¹³⁰⁷ 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).¹³⁰⁸ 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

¹³⁰³ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 157.

¹³⁰⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 125, 141.

¹³⁰⁵ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 141.

¹³⁰⁶ Taylor, *Mark*, 449; Lane, *Mark*, 388; Cranfield, *Mark*, 345-46.

¹³⁰⁷ Malina & Rohrbaugh, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 247.

¹³⁰⁸ 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).¹³⁰⁹ 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.¹³¹⁰

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).¹³¹¹ 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.¹³¹² 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).¹³¹³ 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?").¹³¹⁴ The request of James and John reveals their blindness, because they want to receive places of honour and privilege at the incoming of kingdom.¹³¹⁵ They want to sit (*kaqi,swmen*) with Jesus,

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

¹³¹⁰ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 156.

¹³¹¹ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 152.

¹³¹² Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 152.

¹³¹³ 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).

¹³¹⁴ 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.

¹³¹⁵ 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.¹³¹⁶ But this question makes perfect sense in the context of Mark 10, where what other characters wanted provides a marked contrast.¹³¹⁷ 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; 42:16.¹³¹⁸ The blind man believes that Jesus is able to fulfil Isaiah 35:5 and give sight to the blind.¹³¹⁹ The whole scene recalls Isaiah's promise in 42:16:¹³²⁰

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.¹³²¹ 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

¹³¹⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 130.

¹³¹⁷ Garland, *Mark*, 423.

¹³¹⁸ Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark*, 292.

¹³¹⁹ Garland, *Mark*, 421.

¹³²⁰ 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."

¹³²¹ Schweizer, *The Good News*, 225.

dispenser of the blessings of the eschatological age upon which he had set his heart.”¹³²² 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.¹³²³

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).¹³²⁴ 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).¹³²⁵

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.¹³²⁶ By recognising Bartimaeus’ faith and by healing him, Jesus accepts the title ‘Son of David.’¹³²⁷ 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.¹³²⁸

¹³²² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 130.

¹³²³ Richardson, *Miracle-Stories*, 74.

¹³²⁴ W. Michaelis, “oraw” *TDNT* 5, 347.

¹³²⁵ Johnson, “Mark 10:46-52,” 201.

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

¹³²⁷ Hurtado, *Mark*, 162; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 105.

¹³²⁸ 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.¹³²⁹ 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.¹³³⁰

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.¹³³¹ 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).¹³³² 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.¹³³³ The decision to follow Jesus may be costly. It may contain abandonment of vocation, family, and even one's own life (9:35-37).

¹³²⁹ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 159.

¹³³⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 143.

¹³³¹ Gundry, *Mark*, 595; Lane, *Mark*, 389.

¹³³² Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 142.

¹³³³ Johnson, "Mark 10:46-52," 202.

When he states that Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way, Mark uses the word *ōdoj*, that has also taken on symbolic significance in the Gospel.¹³³⁴ The *ōdoj* 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.¹³³⁵ Jesus begins to go “on the way” (*en th| ōdw|*) which is prepared by John the Baptist (1:2-3), and which ends in Jerusalem.¹³³⁶ 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.¹³³⁷ Thus, in the narrative of the passion *h`ōdoj* becomes symbolic for the way of suffering, rejection, and death that Jesus must travel.¹³³⁸ 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.¹³³⁹ 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.”¹³⁴⁰ The miracle takes on symbolic significance as it caps the discipleship theme in this section.¹³⁴¹ In the

¹³³⁴ Cf. Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 64-65.

¹³³⁵ The use of *ōdoj* 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.

¹³³⁶ Best, *Following Jesus*, 16.

¹³³⁷ Cf. Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 161.

¹³³⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 142.

¹³³⁹ Painter, *Mark*, 152; Achtemeier, “He Followed Him,” 115.

¹³⁴⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 124.

¹³⁴¹ 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.¹³⁴² 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).¹³⁴³ 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.¹³⁴⁴ 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

¹³⁴² Lee, *Hardness of Heart in Mark*, 161.

¹³⁴³ Robbins, "The Healing of Blind Man," 226.

¹³⁴⁴ 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.¹³⁴⁵ 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."¹³⁴⁶

¹³⁴⁵ Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus*, 205.

¹³⁴⁶ Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 46.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarize the argument, to demonstrate the most important conclusions of this dissertation, as well as to expand their implication for understanding the motif of unbelief in Mark's Gospel.

5.1 SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

This thesis began with recognition of the need for a clear understanding of the literary and theological functions of the theme 'unbelief' which is described throughout Mark's Gospel in relation to Jesus' opponents and to his disciples. The main hypothesis for investigating the function of 'unbelief' is that 1) Mark

distinguishes between the opponent's unbelief and the disciples' unbelief. The opponents' unbelief consists in their emphatic and intentional refusal to believe in Jesus, while the disciples' unbelief resides in their failure to understand Jesus' identity; 2) in Mark's Gospel the theme 'unbelief' functions literarily, rhetorically, and theologically to highlight the significance of faith or spiritual perceptiveness as prerequisite for the Christian discipleship. In the present dissertation, an attempt is to be made to show that the unbelief stands in contrast with faith, literally. Thus, this unbelief is very closely related to faith as a prerequisite of discipleship. Through speech acts concerning unbelief, Mark emphasizes that those who are the true disciples must follow Jesus with faith in demanding situations and under difficult circumstance.

Investigation of the literary format of individual passages, which are tied within the wider context of related themes in the narrative, has again demonstrated the value of a feasible and useful method for exploring the 'unbelief' as a theme in Mark's narrative.¹³⁴⁷ In particular, an appreciation of his use of literary devices such as irony, riddles and rhetorical questions, has been crucial for understanding both the dramatic and conceptual aspects of his presentation of this theme.

Kingsbury demonstrates that conflict is a central driving force of Mark's narrative. Jesus is found in conflict with demons, disciples, the crowds, and the Jewish religious leaders, which conflict leads ultimately to his extensive ostracism and rejection.¹³⁴⁸ Behind this conflict, Mark devises a primary contrast between the dawning rule of God and the faithless generation which resists the coming of the kingdom of God. Only Jesus stands in total contrast to the 'faithless generation' (9:19); all other characters are, to greater or lesser degree, vulnerable, partially or totally subject to its power.¹³⁴⁹ Mark therefore establishes the unbelief, not only of the Jewish religious leaders, but also of the disciples, despite the fact that they otherwise belong to the community of faith.

At different points of his narrative Mark applies the same expression of unbelief used to describe Jesus' opponents also to the disciples. Nevertheless, Mark

¹³⁴⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 224.

¹³⁴⁸ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 63-82.

¹³⁴⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 224.

retains a distinction between two kinds of unbelief, namely the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders and the disciples' unbelief.

First of all, the nature of the Jewish religious leaders' unbelief is not primarily a lack of insight, but a refusal to accept the claims and demands of Jesus, which they well perceive, because they fear the existential consequences of doing so. It is a problem of volition more than cognition.¹³⁵⁰

A remarkably regular portrayal of unbelief has appeared from these four passages (2:1-12; 6:1-6; 11:27-32; 15:27-33) dealing with the unbelief of Jesus' adversaries. Mark describes their unbelief as a mixture of seeing and not seeing, of correctly understanding Jesus' implied claim to a unique status, yet refusing to accept it. They recognize Jesus as one who dares to act on God's behalf (2:7), who (like God) possesses wisdom and remarkable healing powers (6:2; 15:31), who claims authority over the Temple (11:28), and who considers himself to be the messianic king (15:32). They clearly perceived his demand for repentant faith. Indeed, the only characters in Mark's Gospel to use the term 'faith,' apart from Jesus, are his opponents (11:31; 15:32). Where their unbelief becomes apparent is in their refusal to recognize a divine source for what seem to be divine works, preferring instead to charge Jesus with blasphemy (2:7) and demonic allegiance (implied in 6:3; cf. 3:22, 28). The root of this unbelief lies in the prior refusal of the opponents to accept John the Baptist's demand for repentance and his message of the Stronger One to come (11:30), with the result that they exhibit hostility towards Jesus from the very beginning of his mission (cf. 2:6-10).

Their unbelief, which was expressed in their refusal to accept Jesus' prophetic claim in 1:14-15, was in contrast to the centurion's faithful confession (15:39). Due to his humble family and social position (6:1-6) and his public honour and his apparent powerlessness (15:29-32), they were unable to accept Jesus as their divine Messiah, the Son of God, despite his obvious authority over sin (2:5, 10), sickness (2:11; 6:2; 15:31) and even the Temple system (11:28). The king of Israel who merely saves others, but will not save himself is not worthy of faith.

They were aggressively opposing Jesus' new rule, because to accept it would

¹³⁵⁰ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 224.

imply an end to the kind of rule, which they devised, and from which they benefited. They not only refuse to respond in repentant faith, but they also actively work to prevent the potential they perceive in Jesus from becoming a reality. Scepticism, mockery, and overt hostility are hallmarks to their unbelief.

On the other hand, the disciples are those who have already accepted the declarations and demands of Jesus and who now struggle to follow him with faith and spiritual insight. Their unbelief consists in periodic failure to act in a manner that is consistent with their commitment to radical dependency on the power of Jesus.¹³⁵¹

In the first part of the Gospel (1:16-8:21), despite the continuous manifestation of Jesus' messiahship in the presence of the disciples in countless healings,¹³⁵² exorcisms,¹³⁵³ and nature miracles,¹³⁵⁴ the disciples remain amazingly obtuse and obdurate in spite of their involvement in the messianic drama.¹³⁵⁵ In 4:35-41, their unbelief is connected with timidity. The disciples and Jesus are in a boat, when a storm arises. The disciples awaken Jesus and implore him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus asks "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (4:40). Then he calms the sea. The implication is that, if they had enough faith in Jesus' power (faithlessness versus faith), they would not be cowardly but would have confidence in Jesus to care for them. Also, in 6:45-52, the story of Jesus walking on the water is told. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and were terrified. Jesus commands, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (6:50). The disciples' timidity, rooted in their faithlessness in Jesus' to protect them from perishing, provides the basis for their inadequate understanding of the significance of feeding miracle (6:52).

In 8:14-21 the inverse reciprocal connection between unbelief and understanding is made explicit. Following the request by the Pharisees for a sign from heaven to substantiate Jesus' activity and authority (8:11), he says "Watch out for the yeast

¹³⁵¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 225.

¹³⁵² Cf. 1:29-32, 32-34, 40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-5, 9-10; 5:21-43; 6:1-6, 53-56; 7:31-37; 8:22-26.

¹³⁵³ Cf. 1:21-28, 32-34, 39; 3:11; 5:1-20; 7:24-30.

¹³⁵⁴ Cf. 4:35-41; 6:35-44, 45-52; 8:1-10.

¹³⁵⁵ T. J. Weeden, *Mark-Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 26-27.

of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (8:15). The disciples, thinking that Jesus is speaking literally, conclude that Jesus is referring to the fact that they neglected to bring bread. Jesus corrects their mistaken interpretation: "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (8:17).

Furthermore, the disciples' responses to the three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33) indicate that they do not understand Jesus' messianic mission to suffer and die. Peter's rebuke of Jesus (8:32), and the disciples' concern over their ranking in the kingdom (9:34), show them to be at odds with God's perspective (8:33). From Mark 8:32, the disciples have been consistently described as those who, although understanding that Jesus is Messiah, struggle to understand the kind of Messiah that Jesus is showing himself to be (8:32-33).¹³⁵⁶ In 9:32-37 their question, "who is the greatest" (9:34), demonstrates a lack of understanding about the true nature of discipleship which focuses on self-denial and servant-hood (8:34) rather than on striving for status and position within the (Christian) community.

Mark 9:19-29 furthers the negative portrayal of the disciples by showing up their unbelief via their own actions, and Jesus' action. Jesus determines that his disciples are unable to cure the epileptic boy because of their faithlessness (9:19). Their inability to heal and the way Jesus connects their unbelief to that inability show the disciples to be falling short of Jesus' expectations for them.

The nature of the disciples' unbelief is a failure of cognition and a persistent inability to understand Jesus' identity and mission. Misunderstanding and fearful amazement are hallmarks of their unbelief. But their problem is not so much an intentional rejection of the truth as a failure to be committed to a spiritual perceptiveness into Jesus' significance upon which their faith was founded, and which is developed into a fuller understanding of his identity and mission, and of their relation to it.

In Mark's Gospel, the language 'hardness of heart' is used as a polemic against the unbelievers (3:5; 10:5; 6:52; 8:17-18). Thus, when the language is used to

¹³⁵⁶ T. J. Weeden, "The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel," *ZNW* 59 (1968): 145-68.

attack the Jewish religious leaders who refuse to accept Jesus' claims and demands, it criticises their obdurate, faithless behaviour and warns of the imminent divine punishment (cf. Pharaoh's hardness of heart in Ex 4-14). In contrast, when the language is used with regard to the disciples who have already accepted his claims and demands, it functions to prevent them from mimicking the unbelieving behaviour. Although Jesus proclaims the arrival of the Kingdom in his authoritative teachings and miracles, the Jewish religious leaders respond to his message negatively. Due to their hardness of heart (3:5), they refuse to accept his authority (1:22; 2:10; 11:28) and accuse him of blasphemy (2:7; 14:64), as Pharaoh whose heart is hardened refused to release the Israelites from Egypt. Thus, when regarding the Jewish religious leaders, the language 'hardness of heart' identifies their intentional, volitional hostility.

Mark also applies the same word *pwrow*, which is used to attack the Jewish religious leaders' hostile behaviour, to the disciples in order to rebuke their incomprehension. The cycle of boat scenes demonstrates dramatically the disciples' hardness of heart. When the disciples see Jesus' power to still the wind and waves, they do not recognize Jesus' divine identity; when they see Jesus walking on the sea, they do not acknowledge his identity, and instead think he is a ghost, because of their hardness of heart. (6:52). Also, when Jesus warns of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herodians, they had neglected to bring bread and fail to understand his capacity to provide daily bread because their hearts are hardened (8:17-18). These narratives present the danger of seeing and not perceiving. Little by little, in their life stance the disciples are duplicating the opponents' faithlessness.

Although Jesus continually reveals his divine identity through teachings and miracles, his opponents intentionally refuse to accept Jesus' claims and demands. The disciples however may be confused and blind, but they are not hostile to Jesus. Thus Jesus is patient, and explains his parabolic words and deeds to them. Furthermore, he warns them to avoid the danger of falling into the same unbelieving attitudes as that of the opponents. Therefore, if the disciples stop the obdurate unbelieving attitudes and repent of their sins, they can be assured of a restored spiritual insight after his resurrection (cf. 14:28; 16:7). However, if like Judas they persist in obdurate faithlessness, they will be rejected by God (14:21).

The portrayal of the disciples' unbelief functions as a teaching tool for the reader regarding discipleship. The role of the reader is to be fully obedient to Jesus in the ways in which the disciples have failed. In Mark's narrative, the reader begins to dissociate somewhat from the disciples, because they show a persistent lack of faith and understanding. In contrast, the reader identifies with certain individuals who respond to him with faith and spiritual perceptiveness (like the haemorrhaging woman, Jairus, the Syrophenician woman, and Bartimaeus). Both Jairus (5:22-24, 35-43) and the haemorrhaging woman (5:25-34) stand in contrast to the disciples, who fear and fail in their faith. Although the Syrophenician woman is initially treated as an outsider by Jesus, she displays the insight of an insider through her understanding of Jesus' parable concerning bread (7:27). The woman accepts the position of the household dog, recognising that she can make no demand on the mercy of Jesus. She points out that the dogs under table are able to eat the children's crumbs. The woman's answer shows her understanding, boldness, persistence, humility and faith. In contrast, although the disciples are insiders, and have been given the mystery of the kingdom of God (4:11), they comprehend neither the loaves (6:52) nor the parables (7:17-18). In this way, the minor characters challenge the reader to overcome fear, and respond to Jesus' claims and expectations with faith.

Although the disciples follow Jesus on the 'way' to Jerusalem (10:32), they do so hesitantly because they are either unable to or unwilling to understand and believe his passion predictions. The spiritual blindness consists of a failure to accept the implication of the mystery of Jesus' death. At this point, the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26) raised the expectation and hope that the Markan disciples or readers might respond to Jesus, not just with partial insight, but with complete understanding.

The healing of Bartimaeus (10:46-52) not only typifies the fruitfulness of faith but also the faithfulness of the ideal follower of Jesus. In the example of the Bartimaeus, Mark demands that the reader keep away from the spiritual ignorance caused by spiritual blindness, and follow him with spiritual perceptiveness and faith, like Bartimaeus.

The paralytic, Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman exemplify true faith, while the Syrophenician woman typifies true understanding. Also the deaf man and the blind man emphasise the significance of spiritual perceptiveness. But Bartimaeus exemplifies true faith, as well as spiritual perceptiveness. He hears that Jesus is passing by and cries out for mercy. With persistence and courage, he continues to cry out even when he is pressured to be silent. Jesus recognises a fervent faith within this persistent plea for help. Also Bartimaeus shows insight into messianic identity of Jesus: he regards Jesus as Son of David. Thus Bartimaeus challenges the reader to follow Jesus with persistent faith and spiritual insight.

Bartimaeus also gives the readers hope that Jesus, who removes physical blindness can enable to them to have the sight to see the 'way' they must follow if they are to be true disciples. True disciples must follow Jesus with the faith and spiritual perceptiveness of the true nature of Jesus. The danger maintaining a failure to understand Jesus' identity is thus linked closely to a false discipleship. The key issue Mark is emphasizing is the true disciples' appropriate understanding of Jesus as suffering Messiah, not politically triumphal Messiah, and persistent faith.

5.2 SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER MARKAN STUDY

A theological perspective is one of the interesting elements in Mark's presentation. In Mark's Gospel, the concept 'unbelief' is not simply the opponents' volitional rejection, but God's will to procure salvation. In Jesus' predictions about his suffering and death (8:31; 8:14; 10:33; cf. 10:45; 14:21, 27), the reality of the opponents' unbelieving rejection fits into God's will (14:36, 49). Jesus' predictions are exactly fulfilled in 14:61-55. Furthermore, in his death the Scriptures are being fulfilled (9:12; 14:21, 49). This no doubt refers to the fulfilment of the OT prediction of the death of the Son of Man.¹³⁵⁷ In other words, it seems to be in accordance with God's plan that Jesus was rejected and killed. Although the faithlessness is used to indicate people's rejection of, and hostile action towards Jesus, the reality of the faithlessness fits into God's purposes.

¹³⁵⁷ This death is indicated in a variety of passage such as Isa. 53:3 and Ps. 41:9-13.

Just as in Exodus Pharaoh's unbelieving rejection and hostility is as much an instrument for the revelation of God himself in his redemptive process (Ex. 9:16; cf. Rom 9:17-18), in Mark's Gospel the unbelievers' hostile rejection is an instrument for the self-disclosure of Jesus as the Son of God (cf. 15:39). Because of their hardened hearts, the unbelievers do not perceive Jesus' divine identity. Thus, they reject him and kill him. But Jesus' death discloses his identity as the Son of God (15:37-39; cf. 1:1). The secret of Jesus' identity leads to his death (cf. 4:11-12), which, in turn, results in the open manifestation of his identity (cf. 4:22).

The faithlessness is not without its redemptive elements because it meaningfully advances the Markan Christology. God, through the parabolic statements, hardens their hearts so that they do not understand the secret of the Kingdom (4:11-12). As a result, they refuse to believe in Jesus' teachings and deeds, and hand him over to death. That Mark seems to be saying that it was God's will that few believe in Jesus, because of hardened hearts, seems to be unavoidable.¹³⁵⁸

It seems to be God's redemptive plan that Jesus is rejected and handed over to death by the opponents whose hearts are hardened. "Without the hardened heart, Jesus would not have been rejected and put to death; and had he not been put to death, there could have been no resurrection and no Christian gospel"¹³⁵⁹ If all people accepted Jesus, there would have been no rejection and no death of the Messiah. If Jesus had not been rejected and handed over to death, there would have been no resurrection and no salvation for the many people (10:45).

The unbeliever's role is an implement for the fulfilment of God's redemptive promise. Where and how we deal with the issue of the function of the unbelievers in God's redemptive process, is a theological question beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on a study of the theme of 'unbelief' in Mark's Gospel. A further study could, for example, investigate the function of the unbelievers in God's redemptive history in relation to Paul's theological perspective.

5.3 FINAL REMARK

The aim of this dissertation has been to clarify a comparatively neglected factor in Markan theology. This dissertation has sought to combine an understanding of Mark's theological conception about unbelief, with an appreciation of how this is

¹³⁵⁸ Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant," 228.

¹³⁵⁹ Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 103.

conveyed to his reader through literary devices. We have found that Mark is an author of considerable literary and theological competence, who has definite perception on the meaning and function of 'unbelief.' This perspective invites comparison with other the Evangelists, especially Matthew and Luke, because Mark, unlike the other, uniquely ends his narrative with a striking expression of unbelief (16:1-8). The most recent research on Mark's Gospel has been various attempts to understand the aim of the author, and so to clarify his theological perspective, which gives coherence to all the features of the Gospel. Not least, elucidation of the theme 'unbelief' should be of value in showing Mark's theological goal, viz to highlight the significance of faith and spiritual insight as prerequisites of Christian discipleship.

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