

Incomprehension or resistance? : the Markan disciples and the narrative logic of Mark 4:1 – 8:30



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Abstract

The characterization of the Markan disciples has been and continues to be the object of much scholarly reflection and speculation. For many, the Markan author's presentation of Jesus' disciples holds a key, if not the key, to unlocking the purpose and function of the gospel as a whole. Commentators differ as to whether the Markan disciples ultimately serve a pedagogical or polemical function, yet they are generally agreed that the disciples in Mark come off rather badly, especially when compared to their literary counterparts in Matthew, Luke, and John. This narrative-critical study considers the characterization of the

Markan disciples within the Sea Crossing movement (Mark 4:1–8:30). While commentators have, on the whole, interpreted the disciples' negative characterization in this movement in terms of lack of faith and/or incomprehension, neither of these, nor a combination of the two, fully accounts for the severity of language leveled against the disciples by the narrator (6:52) and Jesus (8:17–18). Taking as its starting point an argument by Jeffrey B. Gibson (1986) that the harshness of Jesus' rebuke in Mark 8:14–21 is occasioned not by the disciples' lack of faith or incomprehension but by their active resistance to his Gentile mission, this investigation uncovers additional examples of the disciples' resistance to Gentile mission, offering a better account of their negative portrayal within the Sea Crossing movement and helping explain many of their other failures. In short, this study argues that in Mark 4:1–8:26, the disciples are characterized as resistant to Jesus' Gentile mission and to their participation in that mission, the chief consequence being that they are rendered incapable of recognizing Jesus' vocational identity as Israel's Messiah (Thesis A). This leads to a secondary thesis, namely, that in Mark 8:27–30, Peter's recognition of Jesus' messianic identity indicates that the disciples have finally come to accept Jesus' Gentile mission and their participation in it (Thesis B). "Chapter One: Introduction" offers a selective review of scholarly treatments of the Markan disciples, which shows that few scholars attribute resistance, let alone purposeful resistance, to the disciples. "Chapter Two: The Rhetoric of Repetition" introduces the methodological tools, concepts, and perspectives employed in the study. It includes a section on narrative criticism, which focuses upon the story-as-discoursed and the implied author and reader, and a section on Construction Grammar, a branch of cognitive linguistics founded by Charles Fillmore and further developed by Paul Danove, which focuses upon semantic and narrative frames and case frame analysis. "Chapter Three: The Sea Crossing Movement, Mark 4:1–8:30" addresses the question of Markan structure and argues that Mark 4:1–8:30 comprises a single, unified, narrative movement, whose action and plot is oriented to the Sea of Galilee and whose most distinctive feature is the network of sea crossings that transport Jesus and his disciples back and forth between Jewish and Gentile geopolitical spaces. Following William Freedman, "Chapter Four: The Literary Motif" introduces two criteria (frequency and avoidability) for determining objectively what constitutes a literary motif and provides the methodological basis and starting point for the analyses performed in chapters five and six. "Chapter Five: The Sea Crossing Motif" establishes and then carries out a lengthy narrative analysis of the Sea Crossing motif, which is oriented around Mark's use of θάλασσα (thalassa) and πλοῖον (ploion), and "Chapter Six: The Loaves Motif" does the same for The Loaves motif, oriented around Mark's use of ἄρτος (artos). Finally, "Chapter Seven: The Narrative Logic of the Disciples (In)comprehension" draws together all narrative, linguistic, and exegetical insights of the previous chapters and offers a single coherent reading of the Sea Crossing movement that establishes Theses A and B.

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Discipleship in Mark's Gospel by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D. Introductory Overviews: Four Gospels, Four Expectations for Discipleship. Comparative Charts of the Four Gospels. Named Characters in Mark's Gospel. 8:1-2 - In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, / "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat...." 8:34 - He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." 10:32a - They [disciples] were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid This original ending of Mark was viewed by later Christians as so deficient that not only was Mark placed second in order in the New Testament, but various endings were added by editors and copyists in some manuscripts to try to remedy things. The longest concocted ending, which became Mark 16:9-19, became so treasured that it was included in the King James Version of the Bible, favored for the past 500 years by Protestants, as well as translations of the Latin Vulgate, used by Catholics. Paul notably parallels his own visionary experience to that of Peter, James, and the rest of the apostles.