

(Re)Defining the Gospels: Mark as a Test Case, Part Two

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Abstract: The Gospel accounts are stories that report biographical, historical, and theological information regarding the central character, Jesus Christ. This article proposes that the Gospel of Mark not only possesses the elements of narrative that are typical to a story, but Mark also demonstrates that it fits into the subgenre classification known as theological narrative biography proposed in part one of this study. Mark's story ultimately answers two questions: "Who is Jesus?" and "What is a follower of him to do?"

Key Words: Gospel, Mark, genre theological narrative biography, three-fold identity

Studying the Gospel of Mark as Literature

The focus of the preceding article (*JMAT*, Fall 2017, Vol. 21, no. 2) was the classification of the Gospel accounts as genre (narrative) and subgenre (theological narrative biography). The goal was to redefine the traditional long-standing term known as *Gospel* and explicate more fully and carefully the intent of the Gospel authors. The subgenre classification was necessary due to the fact that the Gospels are unique and unlike any other narrative. The examination of genre and subgenre captures the basic framework of the Gospels.

The second part of this study demonstrates that the elements of the narrative of Mark's Gospel is a story comprised of episodes. These brief episodes are structured through three geographic locations (Galilee, "on the way" to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem). They are also communicated through the expressions

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and/or responses of various characters or groups treated as characters (religious & governmental authorities, disciples, and crowd) as they interact with the unifying character and life of Jesus Christ (teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection).

Mark's story contains a theological emphasis. It is more than a biography and history. The theological emphasis is one of the unique features of the Gospel accounts that serves as the basis for its subgenre category, theological narrative biography. Mark's story emphasizes two aspects. He declares, defines, and affirms the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God throughout his story. This is the formal aspect. Mark also emphasizes the role of the disciples thus providing the significance and application of Jesus' identity to the reader. This is the functional aspect. In other words, Mark identifies who Jesus is and in light of knowing him, what Jesus' disciples ought to do.

Literary Genre: The Gospel of Mark as Narrative

Mark developed and composed his story through a narrative comprised of brief episodes structured together, communicated in and around Galilee and Jerusalem during Rome's military control over Israel. Mark is concerned with the life of Jesus and his disciples, Roman and Jewish governments, and other followers. Mark's narrative is put forward as a story that essentially conveys an account of the good news about Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 1:1).² Stein states that Mark is "the biography of Jesus interwoven in a historical narrative."³ In other words, the Gospel of Mark is a narration of the life of Jesus as the Son of God told as a story through various historical accounts within the life of Jesus. Achtemeier states, "We must look at it [the Gospel of Mark] as a totality and allow it to tell its own story. . . . We

² Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), xxi. He also contends that Mark's use of "gospel" in the prologue of his story offers a logical designation for similar writings; that is, 'The Gospel according to'

³ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BEC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 21. Contra Robert H. Gundry. Gundry concludes that the Gospel of Mark is a "loose disposition of materials," or "a collage, not a diptych or a triptych or any other carefully segmented portrayal of Jesus" (*Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 1048-49).

must respect the narrative as it stands and follow its invitation to enter into the narrative world it creates.”⁴

A broad look at each of the elements (e.g., structure, setting, character, and point of view) of narrative throughout the Gospel of Mark demonstrates the coherence and unification of the whole text, thus validating the classification of the Gospel accounts as narrative. This analysis assists the reader with an understanding of the arrangement of the components typical to a narrative (*how* the story is told) and the argument of the narrative (*what* is the content of the story). This facilitates a means to study Mark.

The Gospel of Mark: Structure – Three-fold Identity

Mark’s narrative structure is captured through an eclectic approach called three-fold identity. The reason for the eclectic approach is to illustrate how Mark weaves together geography and theology in order to communicate his story. Geography and theology are not only common among scholars as they understand Mark’s structure, but they also best point to Mark’s purpose.⁵ In other words, the geographical locations are used as the means to communicate the theology, or Mark’s purpose; which is the message of the opening verse of the Gospel 1:1. Mark’s purpose for his story is to explicate the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (formal aspect, “who is he?”) for this is found in the title of Mark’s story (1:1). As a result of knowing Jesus, Mark also provides the applicational significance to his story (functional aspect, “what are the disciples to do?”). Therefore, Mark utilizes geography and theology to write the story of Jesus Christ. And in doing so, he demonstrates that his story is purposeful.

⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Mark*, Proclamation Commentaries 2nd ed., rev and exp. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 42.

⁵ Guelich also claims that geography and theology can be the basis for Mark’s structure. (*Mark 1-8:26*, xxxvi). See other options reported by Kevin W. Larsen, “The Structure of Mark’s Gospel: Current Proposals,” *CBR* 3, no.1 (2004): 140-60. Rikki E. Watts proposes that the structure of Mark’s story has a dual perspective of salvation and judgment within the context of the Isaianic New Exodus (*Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, Biblical Studies Library [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997], 4).

Mark composes his story through three geographical settings; the region of Galilee (1:1-8:21), the way to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52), and Jerusalem itself (11:1-16:8) in order to portray Jesus' identity, the formal aspect of Mark's story.⁶ He uses geography to capture the essence of the story of Jesus through his travels. Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee is followed by his journey southward toward Jerusalem, which ultimately culminates in the climax of his death and resurrection in Jerusalem.⁷

Although the geographical section breaks may not be clearly discernible, for example does the middle section begin at 8:22 or 8:27, an understanding that Mark's story is a flowing narrative seems apparent and his structure is discerned through a reading of the text. Therefore as one reads the text, the following conclusions are made. The first section of Mark's story is communicated through various episodes where Jesus' ministry is primarily in and around Galilee (1:14-8:21). Mark's focus is on the declaration of Jesus' identity. Jesus primarily declares his identity through his teachings and miracles. But Mark's story seems to take a turn at 8:22. This shift is demonstrated not only because of a change in geography (Bethsaida), but also a change in focus (disciples); thus demonstrating the relationship between geography and content, or theology. The focus seems to be more on the disciples' responsibility as followers and less on Jesus' identity.

The middle section of Mark's story demonstrates that Jesus is more narrowly focused on the disciples. He teaches them how to respond and live in light of knowing Jesus' true identity (8:22-10:52). In order to teach his disciples, Jesus defines himself as the suffering and self-sacrificing Messiah.

⁶ Marcus claims that though several structural outlines exist for the Gospel of Mark, that "there does seem to be an overarching geographical framework to the Gospel, within which literary and theological structures play their roles" (*Mark 1-8*, 63).

⁷ See also Dennis Sweetland, *Mark: From Death to Life* (Hyde Park, NY: New City P, 2007), 17. Gundry disagrees. He concludes that "walking through Mark takes us hither and yon with little or no discernible pattern" (*Mark*, 1046).

Mark identifies the final section of his story through a geographical shift. It is here that Jesus now approaches Jerusalem (11:1). Jesus' ministry changes once again. His ministry now is focused on affirming his identity. He enters the eventual place of his death and resurrection, Jerusalem (11:1-16:8), proving he is indeed who he said he was. Therefore, not only does Mark use a change in geography as the means to communicate his story, but also relates these geographical settings to the identity of Jesus Christ, who is the unifying focus of the narrative.

The three-fold geographical settings serve as the means to communicate the formal aspect of Mark's story; the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In the beginning of Mark's story, an introductory verse sets the stage with the emphasis for the readers.⁸ This opening verse, the "good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" grabs the readers' attention. It is placed at the beginning of Mark's story so the readers can answer the question concerning Jesus' identity.⁹ Hooker claims that Mark's theological purpose is found in 1:1. She writes,

Mark has chosen to present 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' in the form of a narrative. . . . Mark has provided a guide to his narrative in the form of a prologue that provides the information we need to read the rest of his Gospel, and so gives us a succinct summary of his christology. . . . The gospel is more than the message that Jesus preached. It is, in fact, Jesus himself—that is, the gospel *about* Jesus Christ. So from 1:9 onward—with the exceptions of 6:14-29 and 14:66-72—Jesus is the central figure in the narrative.¹⁰

⁸ Boring agrees. He claims that Mark is a carefully structured narrative that is composed through the author's Christology provided through his title in 1:1 ("Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel," *Semeia* 52 (1990): 43).

⁹ Jack D. Kingsbury claims that Mark's focus is on Jesus' identity as the 'Messiah, Son of God' that is ultimately revealed by the Roman centurion in 15:39 (*The Christology of Mark's Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress 1983]). See also Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, xl. Joel B. Green states that the answer to the question, 'who is Jesus,' is found in verse one (*The Way of the Cross: Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock], 20).

¹⁰ "Who Can This Be?" in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005),

The episodes of the story of Mark help the reader “wrestle with the question ‘Who then is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ (4:41).”¹¹ These episodes elucidate Mark’s authorial emphasis; that is, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Mark composes this story through the teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as he travels from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The question of identity for Mark runs throughout his story, for each section of the story explicates his identity. The first section (1:1-8:21) declares Jesus as one who causes astonishment and possesses unprecedented authority. Various characters try to make sense of his teaching and miracle-work, but to no avail they are not able to do so. The central section (8:22-10:52) breaks through with Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ (8:29), but this section also continues to report that the disciples are those men who struggle to follow Jesus due to their lack of understanding. Therefore, Jesus further defines who he is (formal aspect); the suffering and self-sacrificing Messiah, and teaches the disciples what they ought to do as a result of knowing him (functional aspect).

The last section (11:1-16:8) affirms Jesus’ identity as the Son of God through Jesus’ own words (14:62) and the words of the Roman Centurion at Jesus’ death (15:39). This section also

80-81. See also Edwards who claims that “Jesus is the uncontested subject of the Gospel of Mark, and he is portrayed as a man of action” (*The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 13).

Achtmeier also claims that Mark’s narrative is to be seen through this verse. He writes, “Yet, for the whole of Mark’s narrative, as for this verse, the only one through whom we can gain life is Jesus. It would appear, therefore, that the power of Jesus is also present with his power to save. Apparently the narrative of Jesus’ deeds and words, accepted as a narrative of deeds done and words spoken with the authority of God’s royal Son, is able to save a person’s life. . . . That means that when Mark speaks of the ‘beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,’ he is not referring to where a book or even a public career begins, but rather to the fact that God’s saving acts, which make up the ‘gospel,’ began with the career of Jesus. . . . Where the gospel is present, there Jesus’ power is present and perhaps even Jesus himself!” (*Mark*, 64).

¹¹ Stein, *Mark*, 21.

testifies to Jesus’ resurrection (16:6), a testament to Jesus’ ability to predict both his death and resurrection (8:31, 9:31, and 10:34). This ability is only demonstrative of God. The following table (table one) shows the cohesive relationship between the three sections of Mark’s story, thereby, demonstrating that the three-fold identity structure of Mark’s story seems to be correct. The three sections are Jesus’ Galilean Ministry (1:14-8:21), “on the way” to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52), and Jerusalem (11:1-16:8).

Table 1. Three-fold Identity of Mark’s Story

Aspect of Mark’s Story	Jesus’ Galilean Ministry (1:14-8:21)	“on the way” to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52) – Jesus’ Three Passion Predictions	Jerusalem (11:1-16:8)
Formal Aspect “Who Is Jesus?”	Declares Jesus’ Identity	Defines Jesus’ Identity and Mission	Affirms Jesus’ Identity
	1:1, 11 (Son of God)	First passion prediction – use of <i>θεῶν</i>	Jesus speaks to his identity (14:61-62)
	3:11; 5:7 (Son of God)	Second passion prediction – use of <i>παραδίδοται and εις χειρας ανθρώπων</i>	Jesus suffers and is killed (15:16-41)
	8:29 (Messiah, Christ)	Third passion prediction – use of <i>Ἱεροσόλυμα</i>	Jesus rises again, after three days (16:1-6)
Functional Aspect “What Are His Disciples to Do?”	Actions of the Disciples	Characteristics of the Disciples	Failures of the Disciples
	Follow Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-17)	Loyalty to Jesus (8:34-9:1)	Failure of obedience (14:32-42)
	Service on behalf of Jesus (3:13-19)	Service to others (9:35-37)	Failure of following (14:50-54)
	Obedience to Jesus (6:7-13)	Humility and Self-sacrifice (10:41-45)	Failure of loyalty (14:66-72)

Mark uses cohesion throughout his story.¹² The horizontal arrows that connect the three sections of his story (three-fold identity) show cohesion. The emphasis falls on the central section (8:22-10:52) due to the repetition of concepts and the explication of details pertaining to both Jesus' identity and the role and responsibility of the disciples. The premise that Mark's central section "hangs together" within Mark's story as a whole is shown in Table One. In other words, Mark's central section offers the reader multiple connections that point both backward and forward to the formal and functional aspects of Mark's story. The following conclusions can be made.

First, Mark shows cohesion between the central section and the rest of Mark's story because he explicates Jesus' identity (Messiah). He does so by pointing back (1:14-8:21) to the multiple times Mark reports Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Mark's report of Jesus' identity serves as cohesive ties connecting the first section to the central section of Mark's story. In other words, Jesus' three predictions of his death, located within the central section, further define what has already been stated by Mark as the author (1:1), stated by God himself (1:11), stated by the demons (3:11; 5:7), and stated by Peter (8:29); thus connecting the central section to the first section of the story.

The central section also points forward to Jesus' identity. Mark's story also implements cohesive ties to affirm his identity. The ties are Jesus' own words (14:61-62) and the words of the Roman Centurion (15:39). Mark is also able to report the affirmation of Jesus' identity because Jesus' predictions come true. Jesus predicts he will suffer, will be killed, and will rise again (cf. 8:31, 9:31; 10:33-34); and he indeed suffers, dies, and rises again (15:16-41; 16:1-6). The final cohesive tie Mark uses to explicate Jesus' identity is through geography. Mark reports in Jesus' final prediction that the destination of his suffering is Jerusalem (10:32). The reader is able to make the connection that this is where Jesus will die in the next chapter (11:1ff).

¹² Cohesion is about relationship, specifically the relationship between words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses. It is what ties a text or a discourse together. However, cohesion does more than tie texts together; it also relates them into a meaningful whole.

Second, Mark shows cohesion between the central section and the rest of Mark's story (11:1-16:8) because he explicates the role of the disciples. Mark demonstrates cohesion regarding the disciples' role that is based on Jesus' identity, not only within each passion prediction, but also by pointing back to the disciples' various actions within the first section of Mark's story. For example, the disciples followed Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-17), served others (3:13-19), and obeyed Jesus (6:7-13). It is clear within the central section that the disciples were not aware of all the implications of following Jesus; thus leading to their misunderstanding (cf. 8:32b-33; 9:33-34; 10:35-40). Mark therefore reports Jesus' expectations for the disciples (cf. 8:34-9:1; 9:35-37; 10:41-45). However, the reader also realizes that Mark reports similar expectations, for the most part, of Jesus earlier in the story.

The central section also points forward to the failure of the disciples (11:1-16:8). Although Jesus clearly specifies the characteristics his disciples are to exemplify, they still find it difficult to obey (14:32-42) and loyally follow (14:50-54, 66-72). It seems clear that Mark shows the disciples' obedience in the first part of his story only to report that they struggle in later sections of his story. The central section seems to show Jesus taking an active role to clarify the disciples' role, but yet Mark later shows their failure in the last section of his story (11:1-16:8). Therefore upon knowing Jesus, the disciples do not fully understand what it means to follow Jesus.

Understanding relationships between the central section (8:22-10:52) and Mark's story as a whole (1:1-16:8) confirms the theme of the story. The central section fits into the story and serves to explicate the details of Jesus' identity. This relates to Mark's christological title (1:1). The central section also portrays the role of the disciples. This relates to the theological significance for the reader. Therefore, the three-fold identity of Mark best represents the structure of his story.

Summary: The Gospel of Mark: Structure – Three-fold Identity

Mark's story is structured as a narrative. It is structured through geography that illustrates the journey of the Son of God.

However, there are specific movements within this geography that relate to Jesus' identity; which is Mark's theological emphasis. Geography and theology for Mark are inextricably tied together. Galilee is where Mark declares Jesus' identity through his teachings and miracles (1:14-8:21), "on the way" to Jerusalem is where Mark defines Jesus' identity by reporting Jesus' three passion predictions (8:22-10:52), and the city of Jerusalem is where Mark affirms Jesus' identity as the Son of God through his suffering, death, and resurrection (11:1-16:8). Therefore the three-fold identity approach to the structure of Mark's story best captures his message.

The Gospel of Mark: Setting

The setting of a narrative provides the "world" in which the episodes take place and characters function to tell the story. Setting is more than location and more than time. It "may illuminate or bring new significance to otherwise obscure features."¹³ At this point, it is important to note that the author provides the setting and he determines what the reader is to know through reading and imagination.

The Gospel of Mark is told through the means of a combination of travel and geography. It is the journey throughout the Gospel that binds the story together. But it is not just movement across a landscape. Rather it is a journey that moves one to the climax of the story; that is, Jesus' death. Therefore, it is the "way" to the cross. During this movement Jesus' identity is declared as the Son of God (1:14-8:21). Jesus continues to move "on the way" to Jerusalem where he will suffer death. It is during this movement that Jesus instructs his disciples regarding their cost to follow him, the central section of the story (8:22-10:52). He arrives in Jerusalem where he is welcomed by the acclamation of crowds only to be crucified by Roman and Jewish authorities (11:1-16:8). It is during Jesus' crucifixion that his identity is affirmed as the Son of God (15:39). Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie claim that Mark's structural setting "leads readers to join the journey of 'the way of God.' . . . The story draws readers

¹³ R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2007), 25.

into the journey and the destiny of Jesus.”¹⁴ Thus, the spatial setting plays a vital role in understanding Mark’s story.¹⁵

The Gospel of Mark is also told through several different temporal venues. As Jesus, his disciples, and the crowds of various sizes move across the landscape, episodes that make-up Mark’s story occur during a general length of time, as well as, the specificity of the length of time.

Mark’s story is generally told through the time period of days rather than weeks or months.¹⁶ Mark’s story also includes the specificity of the day; that is, the period of the day: evening or morning. Thus it is clear that Mark’s story is told in a sequence of episodes that do not just involve geography, but also chronology.

The Gospel of Mark is told through a specific social and cultural climate. This is seen through two venues; the geographical setting and the characters’ social class. As Mark writes his story across the landscape, opposition becomes apparent between the two primary geographical settings; Galilee and Jerusalem. Van Iersel states,

Jerusalem is the centre and capital of the country, the seat also of political power and the temple authorities. Galilee, on the other hand, is on the periphery, a faraway province whose inhabitants are

¹⁴ David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress), 72.

¹⁵ For more detail regarding the setting of Mark see Guelich, “Mark, Gospel of,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 516-17.

¹⁶ Mark Allen Powell indicates that nothing happens in Mark’s story that needs longer than a day to explain. He states, “A crowd remains with him ‘for three days’ (8:2). He teaches that he will rise from the dead ‘after three days’ (8:31). He is transfigured on the mountain ‘after six days’ (9:2). The Passover is reported to be coming ‘after two days’ (14:1). He is accused of claiming he will rebuild the temple ‘in three days’ (14:58; 15:29)” (*What Is Narrative Criticism* [Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1990], 80).

looked upon with suspicion by Jerusalem, partly because of their being mixed with non-Jewish populations.¹⁷

This opposition also demonstrates a distinct classification between people groups and their social standing.¹⁸ The society depicted in Mark's story seems to illustrate a class society. The Pharisees and scribes were those who interpreted and upheld the law of Moses. While on the other hand, the rest of the people in Mark are common folk.

The political climate of Mark's story is the nation of Israel under the military control of the Roman Empire. Herod Antipas and Pilate enforce this military control. This political environment was especially difficult for those living under the dominion of Roman rule within Galilee and Jerusalem and is made evident in Mark's story (10:42; 12:13-17; 13:9). This political regime also served as the appropriate setting for those in opposition to Jesus and his ministry (14:53-15:41).

The setting of the Gospel of Mark is oriented in two major areas: Galilee and Jerusalem. It is in these two locations that Jesus' identity as the Son of God is declared and affirmed. The majority of the episodes that compose Mark's narrative occur during the time period of a day rather than a month or year. At times however, Mark is specific both with the kind of day and the location in which the episodes of his story occur. Mark's story depicts a cultural environment where people of different classes and status function as characters to help facilitate the portrayal and thus the validation of Jesus' identity. In other words, the teachings and miracles of Jesus occur with the

¹⁷ Bas van Iersel, *Reading Mark*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical P, 1989), 22.

¹⁸ R. T. France states, "Mark's geographical symbolism, if such it is, is not a matter of great theological weight; it is rather a vehicle of his dramatic retelling of the story of Jesus, serving to draw out the intensely opposite reactions which he provoked, the contrasting soils into which the good seed had to be sown" (*The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 35). For a detailed discussion of the Roman social classes of people see Duane F. Watson, "Roman Social Classes," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 999-1004.

common folk near or around Galilee; whereas the death and resurrection events involve the military, political, and religious authorities in and around the city of Jerusalem.¹⁹

The Gospel of Mark: Characters

The characters in the Gospel of Mark serve as agents to carry out the plot. They are not only agents *in* the plot, but their actions are also an expression *of* the plot. In Mark, there are four primary characters. They are the Son of God, Jesus Christ; the authorities (both governmental and religious); the disciples; and the common folk (typically described as the crowds who follow Jesus).²⁰

The reader discovers that the plot of the story revolves around the opening verse, "the good news about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God." Mark expresses this message throughout the episodes of the story. In other words, from the very beginning the reader sees that Jesus is the central figure through the announcement and anointing by God (1:1-11). Jesus is the Son of God because God has given him this authority to be the Son, his "beloved Son (9:7)." Mark illustrates Jesus' identity primarily through his words and deeds; namely his teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection.

Mark declares Jesus' identity through the responses to his teachings. Jesus' teaching caused his hearers to be amazed, or overwhelmed for he was no ordinary teacher.²¹ Mark also

¹⁹ Van Iersel notes the apparent contrast between locations and people groups within the story of Mark. He writes, "In Galilee Jesus is very active: he makes a new beginning, finds a number of supporters, gets response, helps the sick and handicapped, casts out demons, and resists his adversaries. Jerusalem is the scene of the passion narrative, in which Jesus plays a passive rather than an active part; here he announces the end of the temple and the world, loses his supporters, fails to get a hearing, cures no one, does not cast out any demons, and is defeated by his adversaries" (*Reading Mark*, 22).

²⁰ The basis of the treatment of these characters will only come from the Gospel of Mark. There will not be a construction of the background or history of these characters from other Gospel accounts.

²¹ ἐκπλήσσω "to cause to be filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed, amaze, astound, overwhelm" (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*,

declares Jesus' identity through his miracles. His identity assumes the prerogatives that only God possesses (2:7); therefore he provides the means for the performing of miracles. These actions of Jesus clearly demonstrate his extraordinary character. In fact, Jesus is so extraordinary that he astounds those who see what he does, causes others to question who he is, and invites opposition from those in authority.

Mark declares Jesus' identity through his death. The significance of Jesus' death for Mark's theology is his willing obedience toward the heavenly Father and his vulnerability to suffer execution at the hands of the governmental and religious authorities.²² Jesus' death must take place (8:31, use of $\delta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}$); therefore implying his death is a part of the divine plan.²³ The purpose of his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34) is to be a ransom for many (10:45). Jesus has a God-given commission; to serve as the replacement or substitute in order to assure the release of a slave from his owner. In this case, ransom humanity from sin and death.

3d ed., rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 308.

²² Francis J. Moloney claims, "He is the Christ and the Son of God as the crucified one. This is a matter of major importance for Mark: Jesus is the crucified Christ and the crucified Son of God. It is in and through crucifixion that Jesus fulfills God's messianic design, and shows that he is the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased (1:11; 9:7). However, the tragic end of Jesus' life is not a dreadful fate that simply falls unjustly upon him. Mark associates the categories of Messiah and Son of God with Jesus' death because he wants his readers and hearers to be aware that the crucifixion of God's Son and Messiah are part of God's larger design" (*Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004,] 142).

²³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 80. Stein states, "Jesus' death is part of the divine plan for his life. It is not a tragedy; an example of how things can take an unfortunate turn or how the best laid plans can go awry. On the contrary, in the death of Jesus all things go exactly according to the divine plan" (*Mark*, 34). $\delta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}$ is a divine passive indicating that God ultimately is acting as the agent in Jesus' death; it is necessary that Jesus suffers, dies, and rises again.

Mark declares Jesus' identity through his resurrection. Jesus' death is not the end. Everything in Mark's story has led to this episode. It is the final scene that invites the readers to reflect on the fact that God's Son has now risen from the dead. As a result, Jesus' predictions that he will suffer, die, and rise again are true (cf. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Jesus' death also vindicates his innocence.

Mark's story involves those in opposition to Jesus as the Son of God. Though the groups of authorities are different, governmental and religious, their opposition is united (3:6).²⁴ The governmental authorities were concerned that their right to rule was given to them by God; therefore they protected this right. They also protected the temple and kept social order. The religious authorities, on the other hand, confronted Jesus regarding legal issues, purity regulations, and his authority in general (teaching, healing, and permitting work on the Sabbath). Although governmental and religious groups had substantial social and political authority, they feared the people (11:18; 12:12; 14:1-2; 15:15) and maintained their position through manipulation (15:9-13) and hypocrisy (12:38-40). It is clear that their primary goal was to oppose the one who had "true authority" from God (1:22), Jesus Christ.

The governmental and religious groups lacked understanding. At times Mark demonstrated that they only had a human understanding of Scripture; therefore they were often in error. They objected to the rule of God and refused to change. They possessed an inability to see and therefore blasphemed God. They rejected Jesus' power and envied his popularity.

The followers are typically viewed in two circles, a narrow circle (the twelve disciples) and a broader circle (others also called).²⁵ Both of these groups are the beneficiaries of Jesus'

²⁴ See the following works regarding the authorities: Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. G. Vermes and F. Millar, 2.381-403; 2.404-14 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-87); Jack D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 14-21.

²⁵ Guelich characterizes the two groups as "both a narrower circle comprised of the Twelve who are called to be 'with him' and specially

ministry (teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection). However, for the most part Mark references the narrower circle of followers when referencing the disciples. The disciples play an important role throughout Mark's story. Although they may not be the "central" character, France contends that they often serve as the eyes through which Mark tells the story of Jesus.²⁶ The disciples also are more than historical figures. The disciples are the early group of followers who exemplified those who carried out the mission of the kingdom of God through their wholehearted commitment (1:18, 20; 2:14; 10:28-30), through their privileged insight (4:11), and through their united effort regarding proclamation (3:14-15; 6:12-13, 30).²⁷

The disciples are mentioned throughout Mark's story. They are mentioned either in a positive or negative way; thus illustrating their commitment, their lack of understanding, their fear and faithlessness, their selfish ambition, and their eventual abandonment of Jesus. The positive way Mark illustrates the disciples is through their commitment. They followed Jesus when he called them (1:16-20; 2:14). The importance to the commitment, and therefore an expression of Jesus' authority, lies in the fact that the disciples left their livelihood (1:16-18) and families (1:19-20) to be followers of Jesus (8:34-38).²⁸

commissioned to share in his ministry of teaching, healing and exorcism (3:13-14; cf. 5:18; 6:7-13) and a larger circle who also are called (e.g., Lev 2:13), commissioned (e.g., 5:19-20) 'followers' (e.g., 2:15-17)" ("Mark, Gospel of," 522).

²⁶ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 28. "It is about how twelve ordinary men who met Jesus and entered into a new dimension of living" (28).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie argue that the disciples fulfill their calling. They write, "They become fishers for people—leaving work and family to follow, going to him on the mountain, then proclaiming, exorcising, and healing when he authorizes them to do so. They serve Jesus by following his instructions to take him in the boat, to find a donkey for him, and to prepare the Passover meal. They go with him anywhere he permits them, staying with him despite storms, trips to the desert, corrections, warnings, and little or no praise or assurance of reward" (*Mark As Story*, 124).

One of the negative ways Mark illustrates the disciples is through their lack of understanding, through a hardened heart (6:52; 8:17). It is through two episodes, namely the feeding of the five thousand (6:32-44) and four thousand (8:1-9), that the disciples do not grasp the significance of the identity of the one they follow.

Another negative way Mark illustrates the disciples is through their selfish ambition. This proves they possess a human mindset. They waited for Jesus' triumphant march into Jerusalem to overthrow the Roman government and desired a reward because they had followed him (9:33-34; 10:35-40). Not only did the disciples desire to be honored, they did not want to experience a shameful death.

This leads to the last negative way that Mark communicates the disciples' character, for they eventually abandoned Jesus (14:50). They abandoned Jesus because of their fear and overestimation of the ability to be faithful (14:26-31, 32-42). The disciples misunderstood Jesus' message and ministry. As a result, they followed, feared, denied, and abandoned their leader and teacher Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The crowd, ὄχλος or πλῆθος, refers to the common people.²⁹ The common folk appear throughout the story with little or no connection to one another (e.g., Simon's mother-in-law [1:29-31]; the woman with an issue of blood [5:25-29]; the Syrophenician woman [7:24-30]; the deaf and dumb man [7:31-37]; the blind man at Bethsaida [8:22-26]; and blind Bartimaeus [10:46-52]). The appearances of the crowd are brief, but important. The crowd demonstrates faith. However this faith is not always a turning to Jesus in repentance and belief. They instead often come to Jesus for the purpose of changing their situation (2:3-5; 5:34; 9:23-25; 10:52).

The story of the Gospel of Mark is told through the various expressions of four characters (or groups treated as a character): Jesus, the authorities, the disciples, and the crowds. Jesus was

²⁹ Edwards claims that Jesus' popularity was so significant that Mark refers to the crowds forty times before chapter 10 (*Gospel According to Mark*, 74). For more information see Kingsbury, *Christology of Mark's Gospel*, 78-80.

one who taught with authority. He also possessed an extraordinary identity. He enjoyed the prerogatives of God. But it was mainly in and through his death and resurrection that Mark's story finds its climax. It is therefore through what Jesus does that invites expressions such as opposition, commitment, amazement, and faith. Mark also makes it clear that these various expressions overlap between characters.

The authorities' primary role was to oppose and seek the destruction of Jesus. Jesus' actions were a challenge and threat to the rulers of the government and religion. The disciples on the other hand, did not oppose Jesus. Rather they were committed and fearful at the same time, following Jesus wherever he went but doing so not really knowing who they were following. The common folk demonstrated faith in the abilities of Jesus; but they came to him only trusting that he would change their situation. It is in the life of these four characters, or groups treated as characters, represented through various and reliable expressions, that the reader is invited to consider Mark's story.

The Story of Mark: Point of View

Mark's story is basically written from two different points of view: the narrator and the characters. Mark dominates the telling of the story. It is through his point of view that the reader captures the characters' opinions, thoughts, and emotions.³⁰ The characters, on the other hand, depict a world that provides the reader with firsthand information. In other words, though their actions, words, etc. are written by Mark, the reader directly hears/reads the characters' view of the situation at hand. It is not from the narrator's point of view.

Mark as narrator captures the historical episodes in the structure that he deems best in order to communicate his story

³⁰ Norman R. Petersen describes this third-person point of view as the omniscient point of view of a narrator. He writes, "That the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents and events; that he is entirely free to move as he will in time and place, and to shift from character to character, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their speech and actions; and also that he has 'privileged' access to a character's thoughts and feelings and motives, as well as to his overt speech and actions" ("Point of View in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 [1978]: 105-06).

about Jesus Christ.³¹ He then integrates the setting, the characters and their actions and depicts the story through episodes and his point of view. For example, in the stilling of the storm (4:35-41) Mark begins the episode by describing a scene in which he presents information as if he were with Jesus and his disciples.³² He reports Jesus' command, "Let us go over to the other side." He continues this close perspective throughout the episode by reporting the significance and danger of the storm by using the result clause, "waves beat into the ship *so that it was now full*," and the informative statement, "Jesus was asleep in the hinder part of the boat." Mark then shifts the perspective to that of the characters in which the reader is able to imaginatively hear and see the words spoken by the disciples, "Master, do you not care that we are close to dying?" and the words spoken by Jesus, "Peace be still." The scene ends with the disciples' frightening discovery that they do not know the identity of the one in the boat with them who possesses power over nature. Mark draws the reader into the story through his and the characters' point of view. In order to accomplish this purpose, Mark selects and arranges historical episodes into the narrative plot.

Summary of The Gospel of Mark as Narrative

In sum, the Gospel of Mark is a narrative that essentially reveals Jesus as he is declared, defined, and affirmed as the Son of God. Mark reports Jesus' teaching, miracles, death, and resurrection through historical episodes.³³ Jesus' words and

³¹ An example of an author using the structure to communicate a particular theme/subject matter is Mark's collection of miracle stories in 4:35-6:56. Here he uses several miracle stories (Jesus' power over nature: 4:35-41; 6:45-52; Jesus' power over demons: 5:1-20; Jesus' power over disease: 5:25-34; 6:1-6; 6:53-56; Jesus' power over death: 5:21-24, 35-43) to demonstrate Jesus' power as the Son of God.

³² This is but one example in the story of Mark. This does not indicate that all episodes are written in this way. However, it does demonstrate to the reader the typical way in which the narrator communicates his story.

³³ Achtemeier states that Jesus is the central figure of the narrative. Mark's Christology is influenced by the beginning of the story, 1:1. Mark's narrative thus revolves around "what Jesus says and does, and the significance of what happens to him" (*Mark*, 52-53). Boring agrees. He too

deeds point to his authority. He possesses divine prerogatives. It is due to Jesus' divine prerogatives that the authorities, disciples, and crowd respond and therefore are revealed as those who are committed, opposed, and amazed.

The elements of the narrative (structure, setting, characters, and point of view) are present as Mark tells his story. Mark organizes his narrative around three geographical locations (Galilee, "on the way" to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem); while maintaining a christological emphasis that Jesus is the Son of God. Consequently, the reader must not miss Mark's strategy to communicate his purpose as he weaves geography and Christology into his narrative. Mark uses the geographical movement of Jesus and the authorities, disciples, and crowd to declare, portray, and confirm his identity as the Son of God. Those involved convey various expressions that illustrate their relationship to Jesus as the Son of God, for they either commit to him or oppose him, and sometimes both. Mark tells the narrative from perspectives that are engaging and accommodating to the reader's understanding. It is clear that the Gospel of Mark is a narrative establishing the identity of Jesus Christ.

***Literary Subgenre: The Gospel of Mark as
Theological Narrative Biography***

Mark composes a story of a central unifying character: Jesus Christ. Mark is a story that chronicles the life of Jesus Christ (biography) within a historical context (history). Mark also has a theological purpose. The preceding genre discussion demonstrates that Mark's narrative structure consisted of the weaving of geography and theology together. Mark's christological emphasis originates with the opening verse of the story and is reported throughout the story by the means of three geographical locations. This emphasis is the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

The discussion here will more carefully develop details of Mark as a theological narrative biography. Mark's theological

claims that Mark's story is about Jesus, one "who appears in almost every scene and is the subject of most of the verbs in Mark. . . . To tell the story of Jesus is to tell the self-defining story of God" (*Mark: A Commentary*, 3).

purpose goes beyond simply identifying Jesus Christ. There is a greater significance for the reader. Mark records how Jesus' disciples, and consequently his readers, ought to live in light of knowing his identity.³⁴

Mark formulates a portrait of Jesus through his teachings, miracles, death and resurrection. Jesus puts forth a message. This message is the gospel; that is, the redemption of God brought to humanity. Mark not only puts forth the gospel message of Jesus Christ, but he also demonstrates how one is to relate to this message.³⁵ Therefore if one knows Jesus Christ and his message, how ought he to follow Jesus? The pivotal issue for Mark centers on the identity of Jesus Christ and how one ought to follow him.³⁶ There are two questions Mark answers throughout his story; that is, "who is Jesus?" And in light of this, "what are his disciples to do?" These two questions speak into the formal and functional aspects of the story of Mark.³⁷ Thus, as the reader answers these two questions, the subgenre classification, theological narrative

³⁴ Peter Bolt agrees that all aspects (biography, history, and theology) must be incorporated into an understanding of Mark's Gospel. He writes, "Some later narrative studies make it a trichotomy by adding the category of narrative. But rather than pitting these three against one another, we should see it as eminently more sensible to recognize them as three aspects of the Gospel of Mark. Mark is narrative about theologically significant historical events" ("Mark's Gospel," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 409).

³⁵ An example of Mark illustrating how one ought to relate to Jesus' message is the blind man, Bartimaeus (10:46-52). Bartimaeus placed his faith in Jesus, whether he could see or not. No longer was he a bystander alongside of the road unable to follow Jesus; rather after placing faith in Jesus and receiving sight, he was able to follow Jesus on the road.

³⁶ Sweetland contends that the identity of Jesus is inextricably tied to following Jesus. He states, "Mark is very interested in his readers' understanding of who Jesus is. We will see that misunderstanding the identity of Jesus leads to misunderstanding discipleship" (*Mark: From Death to Life*, 17).

³⁷ Joel B. Green states, "Mark is not interested in identifying Jesus for the sake of producing the right answer; he is concerned with much, much more than getting his doctrines correct. Equally transparent is the related Markan concern with appropriate response to Jesus" (*Way of the Cross*, 19).

biography, provides the theological significance and therefore the application of Jesus' identity to the reader. To have answered the one question is to have answered the other.

Formal Aspect: "Who is Jesus?"

The Gospel of Mark answers the question "who is Jesus?" in a number of ways. First, Mark answers this question through the christological title or the opening statement of the story (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]),³⁸ "The beginning of

³⁸ Although there is much debate regarding the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ, the longer reading is taken as original. Tommy Wasserman states, "The main question is whether the phrase 'Son of God' was accidentally omitted from an original or added by some scribes in order to expand the divine name or the title of the book" ("The 'Son of God' Was in the Beginning (Mark 1:1)," *JTS* 61, pt 1 [April 2011]: 20). The basis for the longer reading as original is both external and internal evidence. The longer reading has strong manuscript support:)¹, A, B, D, L, W, Δ. The shorter reading however has less external support:)*, Θ. (Patristic and versional support seems to be diverse and favorable for both readings.) Internal evidence also provides support for the longer reading; namely authorial style. Wasserman states, "The argument from Markan style is often appealed to in favour of the longer reading, since the idea of sonship forms a crucial theme in Mark (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 8:38; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36, 61; 15:39) and would be appropriate to indicate in the title or introduction" (42). Eldon Epp agrees and states, "to rule it [the phrase] out . . . might be to remove from the opening sentence the author's dramatic announcement of a major theme for the entire work that follows" ("Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament, with an Excursus on Canon," in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47). See also Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 41, n. 7; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 34; Alexander Globe, "The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1," *HTR* 75 no. 2 (April 1982): 217.

Those in favor of the shorter reading are: Jan Slomp, "Are the Words 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1 Original?" *BT* 28 (1977): 143-50; Peter M. Head, "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1:1 'The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,'" *NTS* 37 (1991): 621-29; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1," in *Text and Contexts: The Function of Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts*, ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (Oslo: Scandinavian UP, 1995), 111-27. The main argument in

the Good News about Jesus Christ, [Son of God]” 1:1).³⁹ This is the first clear statement that Mark uses for the identification of Jesus. It is these introductory words that alert the reader of the significance that is to follow for it provides a key to understanding the whole book.⁴⁰

Second, Mark answers the identity question through the divine confirmation of God at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration (Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, “you yourself, are my son, the beloved one” 1:11 and Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, “This one is my son, the beloved one” 9:7). There is little doubt that these passages speak to the declaration & affirmation that Jesus is God’s Son; the former, a declaration (1:11) to the reader/hearer and the latter, an affirmation (9:7) to the disciples.⁴¹ God’s voice

favor of the shorter reading is the unlikelihood of an accidental omission in the beginning of a Gospel.

³⁹ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is taken as an objective genitive; that is, “the gospel [about, concerning] Jesus Christ.

⁴⁰ France states, “Mark’s book is intended, therefore, to pass on the good news about Jesus. This news has been hitherto the subject of primarily oral declaration . . . but Mark’s book is an attempt to communicate it in written form” (*Gospel of Mark*, 52). Edwards agrees, “In v. 1 Mark declares the essential content of the *euangelion*, the ‘good news.’ The Gospel of Mark is thus not a mystery story in which readers must piece together clues here and there to discover its meaning; nor is it a pedestrian chronicle of dates and places without purpose or significance; nor is it reducible to a mere system of thought. Rather, from the outset Mark announces that the content of the gospel is the person of Jesus, who is the Christ and Son of God” (*Gospel According to Mark*, 26). See also Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 9-10; Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, 32; Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 34; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 44; and Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 146-47; Stein, *Mark*, 40-41; Sweetland, *Mark: From Death to Life*, 17-20. Robert L. Humphrey claims that the prologue (1:1-13) is one of three key narrative moments in Mark that provide Mark’s message, (*Narrative Structure and Message in Mark: A Rhetorical Analysis* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen P, 2003], 29ff).

⁴¹ France states, “Jesus is here explicitly identified in the terms used in Mark’s heading, υἱός θεοῦ. In the narrative that follows there will be secrecy and paradox, but here in the prologue there is open declaration. The reader

declares what Jesus is, not what he has become. There is no adoptionistic view tenable through the text, rather it can only be contrived based on one's dogmatic considerations elsewhere.⁴² Therefore, in both passages Jesus is referred to as God's beloved Son.⁴³

Third, Mark answers the question through the confession of Peter. Jesus asks the disciples for the view of the public as to his identity (8:27-28); but then also asks the disciples for their understanding $\upsilon\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}\ \tau\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\ \mu\epsilon\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$, ("but who do you yourselves say that I am," 8:29). Peter's confession identifies Jesus as the $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, ("Messiah"). This response is representative of the titular statement in 1:1. As Mark reports elsewhere (cf. 1:1, 11; 9:7; 14:61-62; 15:39), Peter's confession was true, for it was his understanding of the significance of his confession that was proved to be erroneous (cf. 8:31-33).⁴⁴

Fourth, Mark also answers the question through the commentary of others. As one reads through the story, he is reminded several times of Jesus' identity. The troubling aspect to this truth is that Jesus' identity is not clearly known by his own followers, but outsiders instead. For example, demons clearly know that Jesus is the Son of God (1:24). Although Mark communicates the demons' understanding of Jesus as $\acute{o}\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ ("the Holy One of God"), this is probably synonymous with Jesus' identity as $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\acute{o}\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ ("Son of God," 3:11; 5:7). They recognized the special relationship that existed between Jesus and God. Another example is the Roman centurion at the scene

need be in no doubt, whatever the reactions of the actors in the story" (*Gospel of Mark*, 79).

⁴² For a view that Psalm 2:7 implies adoption see Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 1:1-50, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 11-12.

⁴³ The word $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ functions as a filial term denoting a special relationship between Son and Father. It could mean the same as John's term $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ("one and only") in John 1:14, 18. See France, *Gospel of Mark*, 82; Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 34; Stein, *Mark*, 59.

⁴⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster P, 1972), 129.

of the cross (15:39). He states that Jesus was the Son of God ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν (“surely, this man was the Son of God”). France argues that this is the climax of the crucifixion scene; that is, “what is new is the source from which the declaration comes, the first human witness to describe Jesus as υἱὸς θεοῦ, and mean it, and that witness not a disciple or even a Jew at all, but a Gentile army officer with no previous connections with Jesus.”⁴⁵ Mark communicates what the centurion saw; a dying man; but more than that, the Son of God.⁴⁶

Last, Mark reports Jesus’ identity through the words and deeds of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus declares that he is the Messiah, Son of God before the Sanhedrin (14:61-62). Due to the accusation of blasphemy and therefore the necessity to confirm this; Jesus is asked by the Sanhedrin if he was the Messiah-Son of God Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ (“are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed?”) and he answers with a strong affirmative answer ἐγώ εἰμι (“I am”). But Jesus does not just affirm his identity, he also states his role as the exalted Son of Man (Ps 110:1) – who possesses the highest honor at the right hand of God, and the coming Son of Man (Dan 7:13) – who will be the Anointed of God with power and majesty as the eschatological judge. Jesus therefore is more than a suffering Messiah; he is an exalted and vindicated Messiah that fulfills the eschatological mission of God.

Functional Aspect: “What Are His Disciples to Do?”

Mark’s intent is not to stop simply at cataloging information and/or doctrine and thus give the reader a Christology. Rather his

⁴⁵ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 659.

⁴⁶ Hooker writes, “For Mark, it is this Gentile soldier who gives to Jesus the title which hitherto has been spoken only by the heavenly voice or by unclean spirits acknowledging their master. . . . Whether Mark thinks that the centurion is aware of the true significance of his words is not clear. . . . Nevertheless, the centurion stands at this point as the representative of those who acknowledge Jesus as God’s son. His words form the climax of Mark’s gospel, for they are the words used in the confession of Christian faith, and they are found in the mouth of a Gentile at the moment of Jesus’ death” (*Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 379).

intent is to move the reader/hearer to the applicational significance based on an understanding of Jesus' identity. Therefore, there is a close connection between "who Jesus is" and "what disciples are to do;" the theological significance. Mark's intent is to transform his audience regarding the nature of discipleship based on a thorough understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

The Gospel of Mark answers the question regarding discipleship in a number of ways. First, it illustrates the actions of a disciple. Mark structures the first section of his book, where Jesus' ministry is in and through Galilee (1:14-8:21), into three major parts (1:14-3:12; 3:13-6:6; 6:7-8:21).⁴⁷ This section of Mark declares and illustrates Jesus' identity as the Son of God while carrying with it the actions of discipleship; that is, the call, the commission, and the work of the ministry. Each of these is tied to the identity of Jesus in the following ways: the call highlights the abruptness of the encounter and immediacy of the response (1:16-20; 2:13-17), thus indicating the force and power of Jesus' presence. The commission highlights the priority of presence with Jesus and the purpose to evangelize (3:13-19), thus demonstrating the importance of Jesus' teaching. The empowering and engaging ministry given to the disciples (6:7-13) signifies Jesus' ability to deal with evil forces. It is the connection therefore between identity and discipleship that is Mark's intent for his readers/hearers.

Second, Mark illustrates the role or characteristics of a disciple. Mark structures the central section of the story (8:22-10:52) into a three-fold pattern where the disciples find themselves traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem. This central section illustrates the connection between Jesus' identity, and *how* the follower is to respond to the identity of Jesus; therefore, requiring a proper definition of Jesus' role and function as Messiah. This central section consists of a three-fold pattern. It contains Jesus' three predictions of his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), providing within each one his definition of Messiah. Each prediction is followed with a misunderstanding by the disciples when confronted with Jesus' meaning of Messiah (8:32b-33; 9:33-34;

⁴⁷ Green, *Way of the Cross*, 50.

10:35-40). And third, it contains instruction from Jesus to explain the disciples' role as follower based on his identity (8:34-9:1; 9:35-37; 10:41-45).⁴⁸ Therefore, this central section in the story of Mark also connects the affirmation and declaration of Jesus' identity (biography and history) with significance for the reader/hearer (theology).

Based on this central section of Mark, what are the roles or characteristics of a disciple? Following each of Jesus' predictions of his death, Mark emphasizes three main characteristics of a disciple. The first characteristic is loyalty to Jesus (8:34-9:1); a single-minded identification with Jesus' message and mission by both "denying oneself" and "loyally following Jesus." In other words, the whole person is to stand under Christ's claim.⁴⁹ This truth follows Peter's misunderstanding of what Jesus will do (8:32b-33). Peter's view of messiahship gives him a wrong view of discipleship. Jesus clearly understood his fate; however Jesus chose loyalty to the Father's plan even though this plan included his death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:7-8). Therefore, Craig Evans states, "To be a true disciple, one must accept the fate of the Master; and the Master's fate is inextricably bound up with his identity, purpose, and mission. True discipleship cannot emerge

⁴⁸ Robert H. Stein states, "The threefold pattern found in Mark 8:31-10:45 reveals that, for the Evangelist, Jesus' passion was neither accidental nor tragic but was clearly foreknown by Jesus. . . . Furthermore, the errors of the disciples are used as a foil by which Jesus' teachings on discipleship can be presented. Discipleship, for Mark, means following Jesus and taking up a cross (8:34). It means a willingness even to lose one's life Christ's sake or, to word it differently, to lose one's life for 'the gospel's' sake (8:35). Discipleship, for Mark, means becoming servant of all (9:35), even as Jesus was servant of all (10:45)" (*Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*, 2nd ed [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 271).

⁴⁹ Each of Jesus' predictions of his death indicates that Jesus foreknew his own destiny; a predictive power in knowing both the fact and manner of his death reserved for one with divine prerogatives. Each of these predictions demonstrate Mark's connection with identity, 'who is Jesus?' and function, 'what is a disciple to be?' This central section of Mark is exemplary of sections that both precede and follow it.

in isolation from true Christology.”⁵⁰ Jesus does not want any follower to propose, and therefore practice his own agenda in lieu of God’s agenda. The follower is to loyally follow God’s Son despite the potential cultural consequences.

The second characteristic is to willingly care for others. A disciple is not to be preoccupied with being the greatest (9:35-37); service is to be directed to all. This truth follows the disciples’ discussion as to who will be the greatest; that is, who will be the greatest among themselves. But clearly Jesus’ death revolutionizes the thinking of being a follower, for being a follower does not entail greatness, but service. Therefore, Green states, “The primary issue is not who receives honor from the rest, but who gives honor to the least. ‘Welcoming’ has to do with showing respectful service . . . Jesus asks his disciples to understand that the greatest honor is extending respectful service to those with no status at all, to the powerless, to those whom society-at-large largely overlooks.”⁵¹ Jesus does not want the follower to promote himself to a position of greatness through a self-exalting pride. Rather, he desires that the disciple willingly serve the insignificant even if it reverses the conventional value-scale of the community.

The third characteristic is to sacrificially serve. A disciple is not to pursue power and prestige (10:35-40); rather one is to insist on being a servant.⁵² This truth follows James and John’s

⁵⁰ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34b (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 30. Graham Twelftree states, “The idea of taking up one’s cross would have been a graphic metaphor not only for Mark’s readers but for all who lived in the Roman world. . . . Thus, in being called to take up his cross the follower of Jesus was being asked to forfeit his life. His life was to be given over into the hands of another” (“Discipleship in Mark’s Gospel,” *StMRev* 141 (1990): 9).

⁵¹ Green, *Way of the Cross*, 74. Dennis Sweetland states, “The result is that Jesus turns things upside down; he teaches that true greatness means giving yourself in personal service to the one from whom you can receive no benefit in return” (*Our Journey with Jesus: Discipleship According to Mark* [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987], 64).

⁵² The text states ‘whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all.’ Edwards states, “The pronouncement is, of course, an oxymoron, for a slave (Gk. *doulos*), who was inferior even to a servant (Gk. *diakonos*), was in

request to sit at the right and left of Jesus, the positions of honor. However, as do all of Jesus' predictions of his death, he turns this request upside down and contrasts the world's value system with his teaching and example of service. Jesus speaks of greatness with service, not power and prestige, for power and prestige focus on the love for self instead of others. Jesus' example of humility and love for others is demonstrated in his purpose of his death (10:45). Stein states, "Jesus does not die the death of a martyr. He dies rather a vicarious and substitutionary death for 'many.' Thus his death is not only the supreme example of what it means to be 'great' in the kingdom of God, that is, being a servant and slave of all; it is also the once-for-all sacrifice."⁵³ Therefore, Evans states, "Jesus' followers must seek to serve and not vie for positions of authority; they must be willing to suffer and not flee from persecution; they must be willing to be last and not insist on being first."⁵⁴ Jesus does not want the follower to presume upon God's prerogative to honor and value what he does. Jesus desires a self-sacrificing service and ministry on behalf of others that ultimately represents God and Jesus, not self.

Last, the Gospel of Mark illustrates the failures of the disciple. Mark writes his final section of his story in Jerusalem (11:1-16:8). It is here that Mark speaks of the coming Messiah who is to be "the ransom for many." Although this section of the story does not provide specific instructions related to discipleship, it does speak to the failure of obedience (14:32-42), the failure of following (14:50-54) and the failure of loyalty (14:66-72) on the part of Jesus' disciples. As Jesus faithfully prepares for his death through prayer to the Father (14:32-42), the disciples exemplify faithlessness in their lack of watchfulness. As Jesus is betrayed into the hands of men (14:43-49), the disciples demonstrate a cowardice and panic. As Jesus

ancient society the last and least of all. The idea of a slave being first is as absurdly paradoxical as a camel going through the eye of a needle (v. 25) – and it probably likewise induced smiles and shaking heads from Jesus' audience" (*Gospel According to Mark*, 326).

⁵³ Stein, *Mark*, 490.

⁵⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 115.

identifies himself as Messiah, the Son of God (14:61-62), Peter denies his identification with Jesus three times. Mark communicates Jesus' resolve to follow the will of God, even to the death of the cross. Surely the Son of God is worthy of continuing devotion and allegiance.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Mark narrates the story of Jesus; thus expressing, through the episodes of Jesus' life, the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But the Gospel of Mark is not just about knowing Jesus; it is also about following Jesus. The purpose of the theological narrative biography is to awaken and subsequently strengthen the faith of the follower. This enables the reader/hearer to connect the "what" and "why" of Mark's intent. In other words, Mark not only writes his story with a christological emphasis but also a theological significance to the reader/hearers' life.

Mark answers "who is Jesus" through the opening christological statement, the confirmation of God, the confession of Peter, the commentary of others, and through Jesus himself. All these support the declaration that Jesus' identity is the Son of God. Mark also answers "what are his disciples to do" through the actions of a disciple, the characteristics of a disciple, and the failures of a disciple.

The connection between form (Jesus' identity) and function (disciple's responsibility) enables the reader/hearer to see how Mark ties together the "what" of his story with the "why." In other words, it seems clear that Mark utilizes the narrative structure (genre) of the story and more specifically the theological narrative biography (subgenre) to communicate and therefore connect the doctrinal emphasis of knowing (identity) Jesus with the practical emphasis of following (discipleship) him. Mark makes this connection throughout the whole story and namely, through the central section of the book. The reader/hearer is able to comprehend the intention of the author through understanding how Mark writes the Gospel as genre and subgenre, or form and function.