

The Gospel of Mark

An Inductive Approach Using Literary Analysis

The Goals of this Study: Specific Introduction

This is what you can hope to gain from this study.

1. To understand why the disciples fail in Mark's Gospel, to have one's own students/readers better understand their own struggles, and to avoid those same failures.

Mark's disciples fail. Although they jump enthusiastically on Jesus' bandwagon in the early chapters, by the middle of Mark's narrative, they struggle to understand even the clearest words Jesus says. It is painfully apparent that Jesus is not who they expected, and they struggle simply to keep pace with him. Mark gives us the impression that even their level of understanding barely increases after chapter 5. We are immediately confronted with the question of how we as readers should relate to these disciples.

Are we slated to follow in the disciples' footsteps, to fumble around and continually be afraid and confused, yet having to pursue Jesus regardless? Is that what faith is? It seems unlikely: Surely Mark intends for us to have a better experience with Jesus than the original disciples did. Perhaps Mark uses the disciples as a bad example for our learning. In some sense, there is something they do that we should *not* do. Reasonable enough, but the question then is, "What must we do differently?" This question may go unanswered, or is typically answered in vague terms like, "Just have more faith than them."

I believe that the apparent lack of intimacy between the disciples and Jesus that pervades Mark's Gospel is something that not only needs to be addressed, but something Mark wants us to address through multiple readings of his narrative. Correspondingly, various issues and topics go seemingly unaddressed in Mark. To name a few:

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is introduced in 1:15 and expected in relation to Jesus, but we have no example of any of the disciples interacting with the Holy Spirit. To what extent is this the cause of their failures? What is the consequence of trying to 'follow Jesus' without a clear understanding of our relationship with the Holy Spirit?
- The problem of the unclean, hardened human heart is illustrated with the scribes early on (3:5), attributed to the disciples soon afterwards (6:52), explicitly addressed by Jesus with no resolution in a major discourse (7:21-23), and diagnosed as a consequence of the fall with Israelite divorce as a tolerated symptom, *even under conditions of Israelite faith* when the Mosaic covenant was ratified (10:1-11). How is the human heart really changed? Does Mark answer that? And what kind of faith is required for people to aim for higher ethical standards (e.g. no divorce) than the Law of Moses?
- Likewise the disciples' intractable resistance to servanthood is not resolved.
- Mark does not offer us a clear definition of this mysterious kingdom of God secret being alluded to everywhere. How are we to penetrate this mystery and participate in its secret?

These issues and more require that we look more closely at Mark's story with some of these questions in mind.

2. To have a profound encounter with the risen Jesus, centered around and rooted in his Cross and Resurrection.

Because this study does not necessarily assume that Mark's Gospel was the earliest Gospel written (though we certainly allow for it), we are not committed to the popular but tenuous assumption often accompanying it, that Mark's Gospel is the least 'adorned,' 'embellished,' and 'developed' theologically. These assumptions have led interpreters to an embarrassingly shallow understanding of Mark's Cross and Resurrection account. By contrast,

this study finds significant and meaningful parallels between the Cross and Israel's Day of Atonement. In fact, we find that Mark has a very strong atonement theology, very similar to that of Hebrews and Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 – 5. We also find significant and meaningful parallels between Jesus' actions and Israel's new covenant prophecies, as well as persuasive explanations for why these parallels exist. Further, all of Mark's themes converge on the Cross and Resurrection, giving it enormous depth, much to the enjoyment of the reader. We find in Mark an emphasis which, in studies of Paul or John, is commonly called 'being in Jesus,' i.e. dying and rising with Jesus, and living in union with the risen Jesus by his Spirit. Mark does this in his own innovative way, and this from supposedly the 'earliest' Gospel.

3. To enjoy the story as an exciting, panoramic movie that viewers will want to watch over and over again.

In our cinema-drenched society, modern movie-goers have new terms and ways of thinking about stories. Good cinematography, screenplay, musical accompaniment, plot-twist, and surprise ending are some words and phrases used to describe our pleasure in watching a good story unfold. Recent literary scholars of the Bible have rediscovered the principles by which Hebrew narrative works, and many of those techniques are uncannily similar to the way we might express our enjoyment of a clever contemporary movie. This study attempts to take advantage of modern movie watching experiences in order to draw out Mark's story.

Our literary analysis suggests that Mark's narrative is meant to be taken first chronologically, then non-chronologically. This study assumes that one will have to comb through Mark's Gospel several times over to understand what Mark is about. Mark invites us into a parable, a story that can be studied from multiple angles and considered again and again. We hope to foster in our students and readers a sensitivity to and a delight in this story, not least because his subject, Jesus, is worthy of being considered again and again.

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The Techniques of this Study – Background

This set of questions draws heavily upon the techniques of literary analysis of Hebrew narrative pioneered by Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Frank Kermode, John Drury, Duane Garrett, John Sailhamer, and James Kugel. The fact that much of this scholarship comes from non-Christian Jewish circles (Alter, Sternberg, Kermode, Kugel, and others) is very significant. They cannot be said to have been biased by a concern to uphold Christian doctrine, yet their findings assist us greatly when dealing with the Gospels in particular. I believe that the church is still recovering from the Gentile anti-Semitism it espoused from its early years. Our ignorance of Hebrew narrative has been one dire consequence of that.

Since 1970, these scholars started to respond against the prevailing tendency to break up Old Testament and New Testament texts in an attempt to find supposedly disparate sources: J, E, P, and D schools; a J school made up of women; multiple Isaiahs; the Essene influence; a Jewish Petrine Christianity; a Gentile Pauline Christianity, etc. Literary scholars of this new movement argue that each book should be evaluated as a finished piece in its entirety, and in fact, that each biblical narrative book demonstrates a formal unity in its entirety. Although there may have been historical sources, they were not nearly as opposed to each other as some might think. Besides that, literary structures, consistently used themes, repeated language, and stylistic considerations all testified to the extraordinary literary unity of biblical narrative works.

Looking for and enjoying those literary qualities are not as difficult as one might think. In fact, as we suggested above, reading and relishing biblical narrative bears remarkable resemblance to modern movie watching. This is particularly true, for various reasons which will become clear, with the Gospel of Mark.

This literary analysis of the Gospel of Mark is different from other styles of Bible study in that it does not try to draw many practical applications until the development of themes is fairly well understood. This requires us to make several changes in the way we do Bible study, namely:

1. Cover larger amounts of material at a time.
2. Trace the development of themes and motifs throughout the entire story.
3. Read the story again in smaller chunks to pick up the details.
4. Rearrange texts to note literary structures, and similarities and differences with other texts.
5. Be more careful and/or have a little more patience in drawing practical applications to our lives.

Traditional forms of Bible study or teaching, whether expository preaching, inductive manuscript study, or topical study, are analogous to viewing a slide show. A chunk of text (say, 20 verses) is selected and scrutinized, and conclusions are drawn. During the next session, the same thing happens with another chunk of text. Usually, the amount of text is about the same size, and one does not revisit material already covered. Hence the Bible study is like a slide show, freezing frames and isolating what one sees from the rest of the story.

The Techniques of this Study – Slide Show vs. Video Camera Paradigms

This Bible study utilizes a video camera paradigm. That is, you have the ability to do the following:

1. *Understand the story from the end: You can watch the movie once, and understand the movie from the end, then watch it again and again to piece together the clues anticipating the ending.*
2. *Tune in to the soundtrack/background music: You can pay special attention to the soundtrack playing in the background and setting the mood as opposed to only the scenes on screen. Often the Old Testament is the “soundtrack.”*
3. *Change the focus and speed: You can use a panoramic lens, normal lens, and zoom lens*
4. *Change the sequence of events: You can splice two sections next to each other and do instant replay*

The slide show paradigm is analogous to using a *zoom lens* at *regular speed*, with *no ability to do special viewing* (splicing, instant replay) and you get to watch the movie only *once so you can't connect it from the ending*.

Using familiar movie-watching techniques by video camera paradigm will invoke both emotional and analytical resources in your twenty-first century audience for the study of Mark's Gospel.

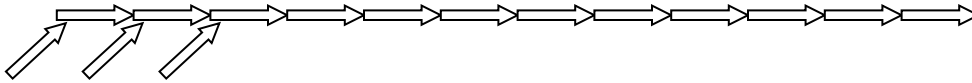
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Reader – Text Dynamics in Mark’s Gospel

What this means for Bible study leaders is depicted by the following (read this in Page Layout format).

Usually we think of trying to “enter” every single story (every 20 verses or so) and engaging it in a personal way. In other words, we do Bible study like this:

Mark’s Story

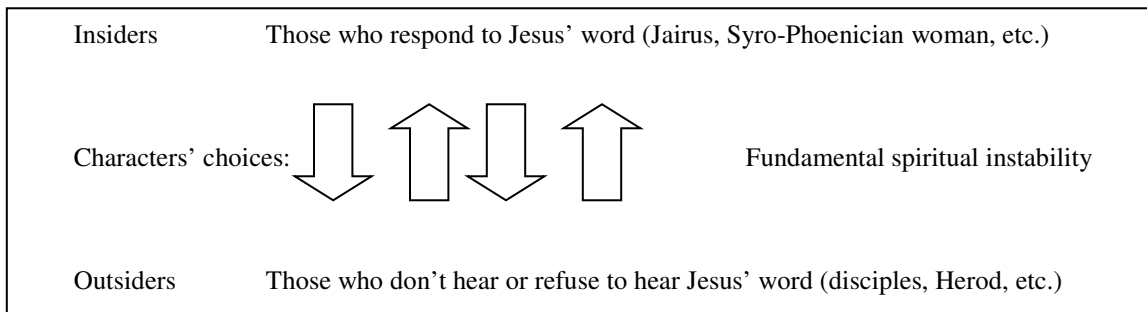


Mark’s story is broken up into pieces in the sense that not much continuity of the whole story is emphasized. Bible study participants are encouraged to draw ‘applications’ in every session from these small sub-stories. Of course this technique is advantageous where membership in the group is unstable, time is limited, and Bible study leaders are less experienced. And the conclusions drawn are often acceptable, but not always.

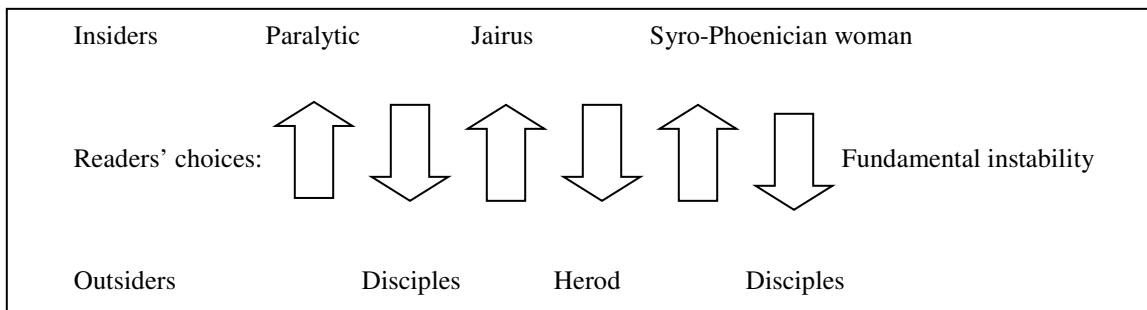
In all biblical narrative, but with Mark in particular, we must be very careful about our methodological approach to narrative, because it will determine or reinforce already existing spiritual assumptions about how to relate to Jesus.

View 1

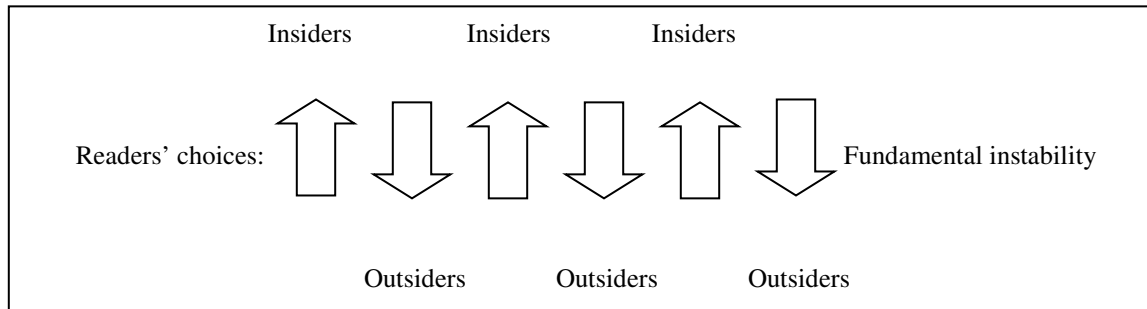
The dynamics between Jesus and the characters in the narrative are often assumed to follow this pattern:



This assumption shapes and/or reflects by methodological assumptions how we approach the text of Mark’s Gospel. Hence when readers “enter” each small sub-story, the overall effect would be something like this:



Thus, immediately trying to identify with all the characters (a methodological issue) in every sub-story gives readers a feeling of fundamental instability (a spiritual issue).



View 2

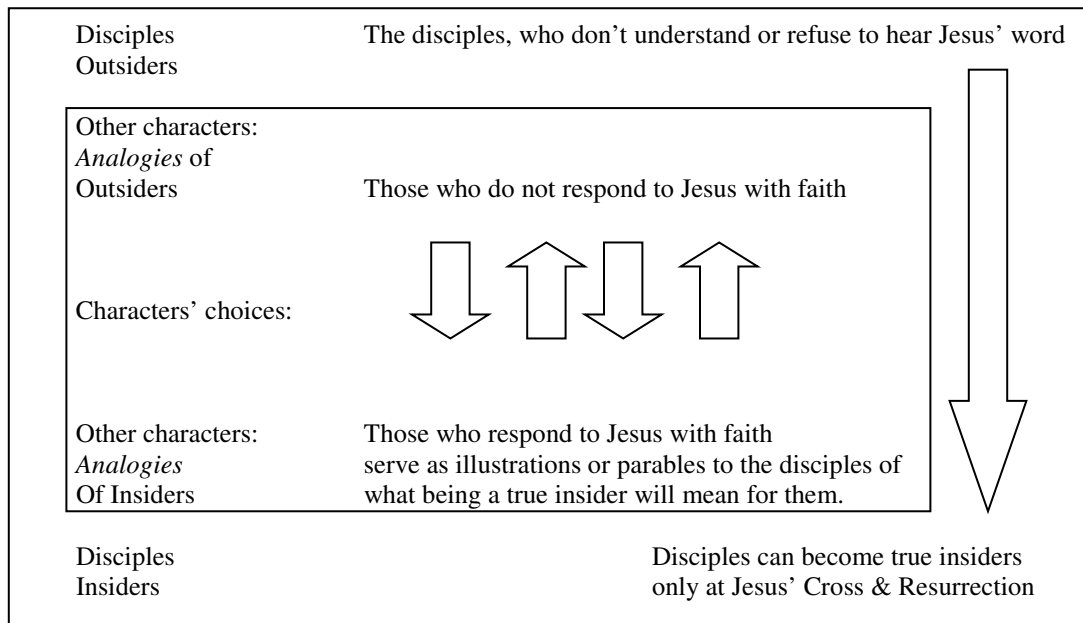
In trying to understand Mark's definitions of faith and salvation one inevitably asks the following question: If we identify ourselves with non-disciple characters, what happens? Were the non-disciples superior to the disciples? Did the leper (1:41-45), the paralytic (2:1-12), the Legion demoniac (5:1-20), the hemorrhaging woman, Jairus the synagogue leader (5:21-43), the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24-30), and other non-disciple characters like the multitude of people who were healed or fed, or even the Roman centurion at the cross, become 'baptized in the Holy Spirit' by interacting with Jesus? Jesus pronounced some of them forgiven, but how and why? Did they become complete 'insiders' to the kingdom of God? Did their hearts become 'clean'? We would be hard-pressed to answer 'yes' to all of those questions.

Other ways of putting the question would be: Would the non-disciple characters have understood the miracles of the loaves? Would they have understood the transfiguration? Would they have been immune from the temptation to power the disciples fell into? Would they have embraced the fullness of Jesus' suffering servanthood, and fully embraced his predictions about dying and rising again?

We believe the answer to those questions is, 'No.' The confession of the Roman centurion is of ironic value and is meant to be contrasted with Simon Peter's; it does not mean that the Roman centurion was 'saved' or had 'faith' as we understand it. The crowds and the multitudes surrounding Jesus are represented somewhat by the crowds in Jerusalem from the triumphal entry to the crucifixion. That is, they are definitely still clinging to the nationalistic, military interpretation of the Messianic role, and they too rejected Jesus in his final hour. Though we may chide the multitude for being whimsical, it is a matter of course that they would be thus: They never heard Jesus predicting his death and resurrection. Only the disciples did. Why then did Jesus predict his suffering, death, and resurrection only with the disciples?

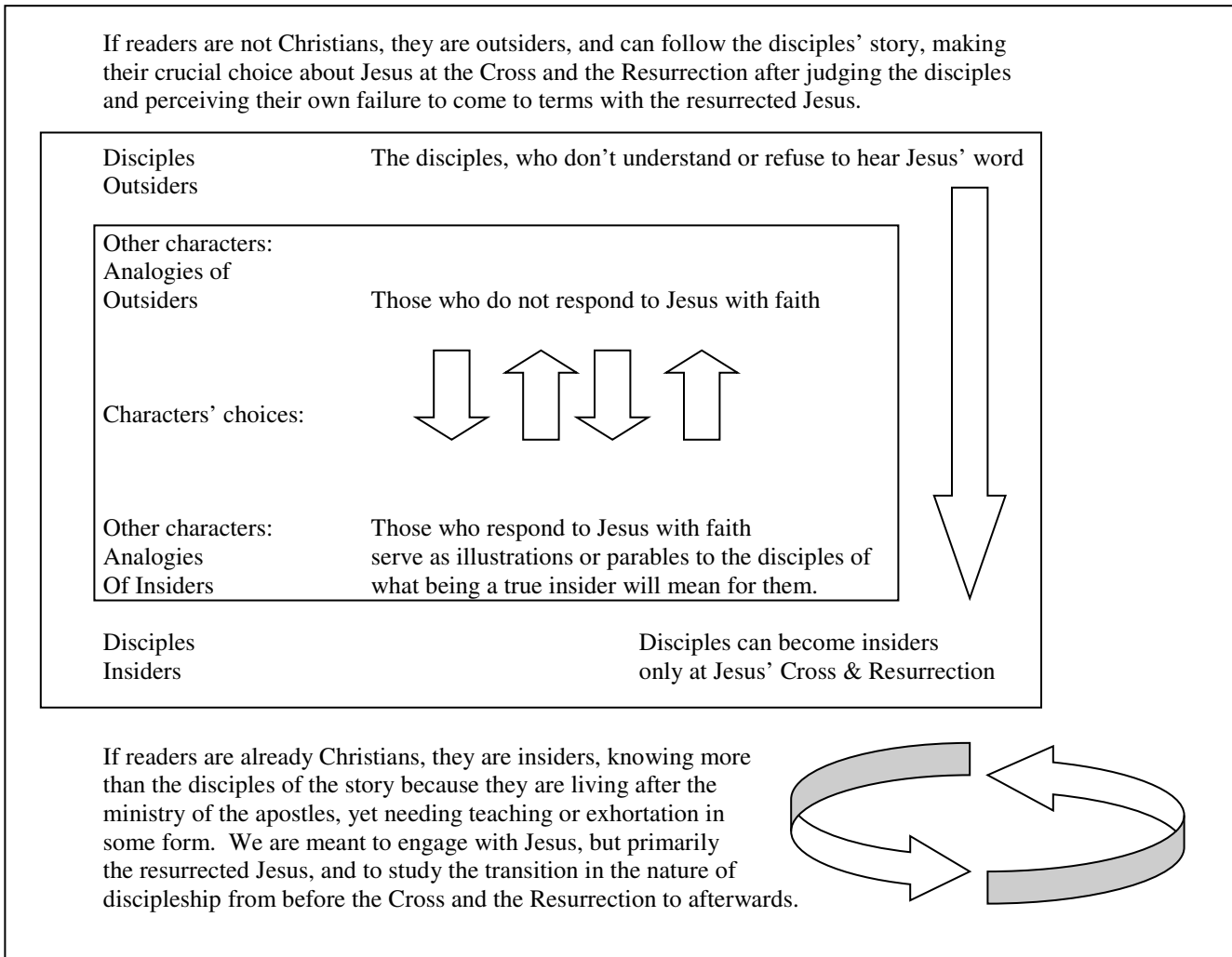
We cannot do away with the privileged status of the disciples vis-à-vis special information from Jesus. They were meant to understand more than all the others, and we are in some sense meant to identify with them, too. But once we start down this road, another set of questions arise. What difference was this special information supposed to make? What are we to make of Mark's commitment to minimizing the disciples' success, maximizing their failure, and withholding from us their internal dialogue which might have made us feel closer to them? What did this privileged position gain them? Is Mark saying that greater information just leads to greater condemnation? And what purpose did this portrayal serve when all Mark's readers knew the apostles as the courageous founders of the church? Some had probably actually known Simon Peter himself. They most certainly knew that the women disciples at the empty tomb eventually passed on word to the men disciples; how else could the church even exist?

Does Mark intend to keep us learning from but fundamentally disidentifying with the disciples while they were in this state? Is there some other way of relating to the disciples? If so, then we reach a different analysis of Mark's theology of discipleship. Something fundamental happened at the Resurrection that changed the nature of discipleship. And correspondingly, we would also require a different methodology to study Mark's text. That methodology is shown below:



Though space does not permit us to make a complete defense of this view here, it will be substantiated below in our analysis. This view suggests that Jesus interacted with the Legion demoniac, the hemorrhaging woman, etc. *for the benefit of the disciples*. These other characters' experiences were not full-orbed entrances into the mystery of the kingdom of God. Instead, they were acted parables, concrete images meant to make a lasting impression on the disciples. Once the inward spiritual reality fully arrived for them after the Resurrection, these healings and miracles served to give categories and words to the disciples so that they could better understand and explain Jesus' identity, his mission, his relation to the Old Testament prophecies and Jewish eschatological expectation, and their own personal transformation after Jesus' Cross and Resurrection.

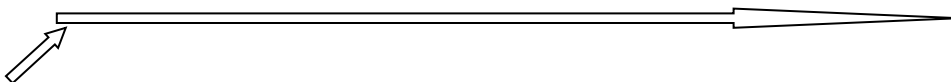
Furthermore, our position as readers of Mark's text seems to be as follows:



Again, this view will be substantiated below, but it is valuable to state this early in the study using this visual aid. The results desired are as follows: By not immediately identifying with all the characters but by paying careful attention to the way Mark himself guides us in that (a methodological issue), we will create in our readers an understanding of the disciples' failure, deepen our appreciation for Jesus' Cross and Resurrection, increase our experience of and dependence on the risen Jesus, promote a higher level of confidence and urgency and power as we live out Mark's emphasis on servanthood and discipleship, and give readers a feeling of fundamental spiritual stability (reinforcement of their identity in the resurrected Christ) rather than instability. And of course, as mentioned before, we hope to give readers of Mark's Gospel reason to delight in this story many times over.

Returning to the question of what this means for Bible study leaders, we are arguing that effective narrative study is done *ideally* as follows:

Mark's Story

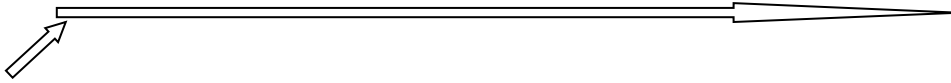


In this Bible study, conclusions are drawn at the end of reading the whole story. Perhaps a preliminary question focuses readers to look for only particular features or elements of Mark's text. A good first question would be,

“Why do the disciples fail?” A conclusion is drawn or a judgment is made at the end of the story, as if the Gospel were a movie that was meant to be watched in its entirety.

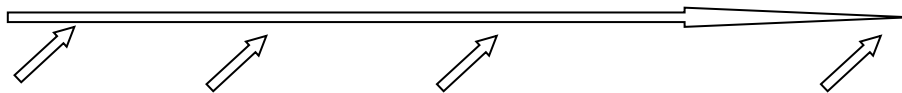
Then, readers enter the story for the second time with a different kind of question. A good second question would be, “Were the disciples insiders or outsiders?”

Mark’s Story



Another conclusion is drawn or a judgment is made at the end of the story. Then, readers enter the story for the third time with a different kind of question. A good third question would be, “How does one really become an insider?” This question starts to focus on and utilize multiple sub-stories. Thus, the readers’ engagement with the larger story is as follows

Mark’s Story



This type of study can probably only be done on a weekend retreat. In that context, membership is fixed, people can spend more time focusing on the story, and only one leader is absolutely necessary, depending on how one conducts the study.

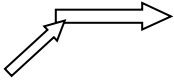
Unfortunately, most Bible studies are done on a week to week basis and in small groups. This type of study is, at present, more difficult and requires leaders with more of an integrative mindset. It also requires more continuity of membership.

Thus, from a *pragmatic* standpoint, a more segmented but careful approach needs to be undertaken. It can be done by Bible study leaders who have been trained in the big picture of Mark. And it can be done by using the various techniques of the video camera paradigm (VC) and alternating with the traditional slide show paradigm (SS).

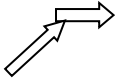
1. VC: Cover larger amounts of material at a time and trace the development of themes and motifs throughout the entire story. Also, follow the play of information and perspectives with different characters.
2. SS: Read some sub-stories in smaller chunks to pick up the details and enable others to relate more deeply with some characters. In Mark, this should be the non-disciple characters like the leper, the paralytic, the demoniac, Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman.
3. VC: Rearrange texts to note literary structures, and similarities and differences with other texts. And identify “echoes” from other biblical stories.
4. SS & VC: Be more careful and/or have a little more patience in drawing practical applications to our lives, especially from the disciples’ lives. Raise questions to be answered later in the narrative.

Hence the Bible study can proceed like this:

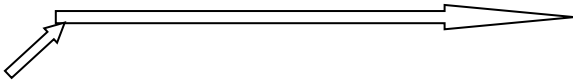
Session 1: Mark 1:1 – 40 allowing students to observe the text, get a feel for Mark’s style, and interact as they are perhaps used to. Ultimately, the leader will raise questions about what is disclosed and what is not.



Session 2: Mark 1:40 – 45 (the leper) and 2:1 – 12 (the paralytic) observing Jesus’ compassion and how we might be like the leper or the paralytic.



Session 3: Mark 1:1 – 4:34 raising explicit questions about being an insider or outsider and getting a feel for Mark’s major theme.



And so on.

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The Techniques of this Study – A Short Step By Step Guide

An acronym: TEDS (Themes, Echoes, Disclosure, Structures)

For more information about this technique, see my paper, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, on InterVarsity's website RIO at <http://regions.ivcf.org/library/>.

A. **THEMES.** *The repetition of certain themes and patterns in the narrative determine the narrator's intention and message. In particular, the ending of each narrative is very important because it ties up various themes.*

1. *Repetition of a Theme*

An idea or scene which is made or developed in some recurrent pattern.

In the movie *Gladiator*, leadership is a powerful theme running through the story. One scene, the *salute to Maximus scene*, occurs three times. When Maximus is leading the Roman armies under Marcus Aurelius, the soldiers say, "General, General, General." When Maximus is leading the slave gladiators in the fighting pits, the men say, "Spaniard, Spaniard, Spaniard." And when Maximus is leading the gladiators in Rome, they say, "Maximus, Maximus, Maximus."

Trace the theme of being an insider or outsider in Mark. Are the disciples insiders or not?

Trace the theme of servanthood in Mark. Why do the disciples fail to be servants?

In Mark, "hardness of heart" is a theme that runs throughout the story. What is "hardness of heart"? How is it resolved or not resolved?

2. *Repetition of Key/Parallel Motifs*

Themes are often made up of motifs. A motif is a concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object recurs through a particular narrative which may be symbolic to that narrative.

In the movie *Mi Familia*, the owl means bad luck. Where it shows up, someone is meant to die.

Demons. What do demons seem to know that humans don't?

The blind. When does Jesus heal them? What relevance does it have to the story?

Jesus' parables. What are parables and why does Jesus use them?

In the crucifixion narrative (14:1ff), there is a motif of someone going free

3. *Repetition of Key/Parallel Events*

a. *Key/Parallel Events: Prophecy – Fulfillment*

Jesus' predictions of his own death and resurrection

b. *Key/Parallel Events: Events of Similar Significance*

The two feedings of the multitudes: How are they similar? Different?

B. **ECHOES.** *Identify Historic and/or Literary Echoes which serve as the "Soundtrack" or "Background Music" to the Story. Parallels to previous biblical stories or events help reinforce expectations or provide emotional charge.*

During World War II, Winston Churchill referred to the battle of Thermopylae because of the historic parallels. Xerxes of Persia was campaigning against Greece. He had a massive army and navy, and the Greek city-states were not yet organized together. Thermopylae was the path into Greece, and 300 Spartan warriors took a heroic last stand and lost. But that battle needed to happen for the Greek city-states to rally together at the battle of Salamis and repel Persia. Churchill's reference to Thermopylae evoked heroism and courage in British soldiers because every British school boy had been educated in Greek history and made the parallel.

When the west coast rapper Notorious B.I.G. was killed, his friend, producer, and fellow rapper Puff Daddy wrote a song called *I'll Be Missing You*. He took an older song by The Police called *Every Breath You Take* and put his own layer on it. Puff Daddy's song was not about a stalker stalking his prey; obviously that's how the two songs were different. But by keeping the beat and melody of the earlier song, he captured the connotations already associated with *Every Breath You Take*, which were emotions of always thinking about someone, anticipating a future meeting. Puff Daddy reworked that theme so that his song communicated a new message: I'm always thinking about my slain friend, anticipating a future meeting. The biblical narrators used similar methods.

Similarly, in the musical version of *Les Miserables*, a melody from one song is re-used in another with a corresponding theme. For instance, after Jean Valjean experiences mercy at the hands of the bishop, he sings about the wonder and mystery of this forgiveness and the transforming effect this has on him in *Valjean Forgiven*. Later, when Inspector Javert experiences mercy at the hands of Jean Valjean, he sings in *Javert's Suicide* about the mystery of this forgiveness and the transforming effect this has on him *using the same melody*. Although there is a difference in the way the two men receive their respective pardons, since mercy gave Jean Valjean hope and new life, whereas it extinguished Javert's zeal for law and in fact Javert's own life, the fact that the same melody is used in both songs serves to underscore the dramatic transformation both men must experience when they are pardoned. Similar echoes occur in biblical narrative.

Compare Mark's stories of Jesus touching unclean people (Mk.1:40-45, 5:21-34) with what the Old Testament said would happen when you touched an unclean person or thing (Hag.2:11-13). What impresses you about Jesus now?

Compare the portrayal of Jesus as a king-in-exile (Mk.2:23-26, 6:30-44, 8:1-10) with David the king-in-exile (1 Sam.18). Who is Jesus implying that the Pharisees are?

Compare the cleansings of the unclean demoniac (Mk.5:1-20) and hemorrhaging woman (Mk.5:21-43) with the prophecy of the new covenant in Ezekiel 36 and 37.

Compare the claim of Jesus to be a king with Jeremiah's vision of the new covenant and the Davidic king (Jer. 23:1-6, 31:31-34)

Compare Mark's story of the cross (Mk.14:32-15:39) to the Day of Atonement (Lev.16:1-34)

- C. DISCLOSURE.** *Sometimes biblical narrative is like a silent movie, where we don't hear the dialogue between characters or an internal dialogue within a character. As readers, our involvement with the text's meaning is affected by the narrator's intended interaction between the reader and the characters, suggested by the level of information shared by the narrator at any given moment.*

The movie *Entrapment* contains two important disclosures of information relating the characters and the audience. In the middle, we discover what Jen (Catherine Zeta-Jones) has known, that she was the thief who stole the painting. So we disassociate from Jen because we realize she's had the upper hand over us in terms of knowledge. Then Mac (Sean Connery) reveals that he was the one who retrieved the painting. Then we disassociate with Mac and associate with Jen because we are as surprised as she is. So our perspectives and feelings towards the characters radically flip-flop as we suddenly discover what the characters have known all along. In the end, we discover what Mac knows: that he's been working for the government trying to trap Jen.

Varying degrees of information leads to multiple perspectives in the story: one character's perspective, another character's perspective, God's perspective, and our perspective as readers. Biblical narratives contain strategically different levels of explicitness and uncertainty to evoke a desired response (or range of responses) from the reader. Biblical narrative also drives towards the convergence of multiple perspectives.

“Every Biblical narrator is of course omniscient, but in contrast, for example, to the narrator of the Homeric poems, who makes his characters beautifully perspicuous even (as in the *Iliad*) when he is dealing with the most darkly irrational impulses of the human heart, the ancient Hebrew narrator displays his omniscience with a drastic selectivity. He may on occasion choose to privilege us with the knowledge of what God thinks of a particular character or action – omniscient narration can go no higher – but as a rule, because of his understanding of the nature of his human subjects, he leads us through varying darknesses which are lit up by intense but narrow means, phantasmal glimmerings, sudden strobic flashes.” (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p.126)

How does the author convey information regarding motives, attitudes, or the inner nature of someone's moral character? In ascending order of explicitness:

1. *Character hidden*

Sometimes when you might expect to get some glimpse of how a character feels or thinks, the biblical narrator withholds that information.

“And as he was going along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ And they immediately left the nets and followed him.” (Mark 1:16-17) We don't know why the disciples followed Jesus. It is hidden from us.

2. *Character revealed through actions, which can either meet or disappoint our expectations*

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching him and falling on his knees before him, and saying, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Moved with compassion, *Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him*, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” (Mk.1:41-42)

3. *Character revealed through gestures, appearances, or costume*

John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. (Mk.1:6)

4. *Character revealed through another character's comments regarding her/him/them*

And Jesus, seeing their [the four friends' and the paralytic's] faith... (Mk.2:5)

Immediately Jesus, aware in his spirit that they [the scribes] were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?” (Mk.2:8)

And he said to them, “Why are you [the disciples] so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?” (Mk.4:40)

5. *Character revealed through direct speech of the individual*

Saving Private Ryan contains an epiphanic insight into a character's life. During an episode where some soldiers are threatening to defect, Hanks suddenly shares about his identity as a schoolteacher. The sudden reminder or hope or glimmer of peacetime life in the midst of war done in the form of a personal self-disclosure is powerful because it is the first time we get an insight into the character's real self and inner life. It is from that point that we really understand

how Hanks' character interprets the war around him and the mission he's on and we sympathize with him more. (Steven Spielberg does this quite often in his movies)

And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mk.4:41)

The disciples are sarcastic and tired when they said to him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" (Mk.6:37)

6. *Character revealed through inward speech*

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

7. *Character revealed by the narrator explicitly in statements about attitudes, motives, etc.*

Specific descriptions made by the narrator are so rare, they are very important whenever they occur.

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching him and falling on his knees before him, and saying, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." *Moved with compassion*, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." (Mk.1:41-42)

For they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but *their heart was hardened*. (Mk.6:52)

But they kept silent, for on the way *they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest*. (Mk.9:34)

Though typical study of biblical narrative seeks to make the audience identify with the characters, this may not always be the narrator's intent. Sometimes the narrator forces us to simultaneously consider different alternatives about the characters' motivations, feelings, or levels of knowledge. Or sometimes the narrator forces us to disassociate with a certain character altogether. If strategic disclosure of certain characters is a device the narrator is using (Mark in particular), then our strategy for how readers and characters interact must change.

For the purpose of preaching and storytelling, this gives us a helpful tool. When a reader's perspective (level of information) coincides with the character's perspective (level of information), the reader is led to identify with the character. Conversely, when a reader's perspective is different from the character's perspective, the reader is led to dis-identify with the character. It is fun to engage other people on how much information they think they have at various points in the narrative and how close or distant they feel to the characters.

D. *STRUCTURE. The literary structure of the narrative often helps make the point.*

1. The Juxtaposition of Stories

The Scriptures are like a tapestry where the individual colors of each story create a meaningful picture as they are placed next to other stories. Often, significant comparisons can be made between two back-to-back narrative events. Also, an entire book can be studied at once, considering especially the beginning and the end. On every level one consistently asks two questions:

1. How is this material similar to what has come before?
2. How is this material different from what has come before?

In Mark, it is frequently on the sequence of smaller stories that the emphasis is made.

The healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk.8:22-26)

The disciples partially perceive Jesus, like the blind man partially healed (Mk.8:27-38)

The disciples do not perceive the meaning of the transfigured Jesus (Mk.9:1-13)

Mark also uses the sandwiched story, where one story is inserted in the middle of another. Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman is a good example of this. Mark does this because it literarily illustrates the insider-outsider theme. The inside story is truly the "inside story" and interprets the outside story.

2. *The Ending that Unveils a Secret in the Story*

At the end of the movie *The Sixth Sense*, you learn that Bruce Willis was really a ghost all the way through the movie, so you want to watch the movie again with the ending in mind. It helps you understand why his wife ignores him, why he can't open certain doors in his house, etc.

In the movie *The Usual Suspects*, not until the end do you realize that Roger "Verbal" Kint was Keyser Soze. Thus, you have to watch the movie again when you know the ending to see how all the clues stack up.

The *Blue, White, Red* movie series by Polish director: Understanding that there are themes of identity lost and identity regained (*Blue*), or captivity and manipulation (*White*), or fall and redemption (*Red*) woven throughout the movies that get resolved at the end makes you want to watch the movie again with the ending in mind. Blue is especially good in this way.

The Gospel of Mark shows that the disciples failed to follow Jesus because of what the ending reveals...

3. *The Unresolved Ending With a Boomeranging Judgment:*

Sometimes a biblical book or story ends without resolving the main tension in the story.

The movie *A Few Good Men* contains a disclosure that reverses the viewers' feelings and judgments. At first we side with Tom Cruise as the lawyer finding out the truth about the murdered Santiago. But after Jack Nicholson's disclosure, we have mixed feelings towards Cruise and his efforts. Furthermore, we have to judge ourselves for enjoying the benefits of military actions we judge.

The book *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding has a boomeranging judgment, where you as the reader detest the savagery of the boys stranded on the island. But then the boys are 'saved' by British sailors returning to their gunboats in wartime. We as readers thus recognize that the savagery of the boys on the island is parallel to the savagery of the men in the world. They are not 'saved' at all, and thus we judge ourselves.

Nathan's parable to King David in 2 Samuel 12 had a boomeranging judgment on David. David provides the ending to the story. But his judgment comes boomeranging back on him when Nathan says, "You are the man."

The book of Jonah gets us to side with God at Jonah's expense. We judge Jonah throughout the story, for disobeying God in sharing His mercy to his enemies. Our judgment comes back on us, however, when we recognize that we disobey God in sharing His mercy to our enemies.

Jesus' parable of the two lost sons in Luke 15:11-32 leaves the ending for the Pharisees to complete. The older son does not enter the celebration, disrespecting his father in public. This is just like the Pharisees are behaving. They are not entering the celebration around the table. They are disrespecting God the Father in public. Thus their judgment comes boomeranging back on them.

Luke's Acts of the Apostles cries out for an ending. Arguably it is to be provided by Caesar. The pattern of Paul going before rulers and authorities culminates at Rome. Thus, the desire to put an ending to the narrative based on the pattern leads to a judgment boomeranging on Caesar himself. The previous

interactions serve as a warning to Caesar, especially Herod, who claimed to be god and was eaten by worms.