1986

Slow to Understand: the Disciples in Synoptic Perspective

Bertram L. Melbourne

Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/94

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.
Thank you for your interest in the Andrews University Digital Library of Dissertations and Theses.

Please honor the copyright of this document by not duplicating or distributing additional copies in any form without the author’s express written permission. Thanks for your cooperation.
INFORMATION TO USERS

While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted. For example:

- Manuscript pages may have indistinct print. In such cases, the best available copy has been filmed.
- Manuscripts may not always be complete. In such cases, a note will indicate that it is not possible to obtain missing pages.
- Copyrighted material may have been removed from the manuscript. In such cases, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each oversize page is also filmed as one exposure and is available, for an additional charge, as a standard 35mm slide or as a 17"x 23" black and white photographic print.

Most photographs reproduce acceptably on positive microfilm or microfiche but lack the clarity on xerographic copies made from the microfilm. For an additional charge, 35mm slides of 6"x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations that cannot be reproduced satisfactorily by xerography.
PLEASE NOTE:

In all cases this material has been filmed in the best possible way from the available copy. Problems encountered with this document have been identified here with a check mark ✓.

1. Glossy photographs or pages ______
2. Colored illustrations, paper or print ______
3. Photographs with dark background _____
4. Illustrations are poor copy ______
5. Pages with black marks, not original copy _____
6. Print shows through as there is text on both sides of page ______
7. Indistinct, broken or small print on several pages ✓
8. Print exceeds margin requirements ______
9. Tightly bound copy with print lost in spine ______
10. Computer printout pages with indistinct print ______
11. Page(s) ___________ lacking when material received, and not available from school or author.
12. Page(s) ___________ seem to be missing in numbering only as text follows.
13. Two pages numbered ______. Text follows.
14. Curling and wrinkled pages ✓
15. Dissertation contains pages with print at a slant, filmed as received ✓
16. Other ___________________________

____________________________
____________________________

University
Microfilms
International
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

SLOW TO UNDERSTAND: THE DISCIPLES
IN SYNOPTIC PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Bertram L. Melbourne
August 1986
SLOW TO UNDERSTAND: THE DISCIPLES
IN SYNOPTIC PERSPECTIVE

A dissertation presented
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Bertram L. Melbourne

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Abraham Terian, Chairman
Professor of Intertestamental
and Early Christian Literatures

Robert M. Johnston
Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins

George E. Rice
Professor of New Testament

Ivan T. Blazen
Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology

Wolfgang M. W. Roth
Professor of Old Testament Interpretation
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Gerhard F. Hasel, Dean
BDA Theological Seminary

Date approved
ABSTRACT

SLOW TO UNDERSTAND: THE DISCIPLES
IN SYNOPTIC PERSPECTIVE

by

Bertram L. Melbourne

Chairman: Abraham Terian
The problem of the portrayal of the disciples of Jesus has been the focus of much scholarly investigation. Discussion has been pursued primarily from the Marcan perspective, in keeping with its assumed priority. Consequently, Mark is seen as creating the disciples' incomprehension to serve his theological intent. The correctness of this notion is questioned in this study which seeks to determine whether incomprehension was an authentic experience of Jesus' original disciples, and whether slowness of understanding was to be expected in teaching and learning contexts.

Recent scholarship on the disciples is surveyed to identify the main issues, approaches, trends, and the scope of the ongoing debate. A Synoptic approach to the motif of incomprehension is proposed because of the unsettled
question of Marcan priority, the equally—if not at times more--disparaging portrayal of the disciples in the other Synoptics, and the need to explain the tradition history of the seemingly negative portrayal of disciples (chapter 1).

The ascription of the prevailing image of the disciples to Mark, or the extent to which the prevailing image is Marcan, is questioned (1) in light of the parallel pericopae dealing with the disciples in the other Synoptics whose authors may no longer be seen as mere redactors of Mark (chapter 2) and (2) by tracing the tradition history of disciples' initial incomprehension, and eventual understanding when hearing and sight converge (chapter 3). In the first instance, the respective portraits of the disciples in each of the Synoptics seem to betray a well established tradition from which it was difficult—if not impossible—to break away. In the second instance, this tradition is recognizable in the common terms and concepts of comprehension/incomprehension in Old Testament theophanic and didactic contexts and in later canonical and extra-canonical Jewish writings of the Second Temple period as well as in Greek literature, especially in texts relating to Greek paideia.

The convergence of hearing and sight for comprehension seems to be a recurring feature in Jewish writings and Greek literature. A more accurate image of the disciples emerges when these observations are brought to bear upon the Synoptics (chapter 4).
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................... vi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 1

Chapter

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................. 11

I. Research on the Marcan Disciples ........................................... 11
   Works Published from 1961-1971 ............................................. 14
   Works Published from 1972-1982 ............................................. 19
Research on the Disciples Outside of Mark ............................. 54
Research on the Disciples in Matthew ....................................... 54
Research Viewing the Disciples in the Synoptics as a Whole ...... 61
Summary .................................................................................... 70

II. HOW MARCAN IS THE SYNOPTIC PORTRAIT OF THE DISCIPLES? .................................................. 74

The Marcan Portrait of the Disciples .......................................... 77
   The Positive Portrait of the Disciples in Mark ......................... 79
   The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Mark ....................... 93
   Conclusion ............................................................................. 107
The Matthean Portrait of the Disciples ....................................... 108
   The Positive Portrait of the Disciples in Matthew ................. 108
   The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Matthew ............... 117
   Conclusion ............................................................................. 131
The Lucan Portrait of the Disciples ............................................ 132
   The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Luke .................... 143
   Conclusion ............................................................................. 154
Summary .................................................................................... 155

III. AN EXAMINATION OF CONCEPTS AND WORDS OF COMPREHENSION IN JEWISH AND GREEK LITERATURE .................................................. 162

Terms and Concepts of Comprehension/Incomprehension .......... 163
| Words Relating to Knowledge and Understanding | 164 |
| Conclusion | 182 |
| The Contribution of Jewish Tradition to the Understanding of Incomprehension in the Synoptics | 183 |
| Seeing and Hearing in the OT: Theophanic Context and Didactic Patterns | 185 |
| Excursus on Fear: The Utilization of OT Patterns in Relation to the Deeds of Jesus | 199 |
| Seeing and Hearing in the Qumran, Apocryphal, and Pseudepigraphal Writings | 204 |
| Seeing and Hearing in the Works of Philo and Josephus | 206 |
| Seeing and Hearing in the Rest of the NT | 211 |
| Conclusion | 216 |
| The Contribution of Greek Tradition to the Understanding of Incomprehension in the Synoptics | 218 |
| Seeing and Hearing in the Greek Paideia | 218 |
| Conclusion | 226 |
| Summary | 227 |

IV. THE DISCIPLES IN SYNOPTIC PERSPECTIVE: A SYNOPSIS | 229 |

| How Should Mark's Portrait of the Disciples be Viewed? | 230 |
| The Matthean and Lucan Portraits of the Disciples | 255 |
| Traditional Master-Disciple Relations in the Synoptics | 258 |
| The Influence of Hearing and Sight on Comprehension in the Synoptics | 260 |
| The Convergence of Sight and Hearing | 271 |
| Summary | 284 |

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY | 288 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Christian Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvT</td>
<td>Evangelical Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBR</td>
<td>Journal of the Bible and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Journal of Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIDNTT</td>
<td>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue Biblique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelSRev</td>
<td>Religious Studies Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RevExp</td>
<td>Review and Expositor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td><em>Scottish Journal of Theology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWJT</td>
<td><em>Southwestern Journal of Theology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDNT</td>
<td><em>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWOT</td>
<td><em>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ</td>
<td><em>Theologische Zeitschrift</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USQR</td>
<td><em>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZTK</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are inadequate to express my deep gratitude to many distinguished persons whose invaluable advice, assistance, encouragement, and support have enabled the completion of this work. In addition to those professors to whom I am indebted in this rich process of stimulation and learning, I am most grateful to Drs. Abraham Terian and George Rice for their facilitation of this writing project.

It was in a doctoral seminar under Professor Terian's tutelage that this thesis had its genesis. When I accepted his challenge to select a Gospel, review the recent scholarship, isolate a problem, and write a twenty page paper, little did I realize that my choice of the Gospel of Mark and the problem of the disciples would have resulted in this dissertation. I owe him a debt of gratitude for his inspiration, unselfish service, demand for excellence, and supervision of my studies. Dr. George Rice was also of invaluable assistance to me. He gave generously of his time, advice and editorial expertise to perfect the manuscript.

Heartfelt gratitude is also extended to my wife, Cavel, to Yves Monnier, and to Judith Swaby for their assistance in typing the manuscript; to Debbie Brown for reading and correcting the manuscript together with my wife; to Barry Casey for assistance in printing the document; to the administration of Columbia Union College, especially Dr Ken Stout--Chairman of the Religion Department--for their assistance, encouragement and understanding; and to my students for their encouragement and understanding.

viii
Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family for their love, sympathy, concern, encouragement, tolerance and understanding. Cav, Yolande, Maurice, and Launice: thanks for everything. I love you.
INTRODUCTION

Synoptic studies in general show that scholars have noted a problem in the portrayal of the disciples of Jesus. This problem has generated a great deal of discussion. The majority of these studies have tended toward discussing the disciples from the Marcan perspective. Two significant factors have contributed to this trend: (1) the espousal of the Marcan priority hypothesis by a significant number of Synoptic scholars, and (2) the influence of

Redaktionsgeschichte\(^1\) on Synoptic scholarship. Together, these factors have led to the conclusion that Mark created the portrait of the disciples to suit his own theological ends, and that the other Synoptists, as creative authors in their own right, adopted much of the Marcan material to suit their purposes.\(^2\)

This conclusion has had far reaching implications for Synoptic scholarship in general, and Marcan studies in particular. As it was pursued, the consensus soon emerged that Mark had deliberately portrayed the disciples as dull-witted, ignorant, incomprehensively blind, lacking in faith, afraid of Jesus,  

\(^1\)Named thus by Willi Marxsen, but the pioneering work in the discipline was done independently by Günther Bornkamm working on Matthew, Hans Conzelmann on Luke, and Marxsen himself on Mark. See I. Howard Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 183-184, 193, nn. 9-11, 16. It is acknowledged, however, that the discipline was anticipated by earlier scholars such as F. C. Baur, William Wrede, and R. H. Lightfoot, among others. See ibid., p. 192, n. 2.

self-seeking, obtuse, recalcitrant, obdurant, obstinate, deaf, wanting in understanding, and unable to withstand adversity.¹ Kelber advances the thesis that Mark relegated them to the outside, thus taking "a decisive step toward identifying the disciples as Jesus' opponents."² Weeden sees no progression in their growth and development. On the contrary, regression is what he sees as characterizing their relationship with Jesus. Consequently, they move steadily downward. They slip from imperception to misconception and finally rejection.³ To some scholars, Mark projects the disciples as complete failures in their attempt at discipleship; he conducts a vendetta against them and attempts to totally discredit them.⁴

Those who hold this view contend that the other Synoptic Evangelists modified Mark's portrayal of the disciples for one reason or another; consequently, the disciples appear in a different light in Matthew and Luke. Matthew is often used to demonstrate the extent to which Mark has been modified. While Mark has the disciples misunderstanding Jesus, Matthew has them understanding him.⁵


²Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, pp. 36-42.

³Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, pp. 26-51, 162-163.

⁴Ibid.

Examination of the literature on the Synoptics reveals that while there is an abundance of works on the disciples in Mark, there is a paucity of works dealing with the disciples from any other perspective. No work was found which was entirely devoted to the portrait of the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew or Luke. It should also be observed that where attempts have been made, they are either inadequate or they deal with discipleship and not the disciples.¹

It seems that there is room for a new approach to the treatment of the theme of the disciples. In the first place, Marcan priority is only an hypothesis which many scholars seem to assume to be a fact. Achtemeier is certainly correct in his claim that "Marcan priority cannot be fully and definitely proven on the basis of the materials we possess. . . ."² He believes, however, that the assumption is very likely. A growing challenge to Marcan priority is now emerging in Synoptic studies.³ This is a desirable trend which indicates that


my contention for a new approach to the disciples is justifiable. Recently Robert M. Fowler asserted that despite the renewed debate over the Synoptic Problem, there is no progress toward resolution. He contends that as presently understood the problem may be insoluble since "We lack the extrinsic evidence necessary to reconstruct the history of the Gospels...."

In the second place, an examination of the Synoptic portrait of the disciples reveals not only striking similarities but also instances in which the other Evangelists have a much more critical opinion of them than does Mark. It would seem that there is evidence which indicates that the primitive tradition did not portray them as saints but included reminiscences of their failures and shortcomings. If this is true, then perhaps, the way forward demands examination of the Synoptic perspective of the disciples. This is one object of this study.

This research also treats the problem of the apparent inability of the disciples to understand Jesus. While Marcan scholarship is adamant on the theory that Mark created the misunderstanding by the disciples, it offers no satisfactory answer for the purpose of its creation. This research proposes

---


2Knodel recognizes the notable absence of NT studies providing Synoptic surveys. See Kingsbury, Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark and Luke, p. vii.

that not Mark but the basic Synoptic tradition is responsible for the portrait of the disciples, and that it is suggestive of the learning experience of the original disciples of Jesus. In other words, the slowness of understanding could be a common feature (topos) within the Hellenistic ideal of education (paideia).

Furthermore, it is rather surprising that while the problem of the portrait of the disciples in Mark has been studied and debated and while Redaktionsgeschichte has been used as a methodology to unlock Mark's purpose for the incomprehension, there has been no thorough study of the vocabulary employed to express incomprehension in Mark, or the other Synoptics. There is, therefore, a need for a study of the incomprehension vocabulary which could provide a key that could unlock the problem of the slowness of the disciples to understand Jesus.

J. J. Vincent proposed, in 1960, that there were a host of historical questions related to the study of discipleship which had been neglected for decades and which needed to be addressed. He cited the affinities between Master-disciple relations in the Gospels and similar phenomena rabbi-pupil relations in Judaism, the Torah-disciple relations in Jewish piety, the philosopher-student relations in Greek civilization, and the teacher-initiate relations in the Mystery religions.1 Vincent's call has, to some extent, gone unheeded. Vernon K. Robbins,2 who has come closest to addressing these issues, was apparently unaware of Vincent's plea. This study seeks what light some of these areas Vincent alludes to might shed on incomprehension and the incom-


prehension vocabulary, since it is believed that Jesus and his disciples had a teacher-pupil association.

It has become evident that a new approach to the discussion on the disciples of Jesus is a necessity. This dissertation intends to explore one such approach. Specifically, it aims at:

1. Examining the parallel Synoptic accounts of the portrait of the disciples to determine whether the incomprehension is limited to one Gospel or is a feature of all. If it is the latter, the study will seek to establish whether incomprehension is traceable to a well-established, unalterable tradition.

2. Isolating the incomprehension vocabulary in the Synoptics, then examining its usage in Biblical and cognate literature.

3. Applying the findings from the usage in Biblical and cognate literature to the Synoptic passages to ascertain what can be learned about the reasons for the disciples’ apparent failure to comprehend Jesus.

This investigation is limited to the area of Biblical Studies and does not address questions on discipleship and related Christological issues in the realm of Systematic Theology. Furthermore, while the discussions will necessarily require brief (re)consideration of the issue of Marcan priority, detailed discussions of the Synoptic problem and suggested solutions are beyond the scope of this study.

The preponderance of recent works on the second Gospel was stimulated by Marxsen and redaction criticism. It is within the context of this development that discussion relating to the problem being addressed in this study lies. Chapter 1, therefore, offers a survey of recent scholarship with a view to determining the main issues being addressed, the approaches adopted, the validity of these approaches, the major trends, and the scope of the ongoing
debate. The surveyed literature provides justification for the inquiry stated above and recommends the way, given below, to arrive at answers.

Chapter 2 seeks to reconstruct the portrait of the disciples as presented by each Synoptist. It does not follow the current approaches which, to a large extent, begin with the assumption of Marcan priority and move on to redaction criticism. They have tended to emphasize the negative and have ascribed it to the creative designs of Mark. This study therefore adopts a more objective approach which does not accord priority to any Gospel, and which will consider both the negative and the positive aspects of the disciples' relationship with Jesus. This approach does more justice to the material and provides a more complete picture. This chapter furnishes the data necessary to demonstrate that while there are differences between the accounts, there are, in fact, striking similarities. It proposes that not Mark, but the tradition behind the Gospels is responsible for the incomprehension of the disciples; especially since Matthew and Luke sometimes included material, omitted by Mark, seemingly more embarrassing to the disciples.

The next section, chapter 3, is devoted to an investigation of the tradition history of the initial incomprehension and subsequent understanding of disciples. First, since Christianity arose from a Jewish matrix, its concepts were influenced by its environment. Jewish heritage is therefore explored for semantic and conceptual antecedents pertinent to understanding incomprehension. Second, since it appears that there is a basic Synoptic tradition that undergirds all three Gospels, the vocabulary common to this tradition, mainly as it relates to incomprehension, is investigated. Attention is given to certain key words, especially as they appear in a teaching context. This vocabulary is studied lexically. Attention will also be given to its use in cognate literature—
Classical Greek, Judeo-Hellenistic, and other Jewish writings. In addition, the Greek *paideia* and the Rabbinic circles are investigated to ascertain significant data for the study. It is hoped that the insights gained will be pertinent in establishing the importance of hearing and seeing for complete comprehension, not only in these two educational systems but also as they impinge upon and can inform understanding of the relations between Jesus and his seemingly uncomprehending disciples.

The final chapter seeks to utilize the results of the preceding two chapters to establish a Synoptic perspective of the disciples. When the similarities within the Synoptic tradition are demonstrated, and their keeping with Biblical concepts and other traditional *topoi* is firmly established, the rationale for the slowness of the disciples to understand will have been realized. With these as foundational, the Synoptic perspective of the disciples is constructed.

The understanding of the disciples/discipleship has long been colored by the Marcan priority hypothesis. As such, Mark is charged with creating the incomprehension of the disciples. The correctness of this notion is being questioned. It is the thesis of this study that incomprehension was indeed a *de facto* experience of the historical disciples of Jesus; however, slowness of understanding was anticipated in contexts of teaching or learning, and that was not necessarily a negative element. In the context of the times, both hearing and seeing were demanded for complete comprehension to take place. While the disciples seemed to have heard the words of Jesus, perception did not immediately follow for there was a conflict between their Messianism, which was confirmed by the deeds of Jesus and his teachings concerning a suffering Messiah. Complete comprehension was not attained until after the passion and the resurrection when they had encounters with the resurrected Jesus. It was
then that hearing and sight converged and complete comprehension occurred.
CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter surveys studies concerning the subject of the disciples of Jesus. Such a survey is essential, for it not only provides the necessary background against which current opinions and developments can be assessed, but also highlights the need for a departure from the present tendencies. Moreover, it can aid in indicating the specific point of departure.

Any review of scholarly opinion on the disciples of Jesus must take a multidimensional approach, for scholars have viewed the subject from different perspectives. Consequently, this review surveys works written from the point of view of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and the Synoptic tradition in general. Scholarship, especially from the Marcan perspective, is rather extensive, and thus precludes exhaustive treatment. However, every attempt is made to be representative and to do justice to the major contributors.

The summary which follows the review aims at highlighting the major developments and at synthesizing the principal issues. This is especially necessary since a chronological approach is being adopted for the review. The summary also indicates the direction for this study and possible directions for future studies.

Research on the Marcan Disciples

For several centuries the Gospel of Mark played no significant role in Gospel research. Indeed it was a neglected Gospel and was thought to be
subservient to Matthew.¹ The veracity of this statement can be substantiated by the fact that none of the major Church Fathers wrote a commentary on Mark.² For centuries, Augustine’s position that Mark was an abridgement of Matthew was the dominant view.³ The second Gospel’s emergence in scholarship began in the eighteenth century with Koppe and continued with Lachmann and Weisse in the nineteenth century.⁴ By the close of the latter century the priority of Mark was assumed, and the Evangelist came to be viewed as an objective historian who reflected the tradition as he received it. Within such a context Mark’s portrait of the disciples would be viewed as belonging to the tradition.

The appearance of William Wrede’s Das Messiasgeheimnis in 1901 heralded a new era for Mark. Not only did Wrede successfully challenge the concept of Mark as an objective historian but he anticipated Redaktionsgeschichte by suggesting that Mark interpreted the portrait of Jesus to reflect dogmatic and apologetic concerns, primarily the Messianic secret. This new approach held significant implications for the portrait of the disciples because Wrede saw Mark as utilizing the negative portrayal of the disciples to enhance his theological motif, the Messianic secret. To him, there was no polemic against the disciples as such, but Mark used their misunderstanding to shroud


²Kealy, Mark’s Gospel, p. 1.


Jesus in a secret until the appropriate time, after the resurrection and Pentecost.\textsuperscript{1} His influence has been decisive.

Another era began for Marcan scholarship in 1956 with Willi Marxsen and \textit{Redaktionsgeschichte}.\textsuperscript{2} With Marxsen, the second Evangelist rose to prominence as a theologian and a creative author who adapted or created his material to suit his purpose. The past twenty-five years have not only seen the utilization of his methods, but the multiplication of monographs within Marcan scholarship in general, and with one special concern in particular, the disciples and discipleship.

Significantly, the theory of Wrede in respect to the disciples held sway until 1961 when Joseph B. Tyson\textsuperscript{3} and J. Schreiber\textsuperscript{4} challenged it. They saw Mark as condemning the failures of the historical disciples while using them in a polemic to attack a reactionary group in his contemporary situation. Though they were united in saying that Mark was condemning the historical disciples and attacking a reactionary group, they held diverse opinions in the identification of the group. Tyson saw the group as being led by the family of Jesus, while Schreiber thought it was led by Peter, James, and John. Despite

\textsuperscript{1}Wrede, \textit{The Messianic Secret}, pp. 101-114, 231-236.


\textsuperscript{3}Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," p. 261-68.

their lack of unity in respect to the identity of the group, their insight has been significant for recent developments in disciple/discipleship studies.

Works Published from 1961-1971

In the decade following Tyson and Schreiber, several major works appeared in the area of Marcan studies. This is particularly true of the period following 1969 when another era for Mark’s Gospel began. Kealy describes it as the era of restoration when the second Gospel was granted an equal place with the other three in the church’s liturgy.1 Of these works, fourteen2 are significant to this study because of their continuing stress on the incomprehension of the disciples. Nineham, in the form critical tradition, saw Mark as a community production designed to meet its need in the face of persecution. He admits the Messianic secret, and sees Jesus as deliberately upholding it. Utilizing Mark 4:10-12 and 8:17, he attributes the obtuseness of the disciples to divine ordination.3 Trocmé views the disciples in Mark as those who follow


Jesus everywhere, who serve as his natural spokesmen though plunged in a way of life totally diverse from the established conventions, who perform material tasks on his behalf, and who are his attendants.\textsuperscript{1} For him, pride, ambition, narrow-mindedness, and hardheartedness are the reasons for their stupidity.\textsuperscript{2} Eduard Schweitzer employed redaction criticism in his approach to Mark. He detects the rearranging hand of the second Evangelist in the portrayal of the disciples. He regards the passion predictions as being constructed by him to highlight their unbelief and misunderstanding. Consequently, Jesus had opportunity to issue calls to discipleship. He follows Wrede in espousing the Messianic secret. He sees a progressive hardening of the hearts of the disciples so they would not venerate Jesus as a miracle worker, a derogatory term in most Hellenistic cities. Their eyes were opened at the passion and resurrection.\textsuperscript{3}

Weeden and Meye each produced two significant works in this period.\textsuperscript{4} Interestingly, they hold contrasting positions. Weeden posits that Mark was produced in an environment in which the idea of "divine men" (theoi-andres) who exhibit their power, was prevalent. He views the first eight chapters of the Gospel as depicting Jesus as a "divine man," while the last eight emphasize him as the "suffering servant."\textsuperscript{5} Weeden thinks that the disciples completely


\textsuperscript{2}So Kealy, Mark's Gospel, p. 182.


\textsuperscript{4}See n. 10 above.

\textsuperscript{5}Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, p. 56.
engrossed the Evangelist's attention. Only Jesus outdid them. The author must, therefore, have ascribed to them a vital role in his plot. The damaging insinuations about their capacity for discernment which Mark made by portraying them as obdurate, obstinate, and recalcitrant had a purposeful design—their denigration.

Weyden is best known for two proposals he makes concerning the second Gospel. The first involves the disciples. He projects a three-stage developmental process for them which emphasizes retrogression instead of progression. They grow from imperception to misconception and finally to rejection. The first stage, 1:16-8:26, is characterized by their inability to perceive who Jesus is, despite his mighty manifestations of his Messianic power. The second stage, 8:27-14:10, though reflecting a sudden and inexplicable insight—"the startling revelation: Jesus is the Christ"—is characterized by a conflict over the characteristics of authentic Messiahship. The third stage, 14:11-16:8, treats the disciples' rejection of Jesus which is revealed through betrayal, denial, and flight. Weeden detects Mark's vendetta against the disciples and his attempt to totally discredit them. His second proposal is that this Gospel was written to solve a Christological conflict in Mark's community. With Tyson and Schreiber, he attributes a polemical objective to the depiction. Mark wanted to correct his community's false Christology.¹

Meye, on the contrary, repudiates any attempt at ascribing to Mark's Gospel a polemic against the disciples. What he detects is an honest portrayal of them. Even when depicted negatively the design was for them to be harbingers of hope to his (Mark's) community. Meye sees his contribution to the

continuing debate as highlighting the role of the didactic motif in Mark's Gospel. He demonstrates that Jesus called a special group of disciples at the beginning of his ministry for the purpose of making them fishers of men. He believes that Jesus added to this initial group to form a company of twelve. While some scholars propose that this group is theological rather than historical, he demonstrates that the Twelve are indeed integral to, and are a part of Jesus' history. Consequently, the Gospel cannot be viewed as an anti-twelve polemic. The Twelve, through their depicted struggles, provide hope for struggling Christians. He thinks that to view them otherwise would be tantamount to depriving struggling and sinning Christians of the hope the Gospel was designed to convey. The misunderstandings and struggles of the disciples were designed to say to such Christians that the Jesus who, in the historical situation, bore with shortcomings before Easter will now bear with them after Easter.

Best and Kelber also made additions to the disciple debate. In 1970 Best published an article on discipleship in Mark. He stated his theme as "discipleship," not "the disciples." Consequently, his concern was not with Mark's concept of the actual disciples as disciples. He views the selected passages as carefully constructed units in which everything is related to Christ or discipleship. The key to unlocking the enigma is 10:43-45 which depicts Jesus as the norm for discipleship. As he was, so his disciples must be.

Best states that this section highlights Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The word "Following," which is emphasized, is employed throughout the Gospel.

1Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, pp. 14, 113-114, 192-209.

almost exclusively for the disciples of Jesus. While they must follow Jesus, he sees Mark clearly distinguishing between them and Jesus at every stage that they followed him and did as he did. The example of Jesus was the pattern for the disciples; hence the journey was one of imitation. However, that imitation could only have been partial because the disciples, unlike apprentices of a philosopher and disciples of a rabbi who could become philosophers and rabbis, could not become a Christ.

Best, therefore, does not see Mark portraying the cross as the end, for heaven was beyond. The cross was the beginning and is always on the way, but the way is simultaneously the way of the risen life, of new possibility, and of service. The original disciples, unbelievers, and disciples in Mark's day did not understand this. The hesitation, doubts, and fears of the historical disciples are to instruct the community and bring them beyond the cross into a truer understanding and a fuller following. For Best, Mark's purpose for writing was to explain to the church the position of those who were apparently willfully blind, who were claiming to be Christians, but whose discipleship was "impoverished and inadequate," and who could not withstand the ailments of discipleship.¹

Kelber's article uses the Gethsemane experience in Mark 14:32-42 to discuss Passion Christology and discipleship failure. He sees Mark not merely as a redactor but, in essence, as "the creator and composer of the Gethsemane story."² He does not see the three-stage prayer scene as emphasizing the attitude of the praying Jesus, but the negative role of the disciples. It is

designed to highlight the incorrigible blindness of the disciples.\footnote{Ibid., p. 179.} He believes their major weakness lay in their failure to accept or perceive the suffering and passion of the Son of Man. Peter openly rejected it. James and John deliberately challenged it. The rest never grasped it. Consequently, while they still went along with Jesus, they no longer got along with him. Gethsemane, therefore, served as the pivotal stage of the collision course between Jesus and the disciples, since it was the last chance that was offered them. Their inability to reconcile the logic of suffering and death left them ill-prepared for their entry into the passion events. They therefore failed to reach the goal and fell by the wayside.

Kelber also addressed the issue of why Mark composed the Gethsemane experience and emphasized the poor performance of the disciples. He sees Tyson's theory, especially as developed by Weeden, as yielding the most promising results. As such, Mark's consistent derogatory portrayal of the disciples was designed to dramatize the dispute among Christians of his time. The disciples are representatives of Mark's opponents who espouse a Christology which rejected the passion. The Marcan Jesus thus corrects the disciples and thereby achieves Mark's purpose of correcting his opponents.

Works Published from 1972-1982

The succeeding decade (1972-1982) saw a multiplication of works on the Gospel in general and on the disciples in particular. As a matter of fact, the works treating the disciple/discipleship theme almost tripled in this decade.
when compared to the last. In the first year, 1972, four important works\textsuperscript{1} by David J. Hawkin, Ralph Martin, Charles J. Reedy, and Walter Schmithals were devoted in whole or in part to the theme of the disciples. Martin detects both a favorable and a very human depiction of the disciples in Mark. They accepted Christ's call, yielded to his claims, yet they were dull-witted, uncomprehending, ignorant, blind, and fickle in their obedience. Apparently, Mark's purpose resided in his effort to show that even those close to Jesus failed to comprehend him, since faith and perception are essential.\textsuperscript{2} Martin sees Mark 14:50 marking the final abandonment of Jesus by the disciples due to their flight. Christ did not reciprocate in like terms, however. He anticipated a reunion with them. Due to the abrupt ending of the Gospel the prediction did not materialize.\textsuperscript{3}

Hawkin sets out to establish the set of purposes which governed Mark's thematic presentation of the disciples' incomprehension. He notes the contribution of Tyson and Schreiber to Marcan scholarship and suggests that if they are correct, a reappraisal of the total understanding of Mark is necessary. Employing redaction criticism, which he felt had a vital role, he sets about his task of ascertaining the role of incomprehension in the Gospel. After a brief survey of the presentation of incomprehension, he suggests that his task would involve distinguishing between the Messianic secret and the Messianic mystery, though he would also establish a relationship between them.


\textsuperscript{2}Martin, \textit{Mark: Evangelist and Theologian}, pp. 116-117, 133.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 203.
Hawkin discovers two distinct sections in Mark: (1) 1:14-8:21 which is dominated by the question, "Who is Jesus?" and by the secret of his identity---this latter suggestion, the secret of Jesus' identity, being more plausible than Weeden's which sees 1:14-8:21 as a refutation of one answer to the question (Jesus as theios aner); and (2) 8:22-16:8 which is dominated by the answer to the question of the first half--"by the mysterious destiny of Jesus and the disciples' incomprehension of it." He views the theme of the incomprehension of the disciples as integral to the whole Gospel.

He sees two crucial inferences emerging from the redaction. There is a distinction between the disciples and those outside their circle. Although the disciples pierce the secret of Jesus' identity, they fail to grasp the mystery of his destiny. Hawkin thinks that the distinction between the disciples and the crowd is accentuated to make an assertion about the contemporary situation of Mark. The disciples are representatives of the post-Easter church and the crowds of Israel. This distinction seeks to explain why the Jewish race as a whole did not enter the Christian Heilsgeschichte. Hawkin sees Peter's confession as the watershed of Mark's narrative. He takes Mark 8:27-33 to be one narrative but notes that it includes two pericopae. While some scholars, such as A. Meyer, see a synthesis between the two, Hawkin contends that in the two can be found both the distinction and the connection between the Messianic secret (the identity of Jesus) and the Messianic mystery (the destiny of death and resurrection). He thereby advocates what he calls a thematic progression. Unlike Meyer, who sees Jesus as rejecting Peter's confession as inadequate and employing silence to prevent their proclamation of what they

did not understand, Hawkin sees the Marcan Jesus accepting the confession. He views the confession as clearing the way for a new aspect of the Gospel story—"the esoteric teaching of Jesus about his coming fate." What is, therefore, seen is the unveiling of the secret of Jesus' identity, bringing forth the unveiling of the mystery of his destiny. The former, therefore, being a necessary prerequisite for the latter.

He finally specifies that Mark's controlling purpose saw both motifs as relating to the economy of revelation. The secrecy motif thematized the darkness in which light is offered to unbelievers while the incomprehension motif thematized the new and different darkness of the depths to which the believer is summoned. Here, then, is indicated what the church was to seek to understand. The key of Peter's confession indicates that the motifs relate to two different groups. The Marcan readers would identify with the disciples and would identify those outside the secret with "the Israel of the times." For Hawkin, the mystery the disciples failed to grasp—the suffering of the Messiah—was the mystery the church was called to enter. The Gentile Christians were to grasp what the disciples had failed to grasp.

Reedy in his examination of Mark 8:31-11:10, discovers the following pattern: (1) passion prediction, (2) a saying on discipleship motivated by misunderstanding or fear, and (3) an allusion to Jesus as possessing Messianic authority. When these findings are added to the fixed pattern of the passion prediction, Reedy discovers a pattern in 8:31-11:10 in which the first three parts—(1) the Son of Man will be delivered (betrayed) to the authorities, (2) he will be put to death, but (3) he will rise from the dead—outline the Marcan Passion account to its present end at Mark 16:8.

Schmithals postulates a theory which challenges the belief that Mark
deliberately ended his Gospel at 16:8 with the women's silence for the purpose of showing the rejection of the disciples. He explains the abrupt ending by claiming that Mark omitted the ending he found in his source. Mark replaced the account of the appearances with the references in 14:28 and 16:7 to the meeting with Peter and the Twelve in Galilee. While his source might have had a kerygmatic pattern similar to 1 Cor 15:3-5, he has transferred most of the appearance narratives to a pre-resurrection setting. Consequently, Mark's transfiguration story (9:2-8) was the first resurrection appearance; the second is found in the account of the call of the Twelve in Mark 3:13-18.

Schmithals attributes Mark's alteration of his source to the Messianic secret. While his source reveals Jesus' identity after the resurrection, it was his design to depict Jesus as making himself known before, both to his inner circle of disciples and to the Jewish officials.

In 1973 John R. Donahue1 made certain contributions to the debate on the Marcan disciples. Donahue sees lack of faith and misunderstanding permeating Mark 8:27-10:52, and culminating in the flight of the disciples and Peter's denial.2 He, like Reedy, sees the passion predictions leading to the disciples' misunderstanding of the necessity of suffering and the teaching by Jesus designed to correct them. He sees the majority of the material in the section as being collected by Mark from their independent circulation, and the definite positioning given them highlights his desire to emphasize the necessity of instruction for the Christian disciple if he is to follow on the way to the cross.3 For Donahue, Mark's portrayal of the disciples was an instructional

---

1Donahue, Are You the Christ?
2Ibid., p. 11.
3Ibid., p. 43.
device for the disciples of his day and probably for disciples in general. Peter’s denial was not primarily about him, but was intended to warn Christians of Mark’s day against failing in the hour of trial as Peter did.¹

The following year three more works appeared.² Schmahl’s was a revision of his doctoral dissertation of 1972. It included a review of scholarship on the Twelve. Its main part featured an examination of the passages in Mark which spoke of the Twelve. Included is a chapter which views Mark’s concept of the relationship between the Twelve and the disciples. Mark took over the tradition of the Twelve as representatives of the new people of God.

Lane’s commentary on the second Gospel criticized Marxsen’s position that Mark made historical events subservient to his theological motifs. Lane, however, saw Marxsen’s "critical studies" as important for future Marcan research. Lane, therefore, employed redaction criticism as a vital hermeneutical approach to the Gospel. He detects in the Gospel an emphasis on the failures of the disciples. Mark 4:40-41 is the first in a series of rebukes. Despite revelations the disciples still remain blind, being filled with misunderstanding. The root of this recurring theme is hardness of heart (Mark 6:45-52), hence the identification of the disciples as being on the same level with the opponents and the crowds. Furthermore, the linking of misunderstanding with the passion predictions underscored their failure to comprehend the Messiahship of Jesus.

Lane identifies the Evangelist’s community as the Roman Christians who were facing persecution and martyrdom. The parallel themes of suffering


in fulfillment of the will of God, misunderstanding, and the call to discipleship exhibit emphases essential to the community's education. Peter's denial is included since it provided a sober example for them.

Lane rejects the contention that the ending of Mark left the disciples in a bad light. The summons to Galilee furnishes evidence that Peter was not rejected. The failure of the women to transmit the angel's message is not negative. On the contrary, it establishes the fact that divine revelation lies beyond normal human experience and that no categories are available to man which can enable him to react appropriately. When confronted with the divine intervention in the historical process, men do not know how to react. Overwhelming fear is man's first response, as exhibited here.

One chapter in Norman Perrin's *New Testament Introduction* is devoted to the Gospel of Mark. Perrin detects the redactional hand of Mark skillfully at work in the treatment of the disciples. Their privileged position did not enhance their ability to comprehend Jesus. Perrin views their lack of comprehension as a literary device, using Mark 8:27-10:45 as an illustration. The Evangelist used it to prepare the way for an interpretation of the necessity for and the signifance of the passion, the dominant theme in the section. The failure motif climaxes in the disciples' failure and Peter's denial.

Contributions to the continuing debate were made in 1975 by C. Focant and Paul J. Achtemeier. In his article, Focant analyzed the relevant passages in Mark dealing with the disciples' lack of comprehension. It was posited that one must not speak too easily and freely about this lack of understanding


2Achtemeier, *Mark*. 

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
since there are two types of incomprehension displayed in the Gospel. The first, being of a positive nature, presents the disciples as reacting with stupor, fear, and lack of understanding, which results from the overwhelming nature of the miracle (4:40-41, 5:31, 6:37, 8:4), the harshness of the teaching (8:32-33, 9:32, 10:24,34), or the greatness of Jesus himself in an epiphany (9:5-6). The second, which is negative, can be seen in 4:13, 6:50-52, 7:18, 8:16-21. Focant suggests that elements of the motif, primarily the positive ones, were present in the pre-Marcan tradition. He believes that Mark systematized the theme with a view to portray to his readers the difficulty of entering into the mystery of Jesus and his cross. Though not entirely agreeing with Luz's arguments, he accepts the idea that the disciples' position does change after 8:27-30. Following Peter's confession, the disciples tend toward perfection though they do not completely attain it.

In his commentary Achtemeier admits the complexity of the problem of the disciples in Mark. The Evangelist gave only a retrogressive picture of them, portraying their misunderstanding heightening in misconception and climaxing in utter failure. He challenges the historical accuracy of such a portrayal since it does not adequately explain the transmission of the Jesus traditions. He suggests that the disciples' lack of understanding in the tradition is evidence that there must have been understanding at some point. Mark, however, seems to have attached much importance to failure. Consequently, he uses it as a part of his interpretive design into which he fits the early independent tradition of Jesus.

Achtemeier believes that it is the treatment of the disciples that gives

---

an understanding of the purpose and aim of the Gospel. Though Weeden and others have arrived at a similar conclusion, he rejects their position asserting that though the disciples confirmed their failure by deserting Jesus in a critical moment, they were not the only ones who failed to perceive what was happening in him. The scribes, Pharisees, and priests also failed. He detects a positive image of the disciples in the Gospel as well. They abandoned everything in response to Jesus' call. There is an ambiguity, however, since the crowds are also given positive treatment by Mark.

Achtemeier finds a lead for understanding Mark's role for the disciples in Mark's treatment of Simon Peter, who reflects the complexity of the Gospel and to whom Mark assigns a key role. This role is not wholly positive since Peter represents the disciples in faithfulness and perception as well as in incomprehension. Since there can be found no attempt at denigration of Peter, Achtemeier can see no denigration for the disciples as a whole. Peter, as far as Achtemeier is concerned, is definitely used as a representative of the group, and whatever Mark wanted to say about Peter he wanted to say about the disciples as a group. Consequently, he does not see Mark representing the disciples as a mirror of the problems of followers of Jesus. If this is at all present, it is not the complete picture.

Achtemeier detects Christology as being wrapped up in Mark's portrait of the disciples. The point being stressed is that suffering is inevitable for a follower of Jesus. To miss this point is to misunderstand Jesus, since Mark's emphasis is on the Jesus who will suffer. The disciples' failure, therefore, is not a result of their psychological makeup; it is bound up with Christology and has only positive implications. No one can understand Jesus apart from knowledge—knowledge of suffering. The disciples' lack of perception serves
Mark's Christological purpose. They have not seen the suffering and death of Jesus; therefore, they cannot understand him.

Joanna Dewey's redactional study, *Disciples of the Way: Mark on Discipleship*, appeared in 1976. It presents three failures on the part of the disciples: (1) inability to comprehend, (2) difficulty in grasping that the way of the world is not to be that of Jesus or of themselves, and (3) failure to understand the full scope of the inbreaking kingdom as reflected in the deeds of Jesus.

Dewey attributes a twofold purpose to the Evangelist. He uses the disciples' difficulties as a method to show where the way of discipleship is hard to grasp. This he employed as a literary technique, "a counterfoil," which permitted him to emphasize things he saw as important for his community. Dewey also sees a positive portrayal of the disciples since they apprehended Jesus' demands and forsook all to follow him. Since they recognized that he had legitimate authority, his preaching and healing do not amaze them.

She also sees the ending of the Gospel as emphasizing the concept Mark wanted to leave with his readers. The relationship of the disciples to Jesus and the kingdom had been shattered by the disciples' actions of abandonment and denial. They have followed the way of the world in their concern for personal safety and fear of public opinion.

Stephen Neill also made contributions to the debate. He contends that Mark emphasized the inability of the disciples to comprehend their Master's teaching. Of special note is the passage Mark 8:17-21, unique to him, which highlights their obtuseness. Neill contends that those who view a continuing

---

tension between Paul and the original apostles in Jerusalem see such passages as polemical, since for them the true understanding of the Gospel came through the Pauline and Gentile tradition.

He suggests, however, that it is possible that Mark could have been recording things as they occurred. Credence to such a view could lie in the fact that even "with the direct shadow of the cross falling directly upon them, they were still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom." They anticipated assignments to prominent positions in this impending realm (Mark 10:35-45).

Of the four works appearing in 1977, Best's seems to be the most significant. He maintains that there is a definite role given to the disciples in Mark which is linked with the purpose of the book. He rejects the "historic" or "polemic" approach to the Gospel which views it as sermonic, as the word "Gospel" implies. It was written perhaps to encourage with the good news those who were finding the Christian way difficult.

Best admits no attack on the original disciples as a group or even a subgroup. He sees Peter being used as spokesman, acting as a foil for Jesus to draw out his teaching. Like Achtemeier, he concludes that if Mark was not attacking the historical Twelve or the historical Peter, it is improbable that he was attacking the historical disciples. He views "amazement" as redactional, but not as particularly emphasized since the crowds are also amazed. Amazement is not strange, however, particularly if Jesus' teaching and activities were in any way new. The fruitful ground for a hostile attitude to the disciples is in the area of their failure to understand Jesus and his rebuke of them, though

there is insufficient evidence for a general accusation for fear of Jesus and blindness. Best sees Mark as providing a basis for understanding rebuke. Rebuke is related to the power of Jesus which can only be properly understood in the light of human weakness. The weakness of the disciples is designed to illustrate Jesus' power. Misunderstanding serves to explain the true meaning of the cross, and blindness is emphasized to draw lessons for his own community. The disciples' failure is employed to give hope to Christians in his church during moments of failure.

Unlike most Marcan scholars, Best sees a positive portrayal of the disciples in the latter half of the Gospel. He also makes the significant contribution that, based on pupil-teacher relationships in the ancient world, Mark could not have been attacking the disciples. This would have been construed as an attack on Jesus. His final point is that Mark did not create the failure, he simply emphasized it.

Kealy's point on the disciples is that Mark presented a picture of them which is historically accurate, but which is typical of the human response in all ages. He does not see Mark simply correcting a false Christology of his time. Mark's functional Christology can only be found when the way of Jesus is compared with his contemporaries, such as John the Baptist, the Essenes, the Pharisees, and others. Mark, among other things, emphasized the fact that even a disciple needed Jesus to open his eyes and gradually reveal himself.

Tannehill views Mark as a narrative composition. He therefore sees the relationship between Jesus and the disciples as being carefully worked out. It moves from concord to expanding and intensifying conflict, thus reflecting the author's concern. The Evangelist utilized the tendency in order to identify with the disciples, to speak indirectly to the reader through their story. A
positive view of the disciples is first portrayed, but it is followed by a revelation of their inadequacies and their conflicts with Jesus. Tannehill sees Mark's purpose as requiring the reader (1) to distance himself from the disciples and their behavior, (2) to ponder how those called "disciples" by Jesus could go so far astray, and, consequently, (3) to understand what is required to escape a similar fate.

Kilgallen contends that one of the distinctive features of Mark's Gospel is the secrecy which enshrouds the identity of Jesus. He views the suggestions that this secrecy was motivated by Jesus': (1) desire to hide his identity from the crowds at his miracles or (2) wish to keep his identity concealed until after his passion, as being either unsupportable or incomplete solutions. He contends that Jesus' desire for anonymity lay in the story line and in Mark's initial presentation of Jesus. Secrecy about Jesus' person "is directly related to emphasis on his message." That is to say, secrecy was based on Jesus' desire to have his audience concentrate on his preaching rather than on his identity.

Kilgallen views Mark as speaking to his community through the example of Jesus. He wanted them to listen to what the Gospel had to say in "65-75 AD." Perhaps he was communicating to them the fact that their response to what he was saying was crucial to their status as Christians, especially since comprehension requires favorable obedience to Christ's teaching.

Several important publications on Marcan scholarship appeared in 1978. Achtemeier added two further works.\(^1\) Interpretation and Southwestern Journal of Theology each devoted an issue to a discussion of current issues in

Mark,¹ and Lane wrote two articles reviewing developments in Marcan scholarship.²

Achtemeier continued his positive approach to the disciples by maintaining that the role Mark ascribed to them is the hermeneutical key to understand the reason for their seeming incomprehension. He asserts anew that while the disciples' incomprehension is a recurring theme, its design was not to emphasize "personal vacillation or psychological aberration." Rather, it is how God's plan is being worked out in Jesus that is at issue.

He contends that the disciples' inability to understand is not due to inconsistency of character, human misfeasance, lack of commitment, or an inadequate level of religious intelligence. On the contrary, it is due to their sheer inability to comprehend, for complete comprehension can only be attained at the climax, the cross, and resurrection. Those close to Jesus can only understand and interpret the Jesus traditions in the light of those events.

Lane's two articles are of a contrasting nature, one being historical³ and the other theological.⁴ In the latter, he suggests that future Gospel research will be affected by the sociological approach and modern literary criticism with its commitment to explanation of the Gospel as narrative. This latter approach, Gospel as narrative story, will have significant effect on the

¹Interpretation 32 (1978), and Southwestern Journal of Theology 21 (1978).


³Lane, "From Historian to Theologian."

⁴Idem, "The Gospel of Mark in Current Study."
Marcan portrait of the disciples. Lane's conclusion to the historical review is also significant. He admits that the historicism of Marcan priority was an unexamined and naive assumption since it was necessary to acknowledge that Mark was a Christian thinker who reflected theologically on the Jesus events. The tendency of Marcan scholarship to divorce the theological assertion in his Gospel from any historical concern on the part of the evangelist is equally inadequate. Lane therefore calls for a more balanced approach which will admit both the historical and the theological. This is a valid point and is essential to any approach to the problem of the disciples.

In 1979 Jack Kingsbury added an article assessing the Gospel of Mark in current research, though unfortunately only focusing on American scholarship. He detects new winds blowing in Marcan research. He suggests that if current trends are valid indicators, then Mark's presentation of Jesus and of the disciples will be one of the five themes that will dominate Marcan scholarship. He asserts that the theios aner approach to Mark's presentation of Jesus is on the wane. Also, the view that Mark portrayed the disciples as opponents of Jesus whom he finally rejected is losing ground. The new trend is to see them in a positive light.

Kelber, Wilfred Harrington, and Willard Swartley also made contributions. Kelber produced a volume which addressed the Gospel as a whole. He


2Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus.

3Wilfred Harrington, Mark, New Testament Messages (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), agrees with Achtemeier and those who believe that without the cross it was impossible for the disciples to know Jesus. He sees this as the rationale for the obtuseness of Peter and the rest.

4Swartley, Mark: The Way for All Nations.
asserts that in essence the conflict and breach between Jesus and the Twelve is Mark's story. He pictures the disciples as blind men. The six boat trips across the lake, designed to initiate them and open up new frontiers, exposed them as panic-stricken men who were ignorant of Jesus' identity, and who were frightened by his power over the raging sea. These trips result in their being charged with hardness of heart and being classified as opponents. Additionally, on the final trip the conflict between Jesus and the disciples attained unprecedented heights. The intent of these trips to non-Jewish territory was to teach them about the unity of Jew and Gentile. This unity was symbolized by the loaf of bread they had in the boat. They mistook Jesus' statement about the bread, and complained about an insufficient quantity. Their failure angered Jesus who charged them with hardness of heart, blindness, and deafness, thus relegating them to the outside. Essentially they were on the way to becoming opponents.

Kelber views the journey to Jerusalem from Caesarea Philippi as marked with mounting tension and confrontation, as the disciples failed to perceive Jesus' message. He views Peter's confession as unacceptable since it conflicted with Jesus' idea of Christ. Jesus' revelation of his true mission was unacceptable to them, therefore, Peter rebuked him. Jesus then rebuked Peter. Kelber detects here a dramatic scene, especially since in Mark rebuke is a technical term connoting exorcism. There is, therefore, a demonic milieu with each of the two protagonists treating the other as a Satanic personality, and with Peter ending up being exposed as Satan.

Kelber sees the drama intensifying with each passion prediction. To lack of understanding were added fear of Jesus and obsession with power. The disciples rebuffed all attempts at learning the true meaning of discipleship.
The arrest of Jesus and their flight marked the end of their discipleship. After his denial, Peter, broken hearted and weeping, is phased cut of the Gospel. The women, overcome by fear and astonishment, fled. This deprived the disciples of Jesus' last attempt at rescuing them. It sealed their fate, since they never met the resurrected Lord and, thereby, missed the way to the kingdom. Mark thus used the ending of the Gospel to deliver "a mortal blow" to the disciples. His community thus received a two-fold message: (1) not to concur with the Twelve, and (2) an invitation to complete the journey of Jesus which was left incomplete by the disciples.¹

Edward Lynn Taylor's dissertation² on the disciples in Mark was completed in this year. He attacked the position that the disciples' reaction to Jesus linked them to Jesus' relatives, the scribes and Pharisees, the temple authorities, and the crowds around the cross, all of whom were viewed as opponents.

Taylor states his purpose as being to investigate the Gospel of Mark in order to discover and explain the function of the disciples of Jesus. He conducted his analysis in dialogue with previous scholarship, with particular reference to those who contend that Mark's portrayal of the disciples was determined by his opposition to a heresy which he attributed to them. He undertook a thorough exegesis of eight significant texts that highlighted the

¹Swartley seems to agree with Kelber when he states that "the gospel leaves the reader with the picture of discipleship begun but not completed inspite of its prominence in the gospel." He also concurs with him on seeing 16:8 as a fitting conclusion to the gospel for, among other things, it indicates that the disciples--both male and female--never came to understanding. He, therefore, sees the Gospel going in the direction of discipleship but not ending with a challenge. See Mark: The Way for All Nations, pp. 114-117, 139-144, 197-201.

²Taylor, "The Disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark."
disciples in the Gospel. He employed the method of those who disparage the disciples but presented a contrary thesis.

He views the disciples' relations with Jesus in three stages: election, failure, and future. The disciples had become thus through the elective initiative of Jesus. Taylor detects in the central section of the Gospel, most used for its negative portrayal of the disciples, notices which draw out the continuing motif of election. Though their failure to comprehend seems to deepen in this section, the elective nature of their relationship to Jesus kept the future open for them. In the final section, despite their flight at the arrest, they were redeemed through his death, for election is a cardinal motif in the pericope which concludes the Gospel (16:1-8).

While the theme of election runs through the entire Gospel, so also does the theme of the disciples' failure. It is expressed in several ways, chief of which is failure to understand. The path to failure emerges in chap. 4 and extends to 14:66-72. Taylor detects in chap. 4 two motifs: (1) failure of the disciples to understand, and, (2) Jesus' bestowal of grace with a view to their failure. This pattern also permeates the Gospel. He sees differences in the nature of the incomprehension. Mark 4:1-34 delineates a failure to comprehend parabola teaching. The failure of 4:35-41 was more radical and involved understanding who Jesus was and what his presence meant. This latter theme reappears in 6:31-44 and 6:45-52 with greater force. The disciples' failure in 8:14-21, where their past failures and blindness are brought to a climax, elicited the most vivid expression of Jesus' displeasure. With those outside they are accused of refusing to see and hear.

In the central section of the Gospel, Taylor sees the disciples' blindness changing course. Their failure was no longer that of comprehending who Jesus
was, but became that of understanding how who Jesus was could become effective for the redemption of man, and how Jesus' destiny would affect their own destiny. He sees their inability "to see and hear" reaching full bloom in the pericopae relating to Jesus and the disciples in Gethsemane and in Peter's denial. He rejects Weeden's thesis that the final half of the Gospel portrays the disciples as finally comprehending yet becoming solidified in a stance of absolute rejection. What is portrayed is "an incapacitating failure of courage." Appropriate for the Gospel is the fact that Peter combined with the final tragedy of discipleship an element of hope. While the disciples' failure to understand culminated in Peter's denial, in the tears of repentance which flowed down his cheeks was manifested the grace of restoration. Therefore while the failure of the disciples pervades the Gospel, it is not the last word.

For Taylor the disciples do not commit apostasy in Mark. This is the indication of Mark 13, the chapter which most specifically speaks of their lot during the interim between the resurrection and the parousia. Their work is projected in the future in 13:10. They were included in the inclusive term ἐκλεκτοὶ as 13:9-13 implies. These verses give a very positive view of the disciples and indicate a faithful bearing of the cross. For Taylor, therefore, the Gospel of Mark speaks of a future for the disciples despite their lack of comprehension.

Two significant articles on the disciples appeared in 1980. Thomas Longstaff\(^1\) took the innovative approach of exploring the theology of Mark from the viewpoint of the Griesbach hypothesis. He asserts that there are two closely related concerns which are central to Marcan theology--correct

\(^1\)Thomas R. W. Longstaff, "Crisis and Christology: The Theology of the Gospel of Mark," 
understanding of Jesus’ Messiahship and of the nature of Christian discipleship. Furthermore, a twofold threat, heresy within and persecution without, is viewed as influencing Mark’s theological position.

Longstaff asserts that most investigations of Mark are based on the Two Document hypothesis and assumes that Mark’s design was to correct a false understanding of Messiahship and discipleship. Yet, such investigations are not really dependent on the two-source theory. On the contrary, their conclusions seem to be more compatible with the Griesbach hypothesis. Longstaff uses examples from Crossan¹ and Weeden² to prove his point. He concludes that their understanding of Mark’s theology does not demand the conclusion that Mark wrote first. He cites the following problem for the theory of Marcan priority:

If in the theological perspective Matthew and Luke are frequently close to the views against which Mark directed his Gospel, how will one understand the ways in which the two might have used Mark as a source, reintroducing ideas which Mark might have found objectionable and yet apparently often with great respect for the Markan text?³

He then queries whether Matthew and Luke could instead be the opponents to whom Crossan, for example, refers. He suggests that this might be too strong a conclusion and would be inaccurate. He posits instead the view that since Matthew and Luke included traditions about Jesus that could be used to support views of Messiahship and discipleship which Mark found objectionable, then Mark could be a Gospel written to present readers with a

---


²Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, pp. 162-163.

³Longstaff, "Crisis and Christology," p. 38.
correct understanding of Jesus' Messiahship and of discipleship. It would not have been written to supersede and replace Matthew and Luke, but was-designed for a community facing intense persecution and requiring unity and stability. Recognition of Mark as a theological polemic strongly implies that debates took place in his community and that these were divisive. Views that emphasized the miraculous power and exaltation of Jesus, and those that saw discipleship in terms of prestige and authority instead of in terms of suffering and service, were most problematic, especially since they would be supported by the tradition preserved by Matthew and Luke. Mark was, therefore, a Gospel designed to show how these two Gospels are to be correctly understood and interpreted. By emphasizing the humiliation and death of Jesus, he encouraged his community to endure their own sufferings since vindication would come with the parousia.

The second article, that of Winsome Munro, sought to explore the role of the women disciples of Jesus. Munro observes that before Mark 15:40 the female followers of Jesus are obscured; however, after it, they suddenly appear among those who habitually follow Jesus. To Munro, the Gospel gives the dominant impression that before Mark 15:39 Jesus was surrounded by a small group of men, and women were encountered in private. There are hints, however, that women were in the accompanying crowd, and that the inner circle of disciples included more than the Twelve.

She contends that there is little preparation for the women who appear at the death and burial of Jesus and at the empty tomb. Despite this, the use of the imperfect \( \dot{\eta} \kappa \omega \lambda \omicron \upsilon \theta \omicron \omicron \nu \) and the phrase "when he was in Galilee" seem to indicate that they belonged to the inner circle and followed Jesus habitually.

\(^1\)Winsome Munro, "Women Disciples in Mark?" *CBQ* 44 (1982):225-241.
Mark 15:40-41 does not, therefore, refer to a new following in lieu of the men who have fled; it could be retroactive in its significance. It seems further that like the other Evangelists, Mark was aware of these female companions of Jesus but failed to highlight them. Munro thinks this is not difficult to understand since the prominence of women in early Christianity was an embarrassment, and Jesus' close association with them has been problematic.

She also contends that while the women are introduced in a typically Marcan redactional pattern it does not imply that they are unhistorical. Mark, in his own fashion, could have been obliged to compensate for previous omissions, since the tradition could have reflected the fact that these women were intrinsically connected with the resurrection faith and proclamation. There could even have been a female circle in which conviction of a risen Jesus existed before it was accepted by a reconstituted male following, especially if the other Gospels are taken into account. For Munro, even if Mark is the earliest Gospel, this does not imply that it has the earliest available version of the tradition. It could be that the silencing of the women in Mark 16:7-8 was an intentional act to contradict an earlier resurrection tradition known to him and preserved in the other Gospels. Motivation for this redactional silencing can be found in Mark's desire to bring to a climax his polemic against the Twelve. Here Munro follows Weeden.

Munro concludes that despite the overall invisibility of women and even because of this tendency, it can be concluded that Mark testifies, though evasively, to a continuing presence of a considerable number of women among Jesus' close followers and the larger group. It also implies the prominence of women and female leadership in the primitive church. Women not only had a key role as witnesses in the early church, but they may have been the original
source of the resurrection faith of the church.

Adding to the debate in 1981 were Norman Beck,1 Harry Fleddermann,2 Jack Kingsbury,3 and John F. O'Grady.4 Beck centered on Mark 8:14-21 and the discussion about bread in the boat. He classifies it in what Bultmann called a Schulgespräch, a teaching dialogue, which indicates it was designed to teach something. His point is that due to anti-Jewish proclivities, distraction caused by the Marcan intrusion of 8:15 into the pericope and the surprisingly persistent mistranslation "no bread" at 8:16-17, there has been limited positive usage of the text in the church. To reclaim this text, he thinks that the exegetical tools currently available should be utilized to uncover the pre-Marcan stratum of the pericope and the importance that the early Christians attached to uniting, in open table fellowship where one loaf would be sufficient, the followers of Jesus from non-Jewish and Jewish backgrounds.

Fleddermann observes that the catchword compositional view of Mark 9:33-50, which sees the material as loosely connected, has often been noted. He contends, however, that Mark's shaping of the discipleship discourse went far beyond this stringing together of traditional sayings and narratives. Mark has taken over traditional material and modified it (vss. 43-48). He has also taken over material used elsewhere and generalized it, forming new units (vss. 33b-35 from 10:35-45 and vss. 36-37 from 10:13-16). He has redacted a statement


3Jack D. Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology--The End of an Era?" Int 35 (1981):243-257.

4O'Grady, Mark the Sorrowful Gospel.
from the LXX (vs. 49 from Lev 2:13a). He used exclusively Q material, and composed new material for the discourse (vss. 33a, 38-39, 41, 50b).

In concluding, he shows that the way of the Son of Man is the way of the community. As the Son of Man came to serve, the community must also follow in his way. There is a difference between Jesus and the community, however, for while he accepted the ultimate expression of this service in the passion and the cross, they never understood nor accepted the cross. It is their striving for honor, their lack of understanding, their unbelief, their steadfast refusal to accept the cross which ultimately scandalized them.

O'Grady follows Achtemeier in challenging the historical accuracy of Mark's portrait of the disciples. While conceding that the disciples did indeed fail at times, he denies that they were complete failures. He views their misunderstanding as having root in their failure to perceive the significance of the suffering and death of Jesus. He sees Mark attributing ignorance, insensitivity, ambition, and failure to them. Mark's most tragic note, however, was his portrayal of an apparent inability of Jesus to deal with the disciples' problem, for he who was able to give sight to the physically blind was unable to give sight and understanding to his disciples.

O'Grady cites the inability of the disciples to see Jesus as the suffering servant as being the basic problem between them and Jesus. This hurdle was only overcome after the crucifixion and it had a transforming effect on them.

Of significance, too, is a volume by Best in which he brought together his lectures and publications of the previous decade. Writing from the perspective of Marcan priority he posits a Roman setting, and contends that the

---

problem facing Mark's community was not heresy or persecution. Rather, it was that which was typical of Christianity from its inception—the inability to comprehend and accept the consequences of following Jesus. The Evangelist's purpose involved uplifting his readers and directing them to the way of true discipleship.

Best views the disciples as human examples, and their negative portrayal has pastoral significance. Its design is to instruct and encourage the weak in the community. Admitting a reversal in position occasioned by years of reflection, Best contends that the failure of the disciples was embedded in the tradition. Mark had an interest in discipleship, not in the disciples. The crucial instructions in this regard are found in 8:27-10:45, where the obligations of a true disciple are outlined. Blind Bartimaeus is presented as the one with whom the reader must identify, for while he understood, the disciples consistently misunderstood. The Gospel provides much for the reader. While the experiences of Peter and his companions offer consolation, the words of Jesus provide encouragement.

In 1982 H. J. Klauck argued for a new approach to the assessment of the role of the disciples in Mark. His plea was for an approach which would take into account the various narrative levels: the world of the figures in the narrative and their interaction, the fictitious narrator and addressee, the abstract author and addressee, the real author and addressee, and the historical author and reader, and would exclude the interpretation which views Mark's presentation of the disciples as polemical. He acknowledges the validity of the historical explanation, since he views Mark as wishing to tell about the past. Besides, he also takes seriously the parenetic interpretation and its

1Klauck, "Der erzählerische Rolle der Jünger im Markusevangelium."
vision of the disciples' exemplifying life in the church.

David Rhodes and Donald Michie took a different approach to Mark in their volume.¹ They investigated the disciples' role in the development of Mark's plot and their characterization in the narrative. The latter pictures them in conflict with Jesus initiated by his high standard of discipleship. They sacrificed much to follow him. They showed great determination to remain loyal to him, especially since they were fascinated by him. He, however, led them to that which they were unwilling to face. From their perspective his demands and expectations were too great.

The drama heightens as the story unfolds. The suspense is found in ascertaining whether Jesus will be successful in his efforts to make good disciples of his chosen associates. This is an issue, for they are pictured as receiving little commendation and many reprimands, corrections, and warnings. The developing plot requires the reader to align himself with Jesus while wondering about the fate of the disciples. The suspense rises and falls and climaxes in Jerusalem. The Twelve² are identified as the characters of the plot and are called "round characters" because of their conflicting traits. They are characterized both favorably and unfavorably. Their actions suggest they were struggling to be loyal to Jesus, yet they failed to understand him and be like him. They are "afraid, self-centered and dense, preoccupied with their own status and power. They succeed in becoming fishers of men, but fail to meet other standards for discipleship set by Jesus."³ They were loyal and courageous,


²The authors see the disciples in the Gospel as referring to "twelve men Jesus chooses to follow him." See *Mark As Story*, p. 122.

³Ibid., p. 123.
and also possessed a capacity for sacrifice with just enough fascination with Jesus to follow him, yet were uncomprehending and often openly in conflict with him.

Rhodes and Michie see the disciples as foils for Jesus in their failure to respond appropriately to the rule of God. Their failure is seen as the primary literary device by which the narrator reveals Jesus’ demands for discipleship. The author employed the framing device to contrast them with Jesus. Parallels are also made between the authorities and the disciples who are at times made to reflect the mentality of opponents. Ultimately, the reader, though sympathizing with the disciples at times, develops feelings of condemnation for their repeated failure and lack of comprehension.

The authors detect an incapacity on the part of the disciples to become true disciples. Not only were they overwhelmed by Jesus, they were terrified by him. In addition, they failed to apprehend the significance of what was transpiring around them. They did not comprehend "the riddles" about the rule of God even after explanation. They missed the importance of many of their own actions in terms of the rule of God, and they failed to transfer learning. Their focus was narrow, the result of their incomprehension, fear, and lack of faith. Their breaking point came in the third boat scene, the third scene about bread. Their incomprehension elicited from Jesus the accusation of their being blind, deaf, and hard of heart.

On the way to Jerusalem, they resisted Jesus’ new teaching concerning suffering, displaying denial and avoidance of it. These events served, however, to reveal their values. They are exposed as wanting to acquire the world, be great, be first, and to have power over others. Their failure to accept suffering and death resulted in their deserting Jesus when he needed them most. While
they were not against Jesus, they were not for him. As for the narrator, he is seen as leading the reader to develop ambivalent feelings toward the disciples through his characterization of them. Their failure could elicit condemnation, but their being followers of Jesus might require a desire for success. The story, however, guides the reader to judge the disciples, not to reject them, and it leaves their future in doubt.

In 1982 James M. Robinson brought three of his previous articles together, gave them an introduction, and published them under the title: *The Problem of History in Mark and Other Marcan Studies.* Robinson devotes three pages to the continuing debate, proposing that Jesus' three formal announcements of his passion occasioned a debate between the disciples and himself. This was primarily due to the fact that their views on the subject were extremely diverse. He sees hardheartedness being responsible for the disciples' failure to understand. Robinson follows Kelber in seeing the disciples' attitude as Satanic. Their yielding to temptation resulted in their joining the Jewish authorities in the cosmic conflict of Satan against Jesus.

Robinson sees the main theme of the debates between Jesus and the disciples surrounding their efforts to dissuade him from the passion. The disciples' false understanding of discipleship was also a major topic. At issue

---


was not just the Messiahship but a different understanding of eschatological existence.

Augustine Stock's *Call to Discipleship*¹ presents Mark 8:27-30 as dividing the Gospel into two halves. The latter part begins with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Stock sees Mark as understanding the confession as the gateway leading into true discipleship, the path of teaching and initiation. In this scenario Peter's confession serves as the signal for Jesus to disclose the core of his teaching in respect to the mission and the demands of discipleship.

Stock notes that the first half of the Gospel makes constant reference to the disciples' lack of comprehension, but in the latter half the confrontation comes to a head. It is the confession that triggered a sharp controversy which revealed that Peter's concept of the Messiah was disastrously short of the reality Jesus revealed. He presents the disciples' non-understanding as the theme which ties together the material between Mark 4 and 8:27-30. This theme is found in four passages which have three other significant elements---(1) a bread or feeding miracle, (2) a miracle on the sea, and (3) withdrawal into the Gentile territory--clustered around them.

For Stock, Mark intended the story to function on two levels: that of the characters and that of the reader. The latter has knowledge which is hidden from the former, who are viewed as making false judgments. Early identification with the disciples is not sustained. It disappears with the negative twist in their story. The reader is thus led to a re-examination of his own discipleship, which accomplished the author's design of self-discovery and,

¹Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982).
thereby, a change. Here Stock agrees with Robert Tannehill.¹

Stock thinks that Mark’s readers were expected to evaluate the disciples’ actions in the light of Jesus’ words and actions. The story line developed on two levels, (1) from the commission of Jesus and (2) from the commission of the disciples. These two levels he views as running parallel. To miss this results in a negative judgment of the disciples, as is required by the norms of the narrative.

Seán Freyne,² in his review of Jesus and the disciples in Mark, postulates that all the groups and the individuals in that Gospel are viewed in their relationship to and diversity from the disciples. Mark combined the skills of a good narrator with the gifts of the dramatist, thus involving the readers and pushing them to take a stance within the unfolding plot.

Freyne divides the Gospel into two portions. The first (1:16-8:30) depicts the disciples in relationship with Jesus. The second (8:31-16:8) reveals them as being at cross purposes with him. In the first half of the Gospel, they were terrified, their hearts were hardened, they could only recall the externals and even their confession of Jesus was inadequate. The second half depicts them in a static relationship, "though being with him," in which they failed to stretch their understanding. Three of the four who promptly responded in chap. 1 and who were prepared for the final crisis fell asleep—though they had been asked to stay with him in his agony—and could not even answer when confronted regarding their lack of concern. One disciple betrayed him and one denied him. For Freyne, Mark summed up their plight in a somber


statement: "Then the disciples all deserted him and fled" (14:50)." He hoped that they had received the final summons to Galilee, but that happy ending would have destroyed the effect he had striven to create. Should they or a reader accept the invitation to return to Galilee, he will be seen.

Lamar Williamson\(^1\) produced a commentary in 1983 as part of a series aimed at integration of historical and theological ideas. Part one of this work, designed for preaching and teaching, gives some consideration to the themes of disciple and discipleship. In his discussion of the major theme of the Gospel, he presents the kingdom as announced by Jesus as being more than an individual matter since it created a community. Jesus called, named, and sent out disciples with whom he associated in his mission. These decisive actions, he says, mark the beginning of each of the three major parts of the Galilean ministry, each of which ends with an inadequate response to Jesus--hostility, unbelief, and misunderstanding.

Parts two and three deal with the incomprehension of the disciples. Interestingly, the Galilean ministry ended with Jesus asking the disciples whether they understood. Part four shows Jesus trying to correct the blindness of the disciples. The passion predictions express the central thrust of discipleship in the section (the latter half of the Gospel). By means of these three passion predictions the Marcan Jesus challenged his disciples' understanding of Messianic kingship in times of rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection. Many themes converged in the passion narrative, especially rejection by his enemies and the failure of his friends.

\(^1\) Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983).
of disciples and discipleship, were made in 1984 by Joel Marcus¹ and Vernon K. Robbins.² Motivated by the attention Frank Kermode³ gave to Mark 4:10-12, Marcus contends that the passage is important for an understanding of Mark's epistemology as well as the Gospel as a whole, both of which express an apocalyptic viewpoint. As such, therefore, his design in his article was to investigate the relationship between apocalypticism and epistemology in the Gospel of Mark. He sees knowledge of vital truth, most importantly that of the secrecy of Jesus' identity, expressed in the Gospel as a gift of God since it does not originate on the human level. God and Jesus as well as Satan and the demons had knowledge which was not accessible to man and which he can only have by divine action. He finds a similar pattern in contemporary apocalyptic literature.

Marcus discovers in Mark a dualism of revelation and concealment. The selected passage distinguishes between the disciples, who received "the mystery of the kingdom" and "those outside," who see and do not perceive and who hear and do not understand. To this distinction is also added the fact that the disciples were granted insights into the identity of Jesus while this knowledge was kept from outsiders. Furthermore, the former group witnessed events and received instructions which were denied the latter. Citing


2Robbins, Jesus the Teacher.

³Frank Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Kermode used Mark 4:10-12 as an interpretive key to the Gospel. He saw Franz Kafka's parable, "Before the Law," in which a man who was kept from admittance to the law by a doorkeeper in his lifetime is still arbitrarily kept out near death, and this passage as having common elements especially since in both "outsiders" are arbitrarily kept out. See pp. 27-28 and 143-145.
examples from 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, and the Qumran literature, he demonstrates that the motif was commonplace in Jewish apocalyptic. While the motif was also found in many religious traditions during the New Testament era, there were differences, as can be demonstrated from the Gnostic literature. The latter viewed revelation as originally occurring at creation and consequently subsequent ones are only a recapturing of that original. Apocalyptic revelation, however, viewed the eschaton as the real revelationary moment until which the elect's knowledge can only be imperfect. In his opinion his latter perview is that of Marcan epistemology.

In keeping with apocalyptic, Mark viewed the secrets of God as remaining imperfectly understood until the time of renewal. Though this is true, the elect community does have some additional knowledge. Mark pictures the disciples as receiving this knowledge, but they were unable to arrive at full understanding. While having some understanding, they did not have the full scope. Marcus notes the theme of incomprehension in the Qumran literature as well. Besides, he views the theme extending beyond Mark 4:13, citing Mark 8:33, 6:52, 7:18, and 8:17-21 as examples. In these passages he sees the disciples as being spoken of in language reminiscent of the outsiders, for they neither understand, see, nor hear. He views the passion narratives as also demonstrating their incomprehension which climaxed in Peter's denial. He contends that the language of Peter's denial emphasizes this in its use of οὐτε οἶδα (I do not know”) and οὐτε ἐπίσταμαι ("I do not understand"). For him, the cross is the climax of the themes of revelation and incomprehension. The "crucifixion--resurrection" event is thus the point at which the secret was made known. Peter by his own admission neither knew nor understood. The chief priests
wanted Jesus to come down from the cross so they could see and believe, but the centurion got the mystery of the kingdom at the cross. The cross was, therefore, the moment of light for the centurion and redeemed humanity. It was there that "knowledge of Jesus' full dignity" was first confessed in the Gospel by a human being. The silence of the women in 16:8 reveals, however, that incomprehension persisted beyond that point. Marcus sees the parousia as the point at which all "veils" will finally be lifted. Until then the elect must be watchful to escape deception.

Marcus viewed the community addressed by Mark as one that was under-going persecution. Their confrontation by a world that was hostile to their claims concerning Jesus was eliciting serious questions. Mark 4:10-12 was, for Mark, a very direct way of answering these questions.

Robbins began with the assumption that interpretation of Mark required a paradigm for research which was in touch with Greek, Greco-Roman, Biblical, and Jewish literature. Furthermore, he postulated that a paradigm diverse from form and redaction criticism was also required. He, therefore, opted for a socio-rhetorical approach. Working on the thesis that the fusion of religious traditions, folklore, and ethical pronouncements in the Gospel of Mark contained

---

1 He sees the similarity between the language here, Mark 15:32, and that of Mark 4:12 as not being accidental. See p. 571.

2 He had tested his thesis in a paper, "Mark 1:14-20: An Interpretation at the Intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions," presented to the S.N.T.S. meeting in Toronto in 1980 and published in NTS 28 (1982):220-236. In this paper he suggested that contemporary commentaries on Mark reflect a major deficiency. They neglect citations from traditions in Graeco-Roman and Jewish literatures. To redress this situation he positioned the Gospel of Mark at a point of intersection between Jewish and Graeco-Roman culture during the first century of the Christian era. He further sought the structure and meaning of Mark 1:14-20 through an exploration of the merger of Jewish and Graeco-Roman conventions and traditions in the passage. He concluded that significant light is shed on the passage from these traditions especially, as it relates to the presentation of Jesus.
parallels both with Jewish and Greco-Roman circles during the first century, he examined Greco-Roman literature featuring religio-ethical teachers to seek any intermingling with Jewish influences which could provide the overall integration of the Jesus traditions in Mark. He concluded that Mark was preserved because it perpetuated an image of Jesus, an understanding of discipleship, and a teaching/learning cycle which was compatible with ideology in Mediterranean society.

Robbins sees Jesus as a disciple-gathering teacher. Mark presented the initial phase in the story of Jesus and his disciples as in keeping with conventional forms. Jesus summoned, taught, and commissioned with the comportment and authority characteristic of Socrates in Graeco-Roman traditions. Yet he also combined Jewish traditions by taking over functions of Yahweh with Yahweh's sanction. In this phase Jesus developed a relationship with his-disciple-companions.

The intermediate phase in which the teacher and the disciple-companion enter into a teaching/learning process with one another is also examined. In Mark, this phase occurred in four stages, which, Robbins says, reveals a merger of both Jewish and Graeco-Roman conventions of teaching and learning in the setting of Mediterranean culture during the Hellenistic period. After noting parallels with Xenophon's Memorabilia, the Hebrew Bible, and Plato's dialogues, which portray teaching and learning as occurring in four stages, he investigated the stages in Mark. It is here that the disciples in Mark are depicted in their confusion and lack of understanding. While disciple-companions are expected to learn specific duties and accept specific responsibilities from their teacher, the disciples are able to perform duties but they are unable to understand the relation of Jesus' activities to the system of thought and action he
introduced to them previously. The third stage marked them in a series of differences in their interaction with their Master. The fourth stage, however, finds them in Jerusalem and gives the impression that they are relaxed with each other.

The final phase of farewell and death also contains parallels. Jesus became a rejected prophet-teacher, and the disciples became separated from him. From here on, remembrance will be the major feature, not actual presence. These parallels, for Robbins, link the Gospel of Mark to a time when both Judaism and Christianity were adapting to a new cultural milieu that was emerging in the Mediterranean world.

Research on the Disciples Outside of Mark

Outside the Marcan perspective, very little research on the disciples has been done. There are a few works written from the standpoint of Matthew and still fewer from that of Luke. This research reviews works done from these two perspectives as well as those that have treated the subject in the Synoptics as a whole.

Research on the Disciples in Matthew

In 1968 the English translation of Beda Rigaux's *Temoignage de l'évangile de Matthieu* was published. Rigaux viewed Jesus as a teacher who had disciples and who taught. This relationship was in keeping with Palestinian tradition in which to be a disciple was a formal, qualitative designation. He views Matthew as presenting two groups around Jesus, a large unnumbered

---


2Ibid., pp. 144-145.
one and a more limited one, the Twelve. He sees Matthew confusing disciples and apostles, though he does not show how. He, however, states that Matthew interjects the disciples into the picture at times where the other Synoptists did not mention them. For Matthew, the disciple is not just an hearer but is also a follower, a follower of Jesus, and as such united in the same ministry. He views this as being typical of the Synoptists in general, but for Matthew in particular the relationship is an intimate one which shows them in Jesus' drama and stresses the equality of tasks and ministry. Jesus is sent, he sends the disciples. God gave Jesus power, he gave the disciples power. They both proclaim, evangelize, and exorcise. "Such is the office of the disciple."

Rigaux shows Peter as occupying a privileged place in the group of the Apostles. Peter is the spokesman of the group, and certain episodes centered around him. The author's position is that Jesus chose disciples for himself, who, by following him, constituted a group sharing his existence. At the same time they schooled themselves on contact with a new teaching.

In 1971 D. Dounan, in an M. Div. thesis, viewed discipleship from the Matthean perspective. He did not, however, address the issue of the disciples. He regards the record as a Gospel of active discipleship.

In that same year Doubleday published the Matthew volume of the Anchor Bible. The authors postulated that the Sitz im Leben for the Gospels was the unsettled situation in Palestine in the years after the events recorded in them, together with the uncertainties relating to the existence of the church within Judaism and the aging of the disciples. They view the background

---

1Dounan, "Matthew: A Theology of Active Discipleship."

for the use of the term disciple in Matthew as being the Old Testament. For them there is a distinction in the way the term disciple is employed in Matthew and Mark as opposed to Luke. While the latter generalizes to include all believers, Matthew and Mark use it to designate a small inner group—the Twelve.

The Twelve had an intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus challenged other groups with the demands of discipleship so they could know what is required for them to stand in the same intimate relationship with him. Albright and Mann see Jesus not detecting any risk with misunderstanding of or fear of the disciples. They therefore had instructions that he never risked to the crowds. They alone were given the secret of the impending passion, thus demonstrating that they were distinct from the crowd.

In 1974 Thomas Best explored the relationship of the transfiguration and discipleship. His purpose was to seek an understanding of Matthew’s account of the transfiguration. His goals were: (1) to explain the differences between Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, (2) to provide a coherent account of Matthew’s own account, and (3) to integrate Matthew’s account in his Gospel as a whole.

In his first chapter, he isolates the Matthean elements of the account by employing source criticism. He also attempts a literary analysis of the structure of the account which is seen as consisting of seven elements. The reader’s attention is shifted to and fro between Jesus and the disciples. From the above analysis it is derived, through a consideration of Matthew’s addition to Mark, that the first Evangelist’s concern is primarily between Jesus and the disciples.

---

1T. Best, "Transfiguration and Discipleship in Matthew."
Best's chapter 3, which deals with the disciples, has two parts. The first is a theological study of the transfiguration and yields the conclusion that the account is a picture of the disciples in relation to their Lord. This is compared with the picture of them in the rest of the Gospel. Best arrives at the conclusion that, for Matthew, the transfiguration is proleptic of the glorious life in the kingdom awaiting the true disciple. Furthermore, the transfiguration is the commissioning of the disciples for the mission to be initiated at the end of the Gospel. The second half of the chapter relates the theological understanding of the transfiguration to the structure of the Gospel as a whole. Best discovers five mountains upon which Jesus is revealed to his disciples. He concludes that Matthew understood the transfiguration in the context of discipleship and as a prelude to that mission activity which is synonymous with true discipleship. Best, like most other Synoptic scholars, espouses the Marcan priority hypothesis and so his work on Matthew reflects his bias.

Schuyler Brown published an article in 1978 which explored the mission to Israel in the central section of Matthew's Gospel. Brown sees the non-hierarchical character of the Matthean community reflected by the use of the term μαθητής, some seventy-three times in the Gospel. Discipleship is presented as one of the motifs which guided the Evangelist as he interpreted the miracle tradition. This emphasis resulted in certain "ecclesiastical" designations losing the specificity they reflect in other NT documents. While in the pre-Pauline kerygma (1 Cor 15:5) "the Twelve" seems to be a particular group, and while in Mark (2:14), the disciples seem to be a larger group than the Twelve, Matthew apparently combined the two, thus the designation "the Twelve disciples" resulted.

---

1Brown, "The Mission to Israel in Mathew's Central Section," pp. 73-90.
Brown finds this identification a common feature in the central section of the Gospel. He contends that since the term "disciple" is not limited to one who followed the earthly Jesus, but could apply to any Christian, then the Matthean identification makes "the Twelve disciples" a "transparency for the members of Matthew's own community." He concurs with Schweitzer that addresses to the Twelve disciples were intended for future disciples. This notion, therefore, had profound implications for the composition of the central section of the Gospel. Brown views Matthew as selecting an event which he felt was "historical," to form the basis for the instructions he wanted to give his community on the nature of discipleship. Since he espouses Marcan priority, Brown feels that a comparison of Mark 6:7-16 and Matt 10, especially vss. 1-10, could demonstrate how Matthew made the mission open-ended by eliminating anything which he felt could not apply to his community and also by additions he felt were in keeping with his purpose. Brown contends that to have his community included in the "sending," Matthew also identified the Twelve apostles with the Twelve disciples. For Matthew the vocation of the Twelve disciples coincides with being sent forth. Given the use of the Twelve as "transparencies," Brown views the statement "Like Teacher, Like Disciple" as connecting the Matthean community with Jesus, in whose authority and suffering they share. This is a fundamental link to understand the central section of the Gospel.

For Brown, while the mission was apparently not for the Gentiles but for Israel, as could be deduced from the deletion of Mark's explicit reference to the Gentile mission and by the prohibition to enter Gentile territory (Matt 10:5), the parallelism between Jesus and his missionary disciples makes the disciples' suffering a witness for both Jews and Gentiles. Despite the exclusion
of Mark’s Gentile mission, Matthew, by using the central section to anticipate the conversion of Gentiles by the suffering of disciples, presupposes a Gentile mission. What Matthew did was not to exclude the Gentile mission as such, but the participation of his community in this mission.

In 1982 Robert H. Gundry\(^1\) published a commentary on the first Gospel. He attempted to give a "fairly complete account of Matthew's literary and theological art."\(^2\) He views Matthew’s Gospel as relating to his community which consists of both true and false disciples. Persecution of the church by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem was creating a distinction between the two groups. True disciples were standing firm in the faith, but the false were making public disclaimers concerning Jesus to avoid persecution. The latter were disregarding the tradition as preserved by the community, and were relying on the authority of false prophets who were claiming revelations from Jesus at hideouts in the city and desert. To deal with the problem, especially that of fear of persecution, Matthew emphasized the danger of little faith and doubt among disciples. He, therefore, stressed the necessity of confessing Jesus and of doing good works among men.

Gundry espoused Marcan priority, thus he views Matthew as modifying Mark.\(^3\) As far as the disciples are concerned, Peter stands out as representative. He typifies the others both in understanding and in confessing Jesus as the Christ, in their prayerlessness, little faith, and denials in times of persecution. Gundry sees Matthew presenting them as comprehending, thus deliberately altering the portrait of Mark. A weakness of Gundry’s work is

\(^1\)Gundry, *Matthew*.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 1.
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 306, 326-327.
that he does not allow Matthew to speak for himself, but consistently views that Gospel through the eyes of the second Evangelist.

At the 1984 SBL meetings, Edwin Johnston\(^1\) read a paper regarding the disciples in Matthew. His approach was also influenced by his presuppositions. He attacks Matthew for taking away the misunderstanding of the disciples in the feeding of the five thousand by redacting the Marcan account. He views Matthew's action as an outstanding example of his intention to make significant changes in the received tradition. He examines instances in which he views Matthew as either retaining (Matt 17:16, 19) or deleting (8:17-18) material drawn from Mark. He also examines what Kingsbury calls Matthew's disinclination "to ascribe miraculous activity to the disciples apart from the scenes in which Jesus prepares them in experience for his own Messianic ministry"--a mission that would take them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

In addition to these works, a number of commentators\(^2\) make passing reference to the theme in the course of their discussion of the disciple/discipleship passages. Influenced by their presuppositions favoring Marcan priority, they come to the first Gospel only to read it as a redaction through and through. Consequently, little attention is paid to the message of the Gospel concerning the disciples.


One study viewing the disciples specifically from the Lucan point of

\(^1\)Johnston, "Matthew's Taking Away of the Disciples' Misunderstanding."


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
view was found. It was done by Dennis Sweetland in 1978 as a doctoral dissertation designed to examine the understanding of discipleship in Luke 12:1-13:9. While there is no consensus in scholarly circles regarding this evangelist’s role in the redaction of this passage, Sweetland contends that discipleship is the thread which is the cohesive element in this section of the travel narrative. Luke 12:1-12 combines both traditional material and Lucan redaction and composition. Luke is responsible for the location of the passage which reassures disciples not to be fearful and anxious in the face of persecution. It also supplies an example of appropriate Christian behavior.

He sees Luke as having intended the material in this section to console the communities who were suffering persecution in the last quarter of the first century. These Christians were either confused or discouraged in respect to the Messianic age. The affirmation of the proximate coming of the Messianic age and the imbibing of a particular understanding of discipleship were among the aims of the redactor, as Sweetland sees it.

Research Viewing the Disciples in the Synoptics as a Whole

In 1960 J. J. Vincent published an article on discipleship and the Synoptics. He noted that discussion of the disciples in the Synoptics has had a problematic past and has been neglected in contemporary studies because of an obsession with such topics as eschatology and Messiahship. He predicted, however, that the theme had a promising future and suggested possible

2 Vincent, "Discipleship and Synoptic Studies."
3 He surveys literature treating this theme. See pp. 456-459.
approaches. Though writing before the mushrooming of studies on Marcan disciple/discipleship, his call has more or less gone unheeded and his suggestions have been neglected.

Vincent asserts that because of the radical and singular nature of discipleship, it is extremely unlikely that the discipleship pericopae were invented by the church. He views Master-disciple relations as "something sui generis," which is not to be explained by any similar relationships in the Old Testament or the contemporary Jewish world of Jesus. Rather, if Jesus had foreseen his own death he must have foreseen a period after his death, when the church would have been built up. He must therefore have prepared for it by his instruction of the disciples.

While calling for renewed discussion of the theme, Vincent does not state how he would like to see the theme approached in the Synoptics. Furthermore, his own doctoral dissertation which came sixteen years later does not conform to the recommendations he posits. Besides, though purporting to be a discussion of the historical and theological significance of discipleship in the Synoptics, it actually is devoted to a discussion of discipleship in Mark with passing references to or comparisons with the other Gospels.

Vincent suggests that his approach to the Gospel of Mark would be through one single line in the tradition—that of the disciples. He thinks that in some sense everything in the Gospel is either about Jesus or about the disciples. While the story is Good News about Jesus, he rarely appears without

1J. J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord: The Historical and Theological Significance of Discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels (Sheffield: Academy Press, 1976). Vincent states in his preface that the original study presented at Basel University actually had more time spent on the Matthean and Lucan material. Perhaps he was obliged to maintain the topic since it was accepted as such; however, the reader of the volume must find that the work is not what it purports to be.
the disciples, and most recorded incidents seem to be for them, or done in their presence. He, therefore, sees Mark as the disciples' version of things. From what would, therefore, be an enormous quantity of material, he decided to select those relating to certain dominant aspects of the disciple-Lord relationship, and elucidate their significance. He finds three main groups of discipleship material in the Gospels: that which relates to: (1) Jesus and his disciples, (2) the continuation of the work of preaching and healing by the disciples and (3) the teaching of Jesus on discipleship. The latter he regards as the relationship of disciples to their Master.

In his first chapter, he discusses the first group by way of an examination of Marcan word usage. He sees Mark having six groups of people in mind for the term disciple: (1) the crowd, the many; (2) those following, the various groups following from time to time; (3) the disciples, called from among the followers; (4) those called, alongside the disciples and the Twelve who are called; (5) the Twelve, and (6) the Three, from among the Twelve who are specifically named. He detects a mixing of the groups by Mark and further sees no "degrees of disciples" but "degrees of discipleship." Furthermore, what seems important is disciple actions not disciple positions. Discipleship is thereby viewed as a dynamic activity of connection and presence with Jesus in his dynamic work. He sees the disciples portrayed as true friends of the Bridegroom, as the new wineskins, as those with David, and as Jesus' true relatives. They were even capable of being sent on a missionary tour, yet they understand neither Jesus nor his mission. They were afraid in the storm. They were accused of blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart.

Vincent understands discipleship in Mark as following Jesus, who was on his way to the cross. Caesarea Philippi is the turning point in the Gospel,
for there Mark began to emphasize the implications of "the kingdom way in
the persecuting world." He sees the true meaning of the Caesarea event lying
in the recognition that Jesus' positive approach will lead to his rejection. He
sees Peter's confession as having more meaning in Mark's time than in Jesus',
especially since the confession was rejected. Mark's story alters dramatically
after this point. The disciples were now on the way, and they became part of
a thematic development. Discipleship became tied to the destiny of Jesus, and
also became related to "What One Wishes."

Vincent sees Mark's apocalyptic chapter as relating to the disciples
and given in answer to questions about the future. It presents the disciples as
having a future since they must proclaim Jesus in the future. They must follow,
and they must proclaim, yet Mark did not indicate whether their misunder-
standing would be cleared up. They are presented in the next chapter, however,
as the dispersed sheep. Though remonstrating against this idea, they fulfilled
it. He sees Mark showing Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the passion as
having been without disciples.

In his final chapter, Vincent seeks solutions for the problem of the
apparent Marcan insistence on the blindness of the disciples. After examining
several solutions, he notes that most, if not all of them, are based on selections
from some aspects of the disciple material, or even on situations in the early
church. He gives his own tentative solution after positing six unreconciled
elements: (1) the disciples' opposition is part of a general opposition, (2) the
Three are more condemned than the Twelve, (3) misunderstanding is part of
the technique of teaching through action, (4) the misunderstanding theme
allows the reader to be better than the disciples, (5) misunderstandings are not
the last word, (6) Jesus in Mark is not a good teacher. For him the disciples
in Mark are being excused rather than accused. What the author was really attempting was a defense of the disciples. He was preparing the reader for their rejection of Jesus. His conclusion is that Mark was more for the Twelve than against them. He views his solution as being compatible with Mark's total story, which is on discipleship. Because the disciples were not perfect disciples, we can be disciples.

In 1968 Sean Freyne\(^1\) did a study of the disciples and apostles as an examination of the theology of the first three Gospels. This work was an expansion of his doctoral dissertation and was done in the context of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's instructions on the Gospels—attempting to show how these instructions can apply when a common theme is being traced within the Synoptics.

The first chapter deals with Jesus and the Twelve employing the three different titles given to the group in the Gospels: disciples, the Twelve, and apostles. He attempts to view the group in the life time of Jesus. He seeks an answer for the problem regarding whether they were apostles during Jesus' ministry. He outlines the positions taken by the scholars, and concludes that the variety of opinions suggests the complexity of the problem.

Chapter 2 views the treatment of each Evangelist in regard to the traditional material on the election and mission of the Twelve. This is done by noting the place each one gave to the accounts in his overall structure, and by examining the individual accounts in order to separate each Evangelist's interpretation from the earlier tradition.

The final three chapters deal with each Evangelist in turn in his treatment of the Twelve as disciples and apostles. Freyne suggests that his study

\(^{1}\)Freyne, *The Twelve*. 

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
gives some appreciation to the individuality of each Evangelist, since each presents a different aspect of the problem. He views Mark as having interest in the Twelve as the group to whom the mystery of the kingdom was given. He highlights their slowness in comprehending Jesus and his mission. It is only the climactic event, the cross, which can reveal the full reality of both. Mark is viewed as a highly dramatic document with the Twelve at its center. Thus the reader cannot remain detached, for the Gospel has a lasting message which is relevant today.

He sees Matthew as highlighting the Twelve as disciples. As such their instruction and life with Jesus are addressed to all believers, since for Matthew, discipleship is to be the distinctive mark of the whole Christian community. The Twelve, therefore, are for Matthew typical of the Christian community in every age. He sees their instruction in the demands of genuine discipleship as addressed to us, and their failures are those of all Christian disciples to the end of time.

Luke concentrates on the Twelve as apostles and seems to have a notion of an apostle which was linked with the lifetime of Jesus. Though Matthew and Mark were aware of the Twelve as apostles, it was Luke who developed their role as apostolic witnesses linking the church to Jesus.

Writing in 1981 for the Proclamation Commentaries, Jack Kingsbury\(^1\) took an approach similar to Freyne. He investigated the concept of Jesus Christ in Q, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Discipleship is one of the four themes common to his four chapters. In Q the disciples are viewed as giving themselves without reserve to the affairs of the kingdom. Their devotion commits them, in emulation of Jesus, to a life-style of "itinerant radicalism," for a disciple is

\(^{1}\)Kingsbury, *Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.*
not above his teacher. Discipleship demands surrendering family ties and the amassing of worldly goods. This group of followers left home, family, and possessions to wander from place to place, imitating his life-style and constituting a new community in Isreal.

Kingsbury views Mark as giving the earthly ministry of Jesus a pivotal role in salvation history. For him, the cross serves as the climactic and decisive event in that history. It is the point to which several of the narratives, including the disciples' lack of understanding, gravitate. The disciples were unable to penetrate the secret of Jesus' identity. Their favorable portrayal, in the earlier chapters, yields to a negative one beginning with the boat rides and continuing to the passion predictions. Their root problem was lack of comprehension. This coupled with cowardice and fearfulness among other weaknesses, relegated them to the outside. He sees enlightenment coming for them at the cross.

Matthew views Jesus and his disciples as comprising a brotherhood of the sons of God. By being designated μαθηταί they are characterized as "learners," and Jesus is their teacher and Lord. He instructs them in the mysteries of the kingdom, but at times they are lacking in faith or need further instruction. Basically, they do not in fact comprehend his words (13:11, 23, 51-52; 15:15-16, 16:12; 26:2), though they are not fettered with ignorance as in Mark since they have insight. Despite this, they fail to endure to the end. However, they are eventually reconciled.

Kingsbury presents Luke as portraying Jesus gathering his disciples from the wide populace because he gathers the true Israel. The people he summoned are a diverse lot: fishermen, tax collectors and sinners, common persons, a certain man (9:59), a rich ruler, and a chief tax collector. He was
even followed by a large group of women who were also seen as disciples. These followers lived with him in the sphere of end-time rule. Luke ascribed to them a multiple role. They were constant companions who witnessed his ministry of word and deed, engaged in missionary activities, and served as a link between the earthly ministry of Jesus and that of the post-Pentecost church.

Interestingly, he views Luke as saying that the Twelve did not abandon Jesus since they remained with him in his trials and sufferings (22:28). After the resurrection Jesus appeared to Peter, the Eleven, and the other disciples, at which time he opened their understanding in respect to both their destinies in God’s plan and in Scripture. This thus prepares them for their mission.

These two approaches are significant and indicate the direction in which research needs to move. Investigations are not as thorough as might have been expected. In addition, the researchers’ commitment to the Marcan priority have doubtlessly influenced their interpretation.¹ Besides, they have made no attempt at giving a Synoptic perspective.

Perhaps it may be appropriate to discuss at this juncture two works that are neither truly Synoptic, nor are limited to a particular Gospel. In 1973 Mark Sheridan wrote an article on the disciples in Matthew and Luke.² His interest was to examine assumptions made by Albright and Mann in the Anchor Bible concerning the disciples in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He views Matthew as restricting the term disciple to the Twelve in his literal usage and as placing great stress on making disciples. Matthew’s account is not necessarily more historical by this fact, however. His portrayal of the under-

¹See, e.g., Kingsbury, Matthew, pp. 8-9.
²Mark Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
standing of the disciples demonstrates the post-resurrection confessing faith of his community. Disciples in Matthew are exemplary for all Christians, for with the help of Jesus, they overcame their lack of trust. For Sheridan they are also representative of leaders.

Sheridan sees Luke as broadening the term disciple to include not only the Twelve, but all believers, and as reflecting great interest in the theme of bearing witness. Luke has a hierarchically oriented portrait of the church in which the Twelve apostles are mediators of Jesus' teaching, and disciples are expected to follow the teaching of the apostles. The term disciples also applies to the Twelve to designate their historical continuity with Jesus. Through Luke's broadening of the term disciples to include all Christians, a call is issued to all believers to follow Jesus as disciples, despite conditions of discipleship.

In 1980 Scot McKnight completed a thesis examining the role of the disciples in Matthew and Mark. He found five roles: (1) historization, (2) imitatio Christi, (3) transparency, (4) reader-identification, and (5) blindness proposed for the disciples in the literature on Mark. After examining these roles, he concludes that in Mark's Gospel the Twelve are historical figures and are historicized. While the imitatio Christi motif is a key teaching in the Gospel, the disciples do not perform it, since they display behavior which is not exemplary. Transparency was not detected but reader-identification is evident. Due to his Christology, his view of salvation-history, and his view of Jesus' didactic program, Mark seems to have given the disciples a blindness role in his Gospel.

McKnight detected the same five theories postulated for the role of

---

1McKnight, "The Role of the Disciples in Matthew and Mark."
the disciples in Matthew as was found for them in Mark. He sees two as applicable to the disciples in Matthew. First, there is an historization traceable to a non-repeatable past, and a special time in salvation history for a specially chosen Twelve. There is also a reader-identification motif which seems to be the role accorded to the disciples by the later church. He does not detect an idealization of the disciples by Matthew. What he finds is a complex of blindness and understanding.

After applying his findings to a passage from each Gospel, McKnight concludes that methodologically, the problem of the disciples is best solved by the use of redaction criticism. Through its application is revealed the fact that the Evangelists had differing views of the disciples due to their respective theological viewpoints.

Summary

This review has highlighted the major developments in Marcan discipleship studies. In 1901, William Wrede did his anticipatory redaction-critical work, though it was not then known as such, to demonstrate that the Messianic secret was created by Mark. His view that Mark, while not conducting any polemic against the original disciples, employed their incomprehension to enhance his Messianic secret held sway for several decades. It was not until the early 1960s that Tyson and Schreiber questioned his theory. They saw Mark condemning the failures of the original disciples and employing them in a polemic against a reactionary group in his contemporary situation. Their theory, while not having gone unchallenged, continues to have some influence. But, just as they differed in their identification of the reactionary group, so do their followers.

In 1956, Willie Marxsen not only named the discipline Redaktions--
that in part sees the Evangelists as creative theologians, but decisively employed it in his study of the Gospel of Mark. Since then, this procedure has become the prevailing method of study. Its use in discipleship studies together with the assumption of Marcan priority has resulted in the conclusion that the second Evangelist created the disciples' incomprehension to suit his own theological ends. There is no consensus in the identification of these theological ends, however.

This review of literature has also revealed a number of other significant issues:

1. The Marcan perspective has certainly dominated Synoptic scholarship. This review has demonstrated a bias in that respect. So dominant has been that tendency that the other Gospels have been viewed through the eyes of the second Evangelist. Against this background the views of the other Synoptics on disciple-ship have been neglected. Where discussions have been attempted, they were conducted primarily from the perspective of the Gospel of Mark.

2. The study has revealed that the espousal of the Marcan priority hypothesis has been the major contributing factor for this phenomenon. This theory has been taken in some quarters not for what it is, an hypothesis, but has been utilized as though it were fact. Synoptic scholarship in general, and disciple research in particular, has not benefited much from this tendency since it has paid little attention to the teachings of the other Gospel writers.

3. There is, therefore, a need to address the views of the other Evangelists concerning these followers of Jesus. They need to speak for themselves on this and other issues, and their views should not be obscured by that of Mark. This research intends to discuss the disciples in the perspective of the
other two Synoptists in addition to that of Mark.

4. Research on the disciples, concentrating on the Gospel of Mark as it has, has had other weaknesses. In the first place, it has been seeking one passage and one concept to employ as an interpretive key to Mark. As such, many interpretive keys, all claiming to be the one key, have been produced. Perhaps there is room for a drawing together of these divergent opinions, for there might be no one key to the Gospel. Furthermore, while it is true that the Evangelists employed their material creatively, there is need for distinction between what is creative and what is part of the original tradition.

Moreover, there has been the tendency to focus only on Mark's day, and to find the motivation for his portrayal of the disciples within the problems of his community. While the problems of his community may have influenced the selection of his material, they should not be seen as creating it, for he purports to report what happened in the historical situation between Jesus and his disciples (or that he could not depart from reporting an established tradition). This approach perhaps is a vestige of form criticism. Redaction criticism is also influenced by this tendency, though for it creativity is attributed to the Evangelists. Under the influence of the latter, the disciples have had a rather negative portrayal. The new literary criticism, however, seems to have halted this one-sided view of the disciples. A more balanced perspective has been gained which recognizes both a positive as well as a negative role for the disciples in the Gospel. However, the emphasis of the new literary criticism also is on the creativity of the Evangelists.

5. Some research has focused on the differences among the Gospels. Since it has been assumed that Mark wrote first, he has been viewed as creating the incomprehension of the disciples, and the other Evangelists have been
viewed as modifying his portrait. Perhaps, attention should also be paid to the similarities between these accounts to see what can be learned. It is within this context that a Synoptic perspective can be constructed.

6. The review reveals that while there is a multitude of works treating disciples and discipleship and noting that there is a deliberate use of the disciples' incomprehension, there is a paucity of works considering the incomprehension vocabulary and inquiring whether it can be informed by parallels in contemporary settings. Robbins and Marcus are exceptions in this regard, so these contributions are of extreme importance. Despite the plethora of works, there is room for continued discussion. There is, therefore, justification for the approach being adopted for this study.
CHAPTER II

HOW MARCAN IS THE SYNOPTIC PORTRAIT
OF THE DISCIPLES?

The suggestion of philosopher C. H. Weisse, in 1838, that Mark was the first Gospel written\(^1\) has had serious implications for Synoptic scholarship in general, and Marcan scholarship in particular. Since then, a firm consensus has emerged that the second Gospel has priority. This assumption, along with the development of William Wrede's thesis that Mark was not an objective historian\(^2\) but had modified his material for theological reasons,\(^3\) have dominated twentieth-century Synoptic scholarship in general, especially in the last four to five decades. Most recently, however, the need to progress beyond redaction criticism has given rise to literary criticism.\(^4\) Under the influence of these movements, Mark has come to be viewed as a creative author who initiated a new literary genre.

Espousal of these views by Synoptic scholars led to the conclusion

\(^1\)See Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*, p. 35. He cites Holtzmann as making this concession in 1863. Cf. Kealy, *Mark's Gospel*, p. 73. Weisse was, in fact, developing an idea which the latter had not exploited.

\(^2\)See Kee, "Mark as Redactor and Theologian," p. 333.

\(^3\)In this statement Wrede anticipated redaction criticism which emerged in 1956 with Bornkamm, Conzelmann, and Marxsen. This discipline sought to detect the editorial work carried out by the Evangelists.


74
that the other two Synoptists utilized Mark in composing their works. When these notions are transferred to the study of disciple/discipleship, an interesting picture emerges. Mark created his portrait of the disciples. Matthew and Luke were dissatisfied with his portrayal. Consequently, they modified his picture to suit their own ends. As such, therefore, the assumption is made that Mark's portrait of the disciples is the original one. On this basis little attention, if any, has been placed on the disciples from the vantage point of the other Gospels. While several monographs, essays, articles, and dissertations have been devoted to the disciples from the Marcan perspective, there is a paucity of works from any other perspective. It is significant that there is no monograph devoted entirely to the portrait of the disciples either in the Gospel of Matthew or in that of Luke.

The fact is, however, that the Marcan priority hypothesis is now being

1 See p. 2 above.

2 For representatives of those who hold this view, see the following: Achtemeier, Invitation to Mark, pp. 28, 119; idem, Mark, pp. 9, 12, 92; Bornkamm et al., Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, pp. 106-111, 118; Freyne, The Twelve, 203; Gundry, Matthew, pp. 298-301, 326-327, 344; Theodore Lescow, "Jesus in Geth-semane," Evangelische Theologie 26 (1966):153, 156; Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, pp. 25-42.

3 This assumption is also arrived at from another viewpoint. Since Mark wrote first he is the one who "established controls, and set limits for the interpretation of the traditions." As such, those who followed him in gospel composition must have modified or amplified his work. See Keith Nickel, The Synoptic Gospels: An Introduction (London: SCM, 1982), p. 63.

4 See p. 4, n. 1 above. See also pp. 54-73 above. Additionally, see Joseph Plevnik, "The Eleven and Those with Them' According to Luke," CBQ 40 (1978): 205-211; and Paul S. Minear, "The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," JETS 26 (1983):399-406. Minear's article is misleading in that it does not really deal with the disciples. Its primary focus is on the ὁχλοι. It aims at identifying them as followers of Jesus, too. The disciples are mentioned to contrast them with the ὁχλοι. Minear even points out that the training devoted to the μαθηταὶ is designed to equip them to be the successors of Jesus in his work for the ὁχλοι. The emphasis of Plevnik's article is on the Eleven and not so much the Eleven as disciples.
strongly challenged. Tuckett suggests that the manner in which the hypothesis was established has recently caused severe doubts to be cast on it. As such it is no longer assumed, as it was in the first half of the century, that it is a satisfactory solution to the Synoptic problem. He also states that this "two-document hypothesis is no longer the firm bedrock of Gospel study it was once thought to be." This hypothesis is a proposed solution, not an established fact (as its dominance of the literature might suggest). Though Achtemeier believes that the assumption of Marcan priority is the most likely solution, he correctly contends that "Marcan priority cannot be fully and definitely proven on the basis of the materials we possess." Robert M. Fowler is even more emphatic in his assertion that:

"Inspite of renewed debate over the Synoptic problem in recent years, the problem is no closer to resolution and as currently understood it may be insoluble. We lack the extrinsic evidence necessary to reconstruct the history of the Gospels."

These calls should not go unheeded. They are summons to halt the over-emphasis on the Gospel of Mark based on the assumption of its priority. Furthermore, they can also serve as summons to seek to ascertain the subject

---


3Ibid., p. viii.

4See Achtemeier, Mark, p. 7.

5Fowler, "Redefining the Synoptic Problem."
of the disciples as can be deduced from the other Synoptists. There are, in fact, striking similarities in the Synoptic accounts regarding the apparent incomprehension of the disciples. Since priority of any Gospel cannot as yet be established, perhaps it might be instructive to trace the subject in each of the Synoptics and then seek to determine what they are collectively trying to say about the disciples. As such, this chapter attempts to: (1) reconstruct the portrait of the disciples presented by each Evangelist, and (2) seek a common denominator or perhaps even a common tradition from which neither of the Evangelists dared break away/dared to depart. A point of departure from current practices in Synoptic studies needs to be noted. Most studies use Mark as the basis for consideration of the material of the other Gospels. That approach has limitations and distorts, to some extent, the picture of Matthew and Luke. The approach adopted here, therefore, allows the picture of each Evangelist to emerge independently.

The Marcan Portrait of the Disciples

Most studies dealing with the disciples in Mark have tended to concentrate on their negative aspect, that is, on their incomprehension. As has been demonstrated by J. J. Vincent, Edward Taylor, and others, there is a positive


side to the disciples in Mark. If justice is to be done and if a realistic portrait of the disciples is to be painted, then the lead of Vincent and Taylor must be followed, and a holistic view taken of the disciples in the Gospel. Since this latter approach has great merits, it is being adopted in this study. As such, the positive aspects of the disciples are considered first, then the negative.

Robbins has successfully demonstrated that Jesus was indeed a teacher. As a teacher, it was natural for him to have disciples. Mark, therefore, in describing his ministry employed the technical term for a disciple—μαθητής—some forty-six times. Meye suggests that this term complements διδάσκαλος, employed for Jesus in the Gospels and commonly used for teachers. Vincent also notes two other terms which are employed for the disciples—οἱ δώδεκα (the twelve) and ἀκολουθεῖν (to follow). He observes nineteen instances of

1Some studies, especially those of the new literary critics, tend to view the negative but see positive implications. Or they note the positive in the early chapters but see a worsening situation as the positive yields to the negative in the later chapters. See Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark: Function of a Narrative Role," pp. 396-397. Other studies give passing reference to the positive but develop the negative. See Achtemeier, Mark, p. 94, and Klauck, "Die erzählerische Rolle der Jünger im Markusevangelium," pp. 6-7. See also Meye, The Twelve, p. 99-100.

2Robbins, Jesus the Teacher. See the review of literature. See also T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: The University Press, 1948), and Meye, The Twelve, pp. 30-87.

3See J. J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord, pp. 28-29. He lists each occurrence and gives a good survey of the positive concepts of the disciples in Mark. See pp. 12-38.

4Cognizance of the debate regarding the relationship between the Twelve and the disciples and also the Twelve and the apostles is acknowledged. Detailed discussions of this problem are not entered into here. See Meye, The Twelve, pp. 88-225; Best, "Mark's Use of the Twelve," pp. 11-35; idem, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark," pp. 372-401; D. Muller, "μαθητής," NIDNTT 1:489; Pierson Parker, "Disciples," IDB 1:845; Karl H. Rengstorff, ἀπόστολος, TDNT 1:424-425, "μαθητής," ibid., 4:450-455; Vincent Taylor, Mark pp. 619-632; Schmehl, Die Zwölf im Markus-evangelium, pp. 20-21; Edward Taylor,
this latter usage which imply discipleship in the second Gospel. Best notes that there are three terms employed for the associates of Jesus—the disciples, the Twelve, and the apostles.¹ What does Mark say concerning these associates of Jesus? Information can be gathered from the following passages in his Gospel.

The Positive Portrait of the Disciples in Mark


Calling the First Disciples

Edward Taylor sees in this passage "dual call stories" or "twin call stories" which are inseparably linked.² His observation is correct. The first call story (vss. 16-18) has seven elements while the second has six. Both stories have Jesus as the main character and answer the questions where? who? and what? Both have a call to discipleship and a response. The unique feature of...


the first is a promise Jesus made to the first disciples.

In the first story, a participial clause, καὶ παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν . . . (vs. 16) answers to where. The location of Jesus, the main character, is given. He is walking along the Sea of Galilee. The main clause answers who, and notes that Jesus sees Simon and his brother Andrew. The ensuing information answers to what, which Vincent calls "their situation." It notes what they were doing, "they were casting a net in the sea." Jesus extends the call to them saying: ἀφεῖ σε ὁ πίσω μον (Come after me), and promises to make them fishers of men. Their response is immediate. They leave their nets and follow him.

As was previously noted, the second story has the same pattern. Continuing along the Sea of Galilee (where), Jesus sees James the son of Zebedee and his brother John (who), mending their nets (what) in their boat. His call meets an immediate response. They leave their father with the hired servants in the boat and follow him. While the initiative resided with him, they responded positively, understandably with faith.


The third call story recorded by Mark follows the same pattern. Like the second, it lacks the statement of promise. For Mark, Jesus is again beside


3Preceding the third call, Mark (2:13-17) has the first-called-disciples bring to Jesus' attention the predicament of Peter's mother-in-law. The "they" clearly refers to the disciples, who may be seen positively at this juncture. Matthew, however, does not mention who brought the matter to Jesus' attention, and Luke has no antecedents for "they" and has not yet recorded the call of the first disciples.
the sea (where). On this occasion he sees Levi (the first Gospel says a man
called Matthew, the third Gospel says a tax collector named Levi). Mark alone
identifies him as the son of Alphaeus. Levi (who) was sitting at the tax office
(where). Jesus says to him, "Follow me." His response to the call was immediate.
He rises and follows him (Luke says he leaves everything and follows him).

It is apparent, then, that the call stories in Mark follow the same
pattern and convey identical messages. The initiative was taken by Jesus as
he issued the call to discipleship.¹ Not only does the the Marcan picture agree
with the other Synoptists' but also with John's. The Johannine Jesus states
that the disciples did not choose them (John 15:16).

The primary task here is to determine what is being conveyed by Mark
concerning the disciples. The following picture emerges:

(1) The five men who are called were not idle men. They were indus­
trious and were engaged in tasks associated with their trade when they received
the call from Jesus.

(2) The fact that it was Jesus who initiated the relationship suggests
that those called were considered worthy of the honor being bestowed on
them.² The fact that Mark introduces Jesus as the Son of God³ in the first

¹Heber F. Peacock, "Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," RevExp 75
(1978): 555-564, concurs. He includes the call of the Twelve and that of the
rich man in his list and sees varying details but some common elements in
the call scenes. He thinks of these common elements as being deliberate and
as indicating the Gospel's view of discipleship.

²See James Donaldson, "Discipleship in Mark," p. 68; R. H. Rengstorf,
"μαθητής," TDNT 4:444; and Schweitzer, The Good News According to Mark,
p. 49, among others where comparison is made between the initial stages of
discipleship with Jesus and with the Rabbinate. Cf. Robbins, Jesus the Teacher,
pp. 55-119, where associations are made between the initial stages of teacher/
disciple relations with Jesus and with both the Rabbinate and Hellenistic
disciple-gathering teachers.

³Manuscript attestatation not unanimous.
verse of his Gospel certainly enhances the impression the reader has of the first disciples since they were chosen by the Son of God.

(3) The disciples were obedient men. Their immediate acceptance of Jesus' invitation to follow him as well as their forsaking of family and business ties to become apprentices to the young Galilean Rabbi speaks favorably of them. (4) The unquestioning and unhesitating response of these men to the summons of Jesus speaks positively of their comprehension. There is no evidence of prior contact between Jesus and these men, despite the claim of some, yet they understood the implications of his call and responded appropriately. They are not would-be disciples.


Following the call of Levi, Mark does not mention the call of other disciples; yet it is evident from Mark 3:13 that there was a large group. In this passage, the reader is informed that Jesus selected some of his disciples and took them into the hills. From these he appointed twelve, for whom he had specific functions. Mark states that they were to be sent out to preach as well as to have authority over demons. Best notes an apparent inconsistency between these two roles. He finds difficulties with their being with him and being sent away from him. Perhaps this difficulty will disappear if the roles are understood.

1See E. Taylor, p. 29, for citation of some who hold this position. Peacock contends, as is proposed here, that there was no prior contact. He asserts, "It is striking that in all the examples the call is presented as coming unexpectedly and without preparation. The call comes out of the blue." See his "Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," p. 567.

2Best, Following Jesus, p. 182.
On the surface it would seem that the Twelve were chosen for fellow­ship⁠¹ and companionship.⁠² While these elements are involved, the design is deeper. Hendricksen is certainly correct when he detects in ἵνα ὁσία μετ’ αὐτοῦ (in order that they might be with him) an educational design.⁠³ They were to be with Jesus so they could learn from him.⁣⁴ Hendricksen observes that, perhaps, they were appointed to first spend some time with Jesus, seeing and hearing him, and learning what he wished to teach. He refers to such an experience as "spiritual education."⁤⁵ Meye makes a similar claim, but adds two significant elements. This seeing and hearing of Jesus marked the way of discipleship. Besides, by being with him they became "the prime witnesses" of his ministry to the multitudes.

This association of the disciples with Jesus was not only intended for their benefit. Having learned from Jesus, they were to be sent out to proclaim the good news. The main verb ἀποστέλλειν is very suggestive. It is a compound word made up of the preposition ἀπό, which means "from" or "away from," and the verb στέλλω, "I send." It implies a sender from whom the one sent departs. As such, the disciples must associate with Jesus in order that they might later be sent out from him for the purpose of proclaiming good news.

Furthermore, they were chosen so that, having learned, they would

⁴See Meye, *The Twelve*, p. 108, where he claims that the work the disciples were to perform was similar to that Jesus himself performed.
⁵Hendricksen, p. 128.
have authority or power to cast out demons. The mission of the disciples was thus to be characterized by preaching and healing.

The pericope has some implications for the portrait of the disciples. First, the passage alludes to a double selection process. He first calls those whom he desires, the larger group alluded to previously. He then appoints twelve from this group. Apparently, at this stage Jesus had a large group of disciples whom he called. He does narrow the group to arrive at these close associates. This selection process, peculiar to Mark, suggests that these disciples met criteria for selection and that there was a positive element.

Second, the pericope suggests that the disciples were capable of growth. Jesus must have seen potential in them. They could learn from association with him, from watching and listening to him, so he appointed them for this threefold task of (1) association with him, (2) preaching, and (3) healing. It is precisely because Jesus had confidence in them that he chose them as associates and entrusted them with weighty responsibilities. This fact should not be overlooked when the disciples are being evaluated.


These two passages add two elements to the Marcan positive conception of the disciples. Disciples are described here as those who are inside, implying

---


2Analysis of the parallel accounts is provided in chap. 4.

3The debate relating to the meaning of *οἱ περὶ αὐτῶν σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα* or whether Mark 4:10-12 is a Marcan addition is not entered into here. For the former, consult R. P. Meye, "Mark 4:10: 'Those About Him with the Twelve,'" *Studia Evangelica* 2, ed., F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
those who are close to Jesus (those with him in contrast to unbelieving relatives, the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.), who are capable of perceiving "the secret\(^1\) of the kingdom of God." They now belong to the group of the initiated, for discipleship connotes "initiation into the secret of the kingdom."\(^2\) Notwithstanding the fact that they do not fully understand it, it was given to

1964), pp. 211-218; idem, Jesus and the Twelve, pp. 152-156; Best, "Mark's Use of the Twelve," pp. 16-18; Cranfield, pp. 146-152; Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 255; Hendricksen, pp. 150-151; Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, p. 56; E. Lohmeyer, Das Evangelium des Markus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), p. 83; Moule, "Mark 4:1-20 Yet Once More," p. 98; Edward Taylor, "The Disciples in Mark," pp. 130-135; Ambrozic, The Hidden Kingdom, pp. 53-72, among others. Meyle's view that the phrase should be limited to the Twelve is unconvincing. Contrary to him, the burden of proof does not rest with those who see a larger group. Instead, it rests with him and with those who would refute the inherent meaning of the text.


\(^1\)This is the rendition of \(\mu\sigma\tau\iota\rho\iota\nu\) in the RSV. This word also means mystery. For its implications especially in relation to Mark 4:10-12, see C. Finkenvath, "Secret," NIDNTT 3:503-507; Bornkamm, "\(\mu\sigma\tau\iota\rho\iota\nu\)," TDNT 4:817-819; Ambrozic, pp. 92-106; Cranfield, Mark, pp. 152-153; Marcus, 537-574; Hendricksen, 151-154; E. Taylor, pp. 148-156; J. Vincent, Disciples and Lord, p. 54, among others.

\(^2\)Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:258.
them. Mark saw no problem here for, as he later states, the disciples also receive private instructions (vs. 34). Perhaps what they do not understand is explained to them in these private sessions—even when they are still uncomprehending.¹

The picture of the disciples as can be derived from these two verses seems to indicate that the disciples are trustworthy enough to receive the mystery of the kingdom. They are also capable of receiving private instructions of which those outside are incapable.


In recording the summoning of the first two disciples (1:16-18), Mark notes that Jesus promised to make them fishers of men. In relating the appointing of the Twelve he also notes the task designated to them, "to be sent out to preach and to have authority over demons" (Mark 3:14-15). Here, in this pericope, Mark records the first instance when the disciples were called upon to perform these tasks.

He informs his readers that following Jesus' rejection at Nazareth, and during his teaching in the surrounding villages, he called the Twelve and began to send them out two by two.² While not specifically mentioning that they were assigned the task of preaching, he explicitly states that they were

¹This is a dominant theme in the Gospel and is pursued below.

²Entry is not made into the debate regarding whether vss. 7-11 are indeed original or constitute a Marcan creation to provide a framework for the mission charge. For this discussion consult V. Taylor, Mark, pp. 302-303; Cranfield, Mark pp. 197-198; Schmahl, p. 69; E. Taylor, pp. 170-172, among others.

Acknowledgement is also made of the debate regarding the historicity of a mission of the disciples during the ministry of Jesus. For an evaluation of these discussions see J. J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord, pp. 56-57; Cranfield, Mark, pp. 201-203, and R. P. Meye, The Twelve, pp. 110-113, 198-199.
given "a continuous power (authority) over unclean spirits." The importance of this passage for the positive image of the disciples does not reside only in the fact that they were considered trustworthy enough to be delegated with authority over unclean spirits; it resides more so in the implications of the mission and in its accomplishments.

Mark tells, by implication, that the disciples were engaged in an extension of the mission of Jesus. Though Mark does not highlight their mission very much, since his emphasis is on their Master's work, this implication is inescapable. Mark further states, though he does not include this in the commission, that the disciples preached on their mission and called hearers to repentance. They also cast out demons, anointed the sick, and performed healings. In vs. 30 he tells that on their return they outlined to Jesus all they had done and taught.

The impression is given that the disciples are competent followers of Jesus. They can join him in fulfilling his mission. They can preach (teach), cast out demons, and heal the sick. They are deserving of rest, for like their Master, they had had little time to eat during their mission (vss. 31-32).


Most discussion of this passage highlights the negative impression of the disciples. Even in the sections where a positive picture could be deduced,

1 This according to Robertson is what edidou implies. See Word Pictures, 1:308.


3 Cranfield's evaluation here is precise. Note his comments regarding the discussion of the interpretation of Mark's use of the mission of the Twelve. See his Mark, pp. 202-203.
the negative has been somehow evinced.\textsuperscript{1} The perceptiveness of the disciples should not be overlooked, however. While their solution to the problem is unacceptable, they were the ones who brought the problem to the attention of Jesus, since he had been busy teaching the shepherdless people. They informed him that the hour was late. Mark specifically states: \textit{kai ήδη ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης προσελθόντες αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταί αὐτοῦ ἔλεγον ὅτι ἐρημός ἐστίν ὁ τόπος, καὶ ήδη ὥρα πολλή} (and when the hour became late his disciples came to him and said, "this is a desert place and the hour is late").

This timely observation should not be overshadowed by the fact that their suggestion, to send the multitude away, was unacceptable. They were expressing concern for their Master, his work, and his audience. Furthermore, they displayed insight, ability to make decisions (though unacceptable), and willingness to assist Jesus in his work. According to vs. 41, they were the agents of the distribution, another positive feature.


This pericope is considered the central point of Mark's Gospel\textsuperscript{2} since there is a marked transition in Jesus' approach to his ministry. Hereafter, his

\textsuperscript{1}Kelber even refuses to credit the disciples for settling down the crowd, feeding the people, and distributing the bread. He says that rather than the disciples helping Jesus to feed the people, it was Jesus demonstrating to them how to feed the people. See \textit{Mark's Story of Jesus}, p. 34.

tutelage is primarily devoted to his disciples.\textsuperscript{1} Despite the attempt of some\textsuperscript{2} to have this pericope impact negatively upon the disciples, by claiming that Jesus rejected Peter's confession, there is much in it that is positive for the disciples. Vincent Taylor perceptively asserts that the pericope "cannot justly be regarded as a 'Marcan construction.'\textsuperscript{3} It is more than the confession of the Marcan community.\textsuperscript{4} This is indeed an actual experience of Jesus and his disciples in the historical situation. The confession certainly was made by Peter on behalf of his companions.

This crucially located pericope, preceding the threefold prediction of the passion, suggests that some growth had in fact taken place on the part of the disciples. They were perceptive enough to pick up the opinions of others, concerning Jesus, and were discriminating enough not to be influenced by them. The passage legitimately asserts that the disciples indeed had some understanding of who Jesus was. They may not have fully understood his mission and its implications. They may not have fully grasped his teaching, especially as it related to suffering and death,\textsuperscript{5} but Peter's confession indicates that they recognized him as the Messiah, that is, "the One in whom the hopes

\textsuperscript{1}So Ambrozic, p. 234; R. P. Meye, \textit{Jesus and The Twelve}, pp. 71, 125, and Cranfield, Mark, p. 266. Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark," p. 400, suggests that beginning here close attention is given to the disciples.


\textsuperscript{3}V. Taylor, \textit{Mark}, pp. 374-375. See also Cranfield, p. 266.

\textsuperscript{4}Contrary to the claims of Bultmann. See \textit{History of the Synoptic Tradition}, pp. 257-259.

\textsuperscript{5}Peter's rebuke of Jesus (Mark 8:32) substantiates this notion for it suggests his intolerance and rejection of the idea of a suffering Messiah.
of Israel would be fulfilled."¹ Jesus' request for silence, when related to what follows (vss. 31-32), need not imply a rejection of the confession. Perhaps Edward Taylor is correct in asserting that what vs. 31 does is to fill out what "the confession ἔχωντος means for Jesus."²


While they were departing from the temple, one of the disciples pointed out to Jesus the beauty of Herod's temple. Jesus then predicted its destruction. As he sat on the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew (identified only in Mark) sought information regarding the time of the destruction of the temple, and also concerning signs.

Perhaps these questions may indicate requests for instruction regarding what was not understood. On the contrary, the nature of the questions reveals that there was a level of comprehension, but that added information was being sought. If this interpretation is valid, then, this would be another hint in Mark's Gospel at a level of comprehension by the disciples. The questions indicate some development of thought beyond the statement of Jesus, and thus support the claim being made here.


In this pericope Mark, as in Matthew, informs his readers that on the day of Unleavened Bread, that is the day on which the Passover lamb was sacrificed, the disciples noted that no preparations were being made for their Passover celebration. (In Luke the entire affair is initiated by Jesus). They

¹Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 376.
²Edward Taylor, p. 225.
took the initiative and went to Jesus to have instructions regarding what preparations he required. Contrary to what might have been expected, they did not cast any blame for this apparent oversight.

Though they had all apparently intended to go, Jesus sent only two of them to make the preparations. This did not create a problem, neither for the two, nor for the rest. The two who were selected followed the instructions, located the person to whom they were sent, and completed the assigned task. The disciples are revealed in this pericope as men with initiative, men who can follow instructions, and men who can successfully complete assigned tasks.

Mark 14:28 (cf. Matt 26:32):
Anticipated (Meeting) in Galilee

Following the Last Supper, as they made their way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus began to prepare the disciples for the effect his passion would have on them. As part of this speech, (not reported by Luke) he projected a meeting with them after the resurrection. This meeting was planned for Galilee.

The implication is that despite Jesus’ knowledge of the devastating effect his arrest would have on them, he had no plans to treat them as they would treat him. Instead, he projected a post-resurrection meeting with them in Galilee. This doubtlessly suggests that Mark, like Matthew, did not regard their flight as the end of their discipleship. There would be a reunion in Galilee. He sought a continuous relationship with them.

1 Vincent Taylor, *Mark*, p. 548, suggests that this statement projecting a meeting in Galilee may have been inserted by Mark to prepare the way for Mark 16:7. He cites as evidence the fact that there is an excellent connection between vss. 27 and 29. So also Bultmann, pp. 266-267. Osborne, p. 55, admits knowledge of this view and lists others who espouse it.
Mark 16:6-7 (cf. Matt 28:5-10):
Message to the Disciples

When the women arrived at the tomb on the third day after the crucifixion, they discovered the empty tomb and were met by a young man in white apparel (an angel). The angel’s words conveyed a momentous message for the disciples. They were to be informed of the meeting in Galilee which was to take place with their Lord as he had projected. This message, recorded by Mark and Matthew, signaled a summoning of those who had displayed such abject failure on the night of the arrest of Jesus. Perhaps it was intended to convey an assurance of forgiveness. Despite their failures, their Master was still willing to associate with them. The special mention of Peter, unique to Mark, is extremely noteworthy, considering his denial. This passage thus shares the good news the disciples had and conveys a positive image of them at the close of Mark’s Gospel.¹

The foregoing passages strongly argue for a positive view of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark. They contend that despite the apparently negative treatment the document gives the disciples, and despite the emphasis current scholarship places on it, there is a favorable picture, as well, that must not be ignored. These disciples must be seen for what they are—men who in response to a call to follow Jesus abandoned all: family, friends, livelihood, etc., and followed him. They yielded to his claim,² listened to his instructions, assisted in his mission, and stayed with him.³ More emphasis needs to be

¹A contrary opinion is discussed below.
²Martin, Mark: Evangelist and Theologian, p. 133.
³Achtemeier, Mark, p. 94.
placed on this aspect, thus giving a balance to the picture of the disciples in Mark.

The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Mark

Mark 1:35-37: Interrupted Meditation

This passage is often cited as being the first in the Gospel to indicate the disciples' incomprehension of the mission of Jesus. Following the first period of ministry, Jesus arose early one morning and retired to a lonely place to meditate and pray.

Mark says that Peter, "Simon and those with him" (possibly some of the disciples) followed him. The verb Mark uses is very descriptive. It implies that they hunted him out or tracked him down to inform him that the crowds were seeking him. It appears that they thought Jesus was missing an opportunity to minister to the multitudes. Despite their good intentions, however, they acted to divert him from his mission, not understanding the importance of his prayer life. They were insensitive to his needs. Interestingly, in the Lucan parallel (Luke 4:42) Jesus was sought by the people, not the disciples.

Mark 4:13: Incomprehension of the Parable of the Sower

Positive elements in the first part of the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples (vss. 10-12) following the parable of the Sower have been pointed

---

1See A. Stock, p. 109, and Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, p. 149.

2Luke says that it was the people who sought and found him (Luke 4:42-43).

3See Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 183.

4Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, p. 28.
out. In vss. 3-9 the parable of the Sower is given. The fact that the disciples questioned Jesus concerning the parables suggests that they did not understand it. Jesus implies that those to whom the secret of the kingdom is given ought to have understood (vs 11). What is implicit there, and must be deduced from the contrast with those outside, is made explicit in vs. 13 by two direct questions, peculiar to Mark: do you not know this parable, how then will you understand all the parables? (οὐκ ὤδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην, καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γνώσεσθε;).

The first question faults the disciples on three counts. In the first place it suggests that Jesus was surprised at their lack of insight. Second, it appears to imply blame, and third it seems to be an implied rebuke. The second question suggests that the lack of insight, in regard to the parable of the Sower, could be tragic for them in that they may be unable to learn by observation and experience. Besides, there seems also to be the suggestion that comprehension of the parable of the Sower would prove an asset in understanding the other parables.

This pericope seems to highlight the disciples' lack of progress in cognition. They failed to grasp the significance of the parable of the Sower,

---

1See pp. 80-81 above for a discussion of this positive view.

2See Lambrecht, "Redaction and Theology in Mark 10," pp. 180-281 for a discussion of the claim that Mark created vs. 13. Cf. Ambrozic, pp. 2-53 in which he claims that vs. 13 was strongly retouched by Mark.

3Vincent Taylor suggests that οἶδα implies "knowing by insight or intuition." Mark, p. 258. See also Hendricksen, p. 155, n. 145.

4Ibid., p. 259.

5Ambrozic, p. 120.

6According to Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 258, this is the implication of the use of γνώσκω. See also Hendricksen, p. 155, n. 145.
which may have been crucial for an understanding of the other parables. A positive factor in the midst of all this, however, is the fact that they expressed their failure and thus Jesus was able to supply the required interpretation.


Mark alone says that on the day following the discourse on the parables, Jesus invited the disciples to go with him to the other side of the lake. They therefore left the crowds and, along with some other boats, headed for the other side. As they crossed, a great storm of wind caused the craft to begin to take in water.

The disciples became agitated, especially when they saw Jesus peacefully asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat, apparently unconcerned about the events that were transpiring around him. They, therefore, awoke him (Mark employed the graphic present to describe their actions), addressing him as Διδάσκαλε, that is, Teacher or Rabbi. Their harsh question, peculiar to Mark, οὐ μὴλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα (is it no concern to you that we are perishing?) reveals that they are terror-stricken men, and implies a rebuke of the Master. They seem to be charging him with lack of concern for their safety. While they had not apparently encountered his power over nature previously, his authority had been sufficiently demonstrated to warrant the exercise of faith on their part. Up to this point they are revealed as terror-stricken men who are lacking in faith.

---


It is interesting that, in Mark, Jesus' first reaction was directed at the raging winds, which he calms. Only then did he address the disciples. Their response to the miracle is also remarkable. Unlike the other Synoptists, Mark says they feared a great fear (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μεγάν) while questioning each other in respect to his identity and his power over the elements. The disciples are here seen as men who are apparently astonished at Jesus' power over nature. They display incomprehension of his person and of his abilities.

The Woman With a Hemorrhage

This passage describes the experience Jesus had with the woman who had a hemorrhage. He had been summoned to the house of Jairus. On his way, the crowds pressed against him. He therefore inquired from the throng which one of them touched him. The disciples could not understand how he asked such an absurd question, given the enormity of the crowd. They, therefore, rebuked him questioning the justification of his inquiry (cf. Luke 8:45, where the questioner is Peter; Matt 9:20-22a is silent about the issue).

Disregarding their rebuke and their intervention in a matter beyond their cognition, he looked around him to see who had performed the act. The woman, who had been healed by her touch, had suffered for twelve years from severe hemorrhages, and had been unable to obtain any relief from physicians, was identified. Jesus perceived that some power had gone forth from him, hence his inquiry. The disciples thus displayed their stupidity by interfering in a matter of which they were not cognizant.

1So too is Luke's, but in Matthew he deals first with their want of faith. See Matt 8:25-26.

2The implications of this statement are pursued below.
Mark 6:45-52 (cf. Matt 14:22-33): Walking on the Water

Following the feeding of the Five Thousand, the disciples left Jesus with the multitude and began crossing the sea of Galilee to go to Bethsaida. After his period of prayer in the hills, Jesus noted that the disciples were having difficulty with the wind on the lake. He therefore appeared to them some time between three and six o'clock in the morning. Mark says he appeared as if he was going to pass them by. Since he was walking on the water, they mistook him for a ghost and were terrified. Their terror was so intense that they cried out. Jesus reassured them, however, by revealing his identity. His entry into the boat had a two-fold effect: (1) the wind ceased and (2) they became utterly astonished. Mark’s rationale for their astonishment is interesting. He says: for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened (σὺ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ’ ἤν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη).

Here the disciples are revealed to be men who easily become afraid, who are astonished by Jesus’ power, and who lack understanding of his feeding miracle. Besides, unlike Matthew, Mark charges them with hardness of heart (vs. 52).

Mark 7:14-18 (cf. Matt 15:10-17): Incomprehension of a Statement on Defilement

The context of this passage states that the Pharisees and scribes had noted that Jesus’ disciples were not observing the laws of purity. They, therefore, approached him on the topic. Following his response, Jesus called the multitude and said to them: hear me all of you and understand (Ἀκούσατε μου πάντες καὶ σύνετε). What was he inviting them to hear and understand?
That it was not what enters a person that defiles, but what comes out.

Apparently, the disciples did not understand his statement. When they left the crowd and had entered the house, they inquired (Matthew says it was Peter who asked him to explain it to them) about the parable. His response to them, "then do you also not understand, do you not perceive that not everything which enters a man from outside is able to defile him . . ." (Ὁ τῶς καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοι ἐστὲ, οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐξωθεὶν εἰςπορευόμενον εἰς τὸν ἄθρωπον οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν κοινώσαι . . .), indicates that he expected them to understand, since they were on the inside. They are, therefore, exposed as not living up to expectations. They seem to be lacking in understanding and insight—as in Matthew.

**Mark 8:1-4 (cf. Matt 15:32-33):**
**Feeding the Four Thousand**

Here is recorded the feeding of the Four Thousand. The problem relates to the fact that the multitude had been with Jesus for three days and had had nothing to eat. Mark, like Matthew, says that Jesus called the disciples and told them that he had compassion on the hungry multitude since they had had nothing to eat.

The response of the disciples is astonishing. Since they had witnessed the feeding of the Five Thousand, they should have understood. Yet, the same lack of insight and apprehension is evident in their question, unique to Mark, "How can we feed these men with bread here in the desert?". They demonstrate incomprehension of Jesus' power and ability. They also display an incapacity to retain learning. Consequently, they appear not to have benefited from their

---

1This has led some scholars to regard both accounts of the feeding miracles as variants of one account. See Vincent, *Mark*, p. 359.
attachment to the Great Rabbi—as in Matt 15:33.

Mark 8:14-21 (cf. Matt 16:5-12):
Incomprehension of a Statement About Leaven

Following the second feeding miracle, Jesus went into a boat with the disciples and departed for Dalmanutha. There, the Pharisees met him and requested a sign from heaven (perhaps to authenticate his ministry). He refused to give the sign and left for the other side of the lake. On his way, he warned his disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Since they had forgotten to take bread, they thought that their neglect had motivated the statement. They, therefore, began a discussion, among themselves, regarding the absence of bread. Discerning their discussion Jesus severely rebuked them saying: "Why do you discuss that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" (τί διαλογίζεσθε ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε; οὐπω οὐδὲ συνίετε; πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν; ὁμολογοῦσα ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὦτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; καὶ οὐμυνημονεύετε, ὅτε τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους ἐκλάσα εἰς τοὺς πεντακισχίλιους, πόσους κοφίνους κλασμάτων πλήρεις ἤρατε;) After they responded twelve, and seven for the feeding of the four thousand, he asked them this question, unique to Mark, "Do you not yet understand?" (οὐπω συνίετε;).

As in Matthew, a very dismal picture of the disciples is painted here. They lack comprehension and perception. However, Mark alone says their hearts are hardened and that they have eyes and ears but can neither see nor hear. Even if Jesus had been speaking about bread, surely he who with a few
loaves had fed five thousand men on one occasion and four thousand on another (women and children being excluded on both occasions) could have provided food with one loaf. They seemed to have failed to grasp even this fact. The final question seems loaded with implications and makes a severe assertion on the disciples.

The Passion Predictions

Following the confession which Peter made on behalf of all the disciples, Jesus began to share with them the events which would take place in Jerusalem. On the three occasions when he spoke, the disciples had difficulties accepting the idea of a suffering Messiah.

At the first prediction both Peter and Jesus rebuked each other—as in Matthew. When Jesus spoke of his passion the second time, Mark, like Luke, says the disciples did not understand what he said and notes that they were even afraid to ask him about it. Following the third prediction there is no response from the group, though Luke adds, "But they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them and they did not grasp (οὐκ ἐγινωσκόν) what he said." However, as though they had learned nothing from what had been previously said, the sons of Zebedee—James and John—request the places of honor in the kingdom. This request caused their companions to become indignant. Jesus, therefore, had to teach them a lesson in humility (Mark 10:35-45; cf. Matt 20:20-28).

These passages portray the disciples as lacking in understanding, afraid of even hinting their non-understanding to Jesus, unwilling to accept the idea of a suffering Messiah, and as men who are struggling for positions in the
anticipated kingdom. If incomprehension was the total picture in the Gospel, then, there would be no growth in their development.


Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to an unnamed mountain where he was transfigured. After the appearance of Elijah and Moses, Peter apparently was so overwhelmed that though "he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid" (vs. 6, peculiar to Mark; cf. Luke 9:32), still felt obliged to say something. Consequently, he proposed that they build three tabernacles, one each for Jesus and his guests. After recording the voice heard by the disciples enjoining them to listen to Jesus for he is the Beloved Son, the descent from the mount, and Jesus' injunction to remain silent about what they had witnessed until after the resurrection, Mark again stresses the disciples' lack of understanding by his remark that they were "questioning what the rising from the dead meant" (vs. 10b, peculiar to him). Despite the fact that this event was preceded by the first passion prediction, the disciples were still ignorant and they questioned one another about a fundamental teaching. They are mirrored as impulsive, fearful, uncomprehending, and unable to transfer learning from one event to another.


At the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, a father with a lunatic boy, followed by a crowd, met Jesus and the Three. The father complained regarding the disciples' inability to heal his child. After a chiding about faithlessness, Jesus healed the boy.
Later that day, the disciples asked Jesus why they had been unable to heal the child. His answer to their question suggests that they lacked the necessary qualifications. Unlike in Matthew, the deficiency here is in their faith. Evidently, they were not even aware of their lack.


The disciples' unawareness of the all encompassing nature of the ministry of Jesus is revealed by this pericope. Mothers were bringing their children for Jesus to bless them. The disciples, without any apparent reason, began to rebuke them. Mark alone says that when Jesus discovered their actions he became indignant. He demanded that the children be allowed to come to him unobstructed. He then proceeded to teach a lesson concerning the kingdom, using the children as teaching aids.


Following an encounter with a man who had wanted to know the essentials of salvation, Jesus remarked to the disciples that it was difficult for those who possessed riches to inherit the kingdom of God. Mark alone says that the disciples became amazed at his words. Jesus repeated the statement and re-emphasized it with a metaphor concerning the camel and the needle's eye. Mark says they became exceedingly amazed and began to wonder to themselves concerning who could be saved (cf. Matt 19:25).

Jesus responded by suggesting that while there are impossibilities with man, all things are possible with God. Peter remarked that they had left all things to follow him. Jesus then outlined that there are present and future rewards of discipleship.
Here the disciples are depicted as being unable to comprehend the teaching of Jesus even after it had been re-emphasized. They are revealed also as uncomprehending men. Peter is seen as speaking out of turn to solicit commendation for their sacrifices in regard to discipleship.


After Jesus had partaken of the Last Supper with his disciples, they sang a hymn and departed to the Mount of Olives. During the journey Jesus predicted their response to his suffering, reinforcing his point with Zech 13:7. Once again Peter acted as spokesman for the group. He assured Jesus that though everyone else should fall away he most assuredly would not. Jesus responded to him by predicting his threefold denial. Peter became more adamant and declared his willingness to die rather than deny his Lord. According to Mark and Matthew, his statement was endorsed by the other disciples. Here are depicted men who are unwilling to learn, who mistrust their Master’s judgment, and who lack the capacity for self-evaluation.


This pericope describes the events in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to the arrest of Jesus. Jesus took the disciples to the garden. He left some in one location and invited them to sit and pray. He took Peter, James, and John with him further on in the garden. He explained to them his extremely sorrowful state and invited them to watch with him. He himself went a little further away to pray. His expression and demeanor, as described by Mark, suggest that he was in need of support.

After he had prayed for a while, Jesus returned and found the disciples
sleeping. They had failed him in his hour of greatest need. Mark alone says he asked Peter if he was sleeping. He agrees with Matthew that Jesus reprimands Peter, questioning whether he could not have watched for just one hour with him. Two more times he departed and returned to be confronted with their failure as demonstrated in their slumber. On the second occasion, Mark and Matthew offer an explanation for their failure. They state that the disciples were asleep because their eyes were heavy. Mark alone says, however, that they did not know how to answer him. Following the third failure, Jesus asked them if they were sleeping and taking their rest. He then told them that the hour was late and that his betrayer was at hand. He, therefore, invited them to prepare for departure.

The disciples are thus seen as unreliable followers who could not be depended upon in a crisis. When they were needed most by him, upon whom they could always have depended, they failed him. Their insensitivity and lack of comprehension therefore become evident.


This passage demonstrates the fact that Jesus was betrayed by one of his close associates, Judas, and was forsaken by the rest of the Twelve. In keeping with his prearranged plan, Judas kissed Jesus and exclaimed, "Master!" Jesus was seized by his enemies and his disciples all forsook him and fled (ἀφεντες αὐτὸν ἐφυγον πάντες). Peculiar to Mark is the story of a would-be follower who also fled. Jesus was left completely abandoned and forsaken. Some interpreters see their action as marking the end of their discipleship.¹

They do present a dismal picture, revealing themselves as unreliable, fearful, uncomprehending cowards. Interestingly, Mark does not identify them. He just uses a plural verb and leaves his readers to make the identification by deduction.


After Jesus’ arrest and the flight of his followers, Mark, like Matthew and Luke, identifies Peter as one disciple who relented and followed his Master from a distance. He followed to the place of trial but did not identify with his teacher. Instead, he associated with the guards. As he sat with them, he was three times identified as a follower and disciple of Jesus, and three times he denied it. The first time he said he neither knew nor understood what the servant said. Besides, he changed his location to perhaps avoid being identified again. But the servant again discovered and identified him. This time also he denied knowledge of his master. At his third identification Peter was overcome and perhaps resorted to that which would most convince his accusers of his innocence. Not only did he refer to Jesus as “this man” but he invoked a curse upon him.¹ As such Peter fulfilled the prediction of Jesus (Mark 14:32-42 and pars.) and revealed how unreliable and lacking in understanding he was.²


²Weeden, Mark: Traditions in Conflict, pp. 38-39, says that it was his denial that marked the total rejection of Jesus and his Messiahship by the disciple.

Kelber uses this text to condemn the disciples. He notes that the insiders, the disciples, failed in that none of them was present to bury their Teacher. It was the outsider, Joseph of Arimathea—a representative of the forces of destruction who had voted to condemn him—who buried him.¹

Perhaps this charge of Kelber is too severe. While it is true that none of the close followers (male) was present, and while it is true that Joseph was not a member of the inner circle, Mark specifically states that: (1) Joseph was a respected member of the council who looked for the coming of the kingdom (Matthew says he was also a disciple of Jesus and Luke calls him a righteous man who was looking for the kingdom); (2) two female disciples, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Joses, saw where Jesus was buried.

What may be deduced from Mark’s witness is that the close followers of Jesus deserted him. They did not think of assisting in ensuring that he had an honorable burial. Consequently, his burial was watched by the women and was attended to by one who was perhaps on the fringes, since he had not yet openly confessed him as Lord.


Very early on the first day of the week the women arrived at the tomb to embalm the body of Jesus. Upon their arrival, they discovered the empty tomb and were addressed by a young man in white apparel. They were amazed at the spectacle but the youth sought to allay their fears and informed them of the resurrection. He told them to inform the disciples, and Peter,

¹Kelber, Mark’s Story of Jesus, p. 83.
that Jesus was gone ahead of them to Galilee where they were to meet him. Mark alone says that the women left the tomb trembling with fear. He even says that they did not say anything to anyone for they were afraid (καὶ οὐδὲν ἐφοβοῦντο γὰρ [cf. Luke 24:5]).

If this is indeed the genuine conclusion of the Gospel as some claim, then the disciples are indeed left in an awful and pitiable situation. They have abandoned Jesus. He died friendless. The women displayed the same qualities, for they too because of fear failed to deliver the crucial message from Jesus which represented a last effort for reconciliation.

Conclusion

The picture of the disciples that emerges from the Gospel of Mark is composite. It is neither completely negative nor completely positive. The disciples, according to Mark, were selected by Jesus himself. In response to his call they forsook relatives, livelihood, friends, and immediate family to follow him and receive instructions.

They did not receive a sudden transformation by this relationship. They remained very human. They reflect lack of insight, lack of comprehension, hardness of heart, fear, blindness, deafness, insensitivity, inability to transfer learning, unreliability, and stubbornness. Despite these failures, they


2 Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, p. 84. See also idem, The Kingdom in Mark, p. 146.
remained with him and shared his mission. They successfully performed exorcisms and healings. They displayed the ability to detect problems and even offer solutions, whether acceptable or not.

According to Mark, the disciples had problems in accepting the type of Messiahship Jesus taught. Consequently, they were totally unprepared for the events in Jerusalem. This lack of understanding and preparation resulted in their failure to support their Master, when that support was most urgently needed in Gethsemane. Besides, it resulted in their forsaking him, fleeing at his arrest, and in Peter's denial. This, however, was not the end for them. Just as Jesus had predicted before the passion, they were summoned to a reunion in Galilee. Despite the fact that, for unknown reasons, Mark does not presently contain that reunion, their summoning to it leaves a positive note of the disciples and Peter in the Gospel.

The Matthean Portrait of the Disciples

The Matthean portrait of the disciples has been ignored by scholarship, or has primarily been seen as a revision of Mark's. A thorough investigation of the Matthean portrait needs to be conducted, so it can be ascertained whether past conclusions are justified, and whether there are, in fact, concepts and ideas regarding the disciples that are unique. An attempt to construct such a portrait is being made here. Like the Marcan portrait above, it proceeds by viewing the positive image first and then the negative.

The Positive Portrait of the Disciples in Matthew


Like Mark, Matthew's portrait of the disciples begins with the call of the first two disciples. Matthew's call to discipleship also fits into a specific
pattern which answers the questions: Where? Who? and What? and gives the call and response. This Gospel also notes that a promise was made to the first two disciples.

Following the arrest of John the Baptist and his preaching in Galilee, Jesus arrives by the sea of Galilee (where). There he sees two brothers, "Simon who is called Peter and his brother Andrew" (who). Matthew says they were casting a net, that is, they were fishing (what), since they were fishermen. Jesus extends the call to them by saying: Δεῦτε ὁπίσω μοι (follow after me). As in Mark, a word of promise follows this call. Jesus tells them: ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἀλείπτων ἀνθρώπων (I will make you fishers of men). Here also their response is immediate. They leave everything and follow him thus sacrificing their livelihood.

Just as was seen in Mark, a second call narrative (vss. 21-22) is closely associated with the first. Matthew says that as Jesus continues along by the sea (where), he sees two other brothers, James and John (who) in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their nets (what). Matthew says his call received an immediate response, as they unhesitatingly leave the boat and their father to follow him. Mark says Jesus immediately calls them and they leave their father (cf. Matt 4:21-22 where Matthew says Jesus calls them and they immediately leave). The witness is that they, too, sacrifice livelihood and filial relations to follow Jesus.

The picture projected here by Matthew is that the disciples did not initiate their relationship with Jesus. He extended the invitation to those whom he would. The disciples therefore were chosen. They, however, exercised their power of choice. The Evangelist hints at the fact that there was no
previous relationship between Jesus and those chosen, yet they instantaneously responded to his call. They did not view the severing of relationships with family, friends, and business as significant obstacles. They forsook all and followed him and became his disciples.

The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount

These two verses constitute the introduction to what has come to be called the Sermon on the Mount. The context suggests that a crowd was present, but that the teaching on the nature of his kingdom was directed to, or intended for, the disciples. Matthew specifically states that the design of the sermon was for teaching (vs. 2; cf. Luke 6:20). He employs the verb ἐδίδασκεν which leaves no doubt as to his intent. He opened his mouth and began to teach. Besides, Matthew notes that Jesus sat down to teach, which implies that he assumed the posture of a Jewish Rabbi.

In his first major discourse, Matthew identifies Jesus as a teacher. He thereby implies that the disciples are capable of receiving instruction. The


3See Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:38, and Gundry, pp. 66.

4Gundry made the suggestion that the sermon was taught to disciples since for Matthew the crowds and the disciples are one and the same. For this interpretation he employs Matt 4:25 which notes that a crowd followed after Jesus. He sees "following" implying discipleship. See Gundry, pp. 64-66.
content of the teaching seems to have centered around the demands of the
kingdom, qualifications, and demands of discipleship for those in preparation
for the kingdom.


Following his experience in the country of the Gaderenes, Matthew says that Jesus went to his own city, i.e., Capernaum, passed by the customs office (where) and saw the collection officer (who), the first Gospel is unique in calling him Matthew, seated (what). Extending the call to him Jesus says: ἀκολούθει μου (follow me). Here, as in Mark, the response is immediate. He rises and follows Jesus (Luke says he forsakes everything).

Again Matthew, like Mark, conveys the idea that the call was extended without any prior contact. Jesus met the tax collector and extended the call to him. The latter accepted the invitation and obediently followed, thus becoming a disciple.


This chapter deals with the mission of the twelve disciples and with the preparation Jesus prescribed for the mission. David Hill rightly observes that the designation Twelve is abruptly introduced in 10:1.¹ This appears to be so, for unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew does not record the choosing of the

¹David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 82. Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:77, observes that the use of the article at this first introduction of the group implies that it was already in existence.
Twelve. Their first mention thus assumes their existence as a group who have already been chosen and have already established an ongoing relationship with Jesus.

At the beginning of the chapter Matthew states that Jesus called the Twelve disciples and: (1) gave them authority both to master unclean spirits and to exorcise them; (2) gave them power to heal diseases and infirmities; and (3) sent them to minister to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. On their mission, endowed with authority, they were to: (1) proclaim the impending kingdom; (2) heal the sick; (3) raise the dead; (4) cleanse the lepers; and (5) cast out demons.

In his instructions to them Jesus acknowledged that they were going out on a dangerous mission. He described it graphically for them. They were to be as sheep in the midst of wolves. They were to expect to be delivered up to councils, to be flogged, and dragged before governors and kings. Despite these hazards, Jesus had confidence in their endurance to commission them for the mission. Notwithstanding the treacherous nature of the mission, the disciples consented to go. Jesus seems, therefore, to have had much confidence in the disciples’ abilities. It also seems that, on their part, the disciples were impressed with their Master and were willing not only to participate in his mission but to take risks for it.

The confidence that Jesus had in the disciples is further seen in vss. 40 and 42. There Matthew says Jesus stated that the reception the disciples would receive would be comparable to that he would have received. Further-

1 Gundry, p. 181, detects in this pericope a uniting of Mark’s choice and mission of the Twelve.

more, he said that the person who demonstrated kindness to a disciple, and recognized him as such, would be rewarded by him.

The Twelve were thus called, commissioned, and given authority. Jesus expressed confidence in their abilities and entrusted them with a difficult mission. They received instructions for their work, and those who help them on their mission are seen as aiding their Master and are promised rewards.

Matt 12:46-50: Jesus' Mother and Brothers

Matthew states that on one occasion as Jesus was speaking to the people, a man\(^1\) told him that his mother and brothers were on the outside wishing to speak to him. Matthew, who alone mentions the disciples in this setting (cf. Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21), does not include, like Mark, that they attempted to stop his mission. He simply says that they desired to speak to him. He also does not mention the intended subject. He states that upon hearing of the request Jesus stretched his hands to his disciples and declared that they were his mother and brothers. Jesus goes on to say that those who did his Father's will are the ones who qualify to be his relatives. From this can be deduced the idea that faithful disciples can serve as replacements, in filial relations, for unbelieving relatives.


After Jesus told the parable of the Sower, his disciples asked him for his rationale for speaking to the multitudes in parables. Jesus responded that

---

\(^1\) In GThom 99 it is the disciples who told Jesus that his brothers and mother are outside. In his response Jesus said to the disciples: "Those here who do the will of my Father are my brothers and my mother. It is they who will enter the kingdom of my Father." This comment seems directed at the disciples and speaks positively of them. See also GEbi 5.
disciples qualify to know the secrets of the kingdom. This response lifts disciples above, and separates them apart from the crowds. It suggests that Matthew, like Mark, sees them as qualifying for initiation into the mysteries of the kingdom.

In the latter part of this passage (vss. 12-16), after quoting Isa 6:9-10, the disciples are described as blessed since they are privileged to see and hear sights and sounds that prophets longed to see and hear. This statement, peculiar to Matthew, should perhaps be linked with the ministry of Jesus, especially in the light of 11:4-6. The disciples are seeing his miracles and are hearing his instructions. They are experiencing the blessings that others, especially John the Baptist, had anticipated but were not privileged to experience.


Following the death of John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to a lonely place. Matthew says that the crowds saw him depart in the boat and followed him on foot. He had spent the day healing their sick and it began getting late. The disciples reflected some insight, in that they observed the lateness of the hour and the famished condition of the people. They, therefore, brought the matter to the attention of Jesus.

There are two other noteworthy factors in this experience. First, not only did they bring the matter to Jesus' attention, but they also proposed a solution to the problem, though their solution was unacceptable. Secondly, when Jesus rejected their solution and commanded them to feed the people, they acknowledged, albeit without enthusiasm, that they had five loaves and two small fishes available. They gave what they had to Jesus and assisted him
in feeding the hungry multitude. Their discernment and willingness to aid Jesus are among the positive qualities that are demonstrated in this pericope.


With this pericope Jesus and his disciples are in the district of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus questioned the disciples regarding the peoples' conception of him. Jesus had apparently expected them to have gathered opinions from their interaction with the people. His notion was not false, for they had picked up some intelligence. When they had shared these with him, Jesus further inquired concerning their perception of him.

Peter spoke on behalf of the group and confessed Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζωντος (You are the Messiah the son of the living God). Jesus then responded that his perception resulted from divine revelation. This response as well as the following comments (vss. 18-19) are peculiar to Matthew.

This pericope also enhances the positive perception of the disciples. It reveals that they were in tune with the public perception of Jesus. In addition, the fact that Peter, speaking on behalf of the group, displayed knowledge of Jesus' identity suggests that there was some growth in their understanding. Comprehension was apparently taking place, if only partially and slowly. Besides, the fact that Jesus commended Peter and his companions and gave responsibilities to them, suggests that he regarded them as trustworthy.


Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple. His disciples pointed out to him the building of the temple. He then predicted its destruction.
Later that day, as they sat on the Mount of Olives, the unnamed disciples (as in Luke) asked Jesus about the destruction of the temple and the signs of the end of the world. These specific questions regarding eschatology demonstrate that some degree of comprehension regarding the teaching of Jesus had in fact taken place. They wanted to pursue the implications of his remarks about the temple.


According to this pericope the disciples observed that the day of Unleavened Bread had arrived, and that there were no preparations being made. They, therefore, went to Jesus to inquire where the preparations were to be made. He, like Mark and unlike Luke, credits the disciples with making this timely observation. It is significant that they did not cast blame at each other, but sought to be part of the solution to the perceived problem, in that they volunteered to make the needed preparations.

Jesus responded by giving the location. Unlike Mark, Matthew does not say that two disciples were sent. He simply says that the disciples went. It is also significant that he does not say the Twelve disciples, simply όι μαθηταῖ (the disciples). This leaves open the whole question of the number of disciples that went to make the preparations. Here then are men of insight who could discern a problem, volunteer to solve it, and successfully carry out the assigned task.

Matt 26:32 (cf. Mark 14:28): Anticipated (Meeting) in Galilee

See the discussion on the Marcan passage.1

1See above, p. 91.

The first Gospel climaxes positively for the disciples. The Evangelist notes that the angel who had met the women at the tomb sent them to inform the disciples about the resurrection and the meeting in Galilee. The women, female disciples, departed quickly as they were bidden. Mathew alone says they departed with fear and great joy as they ran to tell the disciples. Their joyful haste to inform the others was halted, however, by an appearance of the resurrected Lord. His eagerness to meet his disciples, despite their failures, is revealed by his repetition of the message concerning the meeting in Galilee.

Matthew further states that the eleven disciples went as they had been bidden to the mountain in Galilee. There they met Jesus and worshipped him. Though some of them doubted, disbelief is not the last word of the Gospel. The last word is that of enabling and commissioning, as Jesus authorized his disciples to be his representatives making disciples in all nations. This positive ending attests to the restoration of the relations between Jesus and his disciples. It demonstrates that the failures of the close associates of Jesus were not fatal, for prior to his ascension Jesus met with them and commissioned them to be his representatives to all nations.

The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Matthew

Most scholars believe that Matthew corrected Mark's portrait of the disciples by making them understand. This is in striking contrast to their lack of understanding in Mark.¹ This notion has become so entrenched that few

118

scholars have ventured for an unbiased examination of the Matthean material.

In this next section an attempt is made to demonstrate that the seemingly negative image of the disciples persists also in the first Gospel. The passages in which the disciples appear in contexts of incomprehension are considered systematically.


Jesus and his disciples went on board a boat to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to gain a respite from the crowds. While they were crossing, a great storm arose on the sea. The waves were great and it seemed that the boat would be inundated. Despite the ferocity of the waves and the desperation of the disciples, Jesus was asleep.

In their fear, the disciples awoke him saying Κύριε, σῶσον, ἀπολλύμεθα (“Lord, save us at once [aorist], we are perishing [present linear]). On awaking, Jesus demanded of them τί δειλοῖ ἔστε (Why are you fearful?), addressing them as ὀλιγόσιατοι (men of little faith, unique to Matthew). He then arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. This resulted in a great calm. The disciples’ reaction to this first nature miracle in this Gospel is interesting. Matthew says that they marvelled wondering τίταπαρ ἐστὶ σῶτος δι τι καὶ οἴ ἄνεμοι καὶ ἡ θάλασσα αὐτῷ ὑπακούονσιν; (what manner of man [cf. Mark 4:41 and Luke 8:25b] is this that both the winds and the sea obey him?).

The impression is given that the disciples are fearful men, who are unable to withstand adversity. Besides, Jesus charges them with an insufficiency of faith. They also marvelled at his power over nature questioning what manner

---

1So, Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:69.
of man he was. They, therefore, reflect some incomprehension of Jesus and of his power—as in Matt 15:33.

**Matt 13:36, 51: Incomprehension of the Parables**

The context of these verses (unique to Matthew) is the discourse with a number of parables. Following the first parable, that of the Sower, the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. Jesus gave them an answer substantiated by a quotation from Isa 6:9-10. He then commended them for having eyes which see and ears which hear. Unlike Mark, no question requesting explanation of the parable is asked by the disciples, though Jesus proceeded to explain it and went on to tell them other parables.

In vs. 36, Mathew informs his readers that Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples followed him, and upon their entry did not request him to explain the parable of the Sower, as in Mark, but the parable of the Weeds. He acquiesced, and in addition, told them three other parables. After this, Jesus asked them "Do you understand all these things?" (Συνηκατε ταυτα παντα;) They responded in the affirmative.

Those who support Marcan priority see in these two verses Matthew's attempt to correct Mark's uncomprehending picture of the disciples.¹ Perhaps there is another way to see these verses, especially since it cannot be firmly established that Matthew utilized Mark in producing his Gospel.

Matthew's statement, that the disciples went to Jesus and requested explanation of the parable of the Tares, reflects his awareness that the disciples did not comprehend the parables. Furthermore, the question in vs. 51,

"Have you understood all these things?," also suggests awareness of possible incomprehension, despite the affirmative response. Had Jesus been fully aware of their perfect vision and hearing, he would not have needed to ask that question. Kingsbury suggests that Matthew’s purpose is to project an image of "the disciples, i.e. the church . . .(as) indeed capable of understanding the message of Jesus."¹ The fact remains that Matthew has not eradicated all traces of the disciples’ incomprehension.

Matt 14:22-33 (cf. Mark 6:45-52): Walking on the Water

Subsequent to the feeding of the five thousand men and their kin, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and proceed to the other side of the lake. After dismissing the crowds, he went up into the hills to pray alone. By the time he finished praying, it had grown very late. A storm had developed on the sea and the disciples were fighting a contrary wind. Sometime after three o’clock in the morning, Jesus appeared to them walking on the sea. They became terrified, taking him to be a ghost. Matthew alone says they cried out for fear. Their fears only subsided when he spoke, saying: Be of good cheer, it is I, stop being afraid (θαρσέτε, ἐγώ εἰμι μη φοβεῖσθε).

Verses 28-31, unique to Matthew, pick up the impulsiveness² of Peter. Recognizing his Master, Peter asked to be allowed to join him on the water. Hendricksen views the εἰ εὖ εἰ (if it is you) not as expressing doubt, but as conveying the idea of "since."³ He is probably correct, for it is a first class  

¹Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13, pp. 125-126.
³Hendricksen, Matthew, p. 601.
condition and thus emphasizes the reality of the idea. Lenski translates it "if it is, as it is indeed."  

The Lord granted the request. Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water, actually arriving close to Jesus. Matthew says, however, that when Peter saw the wind his faith gave way to fear and he began to sink. He, therefore, cried out to his Master and asked him to save him. Jesus charged him with possessing little faith and with doubting. They got into the boat and the winds subsided. When the other disciples saw what happened, they worshipped Jesus, confessing that he was truly the Son of God.  

The picture of the disciples is that of terrified, fearful men who still feared ghosts. Peter is the impulsive spokesman for the group. Despite his attempt at expressing faith, he is portrayed as a fearful doubter and a man of little faith.

Matt 15:10-17 (cf. Mark 7:14-18): Incomprehension of a Statement on Defilement

The immediate background to this passage seems to be the incidents following the coming of the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem to Jesus. They were concerned with the fact that Jesus' disciples were not faithfully adhering to the tradition of the Elders. After his response he calls the people

\[1\]


\[2\]

Robinson, *Matthew*, p. 131 suggests that perhaps this confession is an addition to the tradition. While this is a possibility, it should be noted that this is not a confession of the Messiahship. Rather, it is a recognition of his divine origin. More will be said below regarding the relationship of the control of the raging sea as a sign of divinity.
to him and appeals to them to hear and understand his statement concerning that which defiles.

Some time later his disciples informed him that the Pharisees were offended by his statement. Following Jesus' response in which he classifies the Pharisees as blind guides, Peter, apparently speaking on behalf of all the disciples, asked him to explain the parable to them (in Mark it is the disciples who ask about the parable). Jesus' question to them are you also still without understanding? (ἀκμὴν καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσυννείοι εἰστε;) implies that they, like some other group (perhaps those outside), were not understanding. Implicit in the statement, as well, is the idea that they had not been understanding in the past, but ought to have improved in their comprehension. The idea is conveyed by Matthew's peculiar use of ἀκμὴν (still) His second question, "do you not know that..." (οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι...), indicates also that they were bereft of insight and the ability to grasp. The Pharisees were termed as blind guides, but the juxtapositioning of these inadequacies of the disciples next to the charges against the Pharisees, could be significant.

Feeding the Four Thousand

Jesus had been in the hills of Galilee in the region of the sea. For three days the people had listened to him without interruption. They had also seen some of their company restored to health. They were so absorbed that they forgot about their physical needs. However, Jesus thought of their need, called his disciples, and explained the situation to them.

1 This statement is substantiated by the fact that Peter asked that the parable be explained ἡμῖν, and also by the fact that Jesus' response is in the plural.

2 Robertson, Word Pictures 1:124.
The response of the disciples is the usual one. They display lack of faith, lack of experience, and incomprehension of Jesus' power. Their question, unique to Matthew (cf. Mark 8:1-4): "where are we to get so much bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" (πόθεν ἡμῖν ἐν ἐρημίᾳ ἄρτοι τοσοῦτοι ὡστε κορτάσαι ὄχλον τοσοῦτον;), demonstrates their lack of growth and their inability to perceive, as well as their failure to retain learning. Despite a similar experience in the feeding of the five thousand they still remain uncomprehending—as in Mark 8:4.

Matt 16:5-12 (cf. Mark 8:14-21): Incomprehension of a Statement About Leaven

Jesus and the disciples had crossed the lake. When they arrived on the other side, they discovered that they had forgotten to take bread with them. Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Due to their inability to comprehend, they failed to grasp his meaning and began a discussion among themselves regarding their failure to have brought bread.

Becoming aware of their discussion, Jesus calls them men of little faith (οἶχοιοιαροι), unique to Matthew, and questions their rationale for a discussion concerning a shortage of bread. He then asks them "do you not yet understand?" (οὐδὲν νοεῖτε;) which seems to indicate that he had, in fact, expected them to understand and was not pleased with their deficiency. He then proceeds to ask them three other pointed questions concerning their "intellectual dullness." He asks them: "Do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves

1 Ibid.
of the four thousand, how many baskets you gathered? How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread?" (σοῦ δὲ μνημονεύετε τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους τῶν πεντακισχιλίων καὶ πόσους κοφίνους ἐλάβετε; σοῦ τοὺς ἐπτὰ ἄρτους τῶν τετρακισχιλίων καὶ πόσας σπυρίδας ἐλάβετε; πῶς σὺ νοεῖτε ὅτι σὺ περὶ ἄρτων εἶπον ψέυδε;). Matthew, unlike Mark, does not provide answers to these questions. Instead he repeats the warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and notes, unlike Mark, that the disciples became aware, following it, that he was not speaking of the leaven of bread but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Τότε συνήκαν (then they understood) could perhaps be seen as a Matthean addition, written later from the standpoint of understanding. If it indeed belongs to the tradition, then behind it can be seen the fact that the disciples had lacked understanding. For it was not until after an "elaborate rebuke and an explanation,"\(^1\) plus a repetition of the question, that they finally understood. The disciples are thus portrayed as uncomprehending, lacking in perception, wanting in faith, and possessing an unreliable memory. The picture here presented is no less dismal than that in Mark.

**Matt 16:21-23 (cf. Mark 8:31-33):**

**The First Passion Prediction**

Following Peter's confession of his Messiahship, Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his passion. His first statement shocked them. As in Mark, the impulsive Peter immediately spoke up. After making this confession and receiving Jesus' commendation, he proceeded to rebuke his Master. His statement "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you" is unique to Matthew. Jesus, however, rebuked Peter, called him Satan, and told him he was a stumbl-

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 129.
ing block (Mark does not include this latter statement). Peter is here presented as an instrument of the devil and as out of place. In this latter position he blocked Christ's path. The statement "for you are not on the side of God but of man" is significant. Peter's confession was by divine inspiration; his added remarks, however, were human. Since the unaided human will tends toward the evil, then Peter is an instrument of the devil, for he is not on God's side. Jesus then utilized the opportunity to make a statement on discipleship.

This pericope thus confirms the failure of the disciples in general, and Peter's in particular. They display reluctance to accept the idea of a suffering Messiah. They have not yet grasped the true significance of his mission and they were unwilling to accept the information concerning it which he shared with them.


Six days after Peter and his fellow disciples confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to a secluded mountain. Matthew says he was transfigured before them, as both his face and garments shone with brilliance. They were joined by Moses and Elijah, who had a discussion with him. Peter, the apparent spokesman for the group, then addressed the opportune nature of the occasion and the possible propriety of erecting tabernacles for the distinguished guests. As in Luke, his speech was interrupted by a voice from a bright cloud which overshadowed them. The voice from the cloud identified Jesus as "My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased," and commanded them to listen to him (ακούετε αὐτοῦ). This occurrence caused the disciples to fall on their faces in fear (peculiar to Matthew). Jesus had to reassure them, advising them not to fear.
This is a very revealing pericope. First, the interruption of Peter's speech could indicate that his speech was ill timed. Being impulsive, he did not wait for a correct understanding of the situation before speaking. Consequently, he was out of context. Second, the fact that the voice invited the disciples to listen to Jesus highlights the fact that they were not listening. The voice could therefore be calling to their attention the fact that listening is a necessary prerequisite of comprehension. It could be inviting them to listen to Jesus even when he spoke about death.\(^1\) This invitation, therefore, could also serve as a rebuke to Peter for his refusal to listen to the prediction of Jesus' death and his attempt to console Jesus.\(^2\)

The disciples are thus revealed as impulsive men who lack understanding of what is transpiring around them, through ignorance and refusal to listen. Again they display fear, though awe is perhaps included. Fear must be seen especially in the light of Jesus' words μη φοβεῖσθε. "He would certainly not prevent them from having awe.

The disciples' lack of understanding is revealed further by their question, "Why do the scribes say that it is necessary for Elijah to first come?" Matthew reinforces this lack of comprehension by his statement τότε συνήκαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἵνα... (then the disciples understood...) vs. 13. This statement attests that Matthew knew the fact of the incomprehension of the disciples. Furthermore, the command of Jesus that they refrain from disclosing to any one what they had seen could imply that they should await full comprehension before beginning to share such information. This would then be another indi-

\(^1\)Perhaps this is the implication of the location of this incident six days after that at Caesarea Philippi.

cation of the disciples' incomprehension and Matthew's awareness of it.


One of the deficiencies of the disciples is brought out in this passage. As Jesus and the three descended from the Mount of Transfiguration, a father approached him and requested mercy for his epileptic son. He had brought the boy to the disciples, but they had been unable to heal him. Jesus, after making reference to the faithlessness of the then generation, healed the boy. Following the incident, the disciples privately inquired about their inability to heal the boy. Unlike in Mark where their inability is attributed to lack of prayer, Matthew blames their lack of success to their possession of "little faith." They seem not to have possessed faith as large as a grain of mustard seed, for while that would have been able to move a mountain, theirs was inadequate to heal a sick boy (vs. 20).

Here then are depicted men, called by the Great Teacher, who had been associating with him for some time, and who had been given authority over unclean spirits and to heal every disease, yet, who could not heal this devil-possessed boy. Furthermore, despite the instructions they had been receiving, they were not even able to recognize their deficiency.


The disciples' insensitivity to human needs and their failure to understand the scope of Jesus' ministry are emphasized here. Relatives began bringing children to Jesus for him to bless and to pray for them. The disciples, for no apparent reason, rebuked them. This action made Jesus unhappy. He, therefore,
commanded the disciples to stop preventing them and continued pronouncing benedictions on them.

The open rebuke of the disciples here is noteworthy. Their failure and lack of understanding must have been very substantial to warrant Jesus' response. This pericope thus says much concerning their lack of growth in understanding.


Following the departure of the rich young man who desired knowledge regarding the essentials for eternal life, Jesus told his disciples about the difficulties a rich man had to enter the kingdom. He gave them an illustration involving a saying about a camel and a needle's eye to demonstrate his meaning. The disciples became astonished at his words and inquired, "Who then can be saved?" They apparently had not learned anything from the hasty departure of the young man and perhaps Jesus' words conflicted with their conceptions of the kingdom. Perhaps also, they could not understand who could be saved if a rich man, the recipient of the rewards for having kept the law, could not.

Jesus assured them that what was impossible with man was possible with God. This response demonstrates the fact that they were again operating on the purely human level and were not open for divine illumination. Again Peter could not remain silent. Before reflecting on Jesus' words, he hastened to add that they, unlike the young man, had forsaken all to follow him. He further inquired about their rewards for their sacrifice. Jesus informed Peter that discipleship had rewards in this life as well as the next. He further warned the disciples that time of acceptance did not give priority to any one.
Matt 26:6-13: The Anointing at Bethany

The lack of understanding of the disciples persisted even to the end. During his last week of public ministry Jesus was at the house of Simon, the leper, in Bethany. While he was there a woman approached him with an alabaster jar of very expensive nard. As he reclined at the table, she poured it on his head.

Matthew ascribes the astonishment expressed in the response to the disciples (Mark has the indefinite "some" of those who were there [14:4]; Luke has "the Pharisee who had invited him" [7:39]). When they saw the woman's action they became indignant. Considering her lavish gift for the Master extravagant, they called it wasteful and suggested that it might have been sold for a large sum of money which could have been donated to the poor.

When Jesus became aware of their reaction, he rebuked them. He told them not to trouble the woman since she had done a beautiful thing for him. He further interpreted her actions as a preparation for his burial. The insensitivity and lack of insight of the disciples are thus further highlighted.


See the discussion of the Marcan parallel.1


Arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus divided the disciples into two groups. The first he told to sit while he went further to pray. The second, consisting of Peter, James, and John, he took along with him. Matthew says that his soul began to be sorrowful and troubled. He told them of his condition and

1Abr...2, p. 103.
invited them to watch with him. He, himself, went a little beyond that point and began to pray.

He returned to them after some time but found them sleeping. He spoke to Peter, inquiring whether they could not have watched even an hour with him. Robertson detects a tone of sad disappointment as Jesus discovered that despite his earnest plea to stay awake, they were sleeping.\(^1\) He then repeated the command for them to watch and pray so they could withstand temptation and went a second time to pray.

On his second return, he found them asleep again. Matthew offers an explanation saying that their eyes were heavy. How unfortunate that their eyes were heaviest on the occasion when Jesus needed them most. He who was ever present in their hour of need could find no help and support from them in his hour of greatest need. He therefore returned the third time to pray. On his final return, he asked them if they were sleeping and taking their rest. He then invited them to arise and depart since his betrayer was approaching.


While Jesus was still speaking to the disciples, Judas, one of the Twelve who had left earlier, brought a great crowd with swords and clubs to Jesus. Utilizing his pre-arranged sign, he kissed Jesus, thereby betraying him. Jesus was thus arrested at the instigation of one of his disciples. When the other disciples saw what was taking place, one of them used a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest’s servant. Jesus chided him, and after his statement to the crowd the disciples forsook him and fled, despite their great plans to

\(^1\)Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 1:213.
follow him to death. They thus show themselves to be cowards.


See the discussion on the Marcan parallel. Mathew has some unique features, however. He alone says Peter's reason for sitting with the guards was due to his desire to see the end. Again he alone says at the third denial Peter denied with an oath and said, "I do not know the man."

Conclusion

The picture of the disciples in Matthew is also composite. They forsook family, friends, and business to be with Jesus and learn from him. They are depicted as men who were called by Jesus and who were entrusted with responsibilities akin to those Jesus himself had. They reflected some growth in their understanding, being able to recognize in Jesus the Son of God and the Messiah. Their concept of Messiahship differed from his, however. They are also seen as men of some insight and initiative. They can recognize problems and offer solutions, though unacceptable. They can accept responsibilities and fulfill assignments.

Despite their close association with Jesus, they remain slow to understand, fearful, impulsive, unwilling to learn, and insensitive. Besides, they were also self-assured and unwilling to listen and learn. As a consequence, they were totally unprepared for the events in Jerusalem, as it affected Jesus and themselves. Matthew occasionally attributes understanding to them after explanations by Jesus. Behind this attempt, however, their incomprehension is clearly visible. In the final analysis, however, their true character is exposed.

1Above, p. 106.
One of them betrayed him, another denied him, and the rest forsook him and fled. If they had indeed comprehended, they ought to have reacted differently.

The Lucan Portrait of the Disciples

Luke's portrayal of the disciples of Jesus, despite the fact that it has been slighted, is valuable. This survey of the Lucan passages follows the pattern already established for the other Synoptists: the positive account is considered first.

The Positive Treatment of the Disciples in Luke


This pericope seems to function, in Luke's Gospel, as the call of the disciples. It appears, however, that there was previous contact between Jesus and the disciples prior to this incident (4:38). The crowds had thronged Jesus as he was standing by the lake. He, therefore, entered Peter's boat and had him move a little from land. From this vantage point he taught the people.

When he had finished teaching them, he invited Simon to move out from the shallow waters into the deep and cast his net for a catch of fish. Simon's address "Master" also suggests previous contact. He informs Jesus that he and his companions had fished all night and had caught nothing. He would obey his command, however. When Simon did, he enclosed a great school of fish which was too large for his nets. When he observed this, he invited his companions, James and John, to come to his aid.

The miracle so overwhelmed Simon that it resulted in introspection. Realizing he was in the presence of someone superior, he was awe struck. He clung to the feet of Jesus and invited him to depart since he, Simon, was a sinful man. Luke attributes this response to fear (θάμως implies wonder
combined with fear) and notes that his companions (including James and John) had a similar reaction.

Jesus' response to the confession and amazement of Simon is remarkable. He said to him μὴ φοβοῦ (don't be afraid) and promised him that from then on his occupation would involve catching men. Though the response was directed at Simon Peter, it apparently included his companions. Luke informs his readers that when they had brought the boats to land they left everything and followed Jesus. These disciples were called, following a miracle by the sea. Schweitzer observes that a call in the imperative is not found, but instead a statement in the indicative. The indicative here does not belong to the disciples. It is Christ's. They follow him after seeing a great miracle and after his statement concerning a change of occupation.


This pericope treats the call of Levi. Unlike the previous call, this one has a definite call in the imperative. Luke says that Jesus went out following his healing of the palsied man. He does not state specifically where he went.


However, on his way he encountered Levi (here he agrees with Mark), a tax collector, sitting in his office. He said to him: 'Ἀκολούθει μοι (follow me). Luke alone says that Levi left everything and followed him.

The disciples are thus pictured in these two call stories as men who did not allow possessions or occupations to prevent them from responding to Jesus' call. They left all their possessions and followed him. Like the others, Luke begins his portrait of the disciples on a positive note. The answers to the questions of where, who, and what are discernible here also, though they are not necessarily pertinent to the argument—whether here or elsewhere.


Luke states that "in these days" Jesus went into the mountain and spent an entire night in prayer. In the morning he called his disciples and chose from them twelve whom he named apostles. The distinct impression is given here that Jesus had a large group of disciples (cf. Mark 3:13-14), for he was able to select twelve from this larger group. Ἐκλέξαμεν ὑμᾶς emphasizes the selecting process and indicates, by being middle, that he himself chose them. Προσεφώνησεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ (he called his disciples) further signifies that the initiative for the choice originated with him.

Luke further states that after Jesus selected these twelve, he designated them apostles.¹ This appellation, derived from the verb ἀποστέλλω, connotes

one who is sent with authority,¹ hence a missionary.² The Twelve selected were the ones he thought capable of being trained for the purpose of being sent out with authority.


After the incident on the mount, Jesus descended to a level place with the Twelve. There was assembled "a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people" from the surrounding regions who were desirous of hearing his instructions and of being healed of their diseases. He healed their diseases and permitted many to touch him. He then "lifted up his eyes on his disciples" and said (cf. Matthew who sets it in a teaching context, Matt 5:1) to them what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Plain.

In this pericope Luke presents two groups of disciples--a select group of twelve and a larger group. The idea that disciples are chosen people is also strengthened by this passage. By the designation ἀπόστολος, Luke indicates that some disciples were capable of being sent out with authority by Jesus. Disciples are also capable of being taught with great expectations.


After Jesus told the parable of the Sower, his disciples inquired concerning its meaning (Luke alone says they inquired "What this parable meant"). The introduction to his answer gives a vital insight relating to the portrait of the disciples. He said to them: "To you has been given knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God." Bornkamm notes that the phrase μυστήριον

²Robertson, Word Pictures, 2:84.
The mystery of the kingdom had been current for some time in apocalyptic usage to designate "the counsel of God which is concealed from human eyes, which is disclosed only by revelation and which will be enacted at the end." As such, the disciples have the ability to perceive the dawn of the Messianic Age and ought to be able to recognize its inbreaking in the person and mission of Jesus. The mystery of the Kingdom, which the disciples had been given, may thus be defined by Jesus, himself, as Messiah.

Disciples are therefore those who have the capacity of receiving information others are incapable of knowing. They are in a privileged position. They know Jesus as the Messiah.

Some negative elements may also be seen in this pericope. Though the mystery of the kingdom had been given them, the disciples had not understood the meaning of the parable. As such it may be construed that they are not acting according to expectations. Though favorably compared with the rest (τοῖς λοιποῖς), they demonstrate incomprehension, for they need private instructions.

Luke 9:1-6, 10a (cf. Mark 6:7-13, 30; Matt 10:1, 5-15): Commissioning the Twelve

When Luke discussed the call of the Twelve, he did not state the nature of the work they would perform. He alone, however, informs his readers in this context that Jesus assembled the Twelve and gave them power (δύναμιν) and authority (ἐξουσίαν) to control demons and to cure diseases. Conzelmann


2Ibid., p. 819.
notes that \( \delta \nu \nu \acute{\alpha} \mu \iota \varsigma \) implies miraculous power.\(^1\) Furthermore, Luke states that they were sent out (\( \acute{\alpha} \nu \varepsilon \sigma \tau \varepsilon \varepsilon i \lambda \varepsilon \nu \) to preach the kingdom and to heal.

Following instructions for the missionary tour, Luke says "they departed and went through the villages, preaching the Gospel and healing everywhere." They returned and told Jesus what they had done. Luke does not record Jesus’ reaction, as in 10:21, but notes that he took them and withdrew to Bethsaida.

The image of the disciples here is of men who are competent. They were entrusted with tasks akin to that of their Master who authorized them to exorcise demons, heal the sick, and preach about the kingdom of God. They had success on their mission, as they preached the gospel and healed everywhere.


Here Luke records the story of a feeding miracle. Following the disciples’ report concerning their experiences on their mission, Jesus withdrew with them to Bethsaida. The crowds found out his location and followed him there. Luke says that he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, as well as healed those who were sick.

Jesus was apparently engrossed in his activities and did not observe the swiftly passing time. Evidently, the people were also absorbed in his instructions, so they too were unaware of the time. Luke says, however, that the disciples noted that it was growing late. They, therefore, went to Jesus, brought the situation to his attention, and even provided a solution to the problem. While their solution was unacceptable and while they seemed to

reflect some amount of incomprehension when they said, "Unless we go and buy food for all this people," they deserve commendation for detection of the problem and for articulating it to Jesus.


In Luke, the feeding of the five thousand is followed by a scene in which Jesus is alone with his disciples praying. Following the prayer, Jesus questioned the disciples regarding the perception people had of him. The disciples provided him with the answers he sought, but he followed up with a more thought-provoking question: "But you, who do you say that I am?" Marshall thinks that this question "implies the inadequacy of the popular estimation of Jesus." While this observation is insightful, an equally profound implication may be discerned in the question. The people and their leaders had formed opinions regarding the identity of Jesus. The disciples were aware of these opinions as their answers portrayed. Jesus, however, was also interested in ascertaining the views that his close associates had formulated concerning him. Perhaps their response was a necessary prerequisite to the future trend of their instructions.

Peter provided an answer to Jesus' question when he asserted on behalf of the group τὸν Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (the Christ of God). His answer speaks positively for the disciples. It suggests that they had recognized Jesus. Some comprehension had, in fact, taken place. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Jesus proceeded to inform them about his impending suffering as well as to instruct them in regard to the cost of discipleship. Their confession of Jesus thus served as prelude to his imparting more vital information to...

\[1^{1}\text{Marshall, } Luke, \text{ p. 366.}\]
them. That is to say, the confession demonstrated their readiness to receive new information.


This pericope, which is unique to Luke, discusses the mission of the seventy (two).¹ Luke says that Jesus appointed seventy (two) others² and sent them two by two. They were sent to all the cities and places where Jesus himself was to come. Among the remarkable things about this mission is the fact that it indicates that the number of Jesus' disciples was large enough to allow a selection process. Furthermore, this large group, like the Twelve apostles, was trustworthy enough to be vested with authority and be sent on missions.

The mission could have been precarious since they were being sent as lambs among wolves.³ They seemed undaunted, however. They received their instructions (vss. 4-16). They accepted the authority to heal the sick and


²Robertson is correct that ἐτέροντα points back to the mission of the Twelve in Galilee, that is to 9:1-6. It could be indicating that the Twelve were not included. Cf. Summers, p. 126, and Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 415.

³The historical accuracy of this mission has been challenged due to its being unique to Luke and also since the contents of the instructions given (vss. 2-3) are similar to those given to the Twelve in Matt 10:16, 37-38 as well as because vs. 4 is similar to 9:3. See ibid., pp. 416-417; Schweitzer, *The Good News According to Luke*, pp. 174-175; cf. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 145 who sees the pericope as a creation of the Post-Easter church.
proclaim the nearness of the Kingdom (in those towns that received them),
then they went out.

Luke does not record their departure, but he mentions their return. He
states that they returned with joy. This was no groundless joy, for they
reported to Jesus that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name.
The response of Jesus is significant. The success of the disciples over the
demons conjured up for him the reality of the final destruction of Satan.
Already in their mission the defeat of the enemy had begun; so he said: "I
see Satan like lightning fall from heaven."

Luke, therefore, pictures the disciples as men who were not afraid to
face challenges; men who could successfully complete a mission and return
joyfully, having won the approval of their Master; men who could be entrusted
with the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over the power of
the enemy without getting hurt. Besides, they were disciples over whose accom­
plishments he could rejoice. Furthermore, they were blessed with eyes and
ears which could perceive for they saw and heard what prophets and kings
desired but failed to attain. They are praiseworthy for they have seen the
signs of God's ultimate power over the devil as was revealed in the defeat of
the demons. Additionally, they were privileged to have lived in the "era of
divine revelations."¹

The Disciples' Request

In this pericope, thought to be part of a section on prayer composed

by Luke,¹ a rather positive picture of the disciples is given in the opening verse. Jesus was praying on an occasion when his disciples were with him. Perhaps the entire group had been impressed with his prayer life and may have discussed it. They may have also discussed the fact that John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray, and they may have observed their inability to pray as their Master did.

Therefore, when Jesus was through praying, one of the disciples (cf. Matt 6:9 where it is Jesus who takes the initiative to) approached him and requested that they be taught to pray as John taught his disciples to pray. Jesus acquiesced and taught them to pray by giving them a model prayer. This was also followed by instructions relevant to prayer.

Luke’s picture here is remarkable. The disciples were able to perform self-evaluation. They had the ability to discern deficiencies and to set about remedying them. This action as outlined here required some amount of understanding on the part of the disciples—of the person, the instructions, and abilities of Jesus.


This passage notes that as Jesus was traveling, large crowds went with him. In his instructions to them Jesus said that any one who would become his disciple had to hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters as well as his own life. In addition, a disciple had to take his cross and follow. This call is one to set priorities right. That is to say, one who would be a disciple ought to be willing to love family, friends, and self less, and to love Christ and the affairs of his kingdom more. The

¹See Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 324. He has been followed by Schweitzer, Good News According to Luke, pp. 190-191.
pericope concludes with a call for those who have ears to hear.

Since Jesus' disciples had been following him, it can be assumed that they had made these sacrifices. As such the disciples are pictured as those who had made the necessary sacrifices. They placed the affairs of the kingdom before family, friends, business, and self.


Luke notes that some were talking about the magnificence of Herod's temple. Jesus then predicted the fall of the temple. Luke states that "they questioned" him concerning the specific timing of these events. Here he differs from Mark (who attributes the question to Peter, James, John, and Andrew) and from Matthew (who attributes it to the disciples). If this was a question of the disciples, or at least some of them, it indicates that they were desirous of receiving additional information. Further, the impression is given that they were not afraid to ask for the additional information that they needed.


See the discussion on Mark 14:12-16 and Matt 26:17-19.\(^1\)


Luke concludes his Gospel on a very positive note for the disciples. He records two resurrection appearances (Luke 24:13-31, unique to Luke, and 24:36-53) and alludes to a third (24:34). On the final appearance Jesus ate with them, taught, explained the implications of scripture for them, commissioned them as witnesses, blessed them, and ascended to heaven in their

\(^1\)See above, pp. 92 and 117.
presence (peculiar to Luke). Most importantly, Luke alone says that he "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" and invited them to remain in Jerusalem for a clothing with power from on high.

Significantly, the last words of the Gospel concern the disciples. Though their resurrected Lord had just departed from them, they were not despondent. Luke concludes with a positive note on their return to Jerusalem with joy and their continuous presence in the temple.

The Incomprehension of the Disciples in Luke

Luke, like Matthew, has been charged with revising Mark’s portrait of the disciples. The standard approach to his material is that of viewing it through the eyes of Mark. This view has been so widely accepted that there has been a consistent neglect of a reproduction of his portrait of the disciples.


Luke states that one day Jesus got into a boat with the disciples and invited them to cross with him to the opposite side of the lake. On the trip Jesus fell asleep. While he was sleeping a storm developed on the lake and the boat fell into danger as it began to take in water. Despite the fact that some of them were fishermen and most had faced a storm on the lake before, they went and woke Jesus exclaiming "Master, Master we are perishing!" - (Επιστάτα ἐπιστάτα, ἀπολλύμεθα). Luke says that when he awoke he rebuked the wind and the raging waves and a great calm followed.

Jesus then reprimanded them for their lack of faith. Their response to

---


2 Ibid., p. 30, 321, 332.
the miracle was surprising. Luke says that they were afraid and marvelled, saying to each other: "Who then is this that he commands the winds and the water and they obey him?" They are thus revealed to be fearful followers who could not withstand adversity and who did not comprehend the person of their Master or his power over nature.

A Woman with a Hemorrhage

Jesus returned from the region of the Gerasenes to the multitude that had been awaiting him. While he was with them he received a request from Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, to attend to his only daughter who was dying. Jesus was apparently followed by the people as he proceeded to the ruler's house. As they were on the way, Jesus suddenly questioned the people to determine who had touched him. When there was no admission of guilt, Peter (in Mark 5:31 the disciples) challenged him about asking such a question when there was such a large crowd surrounding him. Jesus, however, repeated the question and the woman who was responsible, seeking relief from her twelve-year malady, confessed.

Peter must have felt some embarrassment at the final outcome of the episode. He is revealed by it as one who spoke out of turn and without adequate knowledge of the attending circumstances. Jesus' repetition of his question must also have served as a gentle rebuke to Peter, highlighting his ignorance and impetuous character.


Eight days after Peter's confession and Jesus' first passion prediction, Luke says that Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the mountain with him
to pray. As Jesus was praying the appearance of his countenance became altered and his clothing took on a dazzling whiteness. At this juncture he was joined by two men, Moses and Elijah, who spoke to him about his departure\(^1\) (ἐξοδος) which Luke says was to occur in Jerusalem.

Luke alone states that while all this was taking place the disciples struggled to stay awake (vs. 32a). One gets the impression that their view of his glory and his visitors was only dimly perceived through eyes heavily laden with sleep. While still in that state, Peter realized that the visitors were about to depart so he impetuously exhorted his Master to join in building tabernacles. Recognizing the inappropriateness of the suggestion, Luke explains to his readers that Peter did not know what he said. This explanation may reflect views from two perspectives. The first attributes the foolish speech to the overwhelming nature of the experience,\(^2\) and the second views it as a natural result of this sleepy state.\(^3\)

The impression can also be had from Luke's construction that the cloud which overshadowed the disciples was a Divine interruption of Peter's speech. The advent of the cloud also brought fear (ἐφοβηκαὶ) to the hearts of the disciples. Following the entire experience they became solemn. Luke says they kept silent and told no one, in those days, what they had seen.

---


Jesus descended from the mount the following day with his disciples. On descending, they met a crowd that was awaiting them. From the crowd a father cried begging Jesus to heal his son who apparently had been suffering from convulsions, and whom the disciples had been unable to heal. The response of Jesus has been variously understood as directed (1) to all those people present who had failed to demonstrate faith adequate enough for the healing of the boy;¹ and (2) to the disciples, the father, and the crowd.² Perhaps the second point has merits and may be most fitting to the context.

Luke states that Jesus healed the boy and all those present became astonished at "the majesty of God." As the marvelling of both the disciples⁴ and the people continued, Jesus spoke to the disciples. He challenged them with the importance of what he was about to say by inviting them to let his words sink into their ears. He then proceeded to give his second passion prediction. Luke highlights the disciples' incomprehension. He says that they did not understand the saying "as it was concealed from them so they should not perceive it." This seems to be a redactional statement of Luke perhaps designed to protect the disciples. Surprisingly, he adds that though they were

¹Morris, p. 174.
³"All" here could be seen as being very broad and could therefore support the inclusive view.
⁴Leon Morris sees the disciples as the ones who are primarily indicated here. He views Jesus as directing their "attention from the marvelling at everything he did, to the passion." See The Gospel According to St Luke, p. 175.
not cognizant of his meaning they were afraid to ask him about it. Not only therefore do they lack faith and are uncomprehending but they reflect fear of Jesus.


Marshall correctly observes that each passion prediction is followed by data which demonstrates the disciple's inability to understand the teaching of Jesus regarding self-sacrifice.\(^1\) Jesus had just told his disciples about his impending passion. They did not understand and did not seek to have their ignorance enlightened. On the contrary, they began to quarrel about "position and prestige."\(^2\) They were extremely out of context and demonstrated that they had not benefited positively from their close association with Jesus and from his instructions concerning humility and self-sacrifice. Jesus then used a child as a teaching device to demonstrate a lesson of humility for them.

Luke here again demonstrates that the disciples were not listening and learning from Jesus' teaching and instructions. Again, immediately following an important instruction, a totally unrelated incident is brought up by them. This time John was the one who made an ill-timed speech (cf. Mark 9:38). He answered Jesus' instructions concerning humility with a comment about a man whom he had seen exorcising in Jesus' name, but who was not a follower of Jesus. Rather than taking an introspective look following Jesus' words, he began to look at someone else. Jesus answered them by using a parable which suggested that if the man was not against the kingdom, his efforts would


\(^{2}\)Ibid.
enhance it. The disciples at this stage of their development show very little progress.


In this passage the disciples' insensitivity to the feelings and needs of parents and infants is demonstrated. Parents, who wanted their infants to benefit from a benediction conveyed by a touch of Jesus, were bringing these little ones to him. For no apparent reason the disciples kept on rebuking them.

When Jesus became cognizant of their actions, he gave an immediate response to their insensitivity. He called them to him and told them to allow the children to come to him. He further told them to stop preventing them, for the kingdom belonged to those who are as little children.


See the discussion on the parallel passages above.¹


This pericope describes the disciples' response to Jesus' third and most detailed passion prediction. Following his discourse with the ruler who sought information concerning entrance into the kingdom, as well as his comments regarding the difficulty of the rich to gain entrance into the kingdom, Jesus took the Twelve for private instruction. He told them they were going to Jerusalem and all the predictions of the prophets regarding him would be fulfilled. He gave detailed information concerning the treatment he would receive, the mockery and shameful treatment, the fact that he would be spat

¹Mark, see pp. 107-108.
upon, scourged, and killed, but would rise again on the third day. Despite the apparent clarity of this prediction, Luke alone states that the disciples did not understand or grasp what he said. He says that the meaning was hidden from them. Again, Luke seems to be protecting the disciples. If, as was suggested earlier, they belonged to the group to whom it was given to know the secrets of the kingdom, then there was no reason why the meaning of the saying should be hidden from them. The distinct impression is given here that they are extremely uncomprehending. They were apparently not listening to Jesus or they were tuning out the information he was giving them. It appears that something more visible and dramatic was required to aid their understanding. It is noteworthy that Luke follows this picture of the disciples with a passage which has a blind man who received his sight calling Jesus "Son of David" and glorifying God.

Luke 22:3-6 (cf. Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-12): Judas' Plot

Luke emphasizes here that Judas was one of the twelve disciples, thus a close associate of Jesus. This disciple, however, allowed Satan to enter into him. Consequently, he went and arranged with the chief priests and captains to betray Jesus. He made detailed arrangements including time, place, and reward. The reader is thus not left uninformed but is cognizant of the fact that it was the treachery of one of the disciples, Judas, which finally lead to the arrest of Jesus. Perhaps it should be also noted that Luke included this

---


passage to make up for his relocation of the pericope treating the anointing at Bethany.


Following Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, while they were still at the table, a dispute developed among them. Despite the repeated warnings, instructions, and preparations that Jesus had given concerning the events which would transpire in Jerusalem, the disciples had apparently not caught on. They, apparently, were anticipating the inauguration of Jesus' kingdom. With this in mind, they each had expectations concerning the places of position and authority\(^1\) they would hold, and thus began disputing among themselves concerning who would be the greatest.

Jesus' heart must have grieved when he saw their inability to learn and when he reflected on the brief moments he had left with them. He, therefore, seized the opportunity to instruct them in respect to true greatness, climaxing with his own example. The thrust of his argument contrasted the concept of greatness in the Gentile world with that desired by him for his followers.\(^2\) The impression one gets of the disciples at this stage of the story is very dismal. The reader senses the nearness of the end, but is also aware of the disciples utter unpreparedness for it, despite briefings.


As they sat at table Jesus brought to Peter's attention the fact that he and the others were in danger of falling. The self-assured and impulsive

\(^1\)See Marshall, p. 810.

\(^2\)See Summers, p. 278.
disciple did not take time to contemplate Jesus’ words. Morris observes that he did not take time to recognize either the seriousness of the position, or his own weakness, but brashly declared his readiness to even die with Jesus (a statement peculiar to Luke).¹

Knowing Peter, the Master proceeded to predict his threefold denial. He noted that before the cock crew Peter would thrice deny knowledge of him. The blindness, lack of comprehension, and impetuousness of the disciples are thus brought out in this scene of Jesus with the disciples at the table.


Following the Supper, Luke says that Jesus, as was customary with him, went to the Mount of Olives with the disciples. When he arrived, he instructed them to pray for strength to withstand temptation. He, however, went a stone’s throw from them and began praying. After the agonizing prayer, during which he was strengthened by an angel, he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He reproached² them for sleeping and counselled them to arise and pray so they might withstand temptation.

Once again a very dismal portrait of the disciples is sketched. They are revealed to be weak,³ lacking in faith,⁴ and insensitive.⁵ At this crucial hour of their Master’s need they could not even pray for or encourage him.

¹Morris, p. 309.
⁴Ibid.

While he was still speaking to them Judas, the defector, led a crowd toward Jesus and appeared to kiss him. Jesus questioned him as to whether he would betray him with a kiss. Recalling Jesus’ question concerning swords before they departed from the upper room, the disciples inquired whether or not they should use them in his defense. Luke alone has the disciples ask: "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (vs. 49). Before he could reply, one of them used his sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus had to act quickly to prevent further developments, and he also healed the ear.

The disciples' lack of understanding and impulsive nature are again emphasized. This attempt at armed resistance was contrary to Jesus' nature and the nature of his kingdom, as they ought to have known by this time. His immediate healing of the ear could also have served as a rebuke against them as well as his words "No more of this."


See the Marcan parallel above. Some unique features of Luke's presentation must be noted. In the first denial he tells the woman he does not know Jesus. The second time that he was identified he denied being a disciple, while on the third occasion he refused to even acknowledge understanding of what was said. Interestingly, Luke does not say that Peter cursed or swore.

---

1Ibid., p. 313.
2On p. 104-105.

The lack of faith, incomprehension, and other negative character-istics of the disciples seemed to have persisted beyond the passion, according to Luke. He alone notes that the report of the women concerning the empty tomb was viewed by "the eleven and . . . all the rest" as an idle tale, which they did not believe. It appears that not even the report of the women resulted in recollections of the predictions of Jesus.

Luke further states that despite the information that the two disciples on the way to Emmaus had had, regarding the empty tomb, they had not made the associations with the predictions either. They were therefore still grieving. Even the expounding of the scriptures by the stranger did not aid their slow comprehension. Jesus' apparent annoyance at their slowness can be seen in his words of rebuke: "O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had said." Marshall's suggestion that "O" is an exclamation which implies strong emotion, is supportive of this idea. "Oνόητοι" means unintelligent or foolish, without sense, or not understanding. "Βραδεῖς" implies that they were dull and slow to comprehend or act. This indeed was a very serious indictment against them. Perhaps here are represented the most serious charges brought by Jesus against the disciples. Acceptance of all that the prophets had said might have influenced the disciples to believe

1Marshall, p. 896.
2Ibid.
3Robertson, Word Pictures, 2:293.
4Ibid.
the report of the women.\textsuperscript{1} But their faith was only partial\textsuperscript{2} and it had left them in doubt.

Conclusion

Luke presents the disciples as responding to a special call from Jesus which initiates their relationship with him. The circle of disciples is large. Twelve were chosen from this large group and were made apostles, while seventy (two) others were appointed from it to perform missionary tours. Disciples are portrayed positively and negatively in the Gospel. They forsake family, friends, and business to be with him. They recognize him as the Messiah. They request being taught to pray. They take the initiative in recognizing a problem and even offer a solution. On the other hand, they remain lacking in understanding almost to the very end. Their self-assurance and refusal to listen to instructions made them totally unprepared for the events in Jerusalem.

For Luke, the ignorance and lack of understanding of the disciples persisted beyond the resurrection. Many of them doubted the story of the empty tomb. Jesus charged them with being foolish and slow of heart to believe. The Gospel closes on a positive note for them, however. They were reunited with the Resurrected Lord, whose final instructions and commissioning they received. He even presents them as receiving a parting blessing before the ascension, which actually took place in their presence. His final note on them is one of joy, for "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God."

\textsuperscript{1}Marshall, p. 896.

\textsuperscript{2}Cf. Summers, p. 325.
Summary

The preceding examination of the portrait of the disciples, as depicted in the Synoptic Gospels, has been rather revealing. It has provided overwhelming evidence for a mixed image of the disciples. It also seems to challenge severely any portrayal of the disciples which emphasizes only one aspect of their relationship with Jesus—the negative—or which limits their portrayal to one Gospel—Mark's. This conclusion has been arrived at on the following basis:

1. A comparison of the portrait of the disciples in the three Gospels reveals striking similarities. The instances in which they are basically united in their portrayal are more numerous than those in which they are in disagreement. When the latter are examined, it is discovered that there are approximately seven instances when Mark is unique in painting a negative picture (eight if Mark 16:8 is seen as the original ending of the Gospel), eight instances when Matthew's portrait is more negative than both Mark's and Luke's, and seven times when Luke's negative picture differs from both Mark's and Matthew's. Usually the negative points in Mark are overemphasized, while the portrait of the other two Evangelists are neglected. There are strong similarities in the portrait of the disciples, however.

2. The seven instances unique to Mark can be reduced to five basic


2See Matt 8:27a; Matt 14:26b; Matt 14:27-30; Matt 15:23; Matt 16:8b; Matt 16:11; Matt 16:23c; and 26:72.

charges when repetition or similar occurrences in the other Gospels are considered. Of these five, two (lack of understanding about bread and hardness of heart) appear in Mark 6:49-52 in a context which seems to invite unjustified charges against the disciples. In this passage Mark's case against the disciples would have been stronger if their hearts were hardened so they could not understand the nature miracle. The reference to the loaf here appears to be misplaced.

There seems to be insufficient evidence to warrant a conclusion that Mark was deliberately trying to build a negative portrayal of the disciples. This conclusion is strengthened by Mark's omission of some negative elements which are recorded by Matthew and Luke. It could be argued with greater probability that Mark was dependent on Matthew and Luke and that, had he wanted to conduct a vendetta against the disciples, he could have found more of such material in these sources.

3. Since all three Gospels clearly speak of a positive and a negative picture of the disciples, an unbiased approach which examines each aspect is to be preferred to an approach which highlights one to the neglect of the other.

Despite the evidence which requires a balanced approach to the data, the literature still abounds with the opposite views. The fact is that most Marcan scholars—and others as well—are influenced by their presuppositions. They espouse the two-source hypothesis and believe that Mark was utilized and modified by both Matthew and Luke at points where it contradicted their

1Hardness of heart, lack of understanding about the bread, blindness, deafness, and their keeping their lack of understanding to themselves.
This belief has serious implications for disciple/discipleship studies. The portraits of the other Evangelists become edited versions of Mark which are bereft of elements they thought objectionable, and this was supposedly done at a time when the apostles were held in better esteem. The following assumptions are usually made:

1. Mark's portrait of the disciples is negative.

Weeden is a good representative of this thinking. He suggests that Matthew and Luke either omitted or altered the Marcan passages that demonstrate the ineptness or obdurate nature of the disciples. For him, Mark is conducting a vendetta against the disciples which the first and third Evangelists deliberately modify. This view is challenged by the findings of this chapter.

---

1See Schreiber, pp. 154-155. This comment is based on the English translation of the principles which was done by T. H. Robinson, "The Problem of History in Mark, Reconsidered," *USQR* 20 (1965):134.

2See Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, pp. 28-51. Other espousers of this view are cited in n.2, chap 3 below. To prove his thesis Weeden cites the Matthean and Lucan treatment of such passages as Mark 1:37-38; 4:13; 4:38-41; 6:37; 6:51-52; 9:5-6, 10, 32, 38-41; etc. He sees Mark deliberately ending his Gospel at 16:8 to present the disciples in a negative manner by not having them meet with the Resurrected Lord. The other two Evangelists present, however, a totally different picture.

Basic to Weeden's arguments is his belief that Mark wrote first. But what if he did not? What if he is the one who is making the modifications? If Mark 6:45-52 and Matt 14:22-23 are compared, an interesting picture emerges. Weeden claims that Matthew transformed the astonishment of the disciples into worship and omits the charge of hardness of heart. When the passages are carefully examined one can agree with Weeden that there are indeed rephrasings, rearrangements, and deletions. However, it is equally possible to see Mark as secondary. He omits the section dealing with Peter's walk on the sea. Matthew says; "And when they [Peter and Jesus] got into the boat, the wind ceased." Since he had made the omission (and he usually omits material embarrassing to Peter, cf. Mark 8:31-33 and Matt 16:21-23, where he omits Jesus' statement οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν πέτρος ὁ ὀρείχαλκος (a stumbling block you are to me) and makes
First, the findings seem to negate any notion that the Marcan picture of the disciples is entirely, or even primarily negative. It contends that Matthew and Luke, especially the former, are not alone in depicting a positive picture of the disciples, for Mark too speaks well of them. He represents them as forsaking all, including family, business, and friends to follow Jesus. He shows them to be attentive to his instructions and to be sufficiently interested in his mission to participate successfully in it. He depicts them as displaying initiative as well as willingness to provide solutions to problems.

It is contended here also that while Matthew and Luke, especially the former, present the disciples as comprehending, they are not committed to a strictly positive portrayal of them. Even when on occasion Matthew says, "then they understood,"¹ he is by that very statement admitting a lack of comprehension. The statement suggests that initially the defect was discernible and that the attempts to make them understand were added after the event to soften the shock of the disciples' incomprehension.

The study provides evidence that comprehension by the disciples can

Jesus' rebuke contingent upon his turning and seeing the disciples and, Mark 7:17-18 and Matt 15:12-16 where Mark omits the saying that it was Peter who asked the Lord to explain the parable) he had to rearrange the material. He therefore says: "And he [Jesus] got into the boat with them and the wind ceased." Worship also gave way to astonishment, but most surprising of all is his rationale for the astonishment. For him it was not due to present miracle but to their not understanding about the loaves, and the charge of hardness of heart seems to be out of place. Consequently, Mark could also be seen as the one making the rearrangements and deletions.

A comparison of the following passages Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, Matt 8:23-27, Mark 7:17-18, Matt 15:12-16, Mark 14:26-31, Luke 22:31-34, and Matt 6:30-35, among others, will yield a similar result. The point here is that evidence can also be presented in favor of a Marcan correction and deletion. Since the evidence can go both ways and there is no conclusive proof for Marcan priority, then there needs to be less dogmatism in the opinion that Luke and Matthew are modifying Mark's portrait of the disciples and are omitting unfavorable material.

¹See Matt 16:12, 17:13, among others.
also be deduced from Mark. His presentation of Peter's confession presupposes comprehension on Peter's part. Certainly, it is not conceivable that a confession as his was made out of ignorance on his part and on that of his colleagues. It seems that Mark's recording of the confession implies admission of some degree of comprehension by the disciples, who need further divine revelation as of the Transfiguration. Furthermore, the questions of the disciples on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3-4) would seem to require some comprehension of Jesus' teaching. The fact that they were seeking additional information seems to suggest that they were attempting to supplement the divine understanding they had acquired.

Those who detect a negative portrayal of the disciples in Mark, must not view it as the total picture. It seems only fair that the disciples' failures be assessed in the light of their successes. To Weeden and others, the epitome of Mark's negative portrayal of the disciples comes in 16:8. He is said to accomplish this by his failure to reunite the disciples with the resurrected Lord. This charge seems grossly unfair since there is inconclusive evidence that it was Mark's design to make that verse the terminus of his Gospel, the arguments of Weeden and Ludger Schenke notwithstanding. The rigid and conclusive nature of Marcan scholarship in the presence of unresolved issues is astounding. Mark, like the two other Synoptists, seems to have depicted the disciples in keeping with their true character and in keeping with the

1See Traditions in Conflict, pp. 44-51. He views this when taken with the non-appearance of the disciples after Peter's denial as the "crowning evidence" that Mark was denigrating the disciples.

2See ibid., p. 46, for a good list of those who espouse this view.

depiction of the tradition. As such, therefore, he treated both their positive and negative traits.

Second, the assumption that both Matthew's and Luke's portraits of the disciples are primarily positive is a faulty one. While it is true that there is a positive picture of the disciples in these accounts, especially when they are compared with Mark's, the conclusion that they are primarily positive results from a superficial observation. The fact is that a positive impression is not unique to these Gospels. The findings of this chapter clearly argue for a positive portrayal of the disciples in Mark. Neither is a negative picture unique to Mark. It seems that no attempt was made by the first and third Evangelists to portray the disciples as saints. Not only do they, as the second Evangelist, record instances of the disciples' incomprehension or questionable behavior (cf. Mark 4:35-41, Matt 17:17 and Luke 9:41; Mark 10:13-16, Matt 19:13-15, and Luke 18:15-17; Mark 4:35-41, Matt 8:23-27, and Luke 8:22-25, among others), but they record material omitted by Mark which portray the disciples in a negative light. Examples of this latter point can be found in: Matt 14:28-32, Peter's abortive attempt to walk on the water; Matt 16:13-28, Jesus' classification of Peter as a hindrance to him; Matt 26:6-13, the indignation of the disciples when they saw the action of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus (cf. Mark 14:4 where he says some of those present were indignant); Luke 22:21-24, the dispute among the disciples at the Last Supper and Jesus' subsequent rebuke; Luke 24:25-26, the disciples' slowness of heart to understand, etc.).

Misunderstanding and incomprehension cannot, therefore, be said to be unique to one Gospel. They must be seen as features of all three Gospels.

---

1See above, p. 79, "The Positive Portrait of the Disciples in Mark."
When this fact is acknowledged, however, a further question must be pursued. Is incomprehension common to all three Gospels because one Gospel was utilized by the other two, or is it part of an earlier, well-established tradition? Speaking from a Marcan perspective, Vincent prefers the latter possibility. His conclusion is based on the observation that certain early Christian writings seem to indicate this. Chief among those he cites is Acts of Peter 10, which states unequivocally: "Those who are with me have not understood me." One may also cite passages from the Fourth Gospel—the image of the Beloved Disciple notwithstanding. Amos Wilder notes that the ignorance of the disciples is detectable also in Gnostic literature. Given the commonality of the feature in the Synoptics and its existence in other more or less near contemporary writings, the characteristics of the disciples' portrait must be traced in the Tradionsgeschichte of master-disciple relationships.

---


CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS OF COMPREHENSION/INCOMPREHENSION IN JEWISH AND GREEK LITERATURE

Vernon K. Robbins observes that the absence of systematic citations and explications of traditions in Greco-Roman literature, as well as traditions in Jewish literature, is a "deeply-rooted affliction" which plagues contemporary commentaries of the Gospel of Mark.1 It is, therefore, not surprising that there has been no comprehensive investigation of the background of incomprehension or of its vocabulary. As the literature survey in chapter 1 has demonstrated, incomprehension has been consistently viewed as a Marcan creation. This notion explains, to some extent, why discussion of the vocabulary and background of incomprehension has been neglected. For if Mark created the incomprehension, there is no background to study, and examination of the vocabulary in Biblical and cognate literature would be superfluous. Those scholars who have attempted to provide this type of information have concentrated mainly on Mark 4:10-12 and its parallels. Besides, their interest in the passage is motivated by a desire to determine

1 Robbins, "Mark 1:14-20: An Interpretation at the Intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions," p. 220. Since this statement, Robbins has produced a monograph on the Gospel which has sought to address this problem. See Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark, and above, pp. 55-57.
Jesus' reasons for teaching in parables. These studies have been somewhat beside the point, since the passage does not deal primarily with the disciples. Furthermore, Isa 6:9-10, which is seen behind it, could itself have a background which needs to be studied.

The object of this chapter, then, is to provide a conceptual study, an examination of backgrounds resting on philological investigation which can significantly contribute to the understanding of the incomprehension of the disciples of Jesus. This hopefully will serve to fill a vital area of need in discipleship studies.

Terms and Concepts of Comprehension/Incomprehension

Analysis of the Synoptic incomprehension passages reveals that certain key words are employed to convey the concept of lack of understanding. Words related to knowledge and understanding εἰδω/οἶδα, γνω/σκω, νοέω/  


2See Jeremias, Parables, pp. 13-15 (especially p. 15, n. 12), and Lambrecht, "Redaction and Theology in Mark 4," pp. 282-283, among others, who contend that the disciples are included in the incomprehension alluded to there.
άγνωστα, συνήθιμα, πωρόω, and αἰσθάνομαι are often used independently or in conjunction with words of sense perception such as ἀκούω/ἀκούνη, βλέπω, and ὁράω. These words are of great significance when they appear in context with διδασκαλία and its relating forms (διδασκαλία, διδασκάλη, διδάσκαλος) and μαθητεύω/μαθητάνω and their relating forms (μαθητεία, μαθητής)—more so, since the ministry of Jesus did take place primarily in a teaching context.¹

The vocabulary relating to knowledge and understanding is investigated first. This is followed by a study of the words having to do with sense perception. Each word, in the order listed above, is studied lexically and its use sought in certain Classical Greek writings, the LXX, and, occasionally, other Hellenistic Jewish writings (Philo and Josephus).

Words Relating to Knowledge and Understanding

εἰδω/οἶδα

The verb εἰδω has no present active indicative of the same stem in use. The present of ὁράω fills this vacancy,² however. Its second aorist εἰδον is always used with the sense of seeing, while the perfect οἶδα is used in the present with the sense of knowing.³ Here, the primary concern is the latter usage.⁴ Its literal meaning, according to Liddell and Scott, is seeing

¹See Robbins, Jesus the Teacher.


⁴For a discussion of the former usage, that is, "to see," see below, pp. 165-167.
with the mind’s eye, that is knowing.\(^1\) It can denote knowing in an absolute sense and implies full, accurate knowledge.\(^2\) Besides the meaning "know," it also connotes being intimately acquainted with or standing in close relation to another; knowing and understanding how; understanding, recognizing, coming to know, experiencing;\(^3\) realizing, and perceiving.\(^4\)

In the LXX it is closely related to \(γινώσκω\), for which it may sometimes be a synonym,\(^5\) and implies "to have experienced" or "learn to know." This is particularly true when the incohative element in \(γινώσκω\) is subsidiary or absent.\(^6\) Together they are used to render the Hebrew \(יָדָה\). Like \(יָדָה\) it can mean understanding even in the sense of ability.\(^7\) In Classical Greek perception, knowledge is regarded as a mode of seeing. As such, \(οἶδα\) denotes "to know on the basis of one's own observation."\(^8\) Its NT use has few peculiarities since it occurs mostly in the sense of to know or the ability to understand.\(^9\) It is employed of persons in the sense of their not perceiving (Mark 4:12 and Matt 13:14) and of Peter’s not knowing what to say on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:6 and Luke 9:33).

\(^1\)Liddell and Scott, s.v. "εἰδω," p. 483.
\(^2\)James Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the NT, s.v. "οἶδα," p. 439.
\(^3\)Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "οἶδα," p. 556.
\(^5\)Ibid.
\(^6\)Ibid.
\(^7\)Rudolf Bultmann, "γινώσκω," TDNT 1:697.
\(^8\)Ibid., 1:691.
\(^9\)Seesemann, 5:117.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


\( \gamma\nu\nu\sigma\kappa\omega \)

\( \gamma\nu\nu\sigma\kappa\omega \) is derived from \( \gamma\nu\nu\nu\sigma\kappa\omega \) which is its original form.\(^1\) It denotes coming to know, perceiving, and in the past tense, know;\(^2\) understanding, comprehending, recognizing;\(^3\) learn (of), ascertain, find out, notice, realize.\(^4\)

In the LXX \( \gamma\nu\nu\sigma\kappa\omega \) is largely used to render the Hebrew root \textit{yəda'}. Schmitz notes that the concepts of knowing in Greek and Hebrew thought largely coincide, for in both experience through the senses is basic.\(^5\) Though it is true that neither term, Greek nor Hebrew, is originally connected to any specific organ, but implies experiential knowledge;\(^6\) perhaps it is true, however, that the OT usage is broader than the Greek and is less dependent on objective verification.\(^7\) The LXX basically regards knowledge as something which continually arises from personal encounter. It is through these self-revelations, in the past, present, and future, that God's purposes and


\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Schmitz, 2:392.

\(^4\)Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "\( \gamma\nu\nu\sigma\kappa\omega \)," pp. 160-161.

\(^5\)Schmitz, 2:395. Here he disagrees with Bultmann, 1:697, who sees no connection with any organ. For support of Schmitz, see J. P. Lewis, \textit{yəda'"}, \textit{TWOT} 1:366.

\(^6\)Bultmann, 1:697.

\(^7\)Ibid.
demands are determined, and knowledge is gained. Basically, this knowledge seems to relate to the will of God.

Bultmann states that in ordinary Greek γνῶσκω denotes the intelligent comprehension of an object or matter whether initially or in repeated action. He sees the specific Greek understanding of knowledge, which it denotes, as seen in a two-fold differentiation. Γνῶσκω differs from αἰσθάνομαι, which denotes perception but has no emphasis on understanding, and from δοκέω and δοξάζω, which signify having an opinion of some object or matter with no guarantee that it is supposed. However, γνῶσκω views things as they really are and thus has the sense of verifying.

E. D. Schmitz views γνῶσκω as having a wide range of meaning in secular Greek, grasping the full reality and nature of the object under consideration. He concurs with Bultmann in regard to the basic meaning, though he emphasizes that the word stresses that what has become known is that which was experienced. Besides this, γνῶσκω also implies: (1) to distinguish; (2) to know in a personal way, to understand, to be acquainted with, to be expert and to judge—thus denoting familiarity which leads to acquaintance; (3) a relationship of trust between individuals, such as to recognize a friend or love as a friend; (4) knowledge of a situation derived by logical thought process, such as reflecting, judging, and investigating; (5) to be judged, as is implied by the passive voice particularly when used in

---

1 Schmitz, 2:395, 396.
2 Bultmann, 1:704.
3 Ibid., p. 690.
4 Ibid., p. 691.
5 Schmitz, 2:393.
context of civil or criminal court; and (6) gain an insight or perceive intuitively—especially in philosophical contexts.¹

Both Schmitz and Bultmann mention the development in Hellenistic religious circles of a use of the χαξικ word group in a link with Greek philosophy. This use of the word is usually found in Gnosticism.² Basically, it denotes a way of life which sprang from a denial of the validity of human existence in history and the cosmos.³ The χαξικ word group in Gnostic circles connoted knowledge and the act of knowing. The χαξικ was a χάρισμα given by God to man which invested him (primarily the Gnostic) with the divine nature and consequently with immortality.⁴

νοεω/αγονοεω

Arndt and Gingrich list four basic meanings of νοεω as follows: (1) Of rational reflection or inner contemplation, perceive, apprehend, understand, gain an insight into; (2) consider, take note of, think over; (3) think, imagine; and (5) be minded.⁵

In addition to these, νοεω also implies perceiving by the eyes, perceiving by the mind, observing, deeming, and presuming.⁶

¹Ibid., pp. 392-393.

²Discussion of this phenomenon and its thought lie beyond the scope of this present work.

³Schmitz, 2:394.

⁴Ibid., pp. 393-396.

⁵Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "νοεω," p. 540

In the LXX it was used primarily for *bin*, in the *qal*, *hif'il*, and *hithpa'el* which meant to understand, consider, perceive, regard, be prudent. Its background idea is to discern. The organ of understanding was the heart, in keeping with OT thinking. The uses of this verb in the LXX denote activity in the mental sphere to the exclusion of sensual perception. The insight and understanding which it expresses involve the process of judging and exploring the relation of things to one another. Man, however, cannot independently achieve the faculty of insight. It is a gift of Yahweh. Fundamental to the OT concept of knowing is the idea that all true knowledge comes from God.

During the Classical period, *νοεω* literally meant "to direct one's mind upon a subject." It had a broad meaning, which included perceiving and noticing in the sense of receiving both sensual and mental impressions. In philosophical contexts it was used in the sense of knowing, grasping, or thinking. It was usually thought of as a function of the mind. The usage of this verb in Hellenistic-Jewish writings is in keeping with that of the LXX. Its NT usage is in keeping with that of the Koine period and implies perceiving, noting, grasping, recognizing, and understanding (Mark 7:18 and par.; 8:17).

1J. Behm, "νοεω," *TDNT* 4:949.


3Behm, 4:949.


5Behm, 4:948-949. See also Harder, 3:124.

6Behm, 4:949-950.
'Ἀγγοέω is the opposite of νοέω. It implies not knowing or being ignorant. It is used both in Classical Greek and in the LXX against the background of the Greek concept of knowledge. It appears twice in the Gospels, Mark 9:32 and Luke 9:45, in the sense of not being able to grasp.\(^1\)

συνίημι

The verb συνίημι, written sometimes as ξυνίημι, means primarily to bring together in battle,\(^2\) or in a hostile sense.\(^3\) In the middle voice, it implies coming together or coming to an agreement.\(^4\) Conzelmann notes that this sense is not found in the NT.\(^5\)

When used metaphorically, it means to perceive, or hear; to be aware of, or take notice; to understand.\(^6\) It is sometimes used with τι, implying comprehending, understanding, or gaining an understanding of something; or with an indirect question followed by ἐπί, connoting understanding with regard to, or gaining an insight into or in connection with.\(^7\)

The word grouping is very common in the LXX. Interestingly, both the Greek and the Hebrew terms for understanding converge. Bin in the hif'il as well as sakal in the hif'il, like συνίημι, mean to perceive, to note,

---

3Liddel and Scott, s.v. "συνίημι," p. 1718.
4Ibid.
5Conzelmann, 7:888.
6So Liddell and Scott, s.v. "συνίημι," p. 1718. Conzelmann observes that this occurs in the transitive use of the verb. See TDNT 7:888.
especially by hearing. Συνιήμι is usually used to render ἂν which implies knowledge that is more than ordinary. It signifies a power of judgment and perceptive insight which is demonstrable in the use of knowledge.¹ In Hebrew thought, insight is not a faculty native to men. It is a gift and must be sought. Its absence, however, is a fault and is punishable.²

During the Classical Greek period, the verb had the connotations noted above. The transitive use meant to perceive, primarily by hearing. It meant acceptance of a fact by hearing and following it (as in Homer Od. 6.289).³ Conzelmann notes that it was construed with the genitive of the person or thing heard and the accusative of the content of the thing heard.⁴ He thinks that in its broadest sense it meant to note (Aeschylus The Persians, 36-37) and generally to understand, as for example, a language or a thing (Thucydides, 1.3.4 and Herodotus, 3.63.4).⁵ Conzelmann further notes that the word group first implied an activity, but in the pre-Socratics it already came, more and more, to be used for a faculty as intelligence and understanding (Heracles Fragment, 51). He notes that the Sophists contributed to the development of its meaning through their intellectualism.⁶

The noun σύνεσις literally means union (as of two rivers, Homer, Od, 10.515). It was transformed to mean rapid comprehension (Thucydides, 3.82.7

¹Goldberg, 1:103-104.
²Ibid.
³Conzelmann, 7:888.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
⁶Ibid.
where it is used as the perversion of basic concepts). Conzelmann, after conducting a survey of its usage, concluded that it was generally used for the formal side of perceiving. This is especially true of hearing and thus was used for understanding, which is closely related to learning.

These observations are basically true of the Hellenistic period as well. Conzelmann observes, however, a development of thought. While in ancient wisdom it is a reference to God's will that motivates appeal to understanding, in later writings it is a more specific reference to the law that motivates it. He sees Sirach making a full identification of wisdom and the Torah.

In the Qumran corpus, יָדָא', שָׁכָל, and בַּין are in practice synonymous. This would therefore imply that the usage here would be in keeping with the meanings of συνιησ. Understanding the teachings at Qumran was a prerequisite for acceptance into the community. The initiate must be examined in respect to his "measure of this understanding and acts (in the Torah)," 1QS 5:21. As in the OT, insight was not native to man but was derived from the "God of perceptions," 1 QS 3:15-16.

The NT use is rooted in the OT tradition. The terms appear quite frequently in OT quotations, especially of Isa 6:9. This is true of its appearance in the Synoptic Gospels. It is linked with the idea of the

---

1Ibid., p. 889.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., 7: 889-890. Such an identification, however, existed earlier in Ezra (cf. 7:14 and 25).
4Ibid., 7: 890.
5Ibid.
Messianic secret, according to J. Goetzmann. He also sees Mark employing it to express the idea of the disciples' lack of understanding regarding the words and actions of Jesus.

πωρόω

Πωρόω, employed from the time of Hippocrates on, is derived from ὁ πωρος which denotes the tuff-stone. Medically, it implies the hardening, hard swelling, or jelly thickening out of the bone, or the forming of a callus when a broken bone heals. Πωρόω, thereby, came to denote to harden, or petrify. Medically, it can be used of a hard swelling, though it can also mean to heal. As it developed, it came to denote making physically or mentally dull or insensitive. Πωρόω occurs twice in the LXX, Job 17:7 and Prov 10:20, but does not imply hardening in either instance. In the NT, it is only used figuratively to imply a hardening of the heart. Mark employs it in Mark 6:52 and 8:17 of the disciples.

---

2Ibid.
5Becker, 2:153.
6Schmidt and Schmidt, 5:1026.
8Schmidt and Schmidt, 5:1026.
9See ibid. and Arndt and Gingrich, p. 732.
10Since this concept, hardness of heart, is limited only to these two uses in the Gospel of Mark, and since its usage in the LXX has a different connotation, it is not investigated in this study.
The verb αἰσθάνομαι carries the meaning to possess the power of perception, to understand,¹ to apprehend by the senses, to hear and to learn.² Delling lists three possible ranges of meaning for αἰσθάνομαι: sense perception, perception generally—but especially spiritual discernment and intellectual understanding.³ When used as sense perception, αἰσθάνομαι has a sharp distinction from συνίημι. While man understands (συνίημι), the other creatures perceive by their senses (αἰσθάνομαι) but do not understand.

In the LXX the verb occasionally means merely "sensual perception." It mostly carries the idea of a judgment, whether moral, religious, or general, but also has the idea of reception into a state of knowledge.⁴ In the NT the meaning most frequently employed is that which involves perception, especially in terms of spiritual discernment. In the Synoptics, Luke particularly charges the disciples with lacking inner understanding.⁵

ἀκούω/ἀκούη

'Ἀκούω and ἀκούη embrace both physical hearing and the apprehension of something by the mind. 'Ἀκούω implies to hear, listen, attend and

perceive by hearing, while ἀκούω signifies hearing, the ear, a thing heard, message, teaching, rumor, or report.¹

From the time of Homer onwards, ἀκούω denoted hearing, especially with reference to the perception of sounds by the sense of hearing. The verb takes its object both in the accusative and in the genitive case. In the accusative, reference is to the person or thing heard. In the genitive, the impersonal object or the person from whom something is heard is indicated.² The apprehension and acceptance by the mind of what is heard is also covered by hearing.³ In this connection, it also means to learn, understand,⁴ and obey.⁵ The attestation from the time of Homer forward is that the noun ἀκούω has the basic connotations listed above.⁶

Hearing has played an important role in religion. Greek religions, however, tended to place less stress on hearing and more on sight.⁷ Despite this tendency, there was some emphasis on hearing.⁸

In Classical Greek there has been some involvement of ἀκούω in a teaching/learning context. The many speeches and orations recorded attest to this. Besides, Plutarch places some emphasis on this aspect. In his tractate

²Ibid. See also Liddell and Scott, s.v. "ἀκούω," p. 54.
³See Mundle, 2:172.
⁴Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "ἀκούω," pp. 31-32.
⁵Liddell and Scott, s.v. "ἀκούω," p. 54.
⁶Mundle, 2:173.
⁸See Apuleius Metamorphoses, xi.5, 22-23, 29.
on the Education of Children, Plutarch notes that free born children should have knowledge and suggests that one avenue through which this can be gained is through hearing.\(^1\) He even delivered formal lectures which he later wrote out giving instructions to the young on how they should listen to lectures.\(^2\)

In the religion of Israel, hearing played a very vital role. As such, many calls to hearing are made. In this context, therefore, \(\dot{\alpha}k\omega\) is consistently used to render the Hebrew \(\text{šəma}'\) to which it has very close affinity. \(\text{šəma}'\) implies to hear, listen, and obey. When it is employed in the latter meaning, it has the sense of effectual hearing or listening.\(^3\) Mundle says the primary meaning is that of sense perception, but apprehension is also involved. The latter, he says, demands acceptance, listening, understanding and attention to what is heard. \(\text{šəma}'\) thus had the idea of obey and has been rendered in the LXX by a compound of \(\dot{\alpha}k\omega\ \varepsilon\iota\sigma\alpha\kappa\omega\).\(^4\) The book of Deuteronomy has a strong emphasis on hearing and obeying. This results, as will be seen below, from Moses' stress on Israel's benefiting from the instructions God had given them in the wilderness. From this emphasis the daily use of the \(\text{šēma}'\)--that sacred liturgy\(^5\) which emphasizes the duty "to

---

\(^1\)See Plutarch *The Education of Children* 7.C.10. Here he uses \(\dot{\alpha}n\hbox{ή\kappa\o o\nu}\). See below.

\(^2\)Plutarch *On Listening to Lectures*.

\(^3\)Herman J. Austel, "\(\text{šəma}'\)," *TWOT* 2:938-939.

\(^4\)Mundle, 2:173.

hear, learn, teach, think about, speak about, and live according to the word of God"¹ and which must be imprinted upon the minds of those willing to learn, ponder, understand, obey and perform God's word—developed for the pious Jew. It underlines the importance of hearing in the economy of Israel. The frequent calls of the prophets to the people to hear and hearken to the voice of God witnesses to this.²

Ἀκούω in Philo reflects the Greek concept in which hearing is secondary to seeing. Philo, therefore, depreciates hearing. He says that that which is only heard does not make good evidence. While hearing has a place in learning, the certitude of sight is to be preferred.³

While the NT use of ἀκούω basically follows that of secular Greek and the LXX,⁴ Kittel thinks it derives its force from the OT background.⁵ He sees the NT revelation as a word to be heard, a message, a proclamation.⁶ The Synoptic use of the concept is significant. The disciples and other followers of Jesus were invited to listen to the words of Jesus. These calls seem to be for effectual hearing. The implications here are discussed below.⁷

²See Isa 7:13; 28:14, 23; 32:3; 46:3, 12; 55:2; Jer 2:4; 7:2; Eze 3:27; 6:3; 34:7, 9 as examples.
³See Philo, De specialibus legibus 4.59-61 and 106 (LCL).
⁴Mundle, 2:175.
⁵Kittel, TDNT 1:219.
⁶Ibid.
⁷See Chapter 4.
Basically βλέπω means to see or have the power of sight.\textsuperscript{1} In classical Greek, it was used from the time of Pindar onwards. It is closely akin in meaning to ὄραω,\textsuperscript{2} though having a stronger emphasis on the function of the eye.\textsuperscript{3} It possesses some tenses that have not been attested for ὄραω, and has gradually replaced it.\textsuperscript{4} It is used in the accusative of the thing seen,\textsuperscript{5} and consequently developed the meaning to look at, view, look into, give heed or pay attention. Figuratively, it may also connote observing or noticing.\textsuperscript{6}

As previously noted, seeing was of extreme importance in Greek religion. This was also true of philosophical thinking. In this connection ὄραω has predominance, but βλέπω is also employed.\textsuperscript{7}

In the LXX, βλέπω is employed over 138 times,\textsuperscript{8} where it is mostly used to render ῥα'āh. There it denotes primarily the ability to see but also expresses the idea of spiritual perception.\textsuperscript{9} A compound of βλέπω, κατεμ-βλέπω, is used in Exod 3:6 of the seeing of God in a theophany. Michaelis thinks that this particular use represents a softening of the original.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{1}Liddell and Scott, s.v. "βλέπω," p. 318.
\textsuperscript{2}Karl Dahn, "See," \textit{NIDNTT} 3:512.
\textsuperscript{3}W. Michaelis, "ὁράω, εἶδον, βλέπω," \textit{TDNT} 5:317.
\textsuperscript{4}Dahn, 3:512.
\textsuperscript{5}Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "βλέπω," p. 143.
\textsuperscript{6}Dahn, 3:512.
\textsuperscript{7}See Plato \textit{Symposium} 210C-212A.
\textsuperscript{8}Michaelis, 5:327.
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 331.
Whether so or not, this usage represents a significant rendering of \( \beta\lambda\varepsilon\pi\omega \).

Philo uses \( \beta\lambda\varepsilon\pi\omega \) 64 times in alternation with other verbs of seeing. He uses it primarily in reference to sense perception. He infrequently uses it of God and very seldom does it have the sense of spiritual seeing.\(^1\) In Josephus \( \beta\lambda\varepsilon\pi\omega \) is used very infrequently. When it does appear it is often figurative in the sense to note, to observe, or to judge.\(^2\)

In the NT \( \beta\lambda\varepsilon\pi\omega \) denotes sense perception. It occurs about 137 times and refers to the ability to see in contrast to blindness. It is sometimes used figuratively. When used thus, it indicates perceiving and noting\(^3\) as in Josephus. Its use for visionary seeing is very rare in the NT. Significantly, it is never used for the appearances of the resurrected Jesus.\(^4\)

\( \dot{o}\rho\acute{a}w \)

\( \dot{o}\rho\acute{a}w \) is the most predominantly used verb for seeing. Used absolutely, it means to see, to look, to have sight. Its transitive use is employed with the accusative and signifies seeing an object, beholding, perceiving, observing.\(^5\)

It has been employed in Greek usage with the above meaning since the time of Homer. From those early days, to see was regarded as taking part in life itself, and \( \dot{o}\rho\acute{a}w \) developed the meaning to experience. Very early, too, it acquired the connotation of spiritual sight, such as "perceiving and

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 335.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 338.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 343.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 344.
\(^5\)Liddell and Scott, s.v. "\( \dot{o}\rho\acute{a}w \)," pp. 1244-1245.
considering," as well as perception with the other senses. In this latter use ὀφαύ could even be employed for ἀκοῦσ. In a figurative sense it means to understand, recognize, consider or attend to.¹

The Greeks were regarded as "a people of the eye"² and seeing thus had a significant place in their religious life, as well as their philosophical thinking. As the verb most frequently used in this regard ὀφαύ was employed quite frequently in religious and philosophical contexts. Aristotle emphasizes the pre-eminence of ὀφαύ (Metaph. 980a.24-25). Plato exuberantly asserts that the ability to see is a gift of God and the source of philosophy (Tim. 47a-b).³

In the mystery religions the one who was able to see the sacred actions was in a state of felicity. Pindar states, "Blessed is he who has seen these things. . . ." (Fragment 137). For them too, as for the Hellenistic Gnostics, the visual was very important.⁴

In the LXX, ὀφαύ and ἑπιστροφ cover most of the references to seeing.⁵ They are usually employed to express the Hebrew רָאָה, which means to see, look at, or inspect, and which is employed metaphorically in the qal to imply regard, perceive, feel, understand, learn or enjoy.⁶ In most cases ὀφαύ and

¹Dahn, 3:511.
³See Michaelis, 5:321-322.
⁴Ibid., pp. 322-323.
⁵This is the 2nd Aorist of ὀφαύ.
⁶According to Michaelis ὀφαύ is used 520 times and ἑπιστροφ is used 930 times. See TDNT 5:324.
*εἰδον* do not only imply sense perception in the LXX but also intellectual perception denoting to establish or to note. Michaelis thinks that here (the LXX) seeing is often the basis of spiritual perception, though other senses, hearing, for example, are also mentioned.¹ The Hebrew ָּדֶה, like ὅραω, can be used for other senses. As such, the LXX follows the original and employs ὅραω where other renderings could have been natural.² It also follows the original Hebrew in using ὅραω for to experience or to learn to see, to detect or to realize.³ ὅραω is also employed to refer to prophetic perception.⁴ Michaelis says it and *εἰδον* were "the characteristic words used for visionary --ecstatic prophetic seeing."⁵ ὅραω is also employed for seeing God in theophanies (e.g., Exod 20:18-20).

For Philo, as for the LXX, ὅραω is the most important of the seeing verbs.⁶ While he employs it for sensual seeing, its chief use is to denote the spiritual insight.⁷ Michaelis suggests that even when seeing and hearing are compared, seeing is viewed in this sense.⁸ In Josephus too, ὅραω is the verb most frequently used for seeing. Here, however, sensual and mental perceptions are the chief connotations.⁹

¹Ibid., 2:234-325.
²Ibid., 2:325.
³Ibid.
⁴Dahn, 3:513.
⁵Michaelis, 5:329.
⁶Ibid., p. 334.
⁷Ibid., p. 335. See also Dahn, 3:515.
⁸Michaelis, 5:335.
⁹Ibid.
The dominant usage of δράω and εἴδος persist in the NT. There, they have a broad range of meaning, but one which basically conforms with the Greek and OT usages, connoting seeing and perceiving.

Conclusion

As a result of the preceding study two sets of conclusions can be arrived at. In the first place, it seems that the vocabulary relating to knowledge and understanding in Biblical and cognate literature can contribute to understanding of the comprehension problems in the Synoptics. The terms studied carry the basic concepts of understanding or perceiving, especially through the senses. Significantly, for three of the verbs, εἰδω/οίδα, γινώσκω, and νοέω, the knowledge gained is either based on observation or has been verified by experience. For two others, perception or understanding is through hearing and hearing which connotes following/obeying. There is, therefore, a significant involvement of the senses, primarily of hearing and seeing. There seems to be no significant difference between the Hebrew and Greek words employed to express comprehension. In several instances there has been a converging of meanings. Besides, Jewish Hellenistic literature witnesses to the involvement of the senses in comprehension as may be verified by its use of the vocabulary.

In the second place, all the words considered connote perception. This signifies that there is indeed an interplay between sense perception, knowledge, and understanding. It seems that whether it be for hearing or for

1 Ibid., 5:341.
2 Dahn, 3:575.
seeing, sense perception is imperative for complete understanding in the literatures considered.

The vocabulary of sense perception is significant in both Greek and Hebrew thinking. While both the Greeks and the Hebrews had hearing and seeing significantly involved in comprehension, especially in a religious context, the former had a greater emphasis on seeing while the latter had it on hearing. With the Hellenistic Jewish writers, however, there was a significant shift towards the Greek concept. Philo for example, enthroned seeing and degraded hearing.

The Contribution of Jewish Tradition to the Understanding of Incomprehension in the Synoptics

Little attention has thus far been given to possible clarification that the Jewish heritage can provide to an understanding of the incomprehension of the disciples. It is conceivable that since Christianity arose from a Jewish milieu its concepts relating to comprehension/incomprehension were influenced by its environment. As such, investigation of this neglected area in disciple studies might prove beneficial to a solution of the problem of the disciples' misunderstanding.

Researchers who sought to establish the background of Mark 4:10-12 must be commended and their contributions acknowledged. It must be

1T. W. Manson, p. 77, proposes that behind Mark 4:10-12 is the Targum of Isa 6:9-10, and not the LXX or the Hebrew. He has been followed by Cranfield, p. 155; Jeremias, pp. 13-15; Lambrecht, "Redaction and Theology in Mark 4," p. 282; William Manson, Jesus and the Christian, pp. 60-61; Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 256; Gnilka, pp. 13-17; Ambroziec, The Hidden Kingdom, pp. 47-48, among others. Marcus, explores Mark 4:10-12 against the background of Jewish Apocalyptic and moreso the Qumran literature. Gerhardsson, "The Parable of the Sower," postulates that the words of Jesus and his apostles must be seen against the background of the Sēma'. Gnilka, on his part, discusses Isa 6:9-10 noting the use the NT makes of it. Lemcio is one of
admitted, however, that much more needs to be done. Their leads must be followed up for a host of other texts.¹

The incomprehension passages in the Synoptics can be divided into two distinct groups. The first includes lack of comprehension of the words and teachings of Jesus. The second involves a lack of understanding in regard to the mighty deeds of Jesus. The Evangelists employed certain specific terms to convey the idea they wanted to express in each of these groups.

In the first group, terms such as understanding, hearing, seeing, perceiving,² and hardness of heart³ are used. For the second group, fear, fright, astonishment, marvel, terror, and lack of faith are utilized. Repeatedly the disciples were questioned or cautioned concerning their lack of understanding and lack of perception. Several times they were charged with inability to see and hear. It appears that their main problem was lack of understanding which had associations with their hearing, their seeing, and perceiving.⁴ Besides, their fright and fear are frequently highlighted as well.

¹No investigations of specific texts are attempted here, but due consideration is given to concepts and terminologies associated with comprehension/incomprehension.

²Seven times in Mark (4:13; 6:52; 7:14, 17-18; 9:10 and 32), six times in Matt (13:13, 51; 15:16; 16:8-10 and 17:13), and twice in Luke (8:9-10 and 9:43-45) queries, exhortations, or rebukes are directed at the disciples regarding their understanding.

³See above, p. 94, n. 5.

as the reprimands for their fear and faithlessness.\footnote{Mark 4:34-41; 6:49-52 and parallels, among others.} If the notion of B. Gerhardsson that many New Testament concepts and teachings follow patterns derived from the use of Deuteronomy in a manner similar to that used by the Rabbis\footnote{Gerhardsson, "The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation," p. 165-167.} is correct, then it should be possible to locate these concepts, alluded to above, in the book of Deuteronomy. While this is a significant suggestion, the concepts have been sought in other OT documents as well, especially where they occur in contexts of teaching and learning, which are our primary NT settings, and also in contexts of the mighty deeds of God.

Seeing and Hearing in the OT: Theophanic Contexts and Didactic Patterns

A preliminary investigation has shown that the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Job, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are of special importance for our study of backgrounds in regards to the concepts of sight and hearing employed in teaching and learning contexts.

Exodus

In Exod 20:18-21 the theophany at Sinai is vividly reiterated in all its awe. The people are reported as seeing the divine manifestations, the thunderings, the lightnings, the smoking mountain, and they become filled with fear. Their response to Moses, "you speak to us and we will hear but let not God speak to us," implies that they were also overwhelmed by what
they heard—the voice of God. Justification and re-enforcement for such a conclusion are sustained by the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel. It specifically states that the people saw the thunders and that everyone heard them coming forth from the midst of lights. It compares the voice of the trumpet with that which will raise the dead, and states that the people withdrew twelve miles from the scene.¹

The passage thus has a reference to the two significant concepts of hearing and seeing. Ronald E. Clemens notes that the people were made to see and hear God’s active presence.²

The people are said to have seen (MT ro'îm, LXX ὁ πόλεμος) the thunders, the lightnings, etc. This is a qal active masculine plural participle from râ'âh. The fact that this is an active participle indicates that the people were in the continual uninterrupted exercise of the activity of seeing.³ It is used here in a noun clause to indicate past action.⁴ The basic meaning of this verb is to see, look at or inspect. It is sometimes used metaphorically. When thus employed in the qal it can imply regard, perceive, feel, understand, learn or enjoy.⁵ It seems that this is the usage which is employed in this


⁴Ibid. p. 359.

passage.\textsuperscript{1} The MT has another reference to \textit{rā’āh} in the verse. It has the \textit{qal} imperfect third masculine singular. The Samaritan text reads \textit{yāre’}. which signifies that the people were afraid.\textsuperscript{2} This problem aside, the MT has two occurrences of the concept of seeing here.

The people's response to the theophany also involves the verb of hearing. The people requested Moses to speak to them and promised they would hear. An implication is that they did not want to hear God speak. In the context here both the literal meaning and the extended, effectual hearing seem to be involved.

The concept of understanding is not explicit in this passage. It is evident however, for the implication of Moses' words to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to prove you and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin," is that God intended the manifestations as a teaching device. For Israel to learn from and give the correct response to what they saw and heard, they must first understand. Perhaps the Israelites were slow in comprehending God's purpose, and as such needed the discipline of this majestic demonstration of divine power to instruct them.

It may, therefore, be justifiably concluded that what the people saw was intended to teach them comprehension of the Almighty. The indelible impression on their senses would stamp understanding on their minds. The reading of the contents of the book of the covenant (Exod 24:7) in the

\textsuperscript{1}This is the implication from C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch in \textit{Biblical Commentary of the Old Testament}, 27 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 4:127, where it is noted that this is a verb often used for perceiving. John Owens, \textit{Analytical Key to the OT: Exodus} (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 117, translates it thus as does the RSV. However, the NEB and NIV, among others, translate it "saw."

\textsuperscript{2}It has been followed by the RSV, and others. The NEB, NIV, and others, follow the MT.
hearing of the people had a similar design. The hearing of the words, together with the ceremony of ratification which they saw, was designed to create understanding and generate obedience.

In this context the noun for the organ of hearing, 'ōzen, is employed. The organ of hearing represents symbolic actions and is a sign of responsiveness and understanding. The first and last meanings may be involved here which would be in keeping with the interrelated use of the noun.1 Interestingly, šāma‘ appears here in the qal imperfect. The extended meaning, implying obedience, once again seems to be intended.2

Deuteronomy

In the book of Deuteronomy, chap. 4 is of special significance. It contains nine references to hearing, nine to seeing, and two to understanding, all undoubtedly set in a teaching context. Peter Craigie asserts that this chapter is essentially "a miniature sermon on the covenant law which utilizes historical recollection in a general didactic manner."3 The law here is not simply a written code; rather it is a presentation of law in a context of education ("to teach you").

The chapter opens with an exhortation to hearken (MT šēma‘, LXX ἀκούω)4 to the statutes of the Lord. Hearkening here implies laying to heart and observing.5 On the basis of a reminder of what their eyes had seen (MT

---

2The JB, KJV, NEB, NIV, and RSV all render it "obey."
4The qal imperative is here implying a command.
5Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, 3:308.
Moses encouraged the people to obey the law of God so they might live. Very notable is the fact that in the first four verses hearing (MT sāma', LXX ἀκοῦω), seeing (MT rā'ah, LXX ὑπάρχω), and teaching (MT mlamed, LXX διδάσκω) all appear. Here the call to hearken is rooted on what was taught and on what was seen by the eyes of the Israelites.

In vss. 5-8 two references to sight are made and two occurrences of understanding appear. The qal imperfect of rā'ah is used to call the attention of the people to the statutes and judgments that were taught to them. For the references to understanding, bīn (LXX σύνεσις) is employed. Obedience to the statutes and judgments taught by Moses guarantees wisdom and understanding in the sight of the other nations who recognize them as an understanding people.

Exhortations are made in vss. 9-15 to the people to ensure that they keep on guard and not forget what their eyes had seen. The mighty acts of God in the exodus from Egypt, the events on the travels to the Plain of Moab which they had seen must not be allowed to slip from their minds and must be taught to their children and grandchildren. Their children should also be taught regarding the awesome experience at Sinai when they heard the words of God and saw no form, but only his voice.

Finally vss. 30-36 contain six references to hearing and three to seeing. Of paramount importance are vss. 35-36. It is stated here that the

---

1Reference is to an incident in Num 25:1-5 in which certain Israelites had committed illicit relations in religious ceremonies to Baal and were punished.

2Craigie, p. 130.

3Ibid., p. 133.
intent of the things they were made to see (MT רַעְד, LXX βλέπω) is to give them knowledge (MT da'at; LXX εἰδω) that Yahweh is the only supreme God. Furthermore, the design of their hearing the voice of God from the heavens and of their seeing his great fire on the earth is that they might be disciplined. This verb is in the Piel of yāsar. Craigie notes that in Deut 8:5 it is used, as here, of a man disciplining his son.1 The LXX employs the verb παρεδούω. While the RSV renders it discipline and the NEB instruct, it can also be translated educate or teach.2

This appeal to obedience, based on what was seen and heard, couched as it was in the context of teaching, is extremely significant. It implies that the obedience being solicited was not "blind obedience, but an obedience based on understanding."3

Deut 5 opens with four injunctions: hear, learn, be careful, and do.4 The first two are important to this investigation. In the first verse a call to hear is set in a learning context. Israel should hear and learn the ordinances which Moses was to speak in their hearing. The Hebrew root for learn is lāmad (the LXX uses μαθητέω). It has the idea of learning and educating.5 Hearing, šāma', implies a hearing which has obedience as its outcome.6 Verses 22-27 contain references to the role of hearing and seeing in recollections

---

1Ibid., p. 144.
3Cragie, p. 129.
6Cragie, p. 147.
similar to those in Exod 20:18-22. Drazin observes that "hear" is a key word in this section and is repeated very often.\(^1\)

With chap. 6 comes the introduction of the Šêma', which apparently was the covenant in miniature since it summarized all God's promises to his people and his demands on them.\(^2\) The rabbis asserted that the scriptures specifically named the whole heart in the Sema' for God is to be loved with both good and evil inclinations of the heart. They emphasized that the whole inclination to hear and do God's word must control the heart, thus displacing the evil inclination.\(^3\) Additionally, the heart is emphasized for the commandments should not be an affair merely of the memory,\(^4\) neither should obedience to them have its motivation in formalism. On the contrary, obedience should be a response generated by understanding\(^5\) and love.

The importance of the concepts of hearing and seeing in the Šêma' must not be minimized. The initial call is to hear. Furthermore, the requirements of vss. 7-9, whether taken literally--as some pious Jews did--or figuratively,\(^6\) involve hearing and seeing.

After chapter 6, at least two other references to Israel's hearing and fearing are made (Deut 13:11 and 17:13). However, in keeping with the covenantal structure of the book, several calls to hear are made in the


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 169.


\(^5\)Craigie, p. 170

Blessings and Curses (Deut 27:9; 28:1-2; 28:13, 15, and 58). In the concluding charge of Moses, in which he appeals to the people for covenant faithfulness and calls them to a decision, the themes of hearing, seeing, and understanding again feature prominently. He calls upon them to remember what they had heard and seen of God's great acts in the Exodus, the testing in the wilderness, and the events up to their arrival at the Plains of Moab.

In this context 29:2-4 is very significant. The people are told, "you have seen (rā'āh in the MT and ḥpāw in the LXX) all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt . . . the great trials which your eyes saw (rā'āh), the signs and those wonders, but to this day God has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see (lir'ōt in the MT and βλέπειν in the LXX) or ear to hear" (MT lîšmōa' and LXX ἀκοῦειν). What Moses means here, the second half of the verse, is that the people did not naturally possess the spiritual insights necessary to independently learn from these experiences.1 His reminders were intended to help them in the process of time to acquire this perception. But full comprehension seems to be dependent upon a revelation (gift) of God. God, in keeping with OT tradition, is held responsible for their lack of insight since he is the ultimate source of all.2 Again, the obedience that is required and the understanding that is aimed at are to be informed by hearing and sight, that is, by past experience. Interestingly, some of the repeated calls to obedience in chaps. 28-323 are

2Ibid.
3See 28:1, 15, 58; 30:7-10, 15, and 20. Note also 28:2, 13, and 30:13 in which ἀκοῦειν is employed without the preposition by the LXX and is rendered "obey." The importance of hearing to obedience can be deduced from these.
rendered in the LXX by the verb ΕΙΣΑΧΟΥΩ which is derived from the verb to hear. In Hebrew the root שָׁמָּא‘ is used to imply hearing and to implore obedience to the voice of God which was heard at Sinai and which must be heard.

The final reference in Deut is 31:12-13. Here Moses commanded the Levites to assemble the people that they might hear (שָׁמָּא‘) the words of the law which he had written and learn (לָמד) to fear the Lord. Besides, their children must also hear and learn to fear the Lord.

The book of Deuteronomy therefore seems to be replete with the concepts of hearing and seeing. The occurrences of these concepts, where understanding and obedience are required, in teaching contexts are overwhelming and can be instructive. Besides, as Deut 29:1-4 seems to be indicating, a revelation of God is required for optimum benefit to be derived from the events perceived through these two important senses.

I Kings

In chap 10:6-7 of this book an interesting appearance of the combined concepts occurs. Queen Balkis\(^1\) of Sheba in Southern Arabia visited Jerusalem to meet King Solomon. Her visit was motivated by the reports she had received concerning his wisdom. After she had interrogated the Jewish King and he had answered all her questions, and she had seen (MT רָאָה, LXX ἑλῶν) all his wisdom, she made a confession to him. She asserted that the reports she had heard (MT שָׁמַע, LXX ἐκούω) in her own land concerning him were true. She conceded that she had not believed the reports initially,

\(^{1}\)Keil notes that in Arabian Legend this is the name ascribed to her. See his comments in "The Book of Kings," Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 158.
but her coming had verified them by what her eyes had seen (MT rá'āh, the LXX ὄραω. See vss. 6-7). Here then can be found another reference to the insufficiency of hearing, and the need to supplement it with further witnessing of facts that consequently lead to belief.

Job

In the book of Job there are two references that are pertinent to this discussion (13:17 and 42:5). The first is a call by Job to his friends to listen (MT sāma', LXX ἀκοῦω) to his words and to allow his declaration to be in their ears, that is, an invitation to them to pay close attention to what he is about to say. The second is very significant, especially since the two concepts of hearing and seeing are employed in a context which implies that their convergence in Job's experience resulted in comprehension. Matthew Henry observes that what Job had heard (sāma') was derived from his youthful teachers and from his friends, but his vision (MT rá'āh, LXX ὄραω) of God brought sound education which resulted in an enhancement of his understanding.1 At God's disclosure of himself to Job, hearing and seeing converged in a revelation which culminated in full comprehension. This entire encounter resulted not only in an enlightened understanding but in a change of attitude (vs. 6). Here, then, is a significant occurrence of the combined concepts in the book of Job located in a teaching context, for Job requests the Lord to teach him (vs. 4).

Isaiah

Isa 6:9-10, the passage that is most frequently cited as related to

incomprehension in the Gospels, is examined here. The various interpretations of the passage are seen as an embarrassment to OT exegetes primarily because they have overlooked the overall thrust of the passage.\textsuperscript{1} The concern here is not to enter into the debate as to whether it is prediction regarding the results of Isaiah's ministry,\textsuperscript{2} warning to Isaiah in regard to the results of his ministry, or a later reflection of Isaiah on his career and its effect upon his people.\textsuperscript{3} What is of primary concern here are the references to hearing (MT šāma', LXX ἀκούω) and seeing (MT rā'ah, LXX βλέπω) in relation to understanding (MT bīn, LXX σύνηδος) and perceiving (MT da'at, LXX εἴδω).

There is, however, a background to this passage which is vital. The suggestion of Edwin Good that the passage must be taken in the light of Isa 5:19, in which the people sarcastically express their eagerness to see and hear, has some merit.\textsuperscript{4} But, there is a wider background than this. There is an historical perspective that must not be ignored.

Careful examination of the book in general and chaps. 1-6 in particular, shows that it is set in the context of Deuteronomic theology. Von Rad recognizes this when he notes the relations between Isa 1:2 and Deut 21:18-21.

\begin{enumerate}
\item Good, p. 137.
\end{enumerate}
The parallels go beyond this, however. In Isa 1:3 the ox and the ass are said to have knowledge while Israel has no knowledge and does not understand. It should be remembered that Moses' instruction to Israel was set in the context of what was heard and seen. He gave them reminders and instructed them to teach their children so they might also understand and acknowledge God's leading, especially when they entered the land of Canaan (Deut 4-6). Isaiah is charging Israel for not allowing the experiences of the fathers in the wilderness to instruct them in their relationship to God. Furthermore, when the results of unfaithfulness to covenant relations as outlined in Deut 28, especially vs. 32-35, are compared with the book of Isaiah in general, and vs. 4-9 of chapter 1 in particular, the Deuteronomic background becomes more evident.2

Since Isaiah is employing Deuteronomic theology, the references to hearing and seeing in 5:19 and 6:6-10 must be understood in this historical context. It should be remembered that in Deuteronomy Moses called for an obedience that was based on understanding. Besides, for Moses, obedience and understanding must be based on hearing and sight, that is, on past experience as dictated by God's revelations to Israel through hearing and

1von Rad, p. 122.

2Compare Deut 28:35, in which Moses predicts boils from the sole of the feet to the crown of the head, with Isa 1:6 in which Isaiah says "From the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds . . . . " For further evidence that Isaiah is employing Deuteronomic theology in his book, cf. Isa 1:19-20 and Deut 30:15-18; Isa 4:10-12 with Deut 28:1-14, 15-68 and Isa 5:26 with Deut 28:49, among others. Of extreme significance is Isaiah's call upon heaven and earth to listen (1:2). It is reminiscent of a similar call in Deut 32:1 and further of Moses' calls in Deut 30:19 and 31:28 upon heaven and earth to be witnesses to his instructions to the people. Isa 64:4 is also very significant here. Alluding to the Sinai experience Isaiah states that no other nation had seen or heard a god as Israel had. This text should be compared with Deut 4:32-34 where Moses makes a similar claim.
sight. It should also not be forgotten that Moses had charged the people not only to learn from their past but also to teach their children to do so. Faithfulness in this respect would have resulted in blessings, just as unfaithfulness would have resulted in curses. Against this background, Isa 6:9-10 could then be a sad commentary on Israel's past and a woeful trajectory of future experiences unless radical transformation takes place, in the present, as a result of Isaiah's ministry. The nation had failed to learn from its past and as long as that was the case the experience in Isa 6:9-10 would be their lot.

It is within this latter context that the frequent calls to hear and hearken in the book must be seen. The situation was not totally hopeless for Judah, however. All it required was Judah's attentiveness to the lessons from the past and to Isaiah's warnings. Isa 30:18-22 is of crucial importance here. If the people will repent, God will restore them. Their eyes will see (MT ṭā'ād, LXX ὄραω) their teacher and they will hear his voice directing them. God longed to reveal himself to his people in a gracious act but was being prevented by the impenitence of his people.

Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah also has several calls for the people of Judah to hear (šāma' in the MT, see 2:1-4; 5:21; 6:10; 10:1; 11:2; 13:17, among others).

1See Clements, p. 249.

2The LXX translates the MT môreh by πλάνων which implies false teachers. It is followed by the Syriac. Investigation into the rationale for this negative rendition of this obviously positive Hebrew statement is beyond the scope of this research. So also is the debate as to whether God is being referred to or the prophets.

3For further examples of the concepts in Isa, see 21:10; 29:18; 52:15; and 66:8, and 19.
It is, like Isaiah, also set in Deuteronomistic theology. This latter fact is very
evident in 2:4-6 in which reference is made to the deliverance from Egypt
and to the wilderness experience. It can also be seen in 11:2-5 in which the
covenant and the deliverance from Egypt are alluded to. Significantly, these
references contain exhortations to listen and hear.

Of particular importance in this book is chap. 5. It is set in Deuteronomic theology as vss. 7 (cf. Deut 32:21), 15 (cf. Deut 28:49), 17 (cf. Deut 28:31), 19 (cf. Deut 29; 24-26 and 28:48), 22 (cf. Deut 28:58), and 23 (cf. Deut 21:18) show. In vs. 21 Judah is referred to as a senseless people who are
ears but do not hear. While Freedman may be right in regarding the
deficiency in hearing (šāma‘ and ἀκούω being employed by the MT and LXX
respectively) and sight (MT ῥα‘āh, LXX ὀπίων) here as possibly being proverb-
ial, its roots in Deuteronomistic theology are unmistakable, especially in the
context of vss. 19 and 22. Furthermore, given the references in Jeremiah to
the deliverance at the Exodus and noting, here, the combination of hearing,
seeing, and understanding, one can see the specific Deuteronomistic background
in Deut 29:2-4. Keil makes this precise identification.\footnote{Keil and Delitzsch, 21:130.}

Jeremiah, too, then, attests to the traditional use of hearing and
seeing in conjunction. This book substantiates the thesis that there is a
definite OT background to the concepts of hearing and seeing in relation to
comprehension. The fact that the people see but do not perceive, hear but
do not understand indicates that there is a missing link. Perhaps their lack
of fear for the God who gives rain, along with their sins have been preventing God from revealing himself to them. This is a vital link especially in the light of the correlation with Deut 29:2-4.

Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, has many calls to hear and listen (MT šāma', LXX ἀκούω see 2:5, 7-8; 3:10-11, 27; 6:3; 13:2; 16:35; 18:25; 25:3 etc.) and is steeped with Deuteronomic theology.\(^1\) On the basis of constant disobedience, the Lord referred to the nation as a "rebellious house" (Eze 2:5-7; 3:27, and 12:2) and because they were a rebellious house, the Lord told the prophet that they had eyes but were not seeing and they had ears yet were not hearing (Eze 12:2). In addition, the Lord twice told the prophet to give keen attention to what he was telling him. In this context, he is instructed to hear with his ears and see with his eyes (Eze 40:4 and 44:5).

These references demonstrate the fact that the concepts of seeing and hearing are intertwined in the book of Ezekiel. In addition, they indicate that the notions of seeing and hearing as necessary elements for understanding are conceptually traditional in ancient Israel.\(^2\)

Excursus on Fear: The Utilization of OT Patterns in Relation to the Deeds of Jesus

As can be deduced from the previous chapter, not all the instances of the disciples' fear have negative connotations. Fear could perhaps be viewed

\(^1\) Cf. Deut 4:6 with Eze 5:5; Deut 4:27-29, 30:2 with Eze 6:9; Deut 28:36, 49-50 with Eze 11:9; Deut 32:10 with Eze 16:15; Deut 29:11-12 with Eze 16:20, and Deut 29:10 with Eze 20:7, among others.

as a legitimate response to the mighty deeds of God. Besides, φοβέω\(^1\) has a wide semantic range which includes fear, terror, alarm, and fright, as well as reverence, respect, and awe. The concept of fear, therefore, is investigated in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and 1 Samuel to determine whether there are any occurrences which might contribute to understanding the Synoptic use of the concept.

**Exodus**

There are twelve references to fear in Exodus. Five are significant to this study. At the burning bush, Moses is said to have "hid his face since he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod 3:6). The term employed here in the MT is יָּאָר. It denotes (1) the emotion of fear; (2) the intellectual anticipation of evil without emphasis on the emotional reaction; (3) reverence of awe (4) righteous behavior or piety; and (5) formal religious worship.\(^2\)

Meanings (1) and (3) could be very significant for this study. The LXX employs the term εὐλαβεῖομαι which denotes being afraid or apprehensive, to be cautious or circumspect.\(^3\) The use of fear here is not absolute. The complete thought, to look upon God, gives the rationale for Moses' fear and suggests that the manifestation of God's presence elicited a response of fear from him.\(^4\)

\(^{1}\) W. Mundle, "Fear," *NIDNTT* 1:621.

\(^{2}\) Andrew Bowling, "yare\'\," *TWOT* 1:907.


Faced with the mighty demonstration of God's power at the Red Sea, the children of Israel are said to have feared the Lord (Exod 14:31). Fear here is again expressed by yâ're' in the MT, but the LXX employs φοβεῖν. This experience of God's marvelous deliverance intensified the people's fear, that is to say, it produced a wholesome fear of the Lord which resulted in trusting reliance upon his power.

The majesty of the phenomena associated with the theophany at Sinai (Exod 20:18) occasioned fear in the people. To express this fear, the author uses the Heb. nûa' which connotes primarily a repetitive to and fro movement. Here the LXX employs φοβεῖν. Its range also includes shaking as a sign of fear as is seen here. If holy awe is involved, it is not uppermost. In the first place, it is not a connotation of nûa', and in the second place, the people's response seems to imply an emotional fear. This seems to be the logical way to understand their desire not to have God speak to them lest death should result. Moses' response to them also seems to indicate that they were filled with fear and panic. He told them not to fear (MT yâ're' LXX θαρεῖν) for God's intent was to test them so his fear (MT yîr'â, LXX φοβεῖν) would be with them to keep them from sinning.

Moses seems to be saying that the people should not be terror

---


2Keil and Delitzsch, 4:49.

3See Andrew Bowling, "nûa'," TWOT 2:564.

4Keil and Delitzsch, 4:126.
stricken for God's intent was to test them so they could develop awe and reverence which should keep them from sinning.¹

This test substantiates the notion that fear can be expected in contexts where the mighty acts of God are demonstrated.² Besides, it seems to also indicate that God himself intended and expected some degree of fear (awe, reverence, etc.) to result from the mighty deeds accompanying his theophany.³

Finally Exod 34:30 suggests that Moses' encounter with God on the mountain had an effect upon him which was visible. His face became radiant. This in turn had an effect upon the people. Aaron, the elders, and the people in general feared to approach him. He had to veil his face. Thus, even the effect of the Divine majesty upon Moses elicited fear from the people.

Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy also attests to the fact that fear is a legitimate response to God's marvelous deeds. When recounting the giving of the covenant at Sinai, Moses states that God's direct communication caused

¹Compare Andrew Bowling, "yir'â," TWOT 1:401. He suggests that the emotion of terror and fear may be put into man's heart by God.


³This notion is further substantiated by a number of references from the book of Deuteronomy. Not only was Israel expected to fear God as a result of his mighty deeds, but the nations were expected to fear Israel because of God's mighty deeds on their behalf. See Deut 2:25; 4:10; 6:12-13, 20-25; 8:1-6; 11:25, and 28:10.
the people to fear (yir'á). As a consequence, he had to act the part of a mediator between them and God (Deut 5:5).

There are four instances (13:11, 19:20, 17:13, and 21:21) when a fear response seems to be what was expected from the people. Moses states that the punishment meted out to the idolater, the one who showed contempt for the priest and the judge, the malicious witness, and the rebellious son will be heard of by all the people and will cause them to fear.

Besides, Moses instructed Joshua that upon entry into the Promised Land the law should be read to the people every seven years--in the year of the cancelling of debts. All Israel--men, women, children, and aliens--should be assembled and the law should be read in their hearing. Twice he states the intent of his exercise. Its design was for the people to listen and learn to fear the Lord and carefully follow the words of the law (Deut 31:10-13). In addition, he states that when a king was chosen by the people, he should write a copy of the law for himself. He should keep it and read it so he can learn to fear the Lord (Deut 17:19).

Joshua

When the children of Israel passed through the Jordan River on dry ground, they stood in awe of Joshua as their fathers had done for Moses at the Red Sea. Joshua, however, directed the people's attention to God. He told them that God had wrought a miracle for two reasons: (1) so the people of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and (2) so Israel may fear the Lord their God forever.

1 Samuel

Israel had been at war with the Philistines. They decided to take
the ark of the covenant to the battlefield to ensure God's presence with them and guarantee victory. When the Philistines heard that the ark had arrived in the camp of Israel, they became afraid (MT yārei', LXX φοβέω) and said, "Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty Gods?" Their fear was grounded in their awareness that it was the God(s) of Israel that "smote the Egyptians in the wilderness." Here is another instance in which the mighty acts of God caused fear in the other nations (1 Sam 4:5-9).

The notion, then, that there is a background for fear when people encounter the mighty deeds of God is supportable. Evidence for its support can be derived from Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and 1 Samuel. Repeatedly instances have been seen where Israel responded with fear. At times God expected such a response from Israel and from the surrounding nations.

In the light of this evidence there is need to reconsider the Synoptic passages which deal with the fear of the disciples. Maybe the severe charges that have been levied at them are not justified in view of the texts dealing with Israel's encounters with divine revelations.

Seeing and Hearing in the Qumran, Apocryphal, and Pseudepigraphic Writings

The concepts of hearing and seeing are also found in the Qumran writings. Four passages are cited here. In 1QS 4:11 four characteristics of the ways of falsehood are presented. These are: blindness of eye, dullness of ear, stiffness of neck, and heaviness of heart. Those who possess these traits are said to walk in the ways of darkness and guile. Of special interest are blindness of eye and dullness of ear. Earlier, 1QS 3:18-21 states that those born of truth spring from a fountain of light while those born of

1See Bowling, 1:400.
falsehood spring from a source of darkness. If this passage is interpreted in the light of 1QS 4:11, then the source of darkness would include the four characteristics of the ways of falsehood--especially the inability to see and hear.

The other two passages, CD 8:32-34 and 1QH 1:21, have references to hearing and to the unstopping of the ears. These four references seem sufficient to show the presence of the concepts in the Qumran literature. Besides, they indicate that in the first century the concepts were still being associated with each other in contexts of teaching and understanding.

The combined concepts of hearing and seeing also appear in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. They are found in at least four instances in Ben Sira. In his counsels regarding unprofitable children, Ben Sira notes that a city can be replenished by one who has understanding but that the kindred of the wicked would speedily become desolate. In this context he states that he had seen many such things and had heard greater things. Toward the end of the chapter he says; "My son, hearken unto me, and learn knowledge...."

When discussing the creation of man, Ben Sira says that God gave man five\(^1\) operations (powers, JB) which fill him with knowledge and understanding. He lists the ear and the eye among these endowments. In vss.12-13 God's covenant with man is mentioned. Man's eyes are said to have seen God's glorious majesty and his ears heard his glorious voice. This seems to be a reference to Israel's experience at Sinai. Moses is said to have been made glorious in the sight of kings and was shown part of the glory of God.

\(^1\)Two others, a share of intelligence and reason, are listed in vs. 5, but are considered to be a gloss of Stoic origin. See the notes on vs. 5 in the JB.
He was also made to hear God's voice when he received the commandments, the law of life and knowledge, which were to be taught to Jacob and Israel (45:3-5).

Besides these references, the concepts occur together elsewhere in these works in teaching or learning contexts. In 4 Ezra 5:2-3; 6:17-21; 10:55-56; 12:31-38; TReu 2:5-6, and TNaph 2:7, hearing and seeing are employed in contexts which suggest that they are both necessary for total comprehension. It would seem, therefore, that these corpora also attest to the necessity of a convergence of hearing and seeing for comprehension.

Seeing and Hearing in the Works of Philo and Josephus

Philo, an elder contemporary of Jesus who survived him, also attests to the use of the traditional concepts of hearing and seeing in Hellenistic Judaism. The writings of Philo contain numerous references to hearing, seeing, and hearing and seeing combined. Of these, twenty-one are noteworthy due to their combination of the concepts of hearing and seeing. The most significant ones are considered here.

Philo states that ignorance destroys the soul's powers of seeing and hearing. It prevents light, which might show its realities, and reason, which might be its teacher, from entering the soul. He sees knowledge as the opposite of ignorance and as being the eyes and ears of the soul. It allows-no mis-seeing or mis-hearing but surveys and observes all that is worthy to be heard and seen. The references to teaching and learning indicate that

1De ebrietate, 157.
2Ibid., 158.
the concepts occur in a context that is significant.

Philo depreciates hearing, though acknowledging that it contributes to comprehension.¹ He states that those who are far removed from facts should not form hasty conclusions nor should they rely on conjectures. On the contrary they should examine facts closely, inspecting them individually and carefully envisaging them. He recommends this since "The certitude of sight must be held as better than the deceitfulness of hearing." He adds, too, that in the apprehension of truth "hearing² is proved to lag far behind sight," therefore that which is only heard does not make good evidence.³ Philo makes these comments while discussing Gen 11:5. The context cannot be mistaken for he specifically states that the lawgiver, Moses, applied human terms to the Omnipotent God to aid us "his pupils, to learn our lesson."⁴ He also speaks of God's action "to admonish and instruct. . ."⁵ A teaching context is, therefore, evident, and, therefore, makes this reference similar to Deuteronomy.

Later on in the same work, he identifies the sons of Israel not only as hearers but as "sons of him that sees."⁶ He gives as his rationale for this identification the fact that hearing "stands second in estimation and below

¹De confusione linguarum, 140-141.
²See De specialibus legibus, 4.106 in which he discusses the role of hearing in learning. There he associates the cogitation of learning with the regurgitation of a cud chewing animal.
³See also ibid., 4.59-61 in which the ears are said to be less trustworthy than the eyes.
⁴Ibid., 135.
⁵Ibid., 140.
⁶Ibid., 148.
sight, and the recipient of teaching is always second to him with whom realities form clear to his vision and not through the medium of instruction."¹ Philo goes on to acknowledge elsewhere that he who hears and sees should be superior.²

Writing on the migration of Abraham, Philo states that the voice of mortal beings is judged by hearing, but the words of God are seen as light is seen. He makes this inference based on Exod 20:19-22 and Deut 4:12. Commenting on the latter, he says a differentiation is made between things heard and things seen, and hearing from sight.³ He makes a similar point in De Decalogo. There, he states that the voice of God was so clear and distinct that the people seemed to see rather than hear it. Besides, the voice of man is audible while God’s is visible for what God says is not words but deeds which are judged by the eyes and not by the ears.⁴ He further states that the voice of God is seen by the eye of the soul and is interpreted by the power of sight residing in the soul.⁵

In De fuga et inventione, Philo combines hearing and seeing in a teaching context and alludes to their involvement in comprehension. He states that the individual who neglects being attentive to his teacher because of laziness, neglects that which would enable him to see and hear and that which would help him use his other faculties for the observation of nature’s

¹Ibid. See also De fuga et inventione, 208 in which he not only says hearing takes second place, but that it is deceptive, and De congressu eruditionis gratia, 20.70.

²De migratione Abrahami, 47-52.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 46-47.

⁵Ibid., 48.
facts. This person is not forward looking but, like Lot's wife, is looking back on the dark and hidden side of life. He finds Deut 29:4 having fulfillment in such persons since they did not receive "a heart to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear." 1

In his comments on the early education of Moses, Philo continues this combination of hearing and seeing for learning. He contends that Moses applied himself to hearing and seeing what would profit the soul. His cogent remark, that it is that which is seen or heard that can bring profit or loss to the soul, is noteworthy. Besides, in this context profit to the soul must be construed to represent knowledge or learning. This suggestion is verified by the fact that the sentence which follows speaks of the teachers of Moses and that references to learning follow.

It is evident that Philo employs the terms and concepts of hearing and seeing. Besides the instances already noted, Philo states that the person who is intoxicated by folly lies "prostrate and sprawling like sleepers" with his soul's eyes closed. He states that this person, while in that condition, is unable ὁρᾶν οὕτω τῶν θέας καὶ ἰκονίζων οἴδας τε ὧν (to see or hear aught that is worth seeing or hearing). 2 Ὅρῳ and ἰκονίζω are employed here in a context relating to comprehension. 3

Speaking of the comprehension of God, Philo also employs the concepts and vocabulary of hearing and seeing already noted. In the Special Laws, he states that the one who expects his conduct to go unobserved by

1De fuga et inventione, 122-123.
2De somniis, 2.160.
3See also De vita Mosis, 2.201; In Flaccum, 40; De virtutibus, 173; De legatione ad Gaium, 123, 224, and 243 for other occurrences of the combined concepts in Philo.
God knows little in regard to God's power to see and to hear all.¹ ὀραω and ἀκοὐω are employed here.

For Philo then, the concepts of seeing and hearing, "the two royal senses,"² receive much prominence.³ He sees them playing a vital role in learning and instruction. His emphasis, however, is on the superiority of seeing and that is unmistakable. It seems, however, that while hearing is inferior to sight, the individual in whom both are combined has pre-eminence over the one who only sees.

The concepts of hearing and seeing also occur in the writings of Josephus, who was a contemporary of the Gospel writers. In recording Moses' dialogue with God at his call, Josephus notes that Moses had "consternation at that which he had seen and much more at that which he had heard. . . ." The understanding that he received was so overwhelming that despite the fact that he was unsure how he could persuade Pharaoh to let Israel go, mistrusting God was not a viable option for him.⁴

In Antiquities 3, Josephus states that in preparing Israel for the theophany, Moses told them he had been admitted to a sight of God and had listened to the Immortal Voice.⁵ This reference to sight and hearing is followed by two instances of hearing in which the author notes that Israel

¹See 1.279.
²De specialibus legibus, 1.321.
³In addition to the above citations, see also De Decalogo, 89 and 139; De vita contemplativa, 45; Legum allegoriae, 2.69; Ibid., 3.183; De confusione linguarum, 59; De mutatione nominum, 99; De virtutibus, 172-173, 217.
⁴Josephus Antiquities of the Jews (trans. Thackeray, LCL), 2.270.
⁵Ibid., 3.88.
advanced to hear God speak and had listened to his voice from on high.\textsuperscript{1} He also records that when Moses returned with the two tablets of stone, the people rejoiced at what they had seen and heard from their general.\textsuperscript{2}

As he recounts the history of the reign of Saul, Josephus states that after Saul had heard of David he sent a message to Jesse and ordered him to send David to him. His message is significant for it adds to the Biblical data the concepts being studied. It was as follows: "He wished, he said, to see the young man, having heard of his comeliness and valor."\textsuperscript{3} Saul had heard of David but wished to verify his information by sight. This tradition by Josephus is noteworthy especially since his usage and vocabulary are identical to that used in the Synoptic Gospels.\textsuperscript{4} Perhaps it indicates his attempt to use familiar and traditional concepts to express ancient history.\textsuperscript{5}

Seeing and Hearing in the Rest of the NT

The concepts and vocabulary of hearing and seeing are employed in the New Testament outside the Gospels. The context might be different at times, but the concepts are there. The study proceeds with an examination of the Acts, the Pauline, the Petrine, and the Johannine Corpora.

Acts

There are seven instances in the book of Acts in which the concepts of hearing and seeing are employed together. Twice it occurs in speeches of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 89.
  \item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 102.
  \item \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 6.168.
  \item \textsuperscript{4}See \textit{Antiquities} 2.270; 3.88-100, and 102; 6.167, and 9.150-151.
  \item \textsuperscript{5}See also ibid., 9.150-151.
\end{itemize}
Peter (2:33 and 4:20), thrice it is used by Paul (22:14, 15 and 28:26-27), once by Luke in describing the conversion of Paul (9:3-9), and once in the context of the ministry of Philip (8:6).

Speaking on the day of Pentecost in response to the charge of drunkenness, Peter asserts that ὃ ὑμεῖς βλέπετε καὶ ἀκοῦετε (that which you see and hear) is the result of the exaltation of Jesus and reception and outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Peter makes reference not only to what was heard but also to what was seen. The use of βλέπω is consistent with Synoptic usage as well.

In response to the charge by the Sanhedrin not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, Peter asserts οὐ δύναμθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς ὧ εἶδαμεν καὶ ἢκούσαμεν μὴ λαλεῖν (for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard, Acts 4:20). It is very significant that Peter says that that of which he speaks is that which he has both seen and heard. It seems that the proclamation consisted not only of what the disciples had heard from Jesus but also of what they had seen. Luke also records that there was a twofold impact of the ministry of Philip upon the Samaritans. It was not only what they heard that influenced them. They were also impressed by the signs which they saw him do. Here Luke employs ἀκούω and βλέπω to express the concepts of hearing and seeing.

Speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem following his arrest, Paul describes the events leading to his conversion and his becoming a Christian itinerant preacher. He makes reference to the fact that he saw a great light and heard a voice which spoke to him. He notes that his companions saw the light but did not hear the voice (22:6-9). Luke in Acts 8:3-9 records similar facts employing the same verbs. Interestingly in 1 Cor 15:8 in reference to
this experience, Paul describes this light as a revelation of the risen Christ to him. At any rate Paul says here that it was what he had seen and had heard that resulted in his conversion. Besides, in describing his meeting with Ananias, that devout Christian from Damascus who restored his sight, Paul employs the concepts. He says that Ananias told him that God had chosen him for three reasons: (1) to know his will, (2) to see the Righteous One, and (3) to hear the voice of the mouth of the Righteous One. Of significance is the appearance of γινώσκω, εἴδον, and ἀκούω together. Paul is here not only required to hear the voice of Jesus but also to see him.

Ananias also tells Paul that he is to be the witness for Jesus. Having seen and heard Jesus, through the revelation on the road to Damascus, he is now to be a witness to all people in regard to what he has seen (ὁράω) and what he has heard (ἀκούω).

The final occurrence of the concepts in the Book of Acts is found in Paul’s speech to the leading Jews in Rome (28:26-27). Here they appear in the quote from Isa 6:9-10, the passage used in the Synoptics regarding Jesus’ teaching in parables. As in Matthew, the quote here seems to be a direct one from the LXX, though it includes a line omitted in Matthew.

The Pauline Corpus

There are at least five occurrences of the concepts of hearing and seeing, used together, in the writings of Paul. The first, Rom 11:8, is in the context of Paul’s concern in regard to the salvation of his people. Quoting from Deut 29:4 and Isa 29:10 he asserts that God had allowed a spirit of slumber, which affected hearing and seeing, to overtake the Jews.

In the Corinthian Epistles, the concepts occur twice—once in each epistle. The first is again in a quote from the OT (Isa 64:4). In 1 Cor 2:9,
Paul tells the believers that eyes have not seen, ears have not heard, neither had the heart of man been able to conceive the things that God has prepared for those who love him. In this context ἀκούω and ἔδωκαν appear together.

In 2 Cor 12:6 Paul speaks concerning his ability to glory. He states that though he has cause to glory, he does not glory. His rationale is that he does not want anyone to think of him more highly than he sees (βλέπω) him to be or that he hears (ἀκούω) of him. The false impression which Paul seeks to avoid conveying could be communicated through seeing and hearing.

The letter to the Philippians also has two references to the concepts. In 1:30 (cf. vs. 27) Paul notes that the Christians are suffering just as they saw him suffer and they had heard of him suffering. The brethren are also admonished to practise those things they had received and learned from him. Paul describes the things they are to practise as being those which they have heard (ἀκούω) and have seen (ἔδωκαν).

The Petrine Corpus

The first reference in the Petrine Corpus (2 Pet 1:16-18) is a reminiscence of an event in the life of Jesus. Peter assures his readers that they had not followed "cleverly invented stories" (NIV) when speaking to them about the power of Jesus. He states that they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration when the voice came from heaven acknowledging him as Son. He employs occurrences heard and seen to assure the believers of the veracity of the witness that was borne to them.

In 2 Pet 2:8 he again uses the concepts in a reference to Lot. He notes that while Lot dwelt in Sodom and Gomorrah his righteous soul was annoyed by the things he saw and heard. The vocabulary employed is
traditional and the thought is that what is seen and heard can have effect on the soul.

The Johannine Corpus

The Johannine Corpus has several instances in which seeing and hearing are used together. The Baptist, in answering his disciples' query regarding the swiftly moving fame of Jesus, notes that he who comes from above, that is heaven, is above all. In this context John notes that Jesus, he who is from above, testifies to what he had seen and what he had heard (John 3:31-32). The vocabulary employed here is reminiscent of 6:30, 36, 44-47. The Fourth Evangelist notes that following the feeding of the Five Thousand the people began to seek Jesus. In the ensuing dialogue regarding the prerequisites for working the works of God, the people asked for a sign so they could see and believe (6:28-30). After identifying himself as the bread of God (vs. 33) that relieves the hunger and thirst of the believer, Jesus says that they have seen him yet have not believed (vs. 36). As the dialogue continues, Jesus notes that an act of grace is necessary for belief (vs. 44). He verifies his statement with a quote from Isaiah which indicates that all must be taught of God (Isa 59:13). He goes on to say that all those who hear and learn from God will come to him. Since he is the only one who has seen the father, it follows that only those who see the father in him and who hear the father's words in his words will believe and have eternal life (6:44-47).

The first Epistle of John contains some significant occurrences of the concepts. In authenticating the veracity of his proclamation, John asserts that he has had intimate relationship with the facts. He states that he had heard (ἀκούω), had seen (ὁράω) with the eyes, and had looked upon (θεωρέω).
the word of life (1 John 1:1). In vs. 2, he again stresses having seen (ὄραω) the manifestation of life. In vs. 3, John again affirms that what he is sharing with his readers is authentic. He can speak with assurance for he saw (ὄραω) and he heard (ἀκούω) for himself. He is sharing so his readers can have fellowship with the other eyewitnesses and with the Father and his son, Jesus Christ. In vs. 5 he therefore goes on to share with them the message that was heard from Jesus.

Finally in Rev 22.8 the concepts are employed twice. The seer states first that he heard (ἀκούω) and saw (βλέπω) the things he records. He then notes that after he had heard (ἀκούω) and seen (βλέπω) he sought to worship the angel who had given him the revelations.

It seems that in the literature contemporaneous with the Synoptic Gospels, the concepts and vocabulary linking hearing and seeing occur very frequently. Particularly significant is the usage of the concepts in the rest of the New Testament. It seems also that for the early Christian proclaimers hearing and seeing were very important concepts. Seeing seems to have been particularly stressed to point to the events of the passion/resurrection and to refer to the certitude of the proclamation. It seems that following the converging of seeing and hearing for the disciples, their proclamation came to be dominated by these two vital aspects of comprehension, perhaps to ensure that their converts had complete understanding.

Conclusion

At the end of this brief inquiry for a conceptual background for hearing and seeing in Jewish traditions, it is possible to arrive at some conclusions:

1. There is undeniable evidence found in Jewish literature for the
association of hearing and seeing with understanding. While this association is not limited to the book of Deuteronomy, its major significance is to be found there.

2. The association of hearing and seeing is a major feature in Deuteronomistic theology where it appears in the context of teaching and learning. It is there that apparently a noteworthy tradition of the involvement of hearing and seeing in learning and comprehension developed. This tradition had particular associations with obedience as well as with a bestowal of divine grace (insight) given the right prerequisites—hearing and seeing. This tradition was utilized by the major prophets in a related context.

3. The use of this tradition in the NT documents, especially the Synoptic Gospels, should not be viewed as a strange phenomenon, for it was also employed by contemporary Jewish writers. The writings of the Qumran sectarians, Josephus and, primarily, Philo, justify this conclusion. It is significant that Philo not only employed the concepts but ranked them, valuing sight above hearing.

4. There is also evidence that the OT provides a background against which the fear of the disciples can be understood. The mighty acts of God solicited and resulted in fear on man's part. This response must be regarded not only as legitimate but as the only appropriate one, at times. Seen thus, fear would not necessarily demand or imply a negative connotation.

These conclusions are noteworthy. They should be kept in mind as contributing as well as controlling factors which can assist in the understanding of comprehension/incomprehension in the Synoptic Gospels.
The Contributions of Greek Traditions to the Understanding of Incomprehension in the Synoptics

The influence of the Greek tradition on later Jewish thought has been noted in the discussion of hearing and sight in the works of Philo and Josephus. However, we need to consider the mainstream of that tradition.

In 1960 J. J. Vincent noted that there were a host of questions, primarily historical, in the area of discipleship studies that needed to be addressed. He cited the affinities between the Master-disciple relations in the Gospels and similar phenomena in the Rabbi-pupil relations in Judaism, the Torah-disciple relations in Jewish piety, the philosopher-student relations in Greek civilization, and the teacher-initiate relations in the Mystery religions as examples. As far as can be ascertained, no one has followed his lead. He himself ignored this cogent suggestion in his doctoral dissertation published sixteen years after he had made these suggestions. Though thorough investigation of all the areas he enunciated is beyond the scope of this study, some attention is being given to the area of philosopher-student relations in the Greek paideia. Of primary focus are the instances in which the concepts and relevant terminologies related to hearing and seeing appear in a teaching or learning context, implying comprehension and occurring in exposition of a disciple-making teacher or a philosopher.

Seeing and Hearing in the Greek Paideia

The major terminologies employed for hearing and seeing have been in


2J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord. In 1984, Robbins published his Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark. In this work he addressed some of these issues but, as can be ascertained from his bibliography, he seems to have been unaware of Vincent's works. His study is significant, though limited to the Gospel of Mark.
common usage since the time of Homer.\(^1\) Because the connotations they represent have to do with the senses and because they are related to cognition they each came to imply perception. Besides, from a very early period they came to be regarded as the primary instruments of perception.\(^2\) By the time of Heracles, a ranking of the two developed and seeing took pre-eminence over hearing.\(^3\) Due to the emphasis on sight which developed, the Greeks came to be regarded as a people of the eyes.\(^4\) Despite this development, the two concepts were associated quite frequently in the writings of the philosophers and disciple-making teachers.

The Fifth Century B.C.

In the fifth century B.C. hearing and seeing were employed in contexts which emphasized their role in comprehension as well as in contexts which ranked them. In the writings of Aeschylus a statement appears in the former context. Speaking of the miseries which beset mankind Prometheus says: \(\text{o} \, \pi \rho \omega \tau \alpha \, \mu \varepsilon \nu \, \beta \lambda \varepsilon \pi \omicron \upsilon \tau \varepsilon \varsigma \, \varepsilon \beta \lambda \varepsilon \pi \omicron \upsilon \mu \acute{a} \tau \eta \eta \nu \varsigma \, \kappa \lambda \upsilon \omicron \nu \tau \varepsilon \varsigma \varsigma \, \sigma \omicron \upsilon \, \eta \kappa \omicron \omicron \omicron \nu \omicron \nu \cdot \cdot \cdot \) (First of all, though they had eyes to see, they saw to no avail; they had ears, but understood not \ldots).\(^5\) These men of whom Prometheus spoke

\(^1\)Mundle, 2:173, and Dahn, 3:511.

\(^2\)Michaelis, \textit{TDNT} 5:319.


\(^4\)Rudberg, pp. 166-180.

\(^5\)Aeschylus \textit{Prometheus Bound}, 447, 448. Cf. Mark 8:18 where Jesus expresses the same ideas in the form of a question; however, the Marcan saying seems to be dependent on Jer 5:2 (cf. Isa 6:9).
had eyes to see but though they saw, they did not perceive and though they had ears to hear, they did not understand what they heard.

Lysias also associated the two concepts in a context implying understanding. In his oration against Andocides he reminded the men of Athens of the advice of Diocles who counseled them, in the case against a Megarian, who had committed impiety, to make a judgment in the interest of mankind. The objective of such a judgment was: ἵνα ἀκούσαντες καὶ ἴδοντες ἀφρονέστεροι οἱ ἄλλοι δέσι (so that the rest [of the world], having heard and seen, might be more soberminded...). The men of Athens are further told that they understood (ἐπιστάτης) what they must do with Andocides. Their task has been simplified by the fact that he was "caught in the open commission of impiety" and that they have seen and heard his offenses (εἴδετε, ἡκούσατε ἀνά τοῦτον ἀμαρτήματα). Two significant facts may be deduced from the passage. First, it was what was heard and seen that would make the rest of the world become sober-minded (σωφρων). The word implies being of sound mind, being reasonable, sensible, and serious. Understanding what they would hear and see in regard to the Megarian's punishment would assist the world in becoming sensible. Second, it is that which the Athenians have seen and have heard concerning Andocides' offenses that gave them understanding concerning the judgment that they ought to make.

One reference from the writings of Herodotus gives an example of a ranking of the two primary senses for the Greeks. Speaking to his trusted

1Lysias Against Andocides, 54.
2Ibid., 55.
3Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "σωφρονέω," p. 802.
bodyguard, Gyges, concerning the beauty of his wife, Candaules says: ὅτα γὰρ τυχάνει ἄνθρωποι ἔόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν . . . (for men trust their ears less than their eyes . . .).1

Fourth Century B.C.

In the fourth century B.C., as in the fifth, hearing and seeing were employed in association with each other for understanding as well as in contexts giving preference to seeing. In this latter setting, Plato asserts: ὅψις δὴ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον αἰτιὰ τῆς μεγίστης ὑφελείας γέγονεν ἡμῖν . . . (Vision, in my view, is the cause of the greatest benefit to us . . .).2 He proceeded to list some of the other benefits which have been derived from sight and concluded that philosophy has been the outcome of these. It is the greatest gift that the divinity has bestowed upon mortals and is the greatest good of eyesight. He further asserts that the cause and purpose of the best good, philosophy, is that God has bestowed vision upon us.3 Plato states that hearing is also a bestowal of the gods and like sight is designed to assist in learning and sharing in calculations, etc.4 Furthermore, in his discussions concerning the organs of perception, hearing is accorded the third position.5

Socrates, in a discussion with Phaedrus concerning his ability to memorize (learn by heart) Lysias, made a statement which has implications

1Herodotus, 1.8.
2Plato Timaeus, 47A.
3Ibid., 47B.
4Ibid., 47C.
5Ibid., 67B.
here. He stated that when Phaedrus was listening to Lysias, the former did not hear once only since the latter repeated what was read several times. Despite the repetition, however, Phaedrus still was unable to commit what was read to memory. He subsequently had to borrow the book and read for himself.\(^1\) It could be deduced from this statement that hearing was insufficient for Phaedrus to comprehend and memorize the work. Sight was necessary, since to read for himself, he had to see what was in the book. This reference could be seen as an allusion to the importance of seeing in learning.

In his discussion concerning the function of the various senses, Aristotle asked an interesting question which seems to indicate that he gave preference to sight over hearing. He asked: \(\text{ἡ πῶς ἢν ἐκεῖο δῆλον ἀκούσαντι γίγνοιτο, μὴ ἰδώντι;}\) (Or how could a thing be clear to a man who heard it if he has not seen it?).\(^2\)

A number of significant references are found in the writings of Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes with reference to hearing and seeing in association with learning and understanding. Apollonides, an army officer who opposed a course of action contemplated by Xenophon and the others, was charged with incomprehension in language similar to that employed in the Synoptics. Note the words of Xenophon: \(\text{ὦ θαυμασιώτατε ἄνθρωπε, σὺ γε σὺδὲ ὅρων γιγνώσκεις σὺδὲ ἀκούων μέμνησαι (you amazing fellow, you have eyes but still do not perceive, and you have ears but still do not remember).}\(^3\) The conclusion is irresistible that what is seen

\(^1\)Plato Phaedrus, 228A.

\(^2\)Aristotle On Georgias, 980b1-19.

\(^3\)Anabasis, 3.27. Cf. Mark 8:18 and Jer 5:21.
must influence perception and what is heard must also be perceived so it can be recalled. In addition, the implication is that what is both seen and heard is significant for future decisions.

In the Cyropaedia, which as the name suggests deals in part with the education of Cyrus, the father of Cyrus offers counsel and instruction to the youth as he was about to set out on an expedition. He told him that there were signs that the gods were in favor of the expedition. He told him that he was giving him instruction so that he could recognize the omens of the gods for himself and not depend on the interpretation of others to learn their counsel. In this context he said: ἀλλ' αὐτὸς καὶ ὁρῶν τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ ἀκοῦων τὰ ἀκουστὰ γινώσκω (but that you yourself, both seeing what is to be seen and hearing what is to be heard, might understand . . .). Cyrus then, was not to be at the mercy of the soothsayers. He would, however, be able to understand what he saw and heard, since he was taught.

In the context of teaching, Xenophon makes reference to the influence of a disciple-making teacher upon his students. He states that all teachers demonstrate to their disciples that they themselves practice what they teach in addition to leading them on by argument. Socrates was cited as an example of such a teacher who instructed his pupils by what they saw (his practice of what he taught) and by what they heard (his arguments).

1Xenophon Cyropaedia, 1.VI.2.1-9.

2For additional examples demonstrating how seeing and hearing contribute to understanding in the writings of Xenophon see Cyropaedia, 4.11.12 and Occonomicus, 4.9-19.18.

3Memorabilia, 1.2.117.
Plato, in his disputations, also has several references to hearing and seeing paving the way to understanding. Of special significance is a reference in Theaetetus where he noted that in learning effort must be made to distinguish between the letters by sight and hearing. In Timaeus, he notes that sight and hearing are bestowals of the gods in order to assist in learning and comprehension. Besides, in his discussion on women Plato speaks of his belief of the tales he had heard about certain women, called Sauromatides. He states that his belief has been confirmed by his own observations. Seeing thus had strengthened hearing and had led to knowledge.

Aristotle, the pupil of Plato and a teacher himself, also associates hearing and seeing with perception. In his treatise on Memory and Recollection he makes three statements. Speaking about memory he associates hearing and seeing. Again he notes that these two senses as they function in recall relate to time for they have to do with what has happened in the past and that which is remembered. Besides these statements, Aristotle also

1See also Theaetetus, 159E, 173B, 182D-E, 184-198 in which seeing, hearing, and knowing occur and in which the influence of sight and hearing in perception is also discussed; Meno, 79E-89D, especially 81C-D, in which research and learning are said to be by recollections, and Laws, 840E.5-6 which says that what is seen and heard can lead to the corruption of the Athenians.

2Theaetetus, 206A.

3Timaeus, 47C.

4Laws, 804E.

5On Memory and Recollection, 449b21.

6Ibid., 450a20-21.

7See also 451a6-7 for the third statement which is in a similar context.
says that man does not seem to perceive similar things at the same time. He states that different things are perceived with his hearing and with his vision. He therefore associates seeing and hearing as the organs of perception.

While not discussing hearing and seeing, Demosthenes attests to the inferior opinion in which hearing was held. He states that from the earliest times, "time immemorial," evidence based on what was heard was not recognized as competent even in the most trifling of charges. Credence was given only to testimony based on accurate knowledge. Based on the concepts of the times we could say that accurate knowledge was derived by perception through the eyes.

This association of hearing and seeing persisted in Greek literature down to the first century A.D. Writing sometime between the first and second century A.D. in the Education of Children, Plutarch asserts that every free born child should have knowledge of every branch of general education. He notes that this knowledge could be gained μὴ τ' ἀνήκουν μὴ τ' ἀθέατον (both through hearing and through observation). While the vocabulary is different, the concepts are the same and this occurrence is significant. He specifically states that knowledge is acquired through hearing and seeing (observation). Plutarch also notes that fathers who entrust their sons to attendants and masters ought to take cognizance of their instructions by "their own eyes or their own ears." To fail to do this was to fail in their duty and to make them liable for rebuke. To underscore the point, he quotes

1On Georgias, 980b15.

2Against Eubulides, 4.

3The Education of Children, 7C.
an anecdote which said "nothing makes the horse so fat as the king's eye."\textsuperscript{1} Again the involvement of the two important senses, for the Greek, must be noted. The anecdote emphasizes, however, the pre-eminence of the eye (sight).

Conclusion

This brief survey of the Greek \textit{paideia}, primarily as it relates to disciple-calling teachers, has been revealing. The following conclusions, similar to the observations derived from the study of the vocabulary above, seem justified.

1. Hearing and seeing were regarded by the Greeks as the two primary senses. From the time of Homer down, this usage was very common in the literature.

2. A distinct attempt was made to rank the senses. As such, seeing was regarded as the most important sense. In contexts of learning, hearing and seeing must be combined, but the latter was of primary significance.

3. To express comprehension, the Greeks also employed hearing and seeing in conjunction with a verb of knowing or perceiving. In this usage, there is not only a conceptual parallel with the Synoptics, but a terminological one as well.

4. The usage of hearing and seeing in contexts of comprehension is a topos in the Greek \textit{paideia}.

5. This usage in the Greek \textit{paideia} suggests that there is also a background in Greek literature that can inform and assist the understanding

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 9D. See also "How to Study Poetry," 17D-E, especially the quote from Empedocles.
of incomprehension in the NT, especially in contexts of understanding and pupil-teacher relations.

Summary

As a result of the present terminological and conceptual survey of the background, meaning, and use of the vocabulary associated with comprehension/incomprehension, the following conclusions can be arrived at:

1. There is a definite background in the Old Testament, in both the MT and the LXX, that can provide valuable help in understanding the comprehension/incomprehension motif in the Synoptic Gospels.

2. This background involves both concepts and vocabulary. The latter is particularly true of the LXX but is further strengthened by the fact that there is a convergence of the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew terms.

3. The conceptual background is not limited to the OT but includes post-biblical Jewish literatures such as the Qumran writings, Philo and Josephus.

4. The use of the concepts of hearing and seeing to express comprehension is a topos in Biblical, Cognate, and Classical Greek literatures.

5. In the Greek paideia and in the writings of Philo there is some emphasis on the necessity of the involvement of seeing for total comprehension. This is particularly true in contexts of teaching and learning, though it is not limited to it. The distinct impression is given that it is seeing that gives certitude and validity to what is perceived.

6. The NT documents also attest to this emphasis since the early Christian oral proclamation and written communication contained a definite emphasis on hearing and sight.

7. Fear seems to be a legitimate response to the mighty acts of God.
Since there is evidence that there are contexts in which this is a positive response, the fear of the disciples when confronted with the deeds of Jesus or his self-revelation should not necessarily be given a negative connotation.

These conclusions significantly affect the approach that is taken in considering the Synoptic passages. They will serve as valuable controls that can lead to a better understanding of the incidents of incomprehension of the disciples of Jesus. It seems that the conclusion is possible that the disciples could not have completely understood the teaching of Jesus until hearing and sight converged, with the latter substantiating the former. Verifying this assumption is attempted in chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

THE DISCIPLES IN SYNOPTIC PERSPECTIVE:
A SYNOPSIS

The findings of chapter 2 have led to the conclusion that the Synoptic portrait of the disciples is neither peculiar to Mark nor original with him. The similarities in the portrayal could be indicating that besides some interdependence (possibly more on the part of Mark) the Synoptists utilized a common and early tradition. This conclusion conflicts with the trend in Synoptic scholarship which consistently attributes the portrait to Mark.¹ This bias results, to a large extent, from the presuppositions of those who espouse the Marcan priority hypothesis and for whom any deviation from Mark must be regarded as a redaction of his material.²

In view of the fact that the Synoptic problem is yet unresolved, we propose to concentrate on the similarities between the Synoptic accounts on the disciples rather than on the differences between them. Having, therefore, examined the portrait of the disciples in the respective accounts and having noted the similarities, an attempt is made to construct a Synoptic portrait based on these similarities and to interpret certain of its features in light of

¹See the review of literature in chapter 1. Also J. Vincent, Disciples, and Lord, pp. 104-107 for an outline of some modern views.

the findings in the preceding chapter. Special attention is paid to determining how comprehension/incomprehension in the Gospels can be informed by pertinent *topoi* from the Old Testament and other traditions. To achieve the goal of constructing this portrait of the disciples, the following are among the issues which will be addressed:

1. The nature of the Marcan portrait of the disciples
2. The nature of the Matthean and Lucan portraits of the disciples
3. The influence traditional understanding of master-disciple relations could have on the portrait of the disciples in the Synoptics;
4. The bearing of the interrelation between hearing and seeing on the comprehension/incomprehension of the disciples.

**How Should Mark's Portrait of the Disciples Be Viewed?**

It has already been demonstrated that the Synoptic portrait of the disciples is not Marcan. Further, to do justice to the Marcan picture of the disciples, both a positive and negative view is required. Considering the bias of the literature regarding the issue in Mark, perhaps a little more needs to be said, and the following essential questions addressed. Is Mark's portrayal of the disciples more negative than positive? Are there other ways that seemingly negative statements can be understood?

While J. J. Vincent is certainly correct that studies from Wrede to Weeden have accustomed us to see the disciples in a negative light,¹ and while his attempt at a solution is commendable, it cannot be supported here. He postulates that rather than condemning the disciples, Mark is defending them.²

---

¹See Vincent, *Disciple and Lord*, p. 111.

²Ibid., pp. 110-112. He also says "excusing rather than accusing them."
Basic to his position is the assumption that Mark is the creator of the misunderstanding or perhaps is emphasizing it for some design or predetermined end, in anticipation of the preparation for their rejection of Jesus. This is a novel idea but based on a faulty assumption, for it considers Mark and not the tradition responsible for the incomprehension of the disciples. Though influenced by the Marcan priority hypothesis, Edward Taylor is perceptive in his observation that failure is not the last word in the Gospel since a future is depicted for them.\textsuperscript{1} His conclusion that their failure is "most miserable" and could even be described as "total discipleship failure"\textsuperscript{2} is perhaps too severe.

In determining the nature of the Marcan portrait of the disciples, the disciples' response to Jesus' power over nature is separated from their response to his teaching. Besides, the passages dealing with their fear are re-examined in the light of the texts relating to the Gospel of Mark of Israel's encounters with divine revelations.

When the twenty passages\textsuperscript{3} in Mark which express incomprehension are examined, five\textsuperscript{4} seem to be more severe on the disciples. A sixth, Mark 16:8, while not directly expressing incomprehension, has been understood thus by scholars.\textsuperscript{5} Of the five passages three, 4:35-41, 6:45-52, and 9:2-6, relate to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}E. Taylor, "The Disciples of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark," p. 321.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 321.
\item \textsuperscript{3}This figure represents the number of passages discussed in this study under the heading "Incomprehension of the Disciples in Mark." J. Vincent, \textit{Disciples and Lord}, pp. 100-101, lists twenty-nine passages. His figure is inflated due to his breaking up of several pericopae which belong together, e.g., Mark 4:38-40; and 41; Mark 6:35-37. In his study such passages are combined.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21; 9:2-6; and 9:30-32.
\item \textsuperscript{5}See the discussion below.
\end{itemize}
nature and involve a fear response. Mark 8:14-21 is in a teaching context but the major feature of the passage and the issue to which Mark relates the incomprehension has to do with nature miracles. As such, it is discussed here. The fifth passage, Mark 9:31-33, has to do with misunderstanding of the teaching of Jesus. The other fourteen passages reflect a high degree of similarity with the other Synoptic accounts. These findings make it even more imperative that the six passages, cited above, be fully explained.

Mark 4:35-41

On the Sea of Galilee the disciples are confronted for the first time, in Mark, with Jesus' power over nature. Jesus had fallen asleep in the midst of a storm. His panic-stricken disciples awakened him with the question, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" This question is thought to reveal their belief that Jesus was unmindful of their welfare. Mark says that after Jesus had subdued the winds and the calm had ensued, the disciples experienced a deep fear, "feared a great fear".

Weeden classifies this pericope among those which portray the disciples' imperceptiveness. He seems to fault them on two counts: (1) inability to recognize in Jesus the power to aid them in their plight and (2) inability to recognize his true identity. Kelber is even more emphatic than Weeden. He challenges the RSV translation of Mark 4:40-41, classifying it as

---

1See Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 30; Lane, *Mark*, p. 176; and V. Taylor, p. 275, who are examples of those who hold such a view.


inadequate. For him, "And they were frightened with fear" is a better translation. He attributes to the disciples cowardice before the miracle and with consternation and fright after it. The disciples, for him, were panic-stricken men after the miracle, since they were frightened by it and were also uncomprehending in respect to Jesus' true identity.\(^1\)

Kelber's interpretation can be challenged. Mark certainly is communicating something by his use of δειλοί in vs. 40 and his use of ἐφοβήθησαν in vs. 41, especially with the cognate accusative. Δειλοί is also used in cognate literature of those who are timid and cowardly.\(^2\) While φοβέω and its derivatives also mean to be afraid or become frightened, even implying terror, they also denote fear in the sense of reverence, respect, and awe. In this sense it is used of God and men who command respect.\(^3\) Therefore, the disciples who had been acting fearfully and cowardly before the miracle respond with reverence and awe after it. This notion is further strengthened by the fact that in contemporary thought the ability to control the sea and subdue tempests was seen, against an Old Testament background, to be demonstrative of divine power.\(^4\) The disciples must have seen the divine in this action and were responding reverentially to it. Furthermore, on the basis of the findings of chapter 3, it can be said that such a fear was legitimate. Indeed the response of Israel to encounters with divine revelations suggests that fear, that is, reverence and awe, can be regarded as appropriate responses to the mighty

\(^{1}\) Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, pp. 30-31.


\(^{3}\) Ibid. See also W. Mundle, "Fear," *NIDNTT* 1:621-624.

Consequently, the disciples' reaction to the miracle should not be surprising. Jesus' question in vs. 40 does not speak as much to their latter state as it does to the former. He seems to have been questioning their state during the crisis. His question could even have served to initiate the recognition which resulted in the response of vs. 41. Their question then, τις ἀρχων ὁ τότε ἐστίν ὁ καί ἡ θάλασσα ὑπακούει αὐτῷ; (who then is this that even the sea obey him?), far from implying incomprehension of his true identity would be reflecting cognition. It implies that they recognized they were in the presence of a man who had the ability to subdue demonic forces, as winds and raging sea were regarded, and who must therefore be divine.

Weeden's assumption, that the disciples' initial question Διδάσκαλε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὃτι ἀπολλυμέθα; (Master! Do you not care that we are perishing?) implies inability to recognize in Jesus the power to help in their plight, is not incontrovertible. While it does appear to be harsh, it seems to reveal something positive. If the disciples had not had some notion that their Master could have helped them in their predicament, then their question is meaningless. Perhaps, therefore, ἀπολλυμέθα (we perish) should be regarded as inclusive of Jesus. On the contrary, it seems that οὐ μέλει σοι (is it not a concern or a care to you?) is significant, especially when it is considered that ἀπολλυμέθα is emphatic middle. More than revealing concern that Jesus is unmindful of their predicament, their question seems to suggest that they felt he could help them even though they were not sure just how.

---

1See above, pp. 189-194.

2See Martin, Mark: Evangelist and Theologian, p. 133; Nineham, Mark, pp. 146-147; and Best, Following Jesus, p. 231. See also Achtemeier, Invitation to Mark, p. 78. Cf. Robert Stacy, Fear in Mark, p. 124.

3Compare Achtemeier, Invitation to Mark, p. 78.
It seems that Mark did not intend to portray the disciples negatively in this pericope. The disciples are depicted in their humanness as they encountered the divine, occasioned by their Master's stilling of the storm. This passage, therefore, reflects that some level of comprehension was being displayed by the disciples.¹

Mark 6:45-52

This pericope also depicts the disciples on a stormy sea. On this occasion, however, Jesus was not with them initially. When he joined them in the early morning, he arrived walking on the water. They became terrified, taking him to be a ghost. He calmed their fears and identified himself. Mark says that after he embarked, the sea became calm and they became astonished. He concludes the pericope by suggesting that the disciples' utter astonishment was occasioned by their lack of understanding about the bread and by the hardness of their hearts.

There have been a lot of problems with this pericope. Several scholars have noted difficulties with it. Achtemeier suggests that some of its details stand in tension with each other. After listing the inconsistencies, he says that they highlight the fact that Mark placed it in this context for reasons other than historical and geographical accuracy. He finds Mark's rationale for the placement in vs. 52 in which Mark suggests that they did not understand about the loaves because their hearts were hardened.² Vincent seems to accept Quentin Quesnell's evaluation³ that Mark is responsible for the location of the

¹Ibid., p. 78.
²Ibid., p.103.
³J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord, pp. 61-62.
pericope. He further agrees that Mark seems to be making a correlation with the early church's understanding of the bread of the Last Supper. He does not agree, however, that this explanation is the "single core theme of the Gospel."1

Both Nineham and Meye see Mark establishing a relationship between the Feeding miracle and the boat scene. Nineham sees Mark making so close an association that he viewed a comment on the feeding miracle as appropriate at the end of the boat scene. He even views the "hardened heart" and the "understood not" as heralding a link with the parable of the sower.2 Meye thinks that the disciples failed to recognize who Jesus was as he walked on the sea because they had not understood the feeding miracle. He, therefore, views understanding as the crucial point of Mark. He thus concludes that the disciples would have known who Jesus is and therefore would not have feared had they only understood the meaning of the miracle of the loaves. He too sees an association with the parable of the sower.3

Weeden also seems to have difficulties with the location of the pericope. He views it as having common features linguistically and circumstantially with Mark 16:8. He concludes with Bultmann4 that originally the story may have been a post-Easter appearance story. He views the story as having been very positive to the disciples and may have highlighted their awe of the experience. He states, however, that by appending vs. 52 to it, Mark transformed it to

---

1 See Quesnell, pp. 124-125, 175-208.
3 Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 68.
4 Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 230.
view them negatively. They have no reverence for Jesus and are obdurate.¹

It appears, however, that this boat experience must have followed the feeding miracle traditionally. Both Matthew and John place it in the same position (see Matt 14:23-27 and John 6:15-21). Achtemeier seems correct in his assessment that the details are inconsistent. This is especially true in respect to the placing of vs. 52, which, as was previously mentioned, seems to be misplaced. Kelber’s inference—based on vs. 52—that by that statement Mark, in the light of 3:5, was identifying the disciples as opponents of Jesus,² is too severe. Doubtless, however, Mark must have had a reason for placing vs. 52 in this context despite its misplacement. What may have been his motive?

It has already been suggested that the pericope is in the correct sequence. When the parallel account in Matthew’s Gospel is considered it is observed that Matthew has a detail that is omitted by Mark. He says that when Peter recognized that the one walking on the water was Jesus, he requested to be allowed to join Jesus in performing that feat. Permission was granted to him and he actually began walking on the water, but when he took his eyes off Jesus and became concerned about the boisterous waves, he began to sink. He notes that Jesus charged Peter with inadequate faith and with doubting. He further states that it was when Peter and Jesus entered that the winds ceased, and the others in the boat worshipped Jesus, acknowledging him as the Son of God.

When the two accounts are compared it seems that the wonder and amazement of the disciples is more understandable in the context of Peter’s experience than in one which rests on the feeding miracle. As was previously

---

¹Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, p. 50.

²Kelber, Mark’s Story of Jesus, p. 37.
noted Mark has been consistent in his omission of details embarrassing to Peter.\(^1\) Since he omitted Peter's abortive water walking experience, he had to find an explanation for the disciples' wonder and amazement, so he included vs. 52. Perhaps he did not want again to attribute their incomprehension to inability to perceive Jesus' power over the elements, since he had already made that association in 4:35-40. If his purpose here was to discredit them, then he ought to have made that precise association. The disciples' failure to grasp and to grow in understanding would then be brought into greater focus. It must be conceded, however, that Mark is saying in a unique way and in an unusual place that the disciples had not grasped that meaning of the feeding miracles. Perhaps vs. 52 should be seen as a Marcan editorial comment which seeks to redress his omission of Peter's encounter on the sea. Otherwise, to insist that lack of comprehension regarding the miracle of the loaves occasioned their incomprehension and amazement at his power over the elements would fail to take into account understanding which may have been transferred from the previous nature miracle (4:35-41); it would also rule out the strong possibility of tracing the origin of the saying to the amazement which must have resulted from Peter's experience on the waves--his successful walk, his sudden failure, and his rescue by Jesus. Such fear and amazement would be legitimate in the face of a mighty act or self-revelation of God.

**Mark 8:14-21**

Mark places this encounter between Jesus and the disciples in the context of a boat crossing. Prior to it, the Pharisees had unsuccessfully sought a sign from Jesus. The pericope is introduced with the note that the disciples

\(^1\)See above p. 157, n. 2.
had forgotten to take *ἀρτοὺς* (loaves of bread) with them, but that there was a single loaf on board. Having said all that, Mark proceeds to state that Jesus at that point warned the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. He notes that the disciples did not seem to grasp his meaning for they began discussing *πρὸς ἀλλήλους* (among themselves) the fact that they had no bread. Jesus then reprimanded them for their incomprehension. He questioned their ability to perceive and to understand, and sought to determine the true state of their hearts, eyes, and ears. He even challenged their memory of the

1Matthew says ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. Gundry claims he employs this prepositional phrase to replace Mark's *πρὸς ἀλλήλους* and by so doing shifted the meaning from mutual discussion to private thinking. As a result what was a simple overhearing of a discussion has been transformed into divine omniscience. See Gundry, p. 326. Gundry is vulnerable on two counts. In the first place *ἐν ἑαυτοῖς* does not have to denote only "in themselves." There is sufficient attestation to also justify the meaning "among themselves." As such his argument concerning a shift of meaning would fall. See Robertson, *A Grammar of the New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 587; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 75; and Arndt and Gingrich, p. 258, for the verification that *ἐν* also denotes "among." In the second place, how can he be so sure that Matthew was the one who made the changes? His arguments are not convincing. It is possible to reverse some of his arguments to arrive at Matthean priority. To illustrate, he says that Matthew omits Mark's *δεικτέλλετο* in 16:6 and consequently turns "saying" into "said." On the contrary it could be reasoned that it was Mark who inserted *δεικτέλλετο* since he employs it some five times to Matthew's once. It would then be he who turned "said" into "saying." Again in vs. 7 Gundry states that in keeping with his style Matthew inserted *λέγουσι.* It could indeed be true that *λέγουσι* is representative of Matthew's style but that since Mark noted this fact he omitted it when he wrote. Additionally, Mark 8:16 can be cited. Gundry says that the verb *ἐξώ* in this verse is textually uncertain. While Mark has it in the third person plural, Matthew employs it in the first plural. Interestingly, there are textual variations, in Mark, which strongly support Matthew (see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 98) in that reading, but Gundry claims that it was Matthew who used that form of the verb since the copy of Mark he used had it. On the contrary, couldn't it be argued that Matthew's usage was the original one and that it is attested by variant readings of Mark? Who was the one who made changes? The point is that Gundry's claims are based primarily on his presupposition--the Marcan priority hypothesis. Readers of Gundry's work will note that he consistently views Matthew through the eyes of Mark.
feeding miracles climaxing with the question ὡς νεότερε (Do you not yet understand?)

Edward Taylor observes that this passage is one of the most difficult in the Gospel for the exegete.¹ This is verified by the diverse attempts at understanding and interpreting the passage. Some² see this passage as a Marcan creation combining traditional material with his own literary insights. Trocmé sees Mark employing an authentic saying of Jesus. Like Bultmann, however, he thinks its exact meaning is no longer discernible. He views the pericope as designed for members of Mark’s community who are behaving like Pharisees and Herodians. The pericope is designed to encourage them to share with others, like the original disciples who had given everything.³ Other interpreters see Mark’s community being alluded to, but with a different aim in mind. Quesnell contends that the one loaf in the boat was Jesus. The disciples failed to grasp this as did some in his community who also failed to understand Jesus on the Eucharistic bread.⁴ Schweitzer sees the passage reflecting Mark’s description of the total blindness and deafness of man to God’s metaphorical language.⁵ Kelber sees correlation between the boat trips. He views the passage as the sixth and climactic one. He views the one loaf as the embodiment of the oneness of Jews and Gentiles which had been manifested during the boat trips. Their failure angered Jesus. Mark, he claims, now capitalizes on this by

¹E. Taylor, p. 195.
²For a listing of some who hold this view see ibid., p. 196, n. 2. See also Best, Temptation and Passion, p. 78. Taylor himself expresses this view. See pp. 195-218.
³Trocmé, pp. 110-111.
⁴Quesnell, pp. 103-125, 232-257.
⁵Schweitzer, Mark, p. 162.
charging them with blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart, thus placing
them in the role of opponents and seriously challenging their position as
insiders.¹

Quesnell sees Mark 6:30-8:21 as a bread section.² He even feels there
is perhaps a larger pattern. He connects 4:2-20 with 6:45-52, 7:1-23, and 8:14--
25--rebuke and non-understanding in addition to bread as recurring themes.
He contends that since there is this pattern, and since some of the rebukes
for non-understanding are inexplicable in the immediate setting, then the
passages are from the redactor in whose head the interrelationships originated.³
Edward Taylor builds on this idea. He sees Mark attaching much significance
to 8:14-21. For him, it was made "the interpretive apex of a series of miracle
stories in the first half of his Gospel." Mark implies by the question he asked
that the disciples had not learned, though learning had been expected. They
had failed to grasp Jesus' identity and his ability to sustain them in times of
crisis. Their spiritual blindness almost affected their position by taking them
to the edge of joining the ranks of outsiders. He views the author expressing
hope in respect to their spiritual sight.⁴

Norman Beck rejects the solutions which had been offered to the
problems of this pericope. He notes the passage is strategically located in the
Galilean ministry of Jesus, in a Eucharistic teaching section (6:30-8:21) in
which feeding and bread (even crumbs) are emphasized. He expresses doubt

¹Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, pp. 40-41. See also Vincent Taylor,
Mark, pp. 363-365, and Meye, The Twelve, pp. 64-65, who not only see a
relationship with bread but with boat.

²Quesnell, pp. 68-71.

³Ibid., pp.124-125.

concerning whether the pericope actually goes back to the historical Jesus level, though if it did, its purpose was to demonstrate the unity and community of people in the impending eschatological kingdom. He views "the crucial and perhaps primary level of development" of this tradition as coming from mixed communities of Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus. It is a pre-Marcan level and was intended to emphasize the uniting of both groups in open table fellowship. Its primary concern was pastoral and communal. At the third level of development, the Marcan "redactor-writer" inserted 8:15 due to the connection between yeast and bread. The intent was to distinguish the teachings of the Marcan community from that of the Pharisees and the Herodians. Following this, Matthew changed its focus and Luke ignored it while utilizing 8:15 in a different context. For Beck, the pericope originally emphasized the need some of Jesus' followers saw of uniting believers from non-Jewish and Jewish backgrounds.1

Perhaps Beck’s interpretation should also be seen as inadequate. Like so many other Marcan scholars, his vision is tunnelled. Again it must be asked how one can be so sure that Mark's gospel was written first. What if it was not? As long as there is the possibility that he did not write first, then other options ought to be pursued. It must be admitted, however, that there is evidence of Marcan editorial work. This issue is pursued in the course of the discussion.

The insight that the section leading up to Peter's confession seems to have an emphasis on bread-related activities is significant. It must be pointed out, however, that this phenomenon is by no means unique to Mark. It is also

1Beck, pp. 49-56.
evident in Matthew's account. It may very well be that this association belongs to the tradition. The story referring to the Pharisees' request for a sign, perhaps of his Messiahship, was placed within this context. The tradition noted that following this request Jesus warned his disciples regarding the leaven, teaching according to Matthew, of the Pharisees. Since the disciples had forgotten to take loaves of bread for their physical sustenance, they mistook the reference to the leaven of the Pharisees as a reference to their negligence. They, therefore, began a discussion of the supposed problem among themselves. When Jesus became aware of the discussion he rebuked them in regard to their faith, their perception, their memory, and their transfer of learning.

Examination of the pericope reveals that some editorial work has been done. When Matthew's account is compared with Mark's, a number of inconsistencies become evident. In the first place, both Evangelists are united that after the request of the Pharisees, Jesus and the disciples departed for a new territory and that sometime subsequent to this the disciples became aware of their failure to take bread. They are not united, however, on the place of the discovery. Matthew says the discovery was made on the other side of the lake, while Mark seems to say that it was on the boat. Furthermore, while Matthew is consistent in his affirmation that they had forgotten to take loaves of bread, Mark not only says they had forgotten to take bread but that they had had one loaf on the boat. However, subsequent to Jesus's warning

1Matt 16:5-12. It is notable to a lesser extent in Luke because of his omission of much of the parallel material in this section. Enough is retained, however, for the detection of the tendency.

2It would seem that Mark 8:15 should be seen as belonging to the tradition. Matthew has it in the identical context, while Luke records it in a different one.
against the leaven of the Pharisees and the ensuing discussion, Mark completely ignores the fact that he had said there was one loaf and, like Matthew, places emphasis on their failure to take bread.

In the second place, both accounts conflict in regard to the identity of the group mentioned alongside the Pharisees. Matthew has the Sadducees while Mark has the Herodians.

In the third place, both Evangelists agree that the disciples’ perception and comprehension were questioned by Jesus. They are not united, however, in the severity of the charges levied nor in the outcome. Matthew notes that in addition to the charges above, deficiency of faith and memory were also involved. For him, Jesus’ questions regarding the feeding miracles and the bread were not the primary focus. However, they jolted the memories of the disciples resulting in their understanding his intent. Mark, on the other hand, adds hardness of heart, blindness, and deafness to the charges noted above. Besides, he provides answers for the rhetorical questions about the feeding miracles. He then adds one final question, ὃς νῦν σαν ἐσε (Do you not yet understand?). This question he leaves unanswered, thereby allowing the issue of the comprehension of the disciples to remain in doubt.

While there is indisputable evidence of editorial work, and while based on one’s presuppositions calculated guesses can be made concerning dependence, there can be no conclusive answer. Perhaps, then, affirmation of the common tradition is more in order along with an attempt at determining what each author is trying to communicate in addition. Basically, it would seem that the tradition suggested that subsequent to the second feeding miracle, the Pharisees, with or without companions, requested a sign from Jesus with respect to his Messiahship. Jesus refused. Later, when alone with the disciples, he warned
them of the leaven of the Pharisees and other groups. Influenced by their failure to have brought bread, the disciples became preoccupied with their neglect and missed the intent of the instruction. Jesus, therefore, rebuked them for their lack of perception and comprehension as well as their failure to learn from the feeding miracles. Though not as emphatic as Matthew in regard to the disciples gaining some insight from this encounter, the tradition probably meant to imply that they did, since it follows up this pericope with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Mark too can be construed to imply such an understanding. Though he leaves their understanding in doubt, he follows up with the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida and Peter's Confession. From the former, a gradual healing, can be deduced the fact that the disciples are slowly coming to understanding and will perhaps come to comprehend at some future date. The latter, Peter's confession, confirms that indeed some progress, though slow and partial, is taking place. Matthew's statement suggests that there was lack of understanding but that after some time there was movement toward understanding. Viewed thus, Matthew would not be displaying understanding where Mark shows lack of understanding. Rather, both, in keeping with the tradition, are demonstrating slowness to understand.

Two issues yet remain to be resolved in respect to this pericope. First, 

---

1For a similar view but a different application see E. Taylor, "The Disciples of Jesus in Mark," p. 210. In nn. 29-31 he lists a number of scholars who hold a similar view. For a contrary view, see Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*. He claims there is no scope for slowness of understanding in Mark, only lack of understanding without any qualification.

2Τότε (then) is very significant here and denotes a contrast with that which obtained previously.

3Here understanding is limited to the immediate subject. However, the subsequent pericope confirms its gradual movement in respect to Jesus' person. It is yet incomplete.

---
what did Jesus mean by the leaven of the Pharisees? Mark does not really explain or interpret this statement.¹ Vincent Taylor thinks he used it to imply their evil disposition.² Matthew explains it, however, and applies it to the teaching of the Pharisees (16:12). To what would Jesus then be referring? The Pharisees had been linking Jesus with demonic powers and specifically Beelzebub. They had also been challenging the teaching of Jesus with their traditions. They had, therefore, not accepted Jesus as the Messiah since he had not conformed to their expectations. They had been opposing him, yet they had come to seek a sign. The disciples were to beware of false Messianic expectations and of a Messianism based on signs. They were not to concentrate only on sight but were to also listen to his teaching. Significantly, from this point on, especially following the transfiguration, there is (1) A deemphasis on miracles in both Matthew and Mark; (2) A seeking for information by Jesus regarding the Messianic beliefs of both his disciples and multitudes; and (3) An evident shift in his teaching, now emphasizing the suffering Messiah concept.

Second, there is the issue of why Mark questions the disciples' ability to see and hear. In keeping with the notion that the disciples are slow to understand and in keeping with the findings of chapter 3, it would appear that these charges are not inconsistent. Seeing and hearing are associated


with comprehension. As such, these two redactional statements are emphasizing the fact of the disciples' slowness to understand, a fact already expressed in the questions relating to perception.

Mark 9:2-6

This pericope also highlights the fear of the disciples. Some interpret this fear negatively. Weeden refers to it as cowardly while Kelber sees it as associated with lack of perception. Perhaps, there could be another way to view the passage.

Six days after promising that some in his audience would not experience death until they see the kingdom come with power, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to a high mountain and was transfigured (μετέμορφωθη) before them. That the Evangelist desired to portray this as a divine revelation can be seen by the supernatural character of the change depicted. Perhaps this is his rationale for saying no fuller on earth could bleach the clothes of Jesus to make them so intensely white. The presence of Elijah and Moses also takes the experience out of the realm of the ordinary. Following the appearance of Elijah and Moses, Mark says, Peter spoke up. He invited Jesus and the others to join in building tabernacles. Whatever his intent, the statement was inappropriate. The tradition apparently noted its inappropriateness for both Matthew and Luke say that the voice from the cloud interrupted Peter.


2See Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, pp. 35, 49; Kelber, The Kingdom in Mark, pp. 49, 84; Schweitzer, The Good News According to Mark, p. 180; Meye, Jesus and the Twelve, p. 76; Achtemeier, Invitation to Mark, pp. 130-131; Trocmé, p. 129; Nineham, p. 263, among others.

(Matt 17:5 and Luke 9:34). Noting this fact, perhaps, Mark felt obliged to apologize\(^1\) for, or at least explain\(^2\) it. He, therefore, says; \(\text{oú \ γὰρ \ ἦδει \ τί \ ἀποκριθῇ} \) \(\text{ἐκφοβοὶ \ γὰρ \ ἐγένοντο} \) (for he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid).

Mark seems to have done another bit of editorial work here. He links the disciples' fear and Peter's incongruent statement. As such, Peter's statement was the result of their fear which preceded the appearance of the cloud. Luke suggests that their fear came as they were entering the cloud. Matthew, on the other hand, contends that the fear came after the heavenly voice which may even have occasioned it or contributed to it. Regardless of the precise location of the fear,\(^4\) all three Evangelists are agreed that the mighty act of God on the mount resulted in fear on man's part. Vincent Taylor is correct in his assertion that this fear is not fright but supernatural awe.\(^5\) While there are those who give a negative connotation to \(φοβέω\) here, it is perhaps to be seen as positive. Fear here should be seen as a legitimate response to the mighty act of God.


\(^3\)Interestingly, Luke also offered a rationale for Peter's incongruent statement. He says: \(\text{μή \ εἰδὼς \ ὁ \ λέγει} \) (not knowing what he said) as an after thought. Whether this was a reminiscence of Peter preserved by both Mark and Luke or whether Mark was influenced by Luke or influenced him, might never be known. It seems, however, from the nature of the editorial work that Mark may be the depending.

\(^4\)This is not to ignore the fact that there is some redaction here. Rather, what is being isolated is the agreement of the accounts in saying that there was indeed fear. Perhaps all are correct in their location and maybe only Matthew hints at the total perspective.

mighty act of God. This posture is consistent with the findings of chapter 3 of this study.\(^1\) Just as Israel responded with fear and reverential awe when confronted with God’s mighty demonstrations, even so the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration displayed a similar response to their encounter with divine disclosure.

In keeping with this interpretation, this pericope should not be seen as depicting the disciples negatively. Peter’s statement, explained or unexplained, does not portray a failure of the disciples.\(^2\) On the contrary, it confirms that he was overwhelmed by what he saw and, being impulsive, he spoke out of turn. The reflection on this experience in 2 Pet 1:16-18 lends further support to this notion. It speaks of Jesus’ reception of glory and honor from the Father and of hearing the voice from heaven which was borne \(\nu\pi\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\eta\zeta \mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha\lambda\omicron\pi\rho\epsilon\sigma\omicron\omicron\delta\omicron\epsilon\zeta\gamma\zeta\) (by majestic, sublime\(^3\) glory). This statement is not only significant, but is suggestive.\(^4\)

Mark 9:30-32

This pericope records the second passion prediction of Jesus. In Mark the disciples are said not to understand the statement and are afraid to ask for enlightenment. Mark and Luke are somewhat more severe than Matthew at this juncture. Matthew simply says that the second passion prediction caused the disciples great distress.

\(^1\)See above.

\(^2\)Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark*, p. 84 says it is an indication of discipleship failure.


\(^4\)Perhaps this statement confirms Matthew’s view that the voice created fear. It certainly would if it was borne on majestic glory. Cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 345.
Gundry contends that by attributing grief to the disciples Matthew has thereby transmuted "the ignorance of the disciples into sorrow." Furthermore, he views this shift as revealing Matthew's desire to represent the disciples as understanding Jesus' prediction. Gundry attributes priority to Mark and sees Matthew as a redaction throughout. But the grief of the disciples does not necessarily mean that they understood. The statement could be Matthew's veiled way of indicating the precise fact that both Mark and Luke spell out. As such, the disciples could have been grieved because they did not understand the full meaning of Jesus' statement. Besides, Gundry is assuming a lot for, as has been repeatedly said, there is not conclusive evidence to show that Mark wrote first. There is the possibility too that the Evangelists are using independent accounts of the original tradition. As a matter of fact, Vincent Taylor employs this argument to account for the variations between Mark and Luke. This is a viable option that should not be overlooked, since it may assist in interpreting the passage.

Mark 16:7-8

This is a most important passage. There are approximately four endings of the Gospel of Mark current in the manuscripts. Metzger contends that on the basis of the available data Mark 16:8 should be seen as the earliest ascertainable ending of the Gospel. He postulates that there could be three possible reasons for such an abrupt ending: (1) the Evangelist intended to close his Gospel at this point; (2) the Gospel was never finished; (3) the

---

1Ibid., p. 354.
2Vincent Taylor, Mark, p. 403.
3See Metzger, A Textual Commentary, pp. 122-126, for a listing and evaluation of each ending.
Gospel accidentally lost its last leaf before it was multiplied by transmission.\(^1\)

Metzger favors the latter. Many Marcan scholars\(^2\) prefer the first alternative. For them, Mark deliberately chose that ending to signal the concept of the disciples he wanted to leave with his readers.\(^3\) For these scholars, this fitting climax\(^4\) which totally discredits the disciples is reached due to the failure of the women to deliver the message designed to redeem them (the disciples).\(^5\) Mark thus ends his Gospel on a tragic note. Those who espouse this view, therefore, see Mark 16:7-8 as the epitomy of Mark’s negative of the disciples. The following are the reasons most frequently cited for this conviction:

1. Mark wished to emphasize the disciples’ awe and fear of God in the light of Jesus’ victory over death. The appearances were not recorded because they were too awesome to be put into words; Mark ends on a note of fear to stress this.

2. He wanted to explain why the story of the empty tomb remained secret for so long. Since the appearances were well known, Mark merely alluded to them in vs. 7 so he could center on the empty tomb. The silence of the women, not their fear, was his major emphasis.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 126. See also G. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives*, pp. 55-72.


\(^3\)Dewey, *Disciples of the Way*, pp. 118-120.

\(^4\)Swartley, pp. 197-198.

\(^5\)Kelber, *Mark’s Story of Jesus*, pp. 84-85. See also Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, pp. 44-51.
3. He wanted to emphasize the situation of his own time or the imminent *parousia*.

4. No extended narratives existed in Mark's day, only lists of appearances (cf. 1 Cor 15:5-6). Verse 8 is the usual reaction to an angelophany; the silence due to the Messianic secret. The proclamation had to come from the disciples, but since that had not happened yet, an angel had to announce as well as command it.1

These reasons are conjectural and are advanced to support an argument from silence. Osborne's conclusion that Mark 16:8 is not the ending of the book is supportable. Perhaps he is also correct that traces of that ending may be seen in Matt 28.2 However, it is not entirely certain that Matthew is the one utilizing Mark. He may be more correct in his observation that 16:8 is not the conclusion to the Gospel but is a verse which sets the stage for Christ's victorious appearances.3

Mark says that the women left the tomb with trembling and amazement due to fear. He further says that they said nothing to anyone. Kelber's deduction that the women fled as the disciples had earlier fled4 is unjustified. In the first place, there is no comparison between the flight of the disciples and that of the women from the tomb. The disciples fled, perhaps, through fear for their own safety and through their disappointment at the fate that had overtaken their Lord. Their fear is negative. The women, however, fled from the tomb due to their encounter with a divine manifestation. Their fear is not

---

1See G. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives*, p. 56.

2Ibid., p. 65.

3Ibid.

4Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 54.
negative, for in the context of a divine manifestation, it is understandable. Mark does not report where they went or to whom they went. What is sure is that while the men had fled in an act of desertion the women did not, unless they were expected to linger by the tomb. The women left the tomb for they saw no need to linger there. Besides, they had been given a message to deliver to the disciples. The fact that Mark says that they left the tomb but, perhaps by dint of circumstances, does not describe their arrival to the disciples does not transform them into deserters.

Kelber's conclusions may have resulted from Mark's statement that the women said nothing to anyone. For him, this statement includes the disciples. He, therefore, views the women as denying the disciples of the last hope of redemption. Again, this is an argument from silence which assumes that the women forever remained silent. Perhaps Mark is simply trying to say that the fear of the women kept them from saying anything to anyone they met on their way. Concurring with this view, Moule says that their refusal to even linger and exchange a greeting is an Eastern sign of great haste. Robertson may have a point when he states that the women departed from the tomb with mixed emotions and that their excitement was too great for ordinary conversation. Unfortunately, it is now impossible to be sure of how Mark resolved this issue for there is much uncertainty surrounding the ending of the Gospel. What can be affirmed, however, is that if 16:8 is seen as the

---

2Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, p. 54.
4Robertson, Word Pictures, 1:402.
ending it does not leave the disciples in a bad light for the fear and silence of the women are not entirely negative. Furthermore, if it is argued that the ending is lost, then a comparison with other Synoptists might confirm the conclusion that the women may not have said anything to any one but the disciples. Both Matthew and Luke affirm that the women reported their experiences (what they had seen and heard) to the disciples.

Against this background, therefore, it is argued that this text should not be used to view negatively either the women or the disciples. There is not sufficient evidence in the text itself to justify such a use. Silence is not a credible enough argument from which to build a case against the disciples.

This examination of the pericopae in Mark which depict the disciples most negatively has resulted in the following conclusions:

1. Mark's presentation of the disciples is not necessarily negative. Some of the pericopae which have traditionally been used to justify negative interpretations can be viewed differently. It is a fact that one's presuppositions greatly influence one's conclusions. Consequently, those who read Mark with an eye for negative elements will certainly find them. But these must be subjected to further study.

2. Not all the instances of fear in the second Gospel are to be seen as depicting the disciples negatively. In keeping with traditional Old Testament topoi fear should, at times, be seen as an appropriate response to the mighty acts of God. As such, when the disciples are confronted with the divine manifestations of Jesus and respond with fear, that is not a negative response.

3. Mark did not create the incomprehension of the disciples. It was in the tradition—if not taken over from Matthew and Luke. Mark at times, however, dramatizes it more than the other Synoptists. He even highlights it
at points where it is not in keeping with the immediate context. His motive appears to be condemnatory.

4. Mark's portrait of the disciples should be seen as reflective of the tradition whether it depicts the disciples negatively or positively. In this respect it seems to mirror the historical relationship between Jesus and his associates.

The Matthean and Lucan Portrait of the Disciples

It has often been argued that Matthew and Luke modified Mark's portrait of the disciples. This notion cannot be substantiated by this study, which may be added to recent voices questioning the Marcan priority hypothesis. What this study shows is that while there are common elements in Matthew and Luke these are not necessarily modifications of Mark. On the contrary, there seems to be some Marcan amplifications of Matthean and Lucan statements. Nonetheless, it appears that there was a certain perspective of the disciples outlined in the tradition which described the historical relationship between Jesus and his followers. This tradition was employed by all three Evangelists, none of whom dared depart from it.

Thus Matthew's portrait of the disciples depicts a lack of understanding on the part of the disciples. While he may not have dramatized it as much as Mark or couched his comments in the same style, Matthew conveys the idea that the disciples lacked faith, were terrified, and expressed fear when faced with the mighty deeds of Jesus. He similarly records that Jesus questioned the

---

perception and understanding of the disciples on various occasions.\(^1\) There are times when he is even more severe on the disciples than Mark (Cf. Matt 16:22-23 and Mark 8:32-33; Matt 14:22-33 and Mark 6:49-52; Matt 17:17 and Mark 9:19, among others). At issue, however, are the instances, (e.g., 13:51, 16:12, 17:13) when Matthew attributes understanding to the disciples. But, as has already been established, these texts need not present a problem, for by the very way he introduces them, "then they understood," it is implied that there was a time when there was no understanding. Besides, the fact that these statements are always preceded by explanations strengthens this conclusion. These statements are redactional—not so much from Mark as from an earlier tradition. They can be understood in one of two ways:

1. The disciples did not always understand the instructions of Jesus. They were slow in understanding and so from time to time had to receive explanations and further instructions, following which they gained some insights. It is these insights that Matthew records in the manner noted above.

2. They are post-Easter realizations that were read back into pre-Easter occurrences.\(^2\) The disciples had not really understood all the teachings of Jesus. Since Matthew wrote after the disciples had come to understanding, he made some of these redactional statements.

However, these two views are not mutually exclusive. At any rate either position would support the notion that in the historical situation the

\(^1\) Cf. Ulrich Luz, "Die Jünger im Matthäusevangelium," *ZNW* 62 (1971): 141-171. He asserts that the disciples are no more understanding in Matthew than in Mark. If there is a difference he views Jesus as a better teacher in Matthew.

\(^2\) This is precisely the point John makes in John 2:22. Here he states that when Jesus was raised from the dead the disciples remembered and believed.
disciples had not fully understood Jesus. Though they understood at times, their comprehension was only partial. Their experience seemed to have been one of partial understanding combined with persistent dullness (cf. Matt 16:16; 19:13-14, 25-30; 20:20-28; 24:3, among others).

It would, therefore, seem viable to conclude that the Matthean depiction of the disciples also includes positive and negative elements. The disciples accepted Jesus' invitation to follow. They followed to the end but displayed mixed reactions to his deeds and teachings. They understood some things but at times only after much explanation.

Luke's portrait is somewhat similar. Though he does not have much of the material comparable to that where Mark makes his most severe charges against the disciples, enough is retained to convey the same features: fear and imperception with partial display of understanding. Luke witnesses to the fact that the disciples accepted Jesus' invitation to discipleship and forsook all to follow him. For him, they followed to the end, though they neither had complete failure nor complete success. Though they understood some things, they did not grasp the full significance of his mission, hence their failure at the passion.

For Luke, their dullness persisted beyond the resurrection. Fear and terror were their response on both sides of the resurrection, highlighting their humanness when confronted with divine manifestations. It took a special act of Jesus to remedy the situation.

At this juncture it seems plausible to conclude that the Synoptists are agreed in their depiction of the disciples of Jesus. They attest not only to both a positive and a seemingly negative portrayal but also to a slowness of

---

comprehension which is revealed in a fluctuation between understanding and non-understanding.

**Traditional Master-Disciple Relations in the Synoptics**

Associating traditional images of pupil-teacher relations with the portrait of the disciples in the Synoptics is very germane. Robbins asserts that Jesus was a disciple-gathering teacher in the tradition of both Jewish and Greco-Roman conventions.\(^1\) With this fact in mind, it perhaps should be expected that the disciples did react as learner-disciples would in relation to the wisdom of their teachers. In Rabbinic tradition, the teacher sat to instruct\(^2\) while the student-disciple sat before him\(^3\) at his feet.\(^4\) The student's posture in relation to his teacher's was significant. It denoted his subservience as well as the esteem in which teachers were held.\(^5\) Students were the ones who went in search of a Rabbi with whom they hoped to be associated. Aboth admonishes the youthful aspirant "to get himself a teacher."\(^6\) These teachers were seen as the guardians of the citadel of Judaism and as such the exhortation was given

\(^1\)Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, pp. 125-126.


\(^3\)Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, pp. 101-107.


"Let the fear of your Master be like the fear of heaven."\(^1\) Pupils were, therefore, expected to display fear and reverence for their teachers. Besides, the whole scenario emphasized the fact that the student is inferior in wisdom and understanding when compared with his Master, and the entire teacher-student relationship and posture was designed to emphasize it.

In the Graeco-Roman tradition the disciple-gathering teacher was a person of wisdom who interacted with others to transmit the wisdom he embodied.\(^2\) Socrates was portrayed as such a teacher who summoned young men to follow him in order to gain understanding.\(^3\) In the portrayal of his call of Theaetetus, the latter is depicted as becoming afraid of continued discussions with Socrates.\(^4\) The student's lack of understanding and bashfulness before the great teacher are thus emphasized.

It would seem that given this precedence in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman circles the response of Jesus' disciples ought not to be astonishing. As a disciple-gathering teacher Jesus would naturally be seen by his followers as possessing greater wisdom than themselves. Furthermore, once recognized as the Messiah he would be feared and revered and doubtlessly some inhibition would be displayed in his presence. Matthew and Luke credit Jesus with a saying which admonishes followers that a disciple would not be above his

\(^1\)Aboth iv.15. See also Cohen, Everyman's Talmud, p. 176.

\(^2\)Robbins, Jesus the Teacher, pp. 62-63. It should be noted that the apomnemoneumata are usually used to portray the life of a disciple-gathering teacher, according to Robbins.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 89.

It must be admitted that all the misconceptions of the disciples cannot be explained this way. However, a context is provided within which some of their fear and apparent lack of understanding can be understood. It should further be borne in mind that in Jewish circles a student who was slow to understand and slow to forget was viewed positively. Against this background, therefore, the response of the disciples ought to be reassessed. If such behavior was not unbecoming in other disciples, then it should not be regarded thus in the case of Jesus' disciples. Neither should the ability of Jesus as a teacher be questioned.

The Influence of Hearing and Sight on Comprehension in the Synoptics

Earlier it was noted that the insights gained from Biblical and other literatures regarding the influence of hearing and seeing for comprehension could prove beneficial for an understanding of comprehension/incomprehension in the Synoptic Gospels. The merits of this notion are now tested. First, six instances where hearing and seeing were employed together in contexts of comprehension/incomprehension are examined, and then one with hearing and knowing.

2 See Aboth v.15.
3 See J. J. Vincent, Disciple and Lord, p. 110. In trying to resolve the misunderstanding of the disciples he proposes for consideration the possibility that Jesus may have been a bad teacher.
4 These are Matt 11:4-5 and par., Mark 4:12 and pars., Mark 8:14-21, Mark 9:2-6 and pars., Mark 10:46-52 and pars., and Mark 13:7, 16, 29 and pars.
5 Mark 7:14-23 and par.
Both Matt 11:2-5 and Luke 7:20-22 say that John, while in prison, heard of the activities (τὰ ἔργα) of Jesus. Perhaps, what he heard did not conform with his Messianic expectations. He, therefore, sent his disciples to Jesus inquiring: Σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἢ ἔτερον; (are you the coming One or shall we look for another?). In his reply Jesus sent them to tell John what they had seen and heard (ἀκούετε καὶ βλέπετε). He then lists six miracles relating to sight and one relating to hearing.

In this usage an interesting situation is seen. John was in prison. He could not see the works of Jesus. He could only hear of them. On the basis of what he heard, he doubted the Messiahship of Jesus. In response to his questions, Jesus sent information involving both hearing and seeing but with emphasis on seeing. Perhaps his intent was to give him a total picture which should result in comprehension.

Second, all three Evangelists (Mark 4:12, Matt 13:13-17, and Luke 8:10) are agreed that in explaining his reasons for speaking in parables Jesus employed the concept of hearing and seeing. Following his proclamation of the parable of the sower the disciples did not comprehend, so they questioned him about it. The Evangelists present differing versions of the disciples’ question. The consensus is that Mark has the primary account but his presentation gives rise to a number of questions. He says that the disciples asked

---

1 See Schweitzer, The Good News According to Matthew, and Bornkamm, p. 205. They both agree that John had questions concerning Jesus’ lowliness.

2 So Matthew, while Luke uses ἀλλὰς.

3 Matthew here employs the present tense. Luke uses the aorist and reverses the order of the two verbs.

4 Mark says Jesus was asked about the parables. Matthew says the disciples asked why Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, while for Luke the question concerned the meaning of the parable of the sower.
concerning the parables, yet the parable of the sower is the first and only parable given thus far in that particular setting. Besides, while the disciples asked concerning the parables, he has Jesus’ answer seemingly referring to the question posed by Matthew. Similarly, Luke questions the meaning of the parable yet he answers another question—that of Matthew. The first Evangelist poses and answers the question: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Unwittingly then, the second and third Evangelists could be confirming Matthew’s question as the essential one.

The significance of Matthew’s question in relation to Jesus’ answer can be seen from another perspective. After he told the parable Jesus made the comment: ὃ ἔχει ὑπάρχου ἀκούειν (the one who has ears let him hear). Perhaps it is the implication of this statement that motivated the question of the disciples. They were thinking that since they did not comprehend the parables,² then the multitudes ought not to have understood. In his response Jesus suggested that disciples have the opportunity of knowing the mysteries of the kingdom but those outside (the multitudes) are not given that privilege. The Evangelists cite another reason for Jesus’ teaching in parables. It is in this latter context that the hearing and seeing verbs occur. Matthew says: "This is why I speak in parables, that seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, neither understand" (διὰ τούτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ).

¹See Matt 13:9 pars. It should be noted that Mark and Luke insert an additional ἀκοῦω in the passage reading: ὃς ἔχει ὑπάρχου ἀκοῦειν ἀκούετω (He who has ears to hear, let him hear).

²This implication is drawn from the rendering of Mark and Luke. Perhaps it can also be deduced from Matthew, too, since Jesus had to explain the parable to them.
οτι βλέποντες ού βλέπουσιν και ακούοντες ούκ ακούονται. This passage, therefore, uses ακούω (hear) and βλέπω (see) in a context which relates to understanding (συνήθεια). The multitudes will see and will hear but will not understand. Something more is required.

In Matthew's account Jesus' response is set in the context of an Isaianic prophecy. The people's reaction is depicted as a fulfillment of Isa 6:9. This is one of the texts which was viewed as providing an OT background for the relation of hearing and sight for comprehension. In that passage Isaiah employed Deuteronomic theology to suggest that unless Judah learned from past history (i.e., what their fathers had seen and heard in the wilderness) the curses prescribed for disobedience would overtake them. The nation did not learn and, therefore, reaped the consequences. Perhaps Jesus was suggesting here that the nation still had not learned. Consequently, they could neither benefit from the deeds their eyes would behold nor from the teaching they would hear. He expected, however, that since the disciples had accepted his invitation and had followed him they would understand. Their eyes had indeed seen their teacher and their ears had heard him. Perhaps, it is in this context that eyes and ears are said to be blessed, for they had seen and had listened to the Messiah. Yet, how tragic that these privileged associates had not benefited completely from this opportunity. Their understanding was incomplete and their progress had been slow.

1Instead of βλέπω here, Mark employs ἑιδον. However Luke, like Matthew, uses βλέπω.


3For a similar opinion see Marcus, "Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology," p. 568. He correctly contends that the disciples understood some things without having the full picture.
having to await the convergence of sight and hearing.

Mark 8:14-21, especially 17-21, is the third of the significant passages. This pericope depicts Jesus and the disciples in a boat crossing. The latter, due to their overconcern at their neglect to have taken loaves, had misunderstood Jesus’ statement about leaven. In chiding them for their lack of perception and their inability to transfer learning, Jesus, according to Mark, inferred that their hearing and seeing were suspect. These faculties were questioned thus: having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? (ὁ φθορομοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὅτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε). This passage is conceptually as well as linguistically close to Isa 6:9 and Jer 5:21 and has proverbial parallels in classical Greek literature, as in Asch. Prometheus Bound, 447-446 and Xen. Anabasis, 3.1.27. It appears that Mark is indeed utilizing a topos to express the incomprehension of the disciples. While the vocabulary of the latter references may not be identical, the concept is the same and affirms that seeing and hearing are essential for complete comprehension.

Seeing and hearing also occur together in a fourth passage, Mark 9:2-8 and its parallels (Matt 17:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36). The three Evangelists agree in depicting that sight played a significant role in the experience of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. They all describe the transformation of Jesus’ garments. They all speak of Jesus being transfigured before the disciples; Matthew and Luke emphasize the alteration of his appearance. Again, they are all united in saying that Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount, though Mark mentions Elijah first. All these events were apparently perceived by sight. Two facts reinforce this. First, when the disciples emerged from the
cloud they are said to have seen (εἶδον) no one. Mark says: οὐκέτι οὐδένα εἶδον (they no longer saw anyone). Second, as they were descending the mount Jesus commanded them to tell no one what they had seen (Matthew says the vision) until after he was raised from the dead.

Hearing also played a significant role. All the Synoptists confirm that a voice came from the cloud. The voice not only spoke of Jesus as "my beloved son," but it invited the disciples to listen to him (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ). Hearing and seeing were, therefore, important elements in what transpired on the mount. That it is legitimate to make this link can be deduced from the Petrine reiteration of the transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16-18). The notion that this episode is a resurrection story redated, reshaped, and placed in the historical life of Jesus by Mark is questionable. It is doubtful that Mark had anything to do with its positioning. This view is based on the unproven Marcan priority hypothesis. The attestation by all three Evangelists as well as the literary

1Luke does not employ a verb of seeing here. He says εὑρέθη ἑνσοὺς μόνος (Jesus was found alone). This difference should not be overemphasized for it required the sense of sight to note that he was alone.

2Luke omits this command. He states that the disciples kept silent about what they had seen, telling it to no one in those days.

3Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 259. See also for a list of scholars holding this view. Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, p. 119, represents the modern proponents of this view. See for a list of modern scholars.

4Weeden, Traditions in Conflict, pp. 118-119.

5Note Martin's refutation of this position. Mark: Evangelist and Theologian, p. 130. His argument is also based on Marcan priority. Perhaps it could be strengthened if it is observed that Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem is not a Marcan idea but belongs to the tradition as attested by all three Evangelists.
relationships may be indicative that it belongs to the original tradition.\(^1\) The pericope seems to have a vital position in the developing drama which has often been overlooked. While it is true that the confession of Peter marks a turning point in the Gospel,\(^2\) it is equally true that for the Synoptists the transfiguration narrative is an integral part of that transitional event.\(^3\) Immediately preceding the transfiguration and following it, Jesus began to concentrate more on teaching\(^4\) the disciples about his impending passion.

The transfiguration apparently served as the climactic event dramatizing sight, though the disciples did not fully understand what they saw; and it dramatically placed emphasis on hearing. Following a correct and accepted confession of his Messiahship\(^5\) by Peter, Jesus began a specialized teaching ministry for the disciples. His primary focus was his Messianic destiny. His initial proclamation was rejected by Peter, speaking on behalf of all the disciples. They were not listening to Jesus' teaching for they were blinded by his


\(^3\)Kelber argues that the transfiguration scene is the central scene of the whole Gospel and its midpoint. For him, it, not Peter's confession, is the scene of recognition. Perhaps his view is based on his belief that Peter's confession was not accepted by Jesus. See his *Mark's Story of Jesus*, pp. 53-54. Interestingly, he misses the point being outlined here.

\(^4\)A notable exception is the miracle in Mark 1:46-52 and pars. to be discussed below.

deeds which had confirmed him as the ideal Messiah of their dreams and they did not want to hear of a suffering Messiah—a reprehensible idea to them.

At the transfiguration the disciples not only saw Jesus' glory but they heard the bath qol which had not only confirmed Jesus as the beloved Son of God but summoned them to listen to him. Coming at this juncture, the command seemed to have been intended to shift their gaze from deeds only to a focus on his teachings as well. True, it authenticated him, but equally true is the fact that it invited a concentration on listening to his teaching. This combination of sight and hearing here is noteworthy. Significantly, the only miracle recorded by all three Evangelists following this incident, with the possible exception of the healing of the ear (could be significant) of the high priest's servant, is one which involved hearing and seeing. Perhaps, like Cyrus, the disciples were expected to understand from seeing what was to be seen and

1His deeds confirmed him as the ideal Messiah—the political liberator of Davidic descent—who would rid the nation of the Roman yoke with a mighty display of power. They were therefore not hearing him. See Glen W. Barker, William L. Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 104-106, and Martin, pp. 129-130. The latter, it is hoped, is not implying that Peter's confession was not accepted. Cf. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, pp. 49-50, who sees them as desiring a Messiah of power and glory.


3In at least four instances prior to this (Mark 4:9 par. Matt 13:9; Mark 4:23 par. Matt 13:43; Matt 11:15, and Matt 7:16) Jesus had emphasized hearing. However, the disciples apparently had not listened. Cf. Luke 14:35 which occurs after the transfiguration.

4The healing of the epileptic boy is excluded since it was the completion of a miracle attempted by the disciples during the events on the mount.

5See Mark 10:46-52 and pars.
from hearing what was to be heard.¹

The fifth passage is Mark 10:46-52 and parallels (Matt 20:29-34 and Luke 18:35-43). In this final miracle in the Gospels, not counting the one occasioned by the use of a sword by one of the disciples, there is a slight discrepancy among the Evangelists. Matthew says the beneficiaries of the miracle were two blind men. While the second and third Evangelists are united in saying it was a blind man, the former names him while the latter does not. Focus here is on the similarities, not the differences. All three Evangelists say restoration of sight was involved, that the blind man (men) heard Jesus was passing by, that he (they) cried to Jesus for mercy, and that some in the crowd tried to silence him (them). Jesus heard the cry, summoned him (them), sought his (their) request, and granted it. All three Gospels employ a form of ἀκοῦω in stating how the presence of Jesus was perceived and a form of ἀναβλέπω for the restoration of sight. While hearing and seeing had not yet converged for the disciples, this incident, perhaps, anticipated a time when convergence would indeed take place. Just as the blind man (men) had heard Jesus speak, had understood his question, and had received sight, so one day Jesus would give perception to his disciples.

The final passage is Mark 13:7, 16, 29 and its parallels (Matt 24:6, 15, 33, and Luke 21:9, 20, 31). The disciples went to Jesus and sought information concerning the eschaton. In responding to them Jesus employed ἀκοῦω and εἶδω in a very significant manner. In vs. 6, he tells them that they would hear of wars and rumors of war but they should not be alarmed for the end would not follow that which is heard. On the contrary, he told them that when they would see (ἐσήκω) the desolating sacrilege (Luke says when they

¹Xenophon *Cyropaedia*, 1.6.2.
see Jerusalem surrounded by armies) then that would be the sign. Matthew and Mark make the interesting statement ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω (let the one who reads understand).

In this passage ἀκούω, εἶδω and νοεῖω occur together. Jesus told the disciples that hearing alone will not indicate the end. After they had heard of the war they should look to see the desolating sacrilege (Jerusalem surrounded by armies). When sight joined hearing, then that would herald the end.

Moreover, Mark 7:14-23 and its parallel (Matt 15:10-17) is an example of an instance in which a verb of hearing is used with one of knowing. The Pharisees and scribes had criticized the disciples for not conforming to the laws of purity. Jesus, in responding to them, had charged them with rejecting the commands of God and clinging to their tradition. He then called the people, including his disciples, and charged them to hear and understand (ἀκούετε καὶ συνιέτε) what he was about to say. He then proceeded to explain what truly defiled. The call to hear and understand is noteworthy here.

Later when Jesus was alone with the disciples they sought the meaning of his statement regarding defilement. This implies that they had not understood it. Jesus responded by inquiring whether they were still without understanding. It seems they were not living up to expectations in terms of their growth in understanding. He then asked them: οὐ νοεῖτε ὅτι πάντα εἰσπορευόμενον. . . . The use of νοεῖω here is significant. Most English translations render it "see." This seems to be a legitimate translation which is in keeping with the dimension of the word which implies "perceiving by the eyes." Its usage here

1 For a somewhat similar view see G. Osborne, The Resurrection Narratives, p. 62 and n. 22. He may have been too dogmatic, however.

with ἀναφορά in a context emphasizing understanding is noteworthy.

It appears from the foregoing that there is a definite employment of hearing and seeing as necessary elements of comprehension in the Synoptics. These six pericopae (seventeen from among such passages) are instructive. At times seeing precedes hearing, as at the transfiguration and before it, while on other occasions hearing precedes seeing, as at the healing of the blind man (men) and in the Olivet discourse.\(^1\) There is no problem in this nor in the fact that at the Transfiguration hearing is apparently ranked above sight. The crucial point is that in keeping with a traditional *topos* the Gospels portray both hearing and seeing as vital for comprehension. That element which was needed the most was stressed from time to time. Since seeing Jesus' miracles was diverting focus from what was to be heard, attention was called to hearing at the Transfiguration. The disciples had been rejecting Jesus' teaching concerning suffering and death for they could not see it. They could not reconcile that idea of the suffering and death of Jesus--the Messiah--with the fact of his ability to relieve suffering and resurrect the dead which they had seen. Furthermore, this idea did not conform with their Messianism which had visions of power and glory and which his deeds only heightened.\(^2\) As such, the need to listen was dramatically made evident to them. Taken together, then, these passages affirm the veracity of the notion that the Gospels portray the disciples as unable to comprehend the totality of Jesus' witness, since sight and hearing had not yet converged for them.


\(^2\) Cf. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*, p. 221. Meye views revelation in Mark as tridimensional, involving seeing, hearing, and being with the Messiah. This is a good insight but it came in his conclusion and was neither developed nor examined. The relationship of seeing and hearing in the Gospels and in cognate literature was not explored.
The Convergence of Sight and Hearing

All three Gospels affirm that the incomprehension of the disciples persisted beyond the *bath qol* of the Mount of Transfiguration. Their response to the final two passion predictions was dismal. Matthew says they were greatly distressed following the second prediction. Mark and Luke agree (Mark 9:30-32, Matt 17:22-23, Luke 9:43-45) that they did not understand it and were afraid to ask Jesus for an explanation. Luke adds that understanding was concealed from them. Even more reprehensible is the thought that following two predictions of his passion, and given the detailed nature of the third, their response was in the form of a dispute as to which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Their desire for the setting up of the Messianic Kingdom blinded them to the necessity of suffering and death. They were definitely not hearing Jesus. Kelber thinks that their discussion of "personal power and prestige" demonstrates "their tactless attitude."¹

Following this, they are greatly bewildered at his statement respecting the difficulties involved in the salvation of the rich. They even wonder at who can be saved if it is difficult for the pious rich (Mark 10:23-26, Matt 19:23-26 cf. Luke 18:24-26). Peter's response to Jesus' explanation further highlights their incomprehension. The third passion prediction also was met with a similar response. Luke says they did not grasp what he said (18:34). Precisely so, for the sons of Zebedee follow up with a request for the most prominent places in the Messianic Kingdom (Matthew says the request was made by their mother but he does not record any attempt on their part to correct her or forbid her which implies they agreed with her sentiment). This request met with an indignant response by the other ten disciples (10:41 and

¹Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 49.
parallels). This persistent obsession of the disciples with glory and power reflects not only their misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching regarding his Messianic destiny but also their rejection of that type of Messianic idea. They were perhaps more concerned with the role they would be called upon to play in Jesus' Messianic bid.

All three Gospel writers show the resolute determination of Jesus to go to Jerusalem. Already Luke 9:51 says that "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" at the beginning of the so-called travel narrative. As Jesus neared Jerusalem the anticipation of the disciples must have been mounting. Outside Jericho, some seventeen miles away, Jesus once again sought to instruct them concerning the true nature of his mission, especially as it related to eschatology. Perhaps he was protecting them from an over-realized eschatology.

Luke says because he was near to Jerusalem and knew that "they supposed" the Kingdom was imminent (19:11-27), he capitalized on the fact that they were listening (ἀκούω) to him to tell them a parable designed to show them that there would be a delay in the coming of the Kingdom. He had to go away to receive it and there would be a delay before his return.

Again, hearing and seeing would conflict for the disciples and they would choose the latter. As Jesus neared Jerusalem, he sent two disciples to fetch a young mule, a beast of burden that a king would ride when he came

1Morris, p. 274.
2This is the view of Talbert but he credits it to Luke. See Talbert, pp. 177-178.
3Luke does not specifically identify those who hold these views. He has used "they" to refer to the disciples (18:31) and to those opposed to Jesus (19:7). From this as well as the larger context it becomes evident that there was a larger group than the immediate disciples. Perhaps the disciples and some from the group had such notions.
in peace.¹ When the two disciples arrived with the colt, they placed their garments on the animal, perhaps as a kind of saddle.² Unlike Matthew and Mark who said Jesus sat on the animal (Matt 21:7 and Mark 11:7), Luke said the disciples seized the initiative³ and set Jesus upon the young mule (Luke 19:35). They were obviously acclaiming Jesus as king.⁴ They and the multitude used their garments to form a carpet on which their king rode. They even waved palm branches and spread some on the pathway.⁵ Both of these actions doubtlessly had nationalistic significance, especially in relation to royalty.⁶ Barclay contends that this was a deliberate claim on the part of Jesus to be king,⁷ while Robertson, in acquiescing, says these actions could have only one implication--that Jesus was probably presenting himself as Messiah.⁸ They had forgotten his words which they had only recently heard and they had missed his signals of peace and love as implied in the use of an ass.⁹ In keeping with


³Morris, p. 278.

⁴Talbert, p. 179.

⁵Ibid. Talbert says this is a detail omitted by Luke, perhaps because of its "nationalistic overtures."

⁶Lane, *Mark*, p. 396. He believes, however, that there is no Messianic significance attached to them.

⁷Barclay, p. 250.


⁹Barclay, p. 250.
their Messianic expectations they anticipated his setting up his rule in opposition to Caesar and his driving out the Romans.  

What was it that lead them to misunderstand Jesus’s Messianic presentation? Luke seems to suggest that they were misguided by all the mighty works they had seen (πασῶν ὅν εἶδον δυνάμεων, 19:37). This time he does not leave any doubt as to who are the ones who are rejoicing and praising God for what they had seen. He says they were the multitude of the disciples (τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν). Seeing has a triple significance in the context of this passage. First the disciples saw Jesus riding on the colt. Second, Luke specifies a significant bit of geography which has implications for sight. In vs. 37 he again says Jesus is drawing near to Jerusalem but, he does not leave it at that. He specifies his location. He says Jesus was at the descent of the mount of Olives (πρὸς τῇ καταβάσει τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἑλαιῶν). Robertson states that they were going down the southern slope of the mount and at that juncture the first grand view of the city, on that route, came to view. He contends that as they turned down to the city and the picturesque and majestic spectacle came to their view, they became stirred to "rapturous enthusiasm." The sight of Jesus entering the city on the young mule and the sight of the city overwhelmed the disciples and erased from their minds what they had heard. They even forgot the teaching of the parable of the pounds.

---


2Robertson, 2:244-245.

3Ibid., p. 245.
On the contrary, what came to mind was the mighty deeds of Jesus which they had seen—the third significant occurrence of sight. All the mighty deeds of Jesus now converged with these other two sights to confirm their Messianic expectations. They, therefore, began to rejoice and praise God saying: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." Mark includes a statement omitted by Luke, "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!"  

Here then is proof that the disciples were still ignorant of the mission of Jesus. Despite his teaching concerning suffering, and in spite of the implications of the parable of the pounds, they had made no progress. They were not allowing hearing to inform sight so the two could converge. They were relying on sight only. They were still slow in understanding, for hearing and sight were still working at cross-purposes. Interestingly, John says that they did not understand this experience until Jesus was glorified (John 12:16).

Following the Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples set out for the Mount of Olives. On the way Jesus foretold the response of the disciples to his passion. Given his passion predictions and the reiteration of what would transpire in Jerusalem, his words ought not to have come as a shock. However, considering the performance of the disciples, Peter's response is not surprising. Even after the prediction of his denial, Peter was still self-assured as were his companions. They all self-assuredly asserted their willingness to die rather than deny Jesus. This latter affirmation of the disciples indicates that they did understand somewhat the predictions of Jesus, but either did not fully understand them or were unwilling to accept them.

1 Fuller ascribes this statement to the creativity of the Palestinian church. His suggestion that "he who comes" refers collectively to the pilgrims and not specifically to Jesus is unwarranted. See Foundations of New Testament Christology, pp. 112-113.
The Gethsemane pericope also highlights the incomprehension of the disciples. According to Edward Taylor, it is at Gethsemane that the abject failure of the disciples appears most tragic. Matthew and Mark are agreed that Jesus left eight disciples in one place and took Peter, James, and John with him further into the garden (Mark 14:32-33, Matt 26:36-37). He then began to be greatly disturbed and troubled (ἵππει ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδημονεῖν). Lane says he became "appalled and profoundly troubled" stating that this strong language indicates that for Mark, Gethsemane is the critical moment when Jesus was confronted with the immediacy of the full meaning of submission to the Father. The disciples were told of his feeling and were invited to watch with him.

After his first prayer Jesus returned to his three associates but found them sleeping. He rebuked them, addressing his remarks to Peter. Longing for some understanding and support from his trusted associates, he asked them whether they could not have watched with him for an hour. He again invited them to watch but also asked them to pray. When he returned the second time they were again sleeping. Matthew and Mark both tried to excuse them by offering an explanation, their eyes were heavy. Perhaps this included a


2Edward Taylor, p. 260.

3Lane, Mark, p. 516.

4Ibid.
mental dimension in addition to the physical for they did not perceive the meaning and significance of the experience in the garden. Jesus apparently left them undisturbed and went for his third prayer session. When he returned they were still sleeping and taking their rest. Since his hour had come he aroused them and departed. In the hour of his greatest need the disciples were insensitive and uncomprehending. They failed to grasp the meaning and necessity of suffering and were thus unprepared for the impact of reality. Kelber's claim that there was an insoluble problem and a conflict which came to a head here, and that they forfeited their eschatological salvation thus damning themselves, cannot be accepted.

The disciples' slowness to understand left them unprepared for the arrest of Jesus. One disciple tried to defend him by using the sword but eventually they all feared for their safety. Consequently, they forsook him and fled. This, however, did not mark the end of their discipleship. Peter denied his Lord. Jesus died being forsaken. Yet, though hearing and sight are still apart, there is a future for them.

Swartley says that Mark leaves open the question of understanding by

2Despite Mark's comment "They did not understand what to say." Perhaps it is redactional and may not be appropriate here.
3Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, p. 77.
5Edward Taylor is certainly correct in saying a resounding "no" to Kelber's latter suggestion. See E. Taylor, p. 286.
6Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, p. 77.
7E. Taylor, pp. 321-324.
not saying that they did understand. A Achtemeier suggests that suffering and death are crucial for an understanding of Jesus, complete comprehension being only attainable at the cross and resurrection. O'Grady and Harrington view the cross as the climax and therefore the point at which convergence and enlightenment take place. While there is some truth to these theories, for indeed sight of the passion events doubtlessly confirms the truthfulness of what Jesus had said historically, the disciples were still uncomprehending at the cross and even after it. As a matter of fact, they were still slow to understand for some time following the resurrection. It was Joseph of Arimathea who took the body of Jesus and buried it (Mark 15:47; Matt 27:61; and Luke 23:55). It was the women who discovered the empty tomb. The Twelve were not around. Despite the fact that three times Jesus had predicted his passion and that he would rise on the third day, the message of the angel as relayed by the women to the Eleven was met with disbelief. (Because of the ending of Mark, to insist that there was no meeting between Jesus and the disciples in Galilee is no better an argument than to insist on the eternal silence of the women.) Luke says the words of the women were regarded as "an idle tale" (Luke 24:10). Peter did not believe what he had heard. He rose up and ran to the tomb. He looked in to verify it for himself. Even after hearing and seeing

1 Swartley, Mark: The Way for All Nations, pp. 197-201.
3 O'Grady, pp. 62-63; Harrington, pp. xiv-xv.
4 The longer ending of Mark witnesses to this too, noting that when the disciples heard that Mary Magdalene had seen Jesus they would not believe (16:11). Even if the longer ending is rejected, it witnesses to this belief in the early church.
he went home wondering at what had happened (Luke 24:12). The encounter on the road to Emmaus suggests that the disciples had not yet believed the resurrection (Luke 24:25). Jesus even called them "slow to believe" (Luke 24:25). These two disciples and Peter only believed after an encounter with the resurrected Lord. It was in these encounters that the divine gift of revelation was bestowed, convergence took place and complete comprehension was attained. To follow Luke's theology from the end of his Gospel to the beginning of the Book of Acts, it appears that the full perception of Christ resulted in the kerygmatic proclamation following the added revelation at Pentecost. The disciples have now become teachers (cf. Matt 28:19-20). Interestingly, in the Gospel of John the earthly Jesus is already the glorified Christ (e.g., John 2:11). As such, the entire Gospel has a revelatory dimension and witnesses to a gradual "knowing." Consequently, seeing has a crucial role in that Gospel (see especially 1:50-51; 4:48; and moreso chap. 9; cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

Schweitzer and Meye view the meeting in Galilee, which Jesus had foretold (Mark 14:28), and to which the angel had alluded (Mark 16:7), as the time when their failure was made up and misunderstanding was turned to understanding. Schweitzer believes that the record of this miracle was lost due to the lost ending of Mark. Meye suggests that the seeing in Galilee was climactic and resulted in understanding. He views following Jesus through teaching, deed, passion, and resurrection as resulting in sight vis-à-vis understanding. He is correct that these events play a vital part in understanding. However, the precise relationship that the resurrection has for understanding

1John says that the night after the resurrection they were still in hiding for fear of the Jews.

must be explored. Did the disciples come to believe just by hearing of the empty tomb? Furthermore, how is Meye viewing the climactic meeting in Galilee? Does he mean that it is climactic because it was here only that the disciples encountered the resurrected Lord and came to sight and understanding? Or, is it climactic because it was the climactic encounter of the disciples with the resurrected Lord? Or is it to be regarded as the climax of a number of separate enlightening encounters with one major illumination for all, especially those who still had lingering doubts? What is the precise correlation?

It would seem that the first option is the one Meye intends. Given his bias toward Marcan priority, his emphasis on Galilee is understandable. However, a Synoptic perspective would yield different results, for Luke mentions a number of events involving comprehension which would precede this meeting in Galilee. According to Luke it appears that Peter was the first to have had an encounter with the resurrected Lord which was decisive for his understanding. This can be deduced from the fact that by the time the two disciples from Emmaus arrived to inform the eleven of their encounter with Jesus, the eleven had already been positively influenced by Peter's. Luke says: "They found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them said, 'The Lord has arisen' indeed, and has appeared \(\tilde{\chi}0\phi\theta\eta\) to Simon!" (Luke 24:33-34). Its precise location or timing was not recorded. Its place in the tradition is verified by Paul (1 Cor 15:15) who also lists it as the first appearance. Its effectiveness can be deduced from the use of \(\tilde{\alpha}n\tau\omega\varsigma\), an adverb meaning "really, certainly, in truth."\(^1\) What is perhaps implied here is that Peter had attempted to convince the group that Jesus had certainly, of a truth been risen. This confession from the group testifies that he had indeed convinced

\(^1\)Arndt and Gingrich, s.v. "\(\tilde{\alpha}n\tau\omega\varsigma\)," p. 574.
some\textsuperscript{1} of them. Peter, then, could be said to have been the first disciple who came to understanding. Robertson says that it was Peter's seeing which turned the scales for the disciples.\textsuperscript{2} Perhaps it might be more accurate to say that it was the revelation that Peter received at the disclosure of the resurrected Lord that brought about the convergence of sight and hearing, resulting in full comprehension.

The two disciples on the way to Emmaus also had a critical encounter with Jesus prior to the meeting in Galilee. What they had heard on the way was enlightening, but its full impact did not dawn on them until that eventful instant when he took the bread and broke it "and their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (ἐπιγνώσκειν; Luke 24:31). At that crucial moment in their experience hearing and sight converged and, together with the revelatory insight, full comprehension occurred.

In Jerusalem, as they were recounting their experience to the group, the eleven and those with them, Jesus joined them. That hearing alone was insufficient, for total comprehension is evidenced from the response of the disciples. They had just told the two from Emmaus that Jesus had indeed risen. Yet, at his appearance they were startled and frightened and supposed him to be a ghost. Their reaction suggests that some of them were not fully convinced of his resurrection. This interpretation is supported by the question of Jesus, "Why are you troubled and why does questioning arise in your hearts?" Jesus then said: "see my hands. . ." (ἰδέτε τὰς κεῖρὰς μου. . .). He had to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1}See Luke 24:36-38 discussed above.
  \item \textsuperscript{2}Robertson, 2:295.
\end{itemize}
let them see his hands and feet\(^1\) and he even ate to prove his resurrection to them. He then told them that his resurrection confirmed his teaching as also his fulfillment of the OT. When they saw him as the resurrected Lord and listened to his words, in a divine impartation he opened their minds to understand the scriptures (Luke 24:44-45). At this juncture hearing and sight converged for them and they understood the events of the passion as well as their mission. Those present were transformed at that point. Interestingly, John says that Thomas was absent and that he refused to accept the fact on the basis of hearsay only. It took another self-disclosure of the resurrected Jesus to draw the exclamation "My Lord and my God."

The meeting in Galilee that Meye refers to must have taken place subsequent to these events. Writing from the Marcan perspective Meye projects the meeting as does Schweitzer. But the latter suggests that its record was lost with the ending of Mark. If a Synoptic perspective is adopted, then there would be no need to speculate about this meeting for it could be informed by the witness of the other Evangelists. In this respect, Matthew's witness is informing. He says that the disciples\(^2\) went to Galilee to the mountain to

\(^1\)John says that after Jesus had shown them his hands and his side, the disciples became glad that they had seen the Lord. He notes Thomas' reluctance to accept the evidence of hearing only. He therefore corroborates the witness of Luke. The long ending of Mark witnesses to a belief which also confirms Luke's witness that the eleven and those with them did not believe on the basis of hearing only. Mark 16:14 says he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart due to their failure to believe the testimony of those who saw him after the resurrection.

\(^2\)Called the Eleven but perhaps included others as oij dev in Matt 28:17 could be indicating. So correctly Gundry, \textit{Matthew}, p. 594; Robertson 1:244. Cf. Schweitzer, \textit{The Gospel According to Matthew}, p. 528-529; Osborne, \textit{The Resurrection Narratives}, p. 88 and Bornkamm, pp. 132-133. Accepting then, that it was a larger group than the Eleven, perhaps it could be the appearance in Galilee to five hundred that Paul speaks of in 1 Cor 15:6. Some in the group would indeed doubt not having seen the resurrected Lord before. For the
which Jesus had directed them (26:16). He indicates that some worshipped while others \(^1\) doubted. \(^2\) Matthew does not mention the precise moment at which comprehension occurred. One has to read between the lines. Since on the mount Jesus commissions his disciples, it can be presupposed that they had been brought to comprehension, for he would not commission doubters and uncomprehending men. At some point on that mount, doubts, hesitancy, and incomprehension were removed. Hearing and sight converged alongside a divine impartation of sight. Jesus then commissioned his believing and understanding disciples to become teachers.

It has been argued here that hearing and sight were necessary for the disciples to come to comprehension, though not without the revelatory self-disclosure of Jesus. Arguments have been marshalled from the Gospels to demonstrate that this was the case. One other bit of New Testament evidence is now advanced to corroborate the data. Saul of Tarsus, a devout Jew, felt a passion to stamp out every trace of Christianity which he saw as heresy. He, therefore, obtained letters from the Sanhedrin and set out for Damascus. On the way, however, he is confronted by the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9:1-9). Paul not only heard Jesus speak to him but he saw Him (1 Cor 15:8) in a divine self-disclosure. This encounter and its accompanying manifestations were decisive for him and he was converted to Christianity. The influence of sight and

views for and against making this identification, see Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives*, pp. 227-229.

\(^1\) The implication of *οἱ δὲ* noted above would suggest that a larger group is required.

hearing in this experience cannot be minimized. This experience thus confirms the importance of these two vital senses for comprehension, especially in contexts of divine revelation.

Summary

The needed Synoptic portrait of the disciples can now be constructed. It seems that what is required is a composite picture of the disciples. The Synoptists affirm that Jesus was the initiator of the discipleship relationship. They witness that he invited a number of followers, of whom Andrew, Peter, James, John, and Levi are examples, to become his disciples. These specially selected individuals forsook relatives, friends, and livelihood to become attached to this disciple-gathering Rabbi and receive his instructions. From a large group of followers Jesus chose a limited group from which he later selected twelve to become his close associates. It appears that among his followers he had a group of twelve, a group of seventy, and a larger group of unspecified number.

Association with Jesus did not prevent the disciples' failure and manifestations of human weakness. While the disciples accepted responsibilities and performed tasks akin to that of their Master, even going on successful missionary tours, they reflected lack of insight, incomprehension, inability to transfer learning, fearfulness, impulsiveness, and insensitivity. Despite these weaknesses, however, they remained with him, shared his mission, recognized him as the Messiah, requested being taught to pray, and took the initiative in recognizing problems, even attempting solutions.

Prior to the Transfiguration, the primary emphasis of Jesus’ ministry

\[1\] It should be noted that in both Acts 9:7 and 22:9, the companions of Paul are presented as not having full comprehension because hearing and seeing did not converge for them.
was perceived in his deeds. The disciples did not fully understand the implications of these mighty deeds. Their response was varied, including imperception, misunderstanding, fear, and holy awe. Though they recognized Jesus as divine, through his mighty actions over nature, they did not transfer learning from one situation to another. Perhaps the most positive thing that happened for the disciples, in this period, was the confession of Jesus’ Messiahship at Caesarea Philippi. They were attracted to what they were seeing and consequently were not paying sufficient attention to what he was saying. The convergence of both hearing and seeing was necessary for complete comprehension to take place, but due to their emphasis on sight, convergence could not occur. The two were therefore working at cross purposes. The transfiguration was a crucial event for the disciples. It served to change their focus. While sight was an important ingredient in what happened on the mount, the emphasis was really on what was yet to be heard. The bath qol summoned them to listen to the instructions of Jesus. This summons was necessary, for their concentration on sight was obscuring their understanding of his instructions concerning the suffering Messiah. Blinded by sight, they had been viewing him as the ideal Messiah who would liberate them from enslavement and bondage to Rome. Thus blinded, they resisted every presentation Jesus made of himself as the Suffering Servant, both in the passion predictions and in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Apparently the disciples benefited little from their encounter on the Mount of Transfiguration. Their concentration on sight persisted and with it their incomprehension. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem and their enthusiasm witness to this. Therefore, they were totally unprepared for the events which took place in Jerusalem. Their insensitivity and dullness were manifested and
resulted in their betrayal, denial, and forsaking of the teacher they had followed. Their imperception persisted even beyond the passion and resurrection—as is evidenced by the refusal of many of them to accept the fact of the resurrection. Some of them were not willing to accept this fact on the basis of hearing only, and therefore had to see the resurrected Lord for themselves. The resurrection appearances (particularly in Luke) served as that magnetic force which, for the disciples, brought about the convergence of hearing and seeing. At these divine disclosures insight was bestowed, the reality of what was taught was evidenced, full comprehension occurred, and faith was born. Though they had been slow to comprehend, understanding was at last attained, and it not only changed them but was decisive for the world.

This study has highlighted the heavy weighting of disciple/discipleship studies toward the Gospel of Mark. It has argued that a more balanced approach, which gives due consideration to the portrait of each Evangelist and which emphasizes the similarities (rather than the differences) to underscore the undergirding tradition that embraces all three, is required. Chapter 2, therefore, sought to reconstruct the portrait of each Gospel. One finding that has emerged is that, contrary to what is found in the literature, there is in fact a high degree of similarity in the portraits. Besides, the overwhelming weight of the evidence suggests that the depiction of the disciples reflects not just their weaknesses but their strengths. Furthermore, it was seen that the Synoptic portrait of the disciples is not Marcan, but seems attributable to a common tradition that lay behind the Gospels.

It was discovered that the disciples are depicted both positively and negatively throughout the Gospels. That the disciples are portrayed as being slow to understand is a bygone conclusion. Given this phenomenon, the
incomprehension vocabulary was isolated, and the motif was investigated in Biblical and cognate literature to determine whether there were any linguistic and conceptual backgrounds which could assist in understanding the incidents of incomprehension in the Synoptics. It was discovered that in both the Biblical and the cognate literature, a combination of hearing and sight was required for understanding to take place. When the findings of chapter 3 were applied to the most pertinent passages on the disciples in the Synoptics, it was discovered that:

1. Some instances of the disciples' fear should not be interpreted negatively in the light of the OT texts of Israel's response to divine manifestations.

2. The disciples were slow to understand because hearing and sight had not converged for them until they encountered the resurrected Lord. These revelatory encounters were decisive for their becoming teachers.

It is evident, therefore, that incomprehension is not the last word of the Synoptics about the disciples. The commissioning of enlightened and comprehending disciples for a mission to teach the whole world is the last word of the Synoptic portrait of the disciples.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


1Articles in *NIDNTT, TNDT,* and *TWOT* are not separately listed in this Bibliography. Also excluded are Classical authors. Citations of classical authors are from the Loeb Classical Library.


*Septuagint* Edited by Alfred Rahlfs. Deutsche Bibelstiftung Stuttgart, 1935.


