

## *The Invitation-Structure and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*

Gareth Lee Cockerill

gcockerill@wbs.edu

### **Abstract:**

The structure of Mark facilitates the Gospel's invitation to follow Jesus on the path of discipleship by identifying with those whom he calls. The four sections that follow the prologue (1:1-13) each begin with a significant interaction between Jesus and his disciples—1:14–3:12 begins with the call of the first disciples; 3:13–6:6 with the appointment of the twelve; 6:7–8:21 with the sending of the twelve; and 8:22–10:52 with Jesus' questioning the twelve about his identity. Each represents a new phase of discipleship. Mark 1:14–3:12 describes the public demonstration of Jesus' authority in Galilee that provides the occasion both for the call of his first disciples and for the arousal of official opposition. In 3:13–6:6 those who follow are instructed in the importance of "hearing" reinforced by exposure to much greater demonstrations of Jesus' authority. In 6:7–8:21 Jesus' followers actually participate in his authority, and yet seem unable, despite what they have experienced, to grasp his identity as Christ, the Son of God. Mark 8:22–10:52 begins with Peter's apparent overcoming of this problem by confessing that Jesus is the Christ. This section shows the disciples' inability to grasp the new conundrum that Jesus puts before them—the necessity of his suffering as the Christ and of its implications for his disciples. Jesus' public presentation of his claim in the Jerusalem Temple (11:1–13:37) and subsequent passion (14:1–16:8) reaffirm his authority and reinforce the necessity for his followers to follow him by carrying their "cross." Those who follow embrace both Jesus' identity as the Son of God and his suffering.

**Keywords:** structure, disciples, discipleship, confession, passion, Christ, Son of God

## Introduction

Through many years of teaching the Gospel of Mark as an introductory inductive Bible study course I have come to realize that it is an invitation—“come after me” (1:17), “follow me” (2:14), “and he followed him on the way” (10:52). All four of the Gospels have a two-fold theme—first, the identity of Jesus; and second, what it means to be his disciple.<sup>1</sup> That way of putting it, however, while true, is too detached and lifeless. Mark is not inviting us to arm-chair speculation about the identity of Jesus or the nature of following him. The question posed by the Gospel is not an abstract “Who is Jesus?” The question, posed by Jesus, is “Who do *YOU* say that I am?” (8:29, emphasis added). Mark’s Gospel brings us face to face with the person of Jesus by allowing us to identify with the disciples he first called and thus confronts us with Jesus’ invitation to follow him.<sup>2</sup> In order to help us grasp the existential nature of this confrontation I am going to use “we,” “our,” and “us” for the readers/hearers of Mark in the rest of this study. “We” are the readers/hearers.

---

1. Robert H. Stein confirms this understanding of the Gospels when he says, “Mark is about ‘the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (1:1). Every account in Mark focuses the reader’s attention in some way on Jesus” (*Mark*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 21). John R. Donahue concurs: “Mark is the proclaimed good news of Jesus; it is also the narrative of what it means to hear and to respond to this good news” (*The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* [The 1983 Pere Marquette Theology Lecture; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983], 3). See also John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, SP 2 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002], 29: “Though Mark is primarily the ‘good news’ of Jesus, it also tells the story of what it means [for people who live after the Resurrection] to be involved with Jesus.”

2. There is no contradiction between the role of the disciples as those with whom the readers/hearers are invited to identify in their response to Jesus and the disciples as “apostles” or “missionaries” with a unique roll in founding the church. The Bible normally presents founders as paradigmatic—note Abraham and the patriarchs in the Old Testament. On this double role of the apostles, see Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel according to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 128-29. The so-called “negative” characterization of the disciples in Mark contributes to their function as those with whom the readers/hearers are to identify. We agree with John Donahue when he says, “Those literary and theological explanations which assign a positive meaning to the negative picture [of the disciples] while not yet providing a definite solution provide the way to fruitful reflection” (*Theology and Setting*, 30). My hope is that this paper will suggest a more “definite solution.”

The purpose of this study is to show how Mark has structured his Gospel to confront us with Jesus and draw us into following him as his disciples.<sup>3</sup> Almost all of the observations upon which this structural analysis is based have also been made by others. Thus while the synthesis is fresh, the foundation upon which it rests has broad support. This study suggests that Mark should be divided as follows:

Prologue 1:1-13

Jesus Presents His Claim in Galilee 1:14–3:12

Jesus Presents His Claim to His Disciples 3:13–10:52

Jesus Presents His Claim in the Jerusalem Temple 11:1–13:35

Jesus' Passion 14:1–16:8

Since there is little controversy over 11:1–13:37 and 14:1–16:8, we turn our attention first to an analysis of Mark 1:1–10:52.

## **An Initial Analysis of Mark In 1:1–10:52**

Many interpreters take Peter's confession in 8:27-30 as the mid-point of this Gospel.<sup>4</sup> They then divide Mark into two halves, beginning the second half at 8:22 with the healing of the blind man, 8:27 with Peter's confession, or at 8:31 immediately after Peter's confession.<sup>5</sup> They often label the first half of Mark something like "Jesus' Public Ministry" and the second part "Jesus' Death" or they may call the first part his Galilean ministry and the second his ministry in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Strauss entitles the

---

3. The first indication of this connection between discipleship and structure is the fact that "Every major section begins with a discipleship periscope . . ." (Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 30). See the discussion below.

4. See Joel Williams "Does Mark's Gospel Have an Outline," *JETS* 49 (2006): 505-25.

5. R. T. France begins this section at 8:22 but notes that others begin at 8:14, 27, or 31 (*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 321, note 28). Mark Strauss agrees with France in beginning the second half at Mark 8:22 (*Mark*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014], 45). However, among the others who see the second half at 8:27 and 8:31, respectively, are Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas: Word, 1989), xxxvii and William Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 29-32.

6. See the references to Guelich and Lane in the last footnote.

first part “The Authority of the Messiah,” and the second, “The Way of Suffering of the Messiah.”<sup>7</sup> France recognizes the uniqueness of Mark 8:22–10:52 by dividing Mark into three major sections (following the prologue in Mark 1:1–13). He calls 1:14–8:21 Jesus’ Galilean ministry, 8:22–10:52 Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem, and 11:1–16:8 Jesus’ final ministry in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

France’s way of dividing Mark exposes the fallacy of associating 8:22/27/31–10:52 with what follows on the basis of geography.<sup>9</sup> Strauss’ observation that Mark turns from the authority to the suffering of the Messiah at Peter’s confession is correct—in fact, it is crucial for the thesis we are defending—but it is not sufficient reason to join 8:22/27/31–10:52 with what follows. As we will demonstrate below, Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee should be limited to 1:16(14)–3:6(12). From 3:13 through 10:45 Jesus is focusing on his disciples. Dialog with the disciples is especially intense following Peter’s confession. At 11:1 Jesus begins to turn from this focus on the disciples to engagement with the Jerusalem authorities.

Jesus’ questioning his disciples and Peter’s answer in 8:27–30 reminds us of other turning points in Jesus’ relationship with the disciples—he called the first disciples in 1:16–20, he appointed the twelve in 3:13–19, and sent out the twelve in 6:7–13. We would suggest that each of these recurring significant moments in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples—the calling (1:16–20), appointing (3:14–19), sending (6:7–13), and questioning (8:27–30)—signals both a new section of this Gospel and a new phase in the relationship between Jesus and his followers.<sup>10</sup> The call of the four in 1:14–16 introduces Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee in which he invites people to follow him. Those who follow are represented by the twelve, who are appointed in 3:13–19 and who are now urged to “hear” and confronted with a more profound exposure to Jesus’ authority. With the sending of the twelve in 6:7–13 they begin to participate in Jesus’ ministry. Paradoxically, however, they appear heard-hearted and don’t seem to be able to grasp Jesus’ true identity. Finally, in 8:27–30 Peter overcomes this obtuseness with his confession that Jesus is the Christ. At this point Jesus

---

7. Strauss, *Mark*, 45.

8. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11–15.

9. Mark 8:22–10:52 has geographical affinities with the previous chapters. Jesus goes from Bethsaida (8:22) north to the “villages of Caesarea Philippi” (8:27), but then through Galilee (9:30) to Capernaum (9:33). He doesn’t reach “the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan” until 10:1. “Jerusalem” isn’t mentioned until the third passion prediction in 10:32.

10. See reference in note 3 above.

plunges the disciples into a second quandary by introducing his coming crucifixion and the necessity for his disciples to follow him by “taking up” their “cross.” The disciples struggle with this issue through 10:45.

Thus, after the prologue in 1:1-13, we would divide these chapters as follows: 1:16-3:6; 3:13-6:6a; 6:7-8:21; 8:27-10:45. As already noted, each begins with a Jesus-disciples event (calling the four in 1:16-20; appointing the twelve in 3:13-20; sending the twelve in 6:7-13; questioning the twelve in 8:27-30). In each this Jesus-disciples event is followed by discussion/controversy over Jesus’ authority (people in the synagogue in 1:21-28; Jerusalem scribes and Jesus family in 3:20-35; the crowds and Herod in 6:14-39; and the disciples in 8:31-38). Each concludes with a rejection of or failure to understand Jesus (Pharisees and Herodians in 3:1-6; Jesus’ hometown in 6:1-6a; the disciples in 8:14-21 and again in 10:35-45). Mark 1:16-3:6 takes place in Galilee/Capernaum/“along the sea.” Mark 3:13-6:6A and 6:7-8:21 take place “around the sea of Galilee,” though in the second of these sections Jesus goes further afield. Mark 8:27-10:45 is marked by the foreboding journey to Jerusalem.

We have omitted 1:14-15, 3:7-12, 6:6b, 8:22-26, and 8:46-51<sup>11</sup> The

---

11. Joanna Dewey rightly identifies Mark 1:14-15, 3:7-12, 8:22-26, and 8:46-51 as “transitional” passages (“Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53.2 [1991]: 221-36). To this we would add the half-verse Mark 6:6b. The transitional nature of these passages is substantiated by the way in which some interpreters join them with what precedes; others, with what follows. Stein, for instance, assigns 3:7-12 to the following section (*Mark*, 158), while Strauss joins it with what has gone before (*The Gospel of Mark*, 44). Dewey is also correct in arguing that Mark was composed to be heard and that it is thus richly textured so that its various incidents both draw on what has gone before and prepare in different ways for what is to follow. We would agree with her that Mark does not follow an outline determined by rigid breaks where one subject is dropped and another is picked up. Neither the oral character of Mark, however, nor the transitional nature of these passages prevents major divisions in which the narrative moves from one stage of development to another. Dewey likens Mark to a “tapestry” or “fugue” (“Tapestry,” 224). But a “tapestry” has a pattern. I don’t know about a “fugue,” but a symphony has discernible movements. Let’s look at one example of Dewey’s argument. Of course, as Dewey says, the hearer will think of the deaf and dumb man in 7:31-37 when listening to the healing of the blind man at Bethesda in Mark 8:22-26 (“Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark” *Int* 43.1 [1989]: 44). That fact, however, does not detract in the least from the way in which the two healings of blind men (Mark 8:22-26; 10:45-51) bracket the material between them. One must read Mark (and indeed all NT books) in light of the oral/aural character of first century life. However, one must not let presuppositions about this culture blind one to what one actually finds when one comes to Mark. For a response to Dewey, see Williams, “Outline,” 505-25.

transitional nature of these passages reinforces the divisions we have made above. The beginning of Jesus' preaching in Galilee according to Mark 1:14-15 and the summary of his public Galilean ministry in 3:7-12 set 1:16-3:6 apart as the record of Jesus' public Galilean ministry. For that reason from now on we will consider these passages as part of this section—Mark 1:16-3:6 has become Mark 1:14-3:12. One must not forget, however, that the announcement of Jesus' Galilean preaching in 1:14-15 brings the prologue (1:1-13) to a climax and, in one sense, sets the trajectory for the whole Gospel of Mark—since the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus we are called on to “repent and believe the Gospel.” Mark 3:7-12 may end the record of Jesus' public Galilean ministry, but it also anticipates what follows by introducing the theme of Jesus' teaching from a “boat” (3:9) picked up in 4:1, and thus prepares us for the “boat” journeys so characteristic of 3:13-6:6.

There is a fairly strong consensus that the two healings of blind men in 8:22-26 and 10:46-51 frame Jesus' interaction with the disciples over his coming crucifixion in 8:27-10:45.<sup>12</sup> For this reason we will take 8:22-10:52 as one section. Nevertheless, one must remember that 8:22-26 holds the hearers' attention by reminding them of the healing of the deaf-mute in 7:31-37 and that once-blind Bartemaeus' response in 10:46-51 anticipates following Jesus into Jerusalem.

By reinforcing the identification of 1:14-3:12 as Jesus' public Galilean ministry and 8:22-10:52 as the road to Jerusalem, these transitional passages point to the close relationship between 3:13-6:6a and 6:7-8:21. Other factors confirm the intimate relationship between these two sections. For instance, the choosing of the twelve in 3:13-19 anticipates the mission of the twelve in 6:7-13 by saying that Jesus chose them not only “to be with him” but also to “send them out to preach.” The brief summary in 6:6b joins these two sections (from now on we will include this half-verse with 3:13-6:6a for convenience.) Both sections describe Jesus' ministry to his disciples in Galilee. In both the disciples are exposed to his great authority through his miracles and in both they are struggling with his identity. We will note the differences between these sections below. Our point at the moment, however, is that a proper analysis of these “transitional”

---

12. Some interpreters put the account of the first blind man in 8:22-26 with the previous section, others see it as transitional. Stein represents those who see the incidents of the two blind men as setting the boundaries for this section (*Mark*, 386-87). The crucial thing, however, is to see how these two incidents depict the dilemma of the disciples in this section—they are between the first blind man and the second. See the fine article by Juan Carlos Ossandón, “Bartimaeus' Faith: Plot and Point of View in Mark 10,46-52,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 377-402.

sections—1:14-15, 3:7-12, 6:6b, 8:22-26, and 10:46-51—reinforces the Markan divisions suggested above.<sup>13</sup>

## **A Detailed Examination of the Four Main Divisions of Mark 1:14–10:52**

After a brief look at how the Markan prologue (1:1-13) prepares us for what follows, we will review in greater detail each of the four proposed divisions of 1:14–10:52 and the contribution each makes to the disciples relationship with Jesus.

The prologue prepares us for what follows by giving us privileged information about Jesus—he is “Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*” (emphasis added). Indeed, he is the “Lord” for whose coming John the Baptist prepared in fulfillment of prophesy (1:1-8). At his baptism his unique identity is confirmed both by the voice of God the Father and the descent of the Holy Spirit (1:9-11). Before beginning his ministry he overcomes the devil through his Spirit-driven victory over temptation (1:12-13). With this privileged information we join the crowds who hear Jesus in 1:14–3:12.

### *Section One. Mark 1:14–3:12: Jesus Presents His Claim in Galilee*

In 1:14–3:12 Jesus demonstrates his authority before the public in Galilee and calls disciples out of that public.<sup>14</sup> Mark opens this section with the announcement/summary of Jesus’ preaching in Galilee (1:14-15)

---

13. This understanding of the divisions of 1:14–10:52 and the role of these transitional passages was developed independently from, but is very similar to, the suggestion of Perrin in Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994), 305. See also Norman Perrin, “Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark,” in Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin* (Claremont, CA: New Testament Colloquium, 1971), 3-6. These sources are cited in Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 89, note 26. This division of Mark 1:14–10:52 into 1:14–3:12, 3:13–6:6, 6:7–8:21, and 8:22–10:52, is also very similar to the analysis of Lamar Williamson, *Mark*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), vii-x.

14. Failure to recognize that Jesus’ truly public Galilean ministry is limited to 1:14–3:12 and thus that 3:13–10:52 focuses on the disciples is one reason why interpreters fail to see that 8:22–10:52 should go with what precedes rather than what follows.

and closes it with a summary of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee (3:7-12).<sup>15</sup> The material between these two "summaries" falls naturally into two contrasting parts—1:16-51 and 2:1-3:6. Mark 1:16-51 describes the growing popularity of Jesus among the masses that begins with their marveling at the authority of his teaching and power over evil spirits in the synagogue of Capernaum and climaxes, after his healing of the leper, with such popularity that he has to withdraw from town life lest he be mobbed. Mark 2:1—3:6, on the other hand, describes the growing hostility of the rulers that begins with Jesus' claim to forgive sin and climaxes in the Pharisee-Herodian plot to kill him. Jesus' forgiving of the paralytic in 2:1-12 is the turning point. It is here that Jesus clarifies the fact that he is acting with divine authority and thus raises the resistance of human authorities. This clarification of Jesus' authority leads to a clarification of discipleship. Jesus called the first four in 1:16-20. He now calls Levi, a "tax collector and sinner." Furthermore, he affirms that the purpose of his coming is to call "sinners." (Mark 2:13-17 is as close to a purpose statement for this Gospel as we will get.) To become his disciple one must own one's sinfulness, leave the old way of life, repent, and follow Jesus.

This public ministry in Galilee, then, is the occasion for some people to begin following Jesus as his disciples and for the authorities to begin plotting his death. Thus it anticipates both the way in which Jesus draws his followers along the path of discipleship in 3:13–10:52 and the official opposition that dominates his Temple ministry (11:1–13:37) and subsequent passion in Jerusalem (14:1–16:8). Mark continues to build anticipation for Jesus' rejection by introducing the Jerusalem scribes with their capital charge of blasphemy (3:22-30) after the calling of the twelve (3:13-20) and the death of John the Baptist (6:14-39) after the sending of the twelve (6:7-13). The mention of the Jerusalem scribes, Herod, and the speculations of the common people in these key passages anticipates the role of the religious authorities, the secular authorities, and the crowds in Jesus' passion. Note the mention of both the Pharisees and the Herodians in 3:1-6 (cf. 8:15).

---

15. Whether Jesus' ministry is directed to the public or to his disciples is not the same as whether the readers/hearers are "included" by being given the same or even more information than the characters of the story or whether they are "excluded" by having less, as in the interesting study by Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Audience Inclusion and Exclusion as Rhetorical Technique in the Gospel of Mark," *JBL* 129 (2010): 717-73. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that he finds the first three chapters of Mark as characterized by the inclusion of the readers/hearers. The readers begin as part of the public that Jesus is addressing in those chapters (Ahearne-Kroll, "Audience Inclusion," 719) and are invited to join those whom Jesus calls.

*Section Two. Mark 3:13–6:6: Jesus Presents His Claim to His Disciples, Part I*

As noted above, the naming of the twelve in 3:13-19 introduces the next section, 3:13-6:6, in which the disciples are “with him” (3:14). It also anticipates the following section, in which he will “send them out” (3:14). In this section two crucial things happen to those who have begun to follow Jesus. First, they are instructed in the eternal importance of “hearing” the word of God, of obedient perseverance in discipleship. Second, they are exposed to greater demonstrations of Jesus’ authority not available to the general public. After the calling of the four in 1:16-20, the crowds in the synagogue marveled at Jesus’ authority. Now, after the naming of the twelve, the scribes from Jerusalem claim that Jesus’ authority is demonic (3:22-30) and his family thinks he is “beside himself” (3:20-21, 31-35). Jesus’ responses dismiss these two false understandings of his identity and allow him to make it clear that following him is a matter of obedience, not familial relationship. The theme of family-rejection is picked up at the end of this section when Jesus returns to and is rejected by the people in his home town (6:1-6, cf. his rejection by the Pharisees and Herodians in 3:1-6). The bulk of this section can be divided into two sub-sections—the parables of 4:1-34 that emphasize the urgency of “hearing” God’s word in Christ, and the great demonstrations of Jesus’ divine authority in 4:35—5:43.<sup>16</sup> These demonstrations of his authority are meant to lead the disciples to a true understanding of his identity and thus to reinforce the urgency of “hearing.” Jesus withdrew at 1:51 because his popularity made it difficult for him to enter a town. His withdrawal at 4:35 to the “country of the Gerasenes” (5:1) is even more significant, because it is the occasion for the disciples to see undreamed of demonstrations of Jesus’ authority available only to those who have begun to follow—first in the calming of the sea (4:35-41) and then in the deliverance of the demoniac from a “legion” of demons in 5:1-20. Even when Jesus returns at 5:21, the Jewish public does not see the healing of the woman with the issue of blood or the raising of Jairus’ daughter (5:21-43). It is the disciples, those who have already begun following Jesus, who are exposed to these great demonstrations of Jesus’ authority and urged to “hear” with all diligence.

---

16. France calls both 4:1-34 and 13:3-35 “explanatory” discourses (*The Gospel of Mark*, 14-15). He thinks of them as literary “pauses” at the center of the intense first and third “acts” of the Markan “drama.” Be that as it may, the first urges those who have begun following to genuinely “hear” and persevere, the second announces the consequences on those who reject Jesus and thus refuse to hear.

*Section Three. Mark 6:7–8:21: Jesus Presents His Claim to His Disciples, Part II*

The next section, 6:7–8:21, begins, as was anticipated in 3:14, with Jesus' sending out the disciples. In the last section they were urged to "hear" and they observed Jesus' great authority. In this section his authority over sickness and unclean spirits is exercised through them. The food for the five and the four thousand goes through their hands. And yet they do not grasp Jesus' true identity, they are "hard hearted," they do not "hear."

In the first section the call of the disciples was followed by the crowd's amazement at Jesus' authority (1:21-28); in the second, the naming of the twelve was followed by the Jerusalem scribe's attribution of Jesus' authority to the devil (3:22-30) and his family's concern that he was out of his mind (3:20-21, 31-35); now, after the sending of the twelve to preach over a broad area, we are exposed to popular theories about the origin of Jesus' authority and to King Herod's opinion based on his guilty conscience—some say Jesus is Elijah, others that he is one of the old prophets, and others that he is John the Baptist raised to life—the opinion of Herod (6:14-29). The description of Herod's execution of John the Baptist in 6:17-29 not only explains Herod's belief that Jesus is a resurrected John the Baptist but forebodes Jesus' death, for the prologue has already told us that John prepared the way for Jesus and in 11:27-33 Jesus implies to the Jerusalem authorities that his authority is from the same source as John's. All of this discussion prepares us for Peter's confession at the beginning of the next section (8:27-38) which is preceded by a reiteration of the various opinions held by the crowd and followed by Jesus' own announcement of his coming crucifixion.<sup>17</sup>

The first section ended, as we have noted, with the plot of the Pharisees and Herodians against Jesus (3:1-6); the second ended with Jesus' rejection by the people of his home town (6:1-6); this section ends with the gross failure of the disciples to understand and follow, a failure so egregious that the text puts their failure side by side with Jesus' rejection by the Pharisees (8:11-21).

---

17. Moreover, the close association of the disciples with Jesus evidenced by their entering into his ministry in 6:7–8:21 lays a foundation for the close association between the fate of Jesus the Messiah and the necessity for his followers to "take up the cross" and follow him in 8:22–10:45. See the interesting article by Geoffrey David Miller, "An Intercalation Revisited: Christology, Discipleship, and Dramatic Irony in Mark 6:6b-30," *JSNT* 35 (2012): 176-95. Dewey affirms the similarities between Mark 6:14-29 and 8:27-33 but draws different conclusions from them ("Tapestry," 231).

The bulk of this section falls naturally into three sub-sections, each of which highlights the ever greater failure of the disciples that climaxes in 8:11-21. The first sub-section, 6:30-56, centers around Jesus' withdrawal to a "desolate place" and describes the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus' walking on the sea, and the healings at Gennesaret; the second, 7:1-23, appears to take place back in Jewish territory and presents Jesus' teaching on true purity;<sup>18</sup> the third, 7:24-8:10, centers around Jesus' withdrawal far away to the "region of Tyre and Sidon" and describes the healing of the Syrophenician woman's child, the healing of a deaf man in the Decapolis, and the feeding of the 4,000.

Withdrawal is still the occasion for the disciples to experience Jesus' authority as it was in the last section at 4:35, but it is also the occasion that reveals their increasing hardness of heart. Jesus' walking on the water exposes the disciple's failure to understand the significance of the feeding of the 5,000 (6:52). Jesus' teaching on clean and unclean reveals their failure to understand true purity (7:18). Their lack of faith exposed by their weak answer when confronted with the hunger of the 4,000 (8:4) contrasts starkly with the faith of two gentiles—the Syrophenician woman and the deaf/mute from the Decapolis.<sup>19</sup> The unbelief of the disciples appears to be as unsteady as the boat they are in when their blindness climaxes in their supposition that Jesus is concerned because they forgot to bring bread (8:14-21).

*Section Four. Mark 8:22-10:52: Jesus Presents His Claim to His Disciples, Part III*

Jesus' ministry to his disciples reaches its climax in Peter's confession (8:27-30) and the subsequent narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (8:31-45).<sup>20</sup> This section is framed, as argued above, by the two-step healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) and the healing of once-blind Bartemaeus in 10:46-52. The disciples who confess Jesus' messiahship but reject his coming crucifixion see only as the first blind man saw after Jesus' first touch. Unlike Bartemaeus, their confession has not yet led them to follow Jesus "on the way" to the cross.

---

18. Note the appearance again of scribes "from Jerusalem" in 7:1.

19. When Jesus confronts those who helped him feed the 5,000 with the hunger of the 4,000, they say, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?"

20. France comments on the recurrence of the phrase "on the way" and related terms (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:17, 32, 52) and notes that this "journey section of the gospel is also a study of discipleship" (*The Gospel of Mark*, 320-21, quotation at 321). We are contending that the entire Gospel is "a study of discipleship."

In the previous sections Jesus' calling (1:16-20), naming (3:13-20), and sending (6:7-13) of the disciples was each followed by a discussion of his authority/identity—the synagogue crowd was amazed (1:21-28); the Jerusalem scribes and his family attributed his authority to the devil or to insanity respectively (3:20-35); Herod and the common crowd speculated that Jesus was one of the prophets or a resurrected John the Baptist (6:14-29). Here, in response to Jesus' question, Peter gives the true answer—"You are the Christ" (8:29). It appears that the disciples have overcome the hardness of heart that so characterized them in the previous section. Now it isn't the synagogue folk, the Jerusalem scribes, Jesus' family members, Herod, or the crowds who speculate about Jesus. Jesus himself affirms Peter's answer and then proceeds to explain the cruciform implications of his being the Messiah. Not only is he going to his crucifixion, but his disciples must take up their "cross" and follow him. The disciples, delivered from their first quandary by their acknowledgement of Jesus as the Christ, are plunged into a deeper quandary—he is the Christ, but they don't want him to be a suffering and crucified Christ because they don't want to have to follow him by "taking up" their "cross."<sup>21</sup>

The writer has also used the feature of Jesus' "withdrawal" differently in order to highlight the point of this section. In the first section Jesus withdrew from city life at 1:45 to avoid being mobbed in light of his great popularity. In the second section Jesus' withdrawal at 4:35 provided the occasion for the disciples to experience Jesus' divine authority apart from the unbelief of the rulers or the superficiality of the crowds. In the third section we saw that there were two "withdrawals" (6:32, 8:24) centering on the two feedings, and that the purpose of these withdrawals was both to emphasize the disciples' experience of Jesus' authority and their seemingly impenetrable hardness of heart. In this fourth section, 8:22–10:52, the withdrawal is moved to the very beginning. Jesus and his disciples are on their way to the villages of Caesarea Philippi in the north when he asks them who they think he is. Jesus may have had various reasons for picking such a place to ask this question. In the text, however, beginning from this distant location intensifies the threatening, impending nature of Jesus' death, as Jesus and his disciples traverse the long road, not back to Galilee but to Jerusalem—via Galilee (9:30), Capernaum (9:33), the "region of Judea and beyond Jordan" (10:1), "on the road" (10:32), and "Jericho" (10:36). This journey is marked by His three passion predictions (8:31-

---

21. Thus we agree with Strauss' observation that the first part of Mark's Gospel focuses on Jesus' mighty authority as Messiah and Son of God while 8:22–10:52 begins to focus more forcefully on the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and death (*Mark*, 17-20).

32, 9:30-32, 10:32-34). The rest of the incidents in this section clarify what it means to follow a Savior on the road to crucifixion and expose the disciples' persistent blindness to this reality. Their lack of understanding reaches a climax in the request from James and John to sit at Jesus right and left hand in 10:35-45.

The disciples, who have now grasped the fact that Jesus is the Christ but are hesitant about following him to the cross, see, like the blind man in 8:22-26, only in a partial and distorted way. They are on their way to the clarity of the once-blind Bartemaus (10:46-51), who acknowledges Jesus as the Christ by addressing him as "Son of David" and follows him "on the way" to Jerusalem.

## Jesus Presents His Claim in the Jerusalem Temple (Mark 11:1–13:37)

In 11:1–13:37 Jesus resumes in the Jerusalem Temple the public ministry he began in Galilee (1:16–3:12).<sup>22</sup> He who first presented his claim in far off Galilee (2:1-12) now presents it in the Temple, the place representative of God's presence and the center of the religious life of his people. He called his first disciples in Galilee. In the intervening chapters, as we have seen, he led them through demonstrations of his divine authority to confess him as the Christ (3:13–10:52). He now presents that claim to be the Christ before the entire nation.<sup>23</sup> Just as his coming to Jerusalem forces the rulers to choose for or against him, so it forces us the readers to choose. We have come too far with the disciples to ignore Jesus' claim, but if we follow him we must "take up the cross."

---

22. The journey toward Jerusalem described in 8:22–10:52 (though "Jerusalem" is not mentioned until 10:32) concludes with Jesus entering Jerusalem in 11:11, 15, and 27. It must be emphasized, however, that each time he goes immediately into the Temple. The discourse on the Temple's destruction begins in 13:1 with his coming out of the Temple. Thus, this part of Mark takes place not merely in Jerusalem but in (11:11–12:44) or in relation to (13:1-37), the Temple. While the passion that follows in 14:1–16:8 obviously takes place in Jerusalem, the city is not named until 15:41 which speaks of the women who had come up with Jesus to "Jerusalem."

23. Jerusalem "remains the city of David, the chosen capital of the nation which God has chosen to be a light to the nations, and to which even a Galilean Jew belongs. It is the site of the temple, the visible focus of the worship of Israel's God. That is why, if Peter's declaration in 8:29 was correct, Jesus could not stay in Galilee. The Messiah must come to 'his' capital and present himself to his people" (France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 426).

This section centers around three entrances of Jesus into the Temple (11:1-14; 11:15-26; and 11:27-12:44), followed by a departure from the Temple (13:1-37). The first two entrances comprise one sub-section. In them Jesus presents his claim in the Jerusalem Temple, first by the triumphal entry, then by cleansing the temple. The first of these incidents prepares for the greater second. These two entrances are also united by the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-26) which forebodes Jesus rejection and God's judgment on those who reject him.

The second sub-section (11:27-12:44) describes Jesus' third entrance into the Temple. During this third visit the rulers challenge Jesus' claim. Jesus answers their challenge by referring to John the Baptist (11:27-33) and then by the parable of the Tenants (12:1-12). This parable is the definitive, if indirect, explanation of his claim offered in the Jerusalem Temple—he is the “beloved son,” the heir of the “owner.” Then the Pharisees (12:13-17); Sadducees (12:18-27); and a scribe (12:28-34) question Jesus, trying to entrap him so that they can get rid of him. After defeating their questions Jesus goes on the offensive, asking a question of his own (12:32-37); warning against the leaders who have rejected him (12:38-40); and giving a contrasting example of one who responds appropriately to God (12:41-44). Jesus intends to leave them no alternative but to accept him or crucify him.

It is no accident that the third part (13:1-37) of this major section begins with Jesus leaving the Temple (13:1). In this sub-section Jesus, from the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple, pronounces judgment on the Temple and its rulers because they have rejected him. He also announces his second coming as hope for his own, as the ultimate justification of his authority, and as proof of the error of those who reject him. The first two sub-sections (11:1-26; 11:27-12:44) emphasize the purposeful intentionality of Jesus: he will present his claim before the rulers in Jerusalem at the Temple. This third sub-section underscores the consequences of their rejecting his claim.

## **Jesus Fulfills His Claim on the Cross— The Passion (Mark 14:1-16:8)**

Finally, Jesus' rejection by the rulers described in 11:1-13:37 results in Jesus' Passion, narrated in 14:1-16:8. His death at the conclusion of his Jerusalem ministry was anticipated by the plot against his life at the conclusion of his Galilean ministry (3:1-6). A central theme of this section is Jesus' sovereignty over the course of events. He told his disciples, after their confession of his Messiahship, that he was the kind of Christ who would suffer and that, if they followed him, they would have to follow him

to the cross. They, and we the readers, must now face what they struggled with throughout 8:22–10:52.

This section divides easily into subsections—introduction to the passion (14:1-11), preparation for the passion (14:12-42), indictment by the Sanhedrin (14:43-72), condemnation by Pilot (15:1-20), crucifixion, death, burial (15:21-47), and, finally, the Resurrection (16:1-8).

Mark introduces the passion (14:1-11) with the anointing at Bethany which foreshadows Jesus' death and provides him with an occasion to affirm what is ahead. This event is sandwiched between the frustrated plot of the rulers to get rid of Jesus and Judas' offer of betrayal which solved their problem and thus opened the way for all that follows.

Jesus' preparation for the passion in 14:12-42 begins with preparing for the Passover and ends with his agony in the garden as he prepares for what he knows is ahead. Jesus announces his coming death through the institution of the Lord's Supper at the center of this section. This event is sandwiched between his predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, both of which show Jesus' sovereign knowledge of what is coming.

This sub-section describing Jesus' preparation for the Passion is followed by sub-sections on Indictment by the Sanhedrin (14:43-72) and Condemnation by Pilate (15:1-20). The actual indictment is preceded and followed by fulfillments of Jesus' predictions concerning Judas' betrayal (14:43-52) and Peter's denial (14:66-72). Jesus intentionally brings condemnation upon himself by asserting his claim before the High Priest (14:53-65). Before Pilate the charge of claimed Messiahship becomes a charge of pretended royalty (15:1-20). This sub-section describes Pilate's questioning Jesus, his condemning Jesus, though he is convinced of his innocence, and the soldier's subsequent mocking of Jesus. The final subsection of chapter fifteen describes Jesus crucifixion in the midst of being mocked, followed by his death, and his burial, that confirms his death (15:33-47). The centurion's confession in the central part of this subsection is the Gospel's final witness—although crucified, this person was "the Son of God" (15:39).

## **Conclusion: Discipleship and the Structure of Mark Once Again**

It is appropriate to provide some concluding comments on the relationship between structure and discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. We have described 1:14–3:12 as Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. Yet it would be misleading to isolate this section from the three following sections that focus on Jesus' ministry to his disciples. After all, 1:14–3:12 is the call

to discipleship, the beginning of the discipleship that is moved toward fruition in the following sections; with those first disciples we receive Jesus' exhortations to "hear" and are privileged to experience his great authority over nature and over all evil, even death, in 3:13–6:6. Even as that experience of his authority deepens, we, like the first disciples in 6:7–8:21, are confronted with who this person is! He is obviously a human being, but then, how can he act like God? He exercises an authority over demons and nature that only God has; he does so by speaking a word as only God can: He claims to do things, such as forgive sin, that none but God can do. No wonder the disciples were slow to penetrate this mystery! Then, like the disciples in 8:22–10:52, we who accept the verdict of the evidence and affirm that Jesus is the Christ are confronted with Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow him to crucifixion. By focusing on his approach to Jerusalem and his coming crucifixion, 8:22–10:52 helps us transition to his concluding public ministry in the Jerusalem Temple (11:1–13:37) and subsequent passion (14:1–16:8). This public Temple ministry followed by the passion makes it clear that we cannot embrace Jesus as the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God, without following him to the cross. At the same time the understanding of Mark's structure presented in this study demonstrates the prior necessity of accepting Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, before following him as the crucified Messiah.

I have intentionally reserved comment on the account of the Resurrection in 16:1–8 until now. While the reality of the empty tomb confirms Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God, the ambiguity of the women who came to the tomb thrusts the decision of what to do with the risen Christ back into our hands. The sense of incompleteness that caused someone to pen the longer ending of Mark invites us, the readers, to finish the story by confirming our own discipleship. From beginning to end, Mark's Gospel is an invitation to discipleship.