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THE DISCIPLES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK:
A NARRATIVE-CRITICAL STUDY OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In the last fifty years the disciples in the Gospel of Mark have been a much debated subject. Many scholars argue for an ambiguous depiction of the disciples. Most also suggest a downward spiral in the development of the disciples' character. However, very few offer a comprehensive methodology for analysing such a development. This thesis combines Seymour Chatman's 'trait' concept, E. M. Forster's character types, Elisabeth Struthers Malbon's view on telling and showing, and Mieke Bal's method for traits analysis into such a methodology to then analyse the narrative development of the disciples' character in the Gospel of Mark. Analysis of traits and character on both an intra-episodic and inter-episodic level shows that there is a development; this development is not completely downward since in Mark 11:1-12:44 the disciples are depicted more positively than in the preceding passages. The overall pattern of development displays both an elaboration of and a change in the disciples' character. The author of Mark offers both new information on the disciples, and changes their original depiction.

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Since this thesis is the closing work of my Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies, its acknowledgements are also the proper place to thank my parents. After I finished my Master of Science at Ghent University, they supported me fully when instead of stepping into the professional world I wanted to continue studying. Without their support that would not have been possible. Finally, I also want to thank my fiancée Kim Teer who has been extremely patient during the many hours I spent away from the present world in another universe created by (attempts at) creative thinking, libraries, the Gospel of Mark and other books.

Introduction

In the revised edition of their monumental *Mark as Story* David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie state: “Ancient characterization in Greco-Roman literature tended to portray stylized characters who were unchanging and predictable.”¹ They affirm that most characters in the Gospel of Mark answer to this style and “show little change or development.”² This consistency is in accordance with Greek writings, especially Greek tragedy, which are not concerned with character development.³ However, they immediately critique their initial assumption and say that Mark might have been influenced by characterization in the Hebrew Bible where characters know a lot less continuity and are open to change.⁴ They identify the disciples as the strongest characters to display this type of change; such changes can be seen “most clearly in the struggles of the disciples to follow Jesus.”⁵ Rhoads, Michie and Dewey thus offer an ambiguous approach to possible development in the disciples’ character. On the one hand the scholars see the characteristics of Greco-Roman characterization, but on the other hand they do see a certain development in the storyline as far as the disciples is concerned.

That development is as follows. In Galilee, the disciples are hardened. On the road to Jerusalem they express their desire to follow Jesus even through suffering, but in Jerusalem they eventually flee.⁶ So there is some development in the disciples’

¹ David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 100. This is not found in the original version (David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982], 101–103). The revised version has a lot more on characterization and characters so that edition will be primarily used in the rest of this thesis.

² Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100.

³ Fred W. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 12.

⁴ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 90–92.

story and their actions, but Rhoads, Dewey and Michie see this evolution primarily as a storyline development. The development presents an internal struggle the disciples have: they have to choose between following Jesus' demands and gaining glory for themselves.⁷ So the development reveals an internal struggle.

The question then arises how the ambiguity Rhoads, Michie and Dewey experience in the disciples' depiction can then be addressed properly. Is the disciples' character as linear as they first seem to suggest? Cornelis Bennema even questions Rhoads, Michie and Dewey's initial remark that the character in Greek writing is stylized. Following his comparison of Hebrew, Ancient Greek and Modern characters, he calls for a more layered approach.

[I]t is impossible to maintain that Hebrew character can show development while Greek character is a static, ethical type. We can no longer uphold either that, in contrast to modern fiction, ancient literature has no psychological interest in character or that character cannot move towards personality or even individuality.⁸

As will be shown below, many authors conclude at least some kind of development, but character development as such has not been studied in the Gospel of Mark. This lack of research is surprising, since character development is seen as an important field of research. James L. Resseguie has identified character development research as one of the promising aspects of narrative criticism.⁹ However, he does not offer a specific theory for studying character development, nor does he refer to others who have developed such a methodology. This type of theoretical approach has been confusing or lacking since the rise of narrative criticism.¹⁰ There is thus need for the (further) formation of a methodology of character development.

⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁸ Cornelis Bennema, "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature," *BibInt* 17, no. 4 (2009): 394.

⁹ James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 126.

¹⁰ Cf. Burnett, "Characterization," 3.

The central question in this thesis is first: To what extent is there a development in the character of the disciples? The answer to this question leads to a second central question: How can that development be explained: is it elaboration or change? In the first instance the reader gets to know the character better, in the second instance the reader sees the process of change: at the end the character is different from at the beginning.

This thesis has three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is the methodological chapter. First, an overview of the research history on the disciples' development in Mark is given. Then, some concepts are clarified. Finally, narrative methodologies that contribute to the formation of a methodology of character development are combined into an adjusted approach. In the second and third chapters that methodology is applied to the disciples in the Gospel of Mark. The second chapter focuses on the analysis of individual traits. The third chapter focuses on the composition of those traits into character profiles. The episodic character profiles are then compared with one another throughout the whole Gospel. Finally, a conclusion on the development of the disciples in Mark is given.

In this thesis the *English Standard Version* and the 27th edition of the *Nestle-Aland Greek Testament* are used for biblical references, unless mentioned otherwise.¹¹ The abbreviations used are those found in the *SBL Handbook of Style*.¹²

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society, 2001); Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998).

¹² Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 69–152.

Chapter 1. Methodology

This chapter develops the methodology for analysing the disciples in the Gospel of Mark. For reasons explained below, the methodology used is a narrative critical approach. In order to arrive at a narrative methodology of character development, first an overview will be given of what others have said on the development of the disciples and how those scholars have come to their conclusions. Then, some concepts will be defined in order to avoid confusion. This is done after the research history, because not all scholars use concepts (e.g. “disciple”) the same way. Finally, a methodology will be developed based on the first two sections of this chapter, and on how others have studied characters in narratives.

Research History

This overview gives attention to academic works that have disciples and discipleship in Mark as a central theme. Until the last decades of the twentieth century almost no monographs devoted mainly to the topic of discipleship in Mark were written, Robert P. Meye’s *Jesus and the Twelve* being a major exception.¹ For almost twenty years Meye’s work did not have a proper follow-up,² apart from Theodore J. Weeden’s *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*.³ Very few books were published on this subject in the 50s, 60s and 70s of the twentieth century.⁴ More recently several scholars have tried

¹ Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1968); see also: C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate*, JSNTSup 27 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 65. It is not clear why Black does not mention Theodore J. Weeden’s 1971 *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* here since it is one of the key books in his study.

² Black, *Disciples*, 65.

³ Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁴ Hugh M. Humphrey mentions only three monographs published on the disciples in those decades: Klemens Stock’s *Boten aus dem Mit-Ihm-Sein*, Günther Schmahl’s *Die Zwölf im Markusevangelium* and Meye’s *Jesus and the Twelve* (Hugh M. Humphrey, *A Bibliography for the Gospel of Mark*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 1 [New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981], 141–143).

to change this,⁵ but their efforts were mostly limited to book chapters or articles.⁶ Also, most publications seen as vital to the subject are written in English. Camille Focant, in a 2006 reprint of his 1975 article *L'incompréhension des disciples* adds a list of resources for studying the disciples in Mark; few of them are in German, none in French.⁷

There are two major methods for studying the text of the Gospels: one that focuses on the history of the text, and one that focuses on the text as literature.⁸ In the method focusing on history, the aim is mostly to reconstruct the setting or context in which the document came to be.⁹ Central to this method are the original form of the sources the author uses to communicate (form criticism), the sources used (source criticism), and the editing of those sources (redaction criticism).¹⁰ Though form and source criticism are relevant approaches, it is not the goal of this thesis to look at the background of the Gospel story, but to look at the disciples in the whole of it. Thus, redaction criticism, which looks for meaning in the text by thinking about how the author uses his sources to form one whole, is the only historical critical method of immediate relevance for this research. This redaction criticism has played

⁵ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Characters in Mark’s Story: Changing Perspectives on the Narrative Process,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 54.

⁶ Frans Neirynek et al. add some monographs, but the study of discipleship mostly was limited to book chapters or essays (*The Gospel of Mark: A Cumulative Bibliography 1950-1990*, Collectanea Biblica et Religiosa Antiqua 3 [Brussel: Comité voor Godsdienstwetenschappen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1992], 670).

⁷ Camille Focant, “L’ incompréhension des disciples dans le deuxième évangile: Tradition et rédaction,” in *Marc: Un évangile étonnant*, BETL 194 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 79–81. Most of the works mentioned below are suggested by Focant in his article.

⁸ One could also speak of an extrinsic method of literary criticism versus an intrinsic method: for the first approach focus of investigating the literary shape are external factors, for the second the internal elements. See: Thomas E. Boomershine, “Audience Address and Purpose in the Performance of Mark,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 115.

⁹ Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*, GBS (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 14ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11–12, 17–18.

a major role and “prevailed till the 1980s, when a certain change began to take place in biblical studies.”¹¹

Second, there is a method focusing on the text as literature. A big difference with the other method is that, unlike historical criticism, this method focuses “on the finished form of the text.”¹² Even redaction criticism tends to emphasize comparing pericopes among the Synoptics, thus focusing meaning on the level of the pericope instead of on the whole text.¹³ On the other hand, “[l]iterary criticism . . . regards the text as a mirror; the critic determines to look at the text, not through it [as historical criticism does], and whatever insight he obtained will be found in the encounter of the reader with the text itself.”¹⁴ M. H. Abrams divides this approach into four basic types: (1) expressive types that focus on the author, (2) pragmatic types that focus on the reader, (3) objective types that are concerned with the text as a world in itself, and (4) mimetic types that are concerned with literature as a representation of an outside world.¹⁵ Abrams would consider the author-centred and the mimetic types as similar to historical critical method – there is a strong question of actual history behind them.¹⁶ Thus, since the difference between the author-centred and mimetic types on the one hand and redaction critical method on the other hand are not substantial, in this thesis only the objective and pragmatic types will be considered as subcategories in the literary method.

¹¹ Pablo Alonso, *The Woman Who Changed Jesus: Crossing Boundaries in Mk 7,24-30*, BiTS 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 48.

¹² Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

Redaction Criticism

Markan scholarship in the twentieth century was, until the century's final decades, characterized by a focus on redaction criticism.¹⁷ This approach “seek[s] to discover the theology of the Evangelists as it is revealed in their editing of traditional material.”¹⁸ It also wants to look at the settings in which the document arose,¹⁹ and thus focuses on the author and his context.²⁰ C. Clifton Black's *The Disciples according to Mark* serves as an important scholarly work to identify the main positions on Mark's disciples from a historical critical point of view.²¹ In addition to discussing the major works of Meye, Ernest Best and Weeden, he also explains his own position.²²

First of all, Meye is considered to hold a conservative position.²³ He is primarily concerned with the didactic motive of the Markan Jesus in focusing more and more on a small group of followers.²⁴ Because of this, the actual historicity of the disciples is a major issue in the study.²⁵ The disciples serve in Mark to emphasise Jesus' didactic role.²⁶ Thus, the sometimes negative depiction of the disciples serves to show the truth and importance of Jesus' teachings.²⁷ The overall image is that of

¹⁷ Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 102 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ That is why redaction criticism has not been that concerned with the role of the minor characters in Mark; they do not add much to Mark's theology (*ibid.*, 17).

²¹ Black, *Disciples*.

²² The summary and analysis follow Black's non-chronological treatment of the sources.

²³ Black, *Disciples*, 65ff. Black calls this view conservative because Meye is concerned with preserving the historical reality behind the text.

²⁴ Meye, *Twelve*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 192ff.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 214–215.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

real, struggling people who are nonetheless called to great things. This image – and the fact that it is well balanced – is to Meye an important argument for the reality of the disciples that stands behind this Gospel.²⁸

Second, Best represents an intermediate position with his *Following Jesus*.²⁹ In his study Best aims to answer the question of what discipleship meant to Mark.³⁰ It is thus not about the historical accuracy of Mark's depiction, but about his goals in using the character of the disciples for the community to which he was writing.³¹ Best is not clear on a development; he sees the disciples as ambiguous. On the one hand, the disciples illustrate the point that discipleship implies following Jesus on the way (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ), despite fear and misunderstanding.³² On the other hand, they show a bad example of watchfulness.³³ For Best, the disciples have a functional role; their narrative character is not important.³⁴ Best states that Mark “does not create their failure but emphasizes it, and does so with the intention of helping his own community. . . . [However, t]he failure of the disciples shows God's love and strength.”³⁵ Thus, the disciples' depiction is often negative, but it serves a positive role.³⁶

²⁸ Black, *Disciples*, 68.

²⁹ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSup 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); see also: Black, *Disciples*, 99ff. This mediate position characterizes Mark's relationship with his traditional materials as problematic; he is indebted to them, but at the same time uses them with great freedom.

³⁰ Best, *Following Jesus*, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 146.

³³ *Ibid.*, 147, 150–152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 246; Ernest Best, “The Role of the Disciples in Mark,” in *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 98–99.

³⁵ Best, “Disciples,” 129.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

Third, Weeden represents a liberal position in his *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*.³⁷ Like Meye and Best, Weeden looks for the role the disciples played in the historical setting of the Gospel. The role of the disciples in the Gospel can only be understood in light of Mark's personal 'vendetta' against the disciples: "He is intent on totally discrediting them. He paints them as obtuse, obdurate, recalcitrant men who at first are unperceptive of Jesus' messiahship, then oppose its style and character, and finally totally reject it. As the coup de grace, Mark closes his Gospel without rehabilitating the disciples."³⁸ Weeden clearly sees a downward spiral: the disciples at first do not perceive who Jesus is (1:16-8:26); then they have a misconception of his being the Messiah (8:27-14:10); and in the end they reject Jesus (14:10-16:8).³⁹ For this development, Weeden looks only at one aspect of the disciples: their (lack of) understanding. His conclusion seems to proceed from the assumption that Mark is negative about the disciples, and his research is aimed at finding arguments in support of that assumption; the downward spiral was a presupposition rather than a conclusion based on thorough exegesis, or on good use of redaction criticism.⁴⁰ According to Weeden, in the end, Mark leaves his readers with nothing: the disciples fail completely, but Jesus is also absent because of their failure.⁴¹ However, with his downward spiral Weeden is the only one of these three authors to explicitly say something on the character development.

Black summarizes the three scholars as having very different conclusions on Mark's view of the disciples: Meye is positive, Weeden completely the opposite and Best somewhere in between, arguing for a slightly favourable perspective.⁴² The big

³⁷ Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*. Although his work predates that of Meye and Best, Black names him last respecting a three-fold division of types of redaction criticism (Black, *Disciples*, 46–59, 127).

³⁸ Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, 50–51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26–40.

⁴⁰ Black, *Disciples*, 157.

⁴¹ Mark Edward McVann, "Dwelling among the Tombs: Discourse, Discipleship, and the Gospel of Mark 4:35-5:43" (Dissertation, Atlanta, GA: Emory University, 1984), 101.

⁴² Black, *Disciples*, 165.

problem is that the redaction critical method that they use only seems to confirm their own presuppositions and thus does not serve at all as a good method for narrative analysis.⁴³ Black concludes – after having examined other redaction critical works – that redaction criticism does not work as a method for studying Mark, and especially the role of the disciples in it.⁴⁴ There is just not enough agreement on redaction critical method.⁴⁵ Redaction criticism as applied to Mark further starts from the questionable assumption that the Gospel was written to address a specific problem, as Mary Ann Tolbert has noted. If the Gospel has a more general focus, then this aspect of redaction criticism becomes less important.⁴⁶

Literary Criticism: Objective Types

Among the objective types structuralism and narrative criticism are the major types.⁴⁷ Structuralism has been a small project in biblical studies and no structuralist theories about the disciples in Mark have been developed.⁴⁸

This is different for narrative criticism. Narrative criticism of the New Testament started with the study of the Gospel of Mark.⁴⁹ After a group of Markan scholars had investigated the possibilities of narrative criticism, it became a method

⁴³ Ibid., 250.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 249–250.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 254–255.

⁴⁶ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 303–304; see also: Peter G. Bolt, “Mark's Gospel,” in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 396.

⁴⁷ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 12–14, 20.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?” in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 26.

⁴⁹ John R. Donahue, “Redaction Criticism: Has the Hauptstrasse Become a Sackgasse?” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. Mcknight (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 28.

applied by other New Testament exegetes.⁵⁰ Robert C. Tannehill, and Rhoads and Michie are seen as pioneers of narrative criticism.⁵¹ They have also given substantial attention to the disciples in Mark. Further, Werner H. Kelber is included in the list as he gives a lot of attention to the disciples in Mark,⁵² but comes to different conclusions than most other narrative scholars (see below).⁵³ Next, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon is given attention as she has published extensively on the disciples, narrative criticism and characterization in Mark.⁵⁴ Finally, Suzanne Watts Henderson and Ira Brent Driggers offer more recent approaches which Malbon has identified as valuable studies of the disciples' character in Mark.⁵⁵

Tannehill in his 1977 article *The Disciples in Mark* sees the followers of Jesus – whether a bigger group of disciples, the Twelve or an individual – as having one central characteristic: they follow Jesus and thus answer his call.⁵⁶ The disciples play an important role in the Gospel of Mark; the reader is likely to identify with them

⁵⁰ David Rhoads, *Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), xii.

⁵¹ E.g. W. R. Telford, *Mark*, NTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 91; Cédric Fischer, *Les disciples dans l'évangile de Marc: Une grammaire théologique*, EBib 57 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2007), 15–18; R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 20 (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2007), 17; Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Audience Inclusion and Exclusion as Rhetorical Technique in the Gospel of Mark," *JBL* 129, no. 4 (2010): 717; Alonso, *Woman*, 50; Christopher W. Skinner, "Telling the Story: The Appearance and the Impact of Mark as Story," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 5.

⁵² Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), esp. 30–42, 46–53, 75–77.

⁵³ Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 257.

⁵⁴ E.g. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Disciples/Crowds/Whoever: Markan Characters and Readers," *NovT* 28, no. 2 (1986): 104–130; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Text and Contexts: Interpreting the Disciples in Mark," *Semeia* 62 (1993): 81–102; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); see also: Fowler, *Understand*, 257–258; Fischer, *Disciples*, 16–17.

⁵⁵ Malbon, "Characters," 62.

⁵⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57, no. 4 (1977): 388.

since they – initially – respond positively to Jesus.⁵⁷ Mark further creates an intentional tension between identification and ‘repulsion’ because of their failure.⁵⁸ The ambiguity helps the early Christian reader to identify with the disciples in their struggles.⁵⁹ The characterization of the disciples is initially extremely positive, until Mark 4:10.⁶⁰ Then another standard is introduced: do the disciples understand the words of Jesus (Mk. 4:11-12)?⁶¹ From there on the disciples seem to be failing almost continuously. The disciples display “fear, lack of trust, and anxious self-concern (4:40; 6:49-50; 8:14-16)” and these are associated with a lack of understanding.⁶² However, the characterization is not entirely negative from here on. Mark 13 for example not only serves as a source of identification with the disciples – since they also face suffering – it also displays a continuing role for the disciples. Even in their failure, they are given the chance to follow Jesus.⁶³ This is again affirmed in Mark 16:7.⁶⁴ It seems that Tannehill primarily sees a downward spiral in the characterization of the disciples. For the identification of characteristics Tannehill looks to the plot as “*characterization takes place through the narration of action. . . . Therefore, the study of character . . . can only be approached through the study of plot.*”⁶⁵

Secondly, Kelber’s *Mark’s Story of Jesus* opts for a quite negative approach to the disciples’ character in Mark. Already in the second part of the Gospel (4:35-8:21)

⁵⁷ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 393.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 393–394. Tannehill here argues directly against Weeden’s too negative view.

⁶⁰ Tannehill, “Disciples in Mark,” 397–398.

⁶¹ Ibid., 398.

⁶² Ibid., 400.

⁶³ Ibid., 402.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 404.

⁶⁵ Robert C. Tannehill, “The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology,” *Semeia* 16 (1979): 58, emphasis added. See also: David Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark,” *JAAR* 50, no. 3 (1982): 418.

the disciples play the role of the opponents of Jesus.⁶⁶ Next, Peter is the only human in the story compared to Satan (8:33) and thus Peter does not confess Jesus but confronts him.⁶⁷ When the disciples are shown in the following chapters they always conflict with Jesus.⁶⁸ When Jesus' betrayal by Judas is explained, Judas is "but one of the Twelve."⁶⁹ After his departure, the disciples fail again. The disciples – and in last instance Peter – are "phased out of the Gospel story."⁷⁰ Kelber thus has very similar conclusions to those of Weeden – a negative downward spiral – but he uses a different approach to reach them. However, it seems that Kelber already had his conclusion in mind when interpreting the book, because he forgets (or neglects) the more positive and/or neutral references to the disciples. Furthermore, the disciples are always clearly distinguished from the authorities who are the real opponents in the story.⁷¹

Thirdly, Rhoads and Michie observe that the characters in the Gospel do not change much. Mark chooses to reveal character traits gradually, but such gradual revealing is not a development in their eyes.⁷² "[E]vents and conflicts bring out the traits and nature of the characters. As the plot moves to a climax, the characters are shown fully for who they are in the face of death."⁷³ As in the view of Tannehill, the evaluation of the disciples is based on their ability to understand.⁷⁴ The disciples do not object to understanding, like the authorities, but they have certain other negative

⁶⁶ Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷¹ Gregory Lee Waybright, "Discipleship and Possessions in the Gospel of Mark: A Narrative Study" (Dissertation, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 1984), 271.

⁷² Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 103; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100.

⁷³ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

traits: wrong expectations, fear and lack of faith.⁷⁵ Thus although their view of the characterisation of disciples in Mark contains positive elements, Rhoads and Michie also see the process as largely negative. In contrast with Tannehill, Rhoads and Michie see the initial problem as a *lack* of understanding of who Jesus is. This changes when Peter acknowledges Jesus as Christ (8:27). From then onwards, “the issue shifts . . . to misunderstanding.”⁷⁶ Finally, the disciples fail entirely.⁷⁷ However, there are two more positive aspects. First, Peter understands his failure after his denial of Jesus, which puts him in a totally different position from that of the completely negative authorities. His misunderstanding has become understanding.⁷⁸ Second, the ending of the Gospel shows an open fate for the disciples; it is an appeal to all disciples of Jesus to overcome lack of understanding and misunderstanding to come to understanding.⁷⁹ Rhoads and Michie opt for a broader view on characterization than Tannehill did with his focus on function in the plot. In Rhoads and Michie’s approach the focus shifts from the disciples’ action to the reconstruction of their character. Actions and plot form only one aspect of the whole characterization.⁸⁰ Recently, Stephen D. Moore has questioned whether this is not too asynchronic an approach to the Gospel’s characters. It is only since the dawn of Modernity that internalization of characters has been a focal point.⁸¹

Fourth, Malbon has made a major contribution to Markan narrative scholarship, focusing on the disciples. She takes Best’s claims about the role of the disciples in Mark’s construction of discipleship seriously, but adds that Best focuses

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 125.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 128–129.

⁸⁰ Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 418.

⁸¹ Stephen D. Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 75.

too much on the negative depiction of the disciples and too much on the disciples as such.⁸² The disciples are depicted as “fallible followers.”⁸³ She argues that the struggles of the disciples are rather negative, but that these need to be placed within the overall depiction of followership.⁸⁴ Together, the different followers (including the crowds) constitute the image of discipleship; it includes both following Jesus and encountering struggles. So Malbon follows Tannehill in his conclusion that the disciples are “problematic, but potential models nonetheless.”⁸⁵ However, in her view this can only be established when one sees the disciples within the larger group of followers.⁸⁶ In her early studies Malbon takes the interactions of Jesus with both the disciples and the crowds as a starting point for characterization.⁸⁷ Later, she looks at the in-text context (i.e. the overall plot) to explain the characterization of the disciples.⁸⁸ In both cases she finds similar results: a nuanced view on the disciples.⁸⁹ In her description of the disciples, Malbon does not discuss the disciples’ character development. Especially within the literary context of the story, she sees the ambiguous depiction of the disciples as something present from beginning to end.⁹⁰ For example, if the ending really were negative, as others have suggested, it would contradict Jesus’ words in that chapter and that is not what Mark wants to do.⁹¹

⁸² Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Fallible Followers: Women and Men in the Gospel of Mark,” *Semeia* 28 (1983): 30.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁵ Malbon, “Disciples,” 104.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸⁸ Malbon, “Text and Contexts,” 90ff.

⁸⁹ Malbon, “Fallible Followers,” 32.

⁹⁰ Malbon, “Text and Contexts,” 91.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Fifth, Henderson has given a strong argument for a positive depiction of the disciples in the first six chapters of Mark. She argues that the focus of discipleship in those passages is not discovery of the identity of Jesus – something with which the disciples struggle – but participation in Jesus’ mission – something the disciples do well.⁹² That means that at least in the first part of the Gospel, the disciples are depicted very positively, for a reason that has been neglected by most other scholars. The failure of the disciples that comes later in the Gospel must not be seen purely in the sense of their not understanding or opposing Jesus, but also in their not participating with his mission anymore.⁹³

Finally, Driggers in his *Following God* focuses on God as the main actor in the Gospel. God is working in both a transcendent and an invasive way.⁹⁴ It is in this light that Driggers sees the disciples’ depiction as dual as well. On the one hand they are completely dependent on God who guides them in all of their choices. God uses the disciples to invade the world.⁹⁵ At the same time, the disciples are given freedom to respond to God’s call.⁹⁶ So, in their positive actions they are both acting and being led. But, this is also the case in their negative actions. They seem to owe the lack of understanding to themselves, but at the same time God also hardens them.⁹⁷ This creates a tension between positive expectations towards the disciples (they are called) and their reality (they fail). In the end, “Mark’s abrupt conclusion creates a final and lingering theological tension, a tension that in many respects defines the Markan view of discipleship, namely, the tension between human responsibility and

⁹² Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, 2nd ed., SNTSMS 135 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 241, 245.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁹⁴ Ira Brent Driggers, *Following God through Mark: Theological Tension in the Second Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

divine mercy.”⁹⁸ Central to Driggers’ writing is the assumption that if someone understands “God”, the object of that understanding cannot be God. The character of the disciples illustrates this aspect: it is impossible to completely understand God.

Literary Criticism: Pragmatic Types

Pragmatic types of the literary approach to the text focus on the reader. Two major types within this approach are rhetorical criticism and reader-response theory. As mentioned above, pragmatic types are very similar to objective types. In some ways they can be viewed as two accents within literary criticism: on the story level they are concerned with the text as a whole, but at the discourse level the focus shifts from the text to the reader.⁹⁹

Rhetorical criticism is considered to be a pragmatic type because the goal of the method is to clarify how the author uses rhetoric to convince the implied reader to take action.¹⁰⁰ It is however clear that rhetorical criticism and narrative criticism have a strong overlap.¹⁰¹ The biggest difference between them is a shift in focus from narrative to reader, but application of these literary types does not lead to great differences in character analysis.

A first rhetorical critical study is Vernon K. Robbins’ *Jesus the Teacher*.¹⁰² Based on repetition and convention, Robbins divides the Gospel of Mark into three

⁹⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁹⁹ Mark Allan Powell, “Narrative Criticism: The Emergency of a Prominent Reading Strategy,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 33ff.

¹⁰⁰ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 20; see also: Paul L. Danove, *The Rhetoric of the Characterization of God, Jesus, and Jesus’ Disciples in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSup 290 (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 2.

¹⁰¹ Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 30.

¹⁰² Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984); see also: Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow Me! Disciples in Markan Rhetoric*, SBLDS 145 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 13. Powell would later put Robbins in the same category with Weeden, Best and Kelber who also had rhetorical focal points (Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 30). Here however Shiner is followed, putting Robbins with rhetorical criticism.

major parts. Like Meye, he sees the portrayal of Jesus as teacher as the main purpose of the Gospel. To be a teacher, one must have followers and that is where the disciples come in. In the first part of the Gospel (1:1-3:6) the teacher/disciple structure is introduced and this first cycle also initiates the followers in following.¹⁰³ This phase is characterized by a positive depiction of the disciples. In the intermediate phase (3:7-12:44) the focus lies on teachings of the teacher and learning of the followers.¹⁰⁴ Here the image of the disciples changes, especially from the first feeding story in Mark 6 onwards.¹⁰⁵ In the beginning of this learning phase the disciples have encountered numerous new things and in a second step they try to accommodate that knowledge to new challenges.¹⁰⁶ This however proves to be too difficult and results in a rather negative depiction of the disciples. Jesus further shows that this is only the beginning: the disciples must expect more difficulty in following him (8:27-10:45). In the final section of the middle phase Jesus is not just teaching about what is to come, but is also enacting what they had anticipated.¹⁰⁷ Third, in the final phase (13:1-16:8) the teacher says farewell and dies. Here the disciples abandon Jesus, establishing the tragic fate of the Greco-Roman teacher-king or the Jewish rejected prophet-teacher.¹⁰⁸ Robbins thus opts for a downward spiral in the disciples' depiction. A big problem with Robbins' methodology is an over-emphasis on Jesus' role as a teacher. In emphasizing this aspect he neglects the Christological titles, which are so central to the Gospel.¹⁰⁹

In his 1992 dissertation *Follow Me!* Witney Taylor Shiner's central thesis concerning characters in Mark is that they all "serve as plot functions . . . to help

¹⁰³ Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 75–76.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰⁹ Shiner, *Follow Me*, 27.

reveal whom Jesus is.”¹¹⁰ In each of the episodes – which according to Shiner stand as single stories – the disciples serve just one rhetorical role, and in that sense they are not *round* or ‘rich’ characters.¹¹¹ Shiner indicates that contrary to other Greco-Roman philosophical conversion traditions, Mark’s disciples do not display a moral standard as they are accepted into the group of followers, nor a change throughout the following process.¹¹² In portraying the disciples, Mark creates a “two-level narrative world.”¹¹³ He needs to do this because he wants to show at the same time that Jesus is God’s son, and that the world does not accept this fact. The role of the disciples helps to achieve that purpose. Their lack of understanding creates a contrast with the identity of Jesus: they “represent the general human condition.”¹¹⁴ The difficulty of the disciples’ not understanding makes it clear that accepting Jesus as God’s son is something worth pursuing by the reader (level one: God – Jesus) but at the same time it is difficult (level two: Jesus – world).¹¹⁵ Relevant for this study is that Shiner questions whether Mark “intended any coherent characterization of the disciples.”¹¹⁶

Rather, it seems that the characterization of the disciples in each episode or section of the Gospel is for the most part determined by the rhetorical point that is being made about Jesus in that particular part of the Gospel. The resulting portrait of the disciples is coherent only to the extent that it fits within a range of *characterizations* that Mark understood to be appropriate for the disciples of Jesus.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹¹² Ibid., 197.

¹¹³ Ibid., 289.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 251.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 289.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., emphasis added. Note the use of the plural.

The biggest problem with Shiner's approach is that – though he criticizes Robbins for this – he also starts from the assumption that the Gospel of Mark is primarily a teacher/disciple story. In doing so he becomes vulnerable to the same criticism that he applies to Robbins and narrative criticism. Just as narrative criticism uses characteristics of modern day novels, and 'forces' them on the Gospel, Shiner uses characteristics of Ancient teacher/follower works and applies them to the text of Mark as well. In doing this he argues that all the characters support the person of Jesus, but he does not really make an argument to support this statement; he instead treats the different episodes as stand-alone stories.

In his detailed *The Rhetoric of Characterization* Paul L. Danove suggests that there are four rhetorical strategies in the depiction of the disciples. First, in most cases the disciples are shown as neutral. The rather neutral introduction of the disciples indicates that the authorial audience had high esteem of them and was familiar with many stories (narrative framework) about them.¹¹⁸ Second, there is positive sophistication of initial beliefs of the original audience. Repetition reinforces the pre-narrative semantic framework – the authorial audience, or how the original audience sees the disciples at the beginning of the text –, or constructs new aspects within it – narrative audience.¹¹⁹ Third, there is negative sophistication of the initial beliefs, i.e. that Judas betrayed Jesus (3:19) and that the disciples abandoned Jesus.¹²⁰ And finally, and least frequently, there is deconstruction of positive beliefs.¹²¹ Danove sees a development from positive to negative cultivation, but also gives attention to the cultivation of potential but unrealized positive beliefs. The teachings of Jesus on both discipleship and the future hold in them a potentiality for positive beliefs about the disciples; these just are not realized yet within the Gospel.¹²² The

¹¹⁸ Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterization*, 91.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 122–123.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 91–101.

audience's strong positive pre-existing beliefs about the disciples, however, ensure that the disciples are mostly seen in a positive light.¹²³ Their deconstructive depiction in Mark 8-10 needs to be seen within these beliefs and does not overpower them. Danove's study is extremely valuable, being one of the few to develop a methodology for evaluating change within the disciples. Danove gives noteworthy results for the development of the disciples, but in doing this he does not give sufficient attention to the role of the individual disciples within the Gospel. Furthermore, he constantly emphasizes the rhetorical strategy of Mark, while often neglecting the narrative characterization of the disciples – the focus of the present study. For example, in his alterations of positive and negative depiction of μαθηταί and δώδεκα he does not seem to include the settings of the stories, instead merely focusing on the semantics of particular noun-verb combinations.

Reader-response criticism is a second pragmatic type. The type “emphasizes the temporal experience of reading a narrative.”¹²⁴ Thus, reader-response criticism is considered to focus on the reader *over* the text (deconstructionism, transactive criticism and interpretative communities) and the reader *with* the text (affective stylistics and phenomenological criticism), while structuralism and narrative criticism focus on the reader *within* the text.¹²⁵ In the division of ‘within’, ‘over’ and ‘with’ the text, rhetorical criticism fits best in the group looking at the reader *with* the text, since one looks at the affective strategies of the author. It looks at the effect of the rhetoric on the ancient reader. Reader response looks at the effect in general. The effect of the story on the reader is important.¹²⁶ This has too often been neglected, resulting in an over-emphasis on *narrative* and a minor treatment of *discourse* or

¹²³ Ibid., 125.

¹²⁴ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 8.

¹²⁵ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 16–18.

¹²⁶ Horsley, *Whole Story*, 8.

rhetoric – “the ways in which the language of the narrative attempts to weave its spell over the reader.”¹²⁷ However, discourse is the real concern of the author.¹²⁸

Robert M. Fowler was one of the first to study Mark from this reader-response approach. His *Let the Reader Understand*¹²⁹ is the result of that study and still seen as a foundational work for reader-response theory.¹³⁰ Fowler combines the efforts of some of the historical and literary critics mentioned above. He puts them all in the category “philological-historical biblical criticism” and expresses the aim to go beyond this approach.¹³¹ Fowler first looks at the level of the story and sees a growing distance between Jesus and the disciples.¹³² This is, however, on the story level; the real point is that the author tries to create distrust of the disciples’ perceptual point of view – their actual point of view in the story.¹³³ As distance grows to the point where the disciples actually leave Jesus in the story, at the discourse level “the burden of discipleship now falls squarely upon the shoulder of the only remaining candidate for discipleship – the recipient of the narrator’s discourse, the reader of the Gospel.”¹³⁴ In this, Peter’s opposition to Jesus’ aim in Mark 8:27-9:1 is a pivotal point. There Jesus clearly puts Peter on the side of the world: against God’s point of view. Here the reader is inclined to choose God’s side.¹³⁵ It is not just about the disciples’ perceptual point of view (their lack of understanding) anymore, but also about their wrong conceptual point of view; they

¹²⁷ Fowler, *Understand*, 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, passim.

¹³⁰ Skinner, “Telling the Story,” 8; Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 37.

¹³¹ Fowler, *Understand*, 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 66, 70.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

are choosing a different ideological perspective.¹³⁶ From that point on, the author begins to point out how “inadequate” and even “dangerous” the disciples’ conceptual point of view is.¹³⁷ As far as the story level is concerned, Fowler is in line with Weeden and Kelber, but the discourse he sees behind it is completely different.¹³⁸ Fowler sees a negative spiral, but he does not seem to take into account the more positive and/or neutral references to the disciples in the second half of the Gospel. Jesus may be very harsh to Peter in 8:33, but still Jesus continues to invest time and energy in his disciples. Fowler does not consider that the disciples stay with Jesus even after that event and that Jesus continues to instruct them. Though there is failure of their part, this seems to at least suggest a more positive depiction at the story level than Fowler appreciates. Next, Fowler does consider that the author could have a different goal than using confusion to provoke thought about how discipleship should take form. What if the confusion is recognizable for the reader and helps him to identify even more with the disciples, as Tannehill suggests?

Bas van Iersel takes an approach similar to that of Fowler in his commentary on the Gospel.¹³⁹ He chooses to follow Donald Juel’s use of *levels* instead of Fowler’s *story* and *discourse*, and distinguishes between the content of the story and its meaning, the meaning being the most important aspect.¹⁴⁰ In applying the principles of reader-response criticism, Iersel arrives at different results than Fowler. Iersel also acknowledges that the development of the disciples follows a downward line, but he sees the ultimate betrayal by Peter as a point of strong identification between Peter and the persecuted Roman readers who have betrayed other Christians or have failed to testify themselves to be Christians in Roman courts.¹⁴¹ In seeing it

¹³⁶ Ibid., 66, 72–73.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 256–260.

¹³⁹ Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux, JSNTSup 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 21–22.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 455–456.

this way, it seems that Iersel is actually applying a more rhetorical critical methodology, focusing on the ancient reader, rather than looking at ‘timeless’ reader-response. Iersel thus sees the same downward spiral, but it is more positive than the spiral Fowler identifies.

Summary

Discipleship research in the Gospel of Mark has known an increasing academic interest. It is safe to say that most scholars – at least at a ‘discourse’ or ‘meaning’ level – see an ambiguous depiction of the disciples, i.e. containing both good and bad elements. All scholars dealt with above who consider the whole Gospel as a unity, see something of a downward spiral. There is a strong unity in this aspect.

However there are several problems with the studies discussed above. First, most of the scholars seem to base their conclusions about the disciples’ character development mostly on their own presuppositions. How the disciples are characterized in Mark depends on what the scholars think Mark is trying to communicate with his Gospel – and not the other way round. Here Henderson and Danove are the exceptions. Second, and following logically from the first problem, the argumentation for most conclusions on the development of the disciples’ character is very limited. It seems that most of the scholars discussed here affirm what Rhoads and Michie had stated: that the development of the characters is just Mark revealing more about the character of the disciples. At the same time, all of them see some kind of decline of the disciples’ character, but the support offered for this decline is mostly scarce. In many cases, the story and discourse levels are confused. Fowler identifies this in other scholars,¹⁴² but then falls into the pitfall of presuppositions as he neglects more positive passages on discipleship in Mark. Third, and this also contributes to the second problem, there is vague or absent methodology when it comes to characterization. Most scholars use a methodology in which the characterization follows the plot analysis, but this is never really explicated. Danove is the only one that first tries to develop a proper methodology

¹⁴² Fowler, *Understand*, 256–260.

before analysing the character of the disciples.¹⁴³ Fourth, in-text examination of the development is often absent – again Danove is the exception. As mentioned above, most of the scholars consider plot analysis before character analysis. However, the assumption that the plot defines character and that there is no reciprocity between the two is insufficiently argued, if at all.

All in all, the consulted scholars offer a quite consistent view on the disciples' development: it is a downward spiral. The biggest difference of opinion is on how positively that spiral begins and ends. The biggest problem is that very few arguments for this downward spiral are given. This thesis seeks to supply a more objective methodology and solid arguments in order to support or refute this downward spiral.

Concepts

The scholars discussed above use some of the concepts central to the research question of this thesis, but it is clear that interpretations of those concepts differ. Therefore, in a next step the central concepts in this thesis will be delimited before further developing the methodology. The first main research question – To what extent is there development in the character of the disciples? – contains three concepts that need definition before research can begin on the combination of them – i.e. 'development', 'character', and 'disciple.' The first two are literary terms, and the latter is a biblical and/or theological term. The second question – How can that development be explained: is it elaboration or change? – covers two concepts that need further clarification: 'elaboration' and 'change.' The logical order for defining concepts is character – disciples – development – elaboration and change. Elaboration and change cannot be explained without defining development. Since development here is character development, its definition depends on the explanation of character. The disciples are characters in Mark's story, so the broader concept of 'character' will be explained first.

¹⁴³ Granted, Malbon has done this thoroughly for her analysis of Jesus (*Mark's Jesus*, 6–19).

Character

A character in a literary work, including Mark's Gospel, is different from a real living person.¹⁴⁴ It is an actor who lives in the narrative.¹⁴⁵ "Characters are the actors in a story, the ones who carry out the various activities that comprise the plot."¹⁴⁶ S/he may have been based on a real person, but the character in the narrative is Mark's depiction of that person. For a literary understanding of the character it is thus not so relevant to understand that character in real life or in other literary sources (especially if those sources are by another author). The role of a character is limited to the role he/she has within that literary product. So in studying the character of the disciples, one first focuses on their character within the Gospel of Mark. At the same time, the characters depicted in the Gospel of Mark have existed in real life. The implied audience was expected to already have an image of that character, either through meeting the disciples or having heard other stories about them. They do not approach this story, including the character, neutrally and without presuppositions.¹⁴⁷ However, in the end the characters are *mentale Modelle*.¹⁴⁸ The reader or the audience constructs these mental images of the characters with the help of prior knowledge and the information that the author offers.

A character depiction might be influenced by the real life version of that character, but the author is responsible for the literary depiction of that character; the author "controls the amount of information that is available to the reader concerning a character."¹⁴⁹ Within narrative criticism the question is not so much whether this

¹⁴⁴ Williams, *Other Followers*, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 51.

¹⁴⁷ Bennema, "Character," 399–400.

¹⁴⁸ Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese: Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28*, WUNT II/285 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 127.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *Other Followers*, 55; see also: Mieke Bal, *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen: Inleiding in de narratologie*, 2nd ed. (Muiderberg: Dirk Coutinho, 1980), 89.

was information the author had about this character, but how the author uses and reveals that information. For example, in Mark 4:13 Jesus asks the disciples a hard question, implying that they did not understand his message. This is not found in the parallel passages in the Synoptics (Mat. 13 and Lk. 8). In narrative criticism the question would not so much be what really was said, but how Mark wants to construct their character within his narration.

Further, a character does not necessarily need to be an individual; a group of people can function as a character as well.¹⁵⁰ The author can use stereotyping as “a conventional literary device by which a number of characters are made to serve a single role.”¹⁵¹ Characterization through type was common in ancient literature.¹⁵² Characters were either of the good or the bad type.¹⁵³ Classical writers presented their characters as such: they were either “an ideal representation or . . . an example of the characteristics of a species or group.”¹⁵⁴ The goal of characterization is not so much to understand the character, but to evaluate it; it is more about morality than about personality.¹⁵⁵ For example, when Peter in Mark 8:32 takes Jesus apart and rebukes him, he may be representing the overall sentiment of all the disciples: they all were troubled by Jesus’ passion prediction. Gospel literature however does not necessarily use the same characterization as Greco-Roman literature. The Gospels are not exactly the same genre as many of the Greek texts and thus the subject of characterization should not be treated only from a Greek perspective.¹⁵⁶ It seems that Mark was more ambiguous in his depiction of the disciples than this Greco-Roman

¹⁵⁰ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 51.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 30; Burnett, “Characterization,” 6.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Markan Characterization,” *JBL* 108, no. 2 (1989): 278–279.

¹⁵⁴ Burnett, “Characterization,” 6; see also: William M. Wright, “Greco-Roman Character Typing and the Presentation of Judas in the Fourth Gospel,” *CBQ* 71, no. 3 (2009): 548.

¹⁵⁵ Wright, “Greco-Roman Character,” 545.

¹⁵⁶ Burnett, “Characterization,” 8–9.

approach.¹⁵⁷ In doing this Mark offers space for a more multi-layered view on the characters as both individuals and parts of a larger group, but this will be discussed in the following sections.

Disciple

In the analysis of the text, the Greek μαθητής and all nouns and verbs that have the same root will be studied. Of the 46 times the word is used in the Gospel of Mark, in all but one occasion (2:18) it refers to Jesus' followers.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the term δώδεκα will be included. There are different opinions as to whether these terms are completely interchangeable. Most suggest that the δώδεκα are a subgroup of the μαθηταί,¹⁵⁹ but that the two terms are almost synonyms.¹⁶⁰ The words are, however, never used together.¹⁶¹ Though there are indications that the δώδεκα and the μαθηταί are the same character (e.g. 4:10, 34; 11:11, 14; 14:16-17) – or that the δώδεκα are a subgroup of the broader μαθηταί-character (e.g. 9:31-35) – this is never made explicit.¹⁶² It is even not made explicit that the Twelve are all disciples, as Jesus does not explicitly choose the Twelve out of the disciples (see 3:13). It is however clear that at least some of the Twelve are named together with the disciples (e.g. Peter in 8:27-9:1; the Four in 13:1, 3). For this reason it is reasonable to assume that the Twelve are a subcategory of the disciples and that the characterization of the Twelve is thus also transferable to the disciples.

¹⁵⁷ Malbon, "Jewish Leaders," 279.

¹⁵⁸ Meye, *Twelve*, 98.

¹⁵⁹ E.g. *ibid.*, 98–99; Best, *Following Jesus*, 204; Waybright, "Discipleship," 269; Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterization*, 102; contra: Best, "Disciples," 127–128.

¹⁶⁰ Ernest Best, "Mark's Use of the Twelve," in *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 157; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 122.

¹⁶¹ M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 170.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 170–171.

As seen in the previous section, individual characters – especially in ancient literature – can be types for a whole group. Most scholars consulted in this thesis believe that the individual disciple in the Gospel of Mark is “not a solitary individual but the member of a community.”¹⁶³ This option is followed here. Thus, smaller groups of disciples and individuals will be included in the characterization as well. Peter, James, John and Andrew form a group of four; Peter, James and John are a group of three; James and John are a group of two, and both Peter and Judas are presented as individuals.¹⁶⁴ However, Malbon argues that the smaller entities are not depicted in exactly the same way as the whole group; the individual disciples and the smaller groups are often cast in a more negative light than the whole group of the disciples (e.g. Peter in 8:32-33 and James and John in 10:35ff.).¹⁶⁵

So in this study, the ‘disciple’-character includes μαθητής, δώδεκα, and those who are explicitly named as one of the Twelve (3:13-19). However, the possibility that the pictures drawn of the disciples, the Twelve, the Four, the Three and the individuals are not entirely consistent with one another is kept open. As seen below, the development analysis continuously asks whether the development is different when subgroups or individuals are the focal point, and when those subgroups are excluded from the whole. For example, does considering only the Four lead to a different answer to the central questions? And does excluding the Four from the analysis result in different conclusions?

Here, a distinction between the character of the disciples and the theology of discipleship in the Gospel should be made.¹⁶⁶ Malbon makes a strong case for the

¹⁶³ Best, *Following Jesus*, 243.

¹⁶⁴ Ernest Best, “Peter in the Gospel According to Mark,” in *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 174–175.

¹⁶⁵ Malbon, “Disciples,” 124.

¹⁶⁶ μαθητεύω and ἀκολουθέω are seen as synonyms by Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida. The authors also seem to imply that the derivatives of the verbs - incl. the noun μαθητής - are interchangeable with ἀκολουθέω as well (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1996], 469–470). In this thesis ἀκολουθέω is considered to be a verb that can occur with the disciples being its subject (e.g. Mk. 6:1). However, that does not imply that anyone who “follows” is a part of the disciples’ character.

disciples and the crowds being complementary groups illustrating the theme of discipleship.¹⁶⁷ Disciples and crowds cannot exist without each other. This implies that the crowds and the minor characters (e.g. Bartimaeus in Mk. 10:46-52) can serve as an illustration for discipleship, but that does not mean that their character is included in the narrative character of the disciples; the minor characters' depiction can at most be seen as analogous or contrasting to that of the disciples.

Development, Elaboration and Change

'Development', 'elaboration' and 'change' are closely related words, so they are here defined together. Within narrative criticism it is important to pay attention to possible developments of the character, according to James L. Resseguie.¹⁶⁸

'Development' takes place when characters introduced earlier are further described or characterized. This already indicates that it does not apply to flat characters. Flat characters do not surprise the reader: they are predictable because they are always depicted in the same way. To speak of character development implies that the author adds information about a given character. Depiction of the character in later events is not just a repetition of how the character was introduced in earlier episodes. So development is only possible in round characters (see below).

Both 'elaboration' and 'change' refer to types of character development. 'Elaboration' means that the character stays the same, but that the depiction of the character becomes broader: the reader gets to know the character better – in more different facets. 'Elaboration' refers to what the reader experiences when seeing the dimensions of one character better. The author can choose to "increase the depth and clarity of the information available to the reader concerning a character."¹⁶⁹ Mark can use this process of clarification. Thus, aspects of the character shown in the later episodes are not contradictory, but complementary to depiction of the character at the

¹⁶⁷ Malbon, "Disciples," 126.

¹⁶⁸ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 20.

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *Other Followers*, 56.

beginning of the story. However, introducing new features of a character does not necessarily imply that the character is elaborated; it can also imply a difference or change in that character.

‘Change’ refers to a process occurring within the character; the character is not the same at the beginning as at the end of the narrative.¹⁷⁰ Change can be observed in two different ways: as a contrast or as a shift in focus. In the first case the character displays opposite features at the beginning and at the end. In the second case the character’s initial features recede into the background and new features – which the character did not have at the beginning – become the focus of attention. Thus, traits may be replaced by their opposites (radical change) or just disappear to be replaced by a set of traits that give a different image (evolving change).¹⁷¹ These concepts are further developed in the methodology (see below), where they are made more empirical, i.e. it is determined how for example development can be studied. What are the indicators for development? An attempt is made in the next section to compose a both workable *and* comprehensive methodology for character development analysis.

Characterization

The methodology used to answer the research questions fits in the narrative critical types of literary critical method. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the questions focus on the text as a whole, which is a focal point of narrative criticism.¹⁷² The questions are literary questions and “narrative criticism focuses on how biblical literature works as *literature*.”¹⁷³ Second, the questions do not focus on what the

¹⁷⁰ ‘Transformation’ is an other concept used for this idea (e.g. Christian Dionne, “Le point sur les théories de la gestion des personnages,” in *Et vous, qui dites-vous que je suis? La gestion des personnages dans les récits bibliques*, ed. Pierre Létourneau and Michel Talbot, Sciences bibliques 16 [Montréal: Médiaspaul, 2006], 26). ‘Transformation’, however, often has a strong positive connotation (change to better) and thus will not be used in this thesis.

¹⁷¹ Williams, *Other Followers*, 58.

¹⁷² Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 412; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 7; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 38.

¹⁷³ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 18.

relationship is between the disciples as literary characters and the historical disciples or how the author used his sources (as would be the case in the more historical critical method). Neither are the questions of what the intention of the actual author is or how the original readers would have interpreted Mark's characterization of the disciples the focal point (as would be the case in rhetorical criticism and reader-response criticism). The questions focus on the depiction of the disciples' character within the text, which is one of "formal features of a text in its finished form."¹⁷⁴ They are questions about the in-text elements of the disciples' character.¹⁷⁵ Though inquiries about the intention of the author, the place of the character in the discourse of the whole text, and the interpretation of the reader are important, they are not the aim of this thesis. And though it would be interesting to compare the text of Mark with that of Matthew and Luke; that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The questions deal with the characterization of the disciples within the Gospel narrative

¹⁷⁴ Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *BSac* 153, no. 611 (1996): 334; Johannes C. de Klerk, "Situating Biblical Narrative Studies in Literary Theory and Literary Approaches," *Religion & Theology* 4, no. 3 (1997): 191; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 19. Powell suggests that narrative criticism can be divided into three categories. All start from the text as a whole but the hermeneutical aim is different; they use narrative criticism for different reasons. Some want to find out what the intent of the author was. Others are primarily concerned with what the text says. And a last group of scholars aims to find out what the text does to the reader (and how it does it). Though the hermeneutical question is very important, the focus of this thesis is almost pre-hermeneutical: the goal is to examine the disciples within the story, not so much what the author, the text or the reader does with that depiction (Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 26ff).

¹⁷⁵ For good introductions on the history and the method of narrative criticism, see: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*; Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism"; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*; Malbon, "Narrative Criticism"; Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *Pour lire les récits bibliques: Initiation à l'analyse narrative* (Paris: Cerf, 1998); J.P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*; Finnern, *Narratologie*; Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, eds., *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). For theories of narrative outside biblical studies, see the following books: (especially Chatman is seen as foundational for narrative criticism in biblical studies) Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Bal, *Narratologie*; Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Routledge, 1982); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1983); Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983); James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, eds., *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 33 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, trans. Patricia Häusler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik (London: Routledge, 2009).

and the focus lies on the text as a whole and not in relationship to the other Synoptics.

In his *Story and Discourse* – which most narrative critics see as foundational for narrative criticism¹⁷⁶ – Seymour Chatman distinguished the four key elements of a story: characters, settings, happenings and actions.¹⁷⁷ The actions and the happenings together are the ‘events’ and the characters and the settings are the ‘existents.’¹⁷⁸ The following sections of this chapter focus on the character element of the story and how it can be analysed.

Character Analysis

Recognizing Gospel literature as story implies that sufficient attention is given to the character within that story as it is one of the four key elements.¹⁷⁹ However, in history most of the time the focus has been on the events that constitute the plot.¹⁸⁰ If too strong a focus on the story line and the events in it is not necessarily good, neither is an overemphasis on individual characters or character groups. If the focus lies too strongly on (re)constructing those characters, one loses sight of the fact that in the end the implied author – the author that becomes visible through the text – is communicating something to the implied audience – the audience that is constructed

¹⁷⁶ Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 414; Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 154; Malbon, “Jewish Leaders,” 259; Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 26; Donahue, “Redaction Criticism,” 43; Marguerat and Bourquin, *Récits bibliques*, 76–77; Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterization*, 2n3; Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus*, 7, 7n17, 8n20. Reader-response theorists also build on Chatman (e.g. Fowler, *Understand*, 16). Next to that he is also seen as influential in mainstream literary sciences, see: Monika Fludernik, “Histories of Narrative Theory (I): From Structuralism to the Present,” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture 33 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 42.

¹⁷⁷ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19; Malbon, “Jewish Leaders,” 259n1.

¹⁷⁸ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19.

¹⁷⁹ David R. Bauer, “The Major Characters of Matthew’s Story: Their Function and Significance,” *Int* 46, no. 4 (1992): 357.

¹⁸⁰ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 107; Burnett, “Characterization,” 3; Bennema, “Character,” 375–376.

in the text – and he is using the characters to do so.¹⁸¹ Characterization is never an end in itself.

How then can a character be analysed? There are different methodologies for this.¹⁸² Below is a selection of four methodologies that when combined can contribute to a comprehensive character analysis: (1) the use of types; (2) the constitution of types through traits; (3) the identification of traits through showing and telling; and (4) the evaluation of traits through point of view and rhetorical analysis.

(1) *Types*. The most influential approach to characters in both literary studies and narrative criticism is that of E. M. Forster.¹⁸³ He introduces the difference between round, flat and stock characters.¹⁸⁴ Round characters have a wide variety of possibly conflicting traits, flat characters have predictable and stable traits and stock characters have just one trait throughout the story.¹⁸⁵ However, these categories should not be seen too strictly. The line between round and flat characters is more of a continuum than a division between mutually exclusive categories.¹⁸⁶ Although flat, round and stock character types have been a starting point for character analysis since Forster introduced these concepts in the early twentieth century, it seems that

¹⁸¹ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 9.

¹⁸² Bennema, "Character," 376.

¹⁸³ Dionne, "Gestion des personnages," 23–25.

¹⁸⁴ Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism," 417; Marguerat and Bourquin, *Récits bibliques*, 77–78; Bennema, "Character," 376; a brief excerpt of Forster's *Aspects of a Novel* can be found in: E.M. Forster, "Flat and Round Characters," in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), 40–47.

¹⁸⁵ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 55; this theory is based on the E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, see: Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 29.

¹⁸⁶ Burnett, "Characterization," 18. Forster agreed on this as well. His use of "flat" and "round" already showed how they were interrelated (Forster, "Characters," 47). An elaboration of the round, flat and stock characters approach can be found in M. Pfister, which Finnern has further developed (in: Finnern, *Narratologie*, 156–162). Finnern distinguishes eight dimensions: static-dynamic (change), shallow-detailed (detail), one dimensional-more dimensional (dimensions), typical-individual (conventionality), closed-open (transparency), realistic-unrealistic (reality), coherent-incoherent (coherence) and transferable-psychological (generality).

narrative theory on character has not gotten much further apart from some minor attempts.¹⁸⁷ The research history above suggests that the disciples are round characters – hence their ambiguous depiction – but defining them as a round character is in itself not a detailed methodology for further defining that character and its potential development.

(2) *Traits*. In line with the round typing of the disciples, Stephen D. Moore states that “the disciples in Mark are . . . complex in that they display conflicting traits.”¹⁸⁸ With this statement, Moore unintentionally makes the bridge between the approach of character types and that of traits analysis. Already in 1980 Chatman stated that “the concept of ‘trait’ is about all we have for the discussion of character.”¹⁸⁹ Traits basically are the specific features a character displays. They can be mentioned explicitly or found in the text/story implicitly.¹⁹⁰ They are “narrative adjective[s] out of the vernacular labelling a personal quality of a character, as [they persist] over part or whole of the story.”¹⁹¹ This does not imply, however, that the traits exist as actual adjectives in the story.¹⁹² A critical aspect of traits is that they are persistent. Being hungry is not a trait if it occurs only once, but if it is repeated for the same character constantly, it can be. All the traits together form the whole character. In this definition of traits as narrative adjectives, traits can include feelings, but also actions, behaviours and attitudes.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Bennema, “Character,” 376.

¹⁸⁸ Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 15.

¹⁸⁹ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 108; cf. Dionne, “Gestion des personnages,” 22.

¹⁹⁰ Finnern, *Narratologie*, 129.

¹⁹¹ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 125; see also: Burnett, “Characterization,” 16.

¹⁹² Burnett, “Characterization,” 16.

¹⁹³ Chatman makes a distinction between ‘traits’ and ‘habits’, with a trait being a “great system of interdependent habits.” The biggest difference is that a trait has a “relative persistence” (in: *Story and Discourse*, 122; see also: Dionne, “Gestion des personnages,” 22). This is in accordance with how the concept of traits is used in this thesis.

Mieke Bal is one of the few scholars to have given the traits approach more methodological attention. She suggests analysing characters on two semantic axes: the first shows the characters and their role within a story, and the second their possible qualifications (*kwalificaties*); synonym to what in this thesis is called ‘traits.’ The combination of these axes results in a matrix in which the following signs can be found: +, - and \emptyset ; each of the characters has a trait positively, negatively, or not at all.¹⁹⁴ This method can result in the construction of the different characters in a story, and it makes it easy to compare the characters.¹⁹⁵ Her approach is very useful as it helps to compose images of individual characters per episode. However, Bal in her examples focuses on shorter stories and/or episodes. She does not address the question of how the characters evolve throughout larger stories. One aspect she adds is that if characters, who at story level are different individuals, consist of the same set of traits, those characters are basically synonyms.¹⁹⁶ Thus, if the disciples are individuals they might prove to be a type for the whole group if their traits are exactly the same as that group. A difficulty with Bal is that she works with contrasting traits (plus or minus), but that it is not always so clear what the negative opposite of a trait is. For examining development in characters, Bal’s method can be used to not only to compare each character with other characters in one episode, but also to compare the same character with itself in different episodes. So, for example, while in Bal’s method the disciples in 8:1-9 would be compared to Jesus, her method can also be used to compare the disciples in 8:1-9 with the disciples in 8:27-9:1.

(3) *Showing and Telling*. Bal’s character composition through the identification of traits still does not explain how to identify those traits. Here, the approach of “showing and telling” is useful. The two concepts were introduced by Joseph Warren Beach,¹⁹⁷ and further developed by Wayne Booth.¹⁹⁸ Biblical scholars picked up on

¹⁹⁴ Bal, *Narratologie*, 94–95.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in: Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2.

this distinction.¹⁹⁹ They offer two ways of how an implied author can depict characters: “The implied author can reveal characters either by telling the reader about them or by showing the reader what the characters are like within the story.”²⁰⁰ The latter is the method used most in the New Testament,²⁰¹ as is the case with Greco-Roman literature: the character is mostly shown through the actions.²⁰² The actions of the characters or their treatment by other characters show who they are. The same goes for the disciples; in very few places does the author say something about the disciples.

Malbon further narrowed down the ways of ‘showing a character.’²⁰³ She sums up three ways a character can be known. First, a character can be known through what he says or does; second, by what other characters say to or about him and their relationship to him; third, by what the narrator says about him or what the narrator does to him (e.g. contrasting the character with other actors).²⁰⁴ The combination of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 3ff.; Banfield, *Unspeaking Sentences*, 69.

¹⁹⁹ Dionne, “Gestion des personnages,” 32.

²⁰⁰ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52; see also: Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 98–99.

²⁰¹ Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 29; similar conclusions are made of Old Testament texts, see for example: Mark A. O’Brien, “The Contribution of Judah’s Speech, Genesis 44:18-34, to the Characterization of Joseph,” *CBQ* 59, no. 3 (1997): 430; and in non-biblical literature, see: Fludernik, *Narratology*, 44.

²⁰² Burnett, “Characterization,” 11.

²⁰³ Several other biblical scholars have a similar division. E.g. Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 116–117; Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 417; Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 52; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 98–99; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 47ff.; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 121–122. Joel F. Williams actually offers eleven different ways for a narrator to reveal the characters (in: *Other Followers*, 61–67). Applying this detailed approach would first of all be beyond the scope of this thesis. Secondly, there is some overlap in these ways. For example, Williams considers the narrator giving a trait and the narrator explaining inner thoughts or appearance to be different. However, in the definition of traits used in this thesis, the two latter are a subcategory of the ‘giving a trait.’ Christian Dionne gives a comprehensive overview of how showing and telling has played a role in the writings of literary theorists and biblical scholars (in: “Gestion des personnages,” *passim*).

²⁰⁴ Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 28–29; Jeannine K. Brown uses a very similar division, but leaves out what the narrator does to the disciples. Her approach is, just like Malbon’s approach, quite practical and easy to apply (see: *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, SBLAB 9 [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], 49–58).

those ways is the whole of the characterization.²⁰⁵ In her recent *Mark's Jesus* Malbon uses this approach to analyse how Jesus is depicted in Mark.²⁰⁶ Though she does not use this methodology to look at the *development* of Jesus' character, her approach is very useful for identifying traits of the disciples. Bennema supports this approach, since the characterization of ancient sources is mostly indirect, i.e. the narrator does not simply state what a person is like or what he is feeling.²⁰⁷

(4) *Evaluation*. Finally, how are the traits, found through analysing showing and telling, evaluated? If a character is hungry, this can be positive (good appetite), negative (gluttonous), or neutral (normal human behaviour). How can this be decided? A first analysis considers the existing image of the character. If evaluation of the character has been positive before, it is not likely that this evaluation will change easily. Readers have the tendency to leave the character in a certain category: if a character is perceived as good, the reader will not change his opinion unless this change is made explicitly.²⁰⁸ Where a positive opinion is concerned, one speaks of the halo effect: the halo is not easily removed from the character.²⁰⁹ Where the opinion is negative, it is called the devil effect.²¹⁰ This implies that how the character is introduced (or assumed) in the beginning weighs on the rest of the book. If the character starts with a positive depiction, it is only through very negative countering that this image is altered. In the research history discussed above this aspect is barely

²⁰⁵ Rhoads had come up with a similar approach before that, but left out what the author says about the characters. See: Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism," 417.

²⁰⁶ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus*, 15.

²⁰⁷ Burnett, "Characterization," 11; Bennema, "Character," 397. Monika Fludernik asserts that in modern novels it is not so much about "what" the character does, but about how s/he does it (Fludernik, *Narratology*, 46). These rather emotional adjectives however are mostly absent in the Gospel of Mark.

²⁰⁸ Finfern, *Narratologie*, 132–133.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 133; the concept was first introduced and studied by Edward Thorndike in 1920, see: Jon E. Roedeklein, *Dictionary of Theories, Laws, and Concepts in Psychology* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), 227.

²¹⁰ Roedeklein, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 227.

given attention. If these presuppositions are limited to the text, the first introduction of the characters is of the greatest importance. In 1:16-20 the disciples are introduced in a positive way. This positive evaluation has to be taken into account when evaluating later passages. However, in the case of the disciples, their character is not fiction, at least not entirely. The historical reader already had met or heard of the disciples and takes those pre-existing beliefs to the text.²¹¹ Though this is never made explicit in the text, it can be assumed that these beliefs were positive. If this were not the case, the narrator would have made the introduction of the disciples more explicitly positive to counter those negative pre-existing beliefs, or affirmed the negative beliefs in the introduction, but neither happens.

A second analysis looks at the rhetoric in which the character traits are introduced. Is it explicit (telling) or implicit (showing through actions, sayings [by self or other characters], and analogies)?²¹² Explicit rhetoric is more straightforward than implicit rhetoric.²¹³ If the narrator makes an explicit comment, less interpretation is left to the implied reader. So if a narrator wants to avoid a wrong evaluation, it is better to make an explicit comment. This comment will be more dominant exactly because the narrator wants to avoid misinterpretation. If the narrator says that the disciples' heart was hardened (6:52), there is no doubt about the negative evaluation here. Less strong, but still unambiguous is what Jesus or God say about or to the disciples. The narrator has established their good point of view and thus what they say weighs strongly. When Jesus asks the disciples whether their hearts are hardened (8:17) this also results in a negative evaluation. Sayings of the disciples themselves, and actions of the disciples or other characters are still less explicit as the actions themselves do not hold a straightforward evaluation. When the disciples ask who Jesus is (4:41), it is only indirectly that it becomes clear whether

²¹¹ Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterization*, 12; Altman, *Narrative*, 294; Finnern, *Narratologie*, 127–128.

²¹² Finnern, *Narratologie*, 152–153. Finnern makes a further distinction between characterization by author and by the characters, but it seems to overlap with his first distinction between explicit and implicit.

²¹³ Fowler, *Understand*, 82.

this is a positive or a negative statement. Stressing a character trait can also be done through analogy or contrast. If a minor character displays a lot of faith when the disciples do not, the contrast between the minor character and the disciples underscores the trait. However, this approach requires the implied reader to make the connection between the disciples and the minor character. Analogies and contrasts are thus weakest as they are most implicit.

In addition to the level of explicitness, the distribution (are several traits offered at once or are they distributed throughout the story), quantity (how much is said or shown about the character) and frequency (are characteristics repeated) of characterization are considered.²¹⁴ The information about the characters in a narrative is more limited than the data about living people, but at the same time it is more significant.²¹⁵ The information that the narrator in Mark gives about his characters has been selected by him and thus has some added value since it says something about his intentions.²¹⁶ The narrator also controls the order in which the features of a character are presented.²¹⁷ He can also use repetition to stress the importance of the information given.²¹⁸ When a trait is repeated several times, the narrator makes sure that the implied reader notices the trait. If the narrator wants the implied reader to notice, the trait is probably significant to the narrator and thus to the whole characterization.

A third analysis looks at the point of view. For all Gospels, the perspective that is presented as dominant is that of God. God's evaluative perspective is what counts in the story.²¹⁹ This is the point of view that the narrator – who is not neutral –

²¹⁴ Finnern, *Narratologie*, 154.

²¹⁵ Williams, *Other Followers*, 56.

²¹⁶ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 121.

²¹⁷ Williams, *Other Followers*, 56.

²¹⁸ Bal, *Narratologie*, 93; Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 95–96; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 42–53.

²¹⁹ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 24.

assumes.²²⁰ In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus as protagonist shares the narrator's point of view and thus also God's point of view. This is established by the introduction of the Gospel (Mk. 1:1-15) where Jesus is installed as someone who follows God completely and is a realization of God's plans. The point of view of the other characters is measured by the protagonist's stance.²²¹ Their point of view can either be positive – siding with the narrator, God and Jesus – or negative – resisting the narrator, God and Jesus.²²² For example, though in an ancient context leaving one's family (1:16-20) would have been evaluated negatively, this act of the disciples is clearly in accordance with Jesus' point of view and thus is evaluated positively.

'Showing and telling' can be used to find traits, and rhetoric and point of view, in combination with the earlier evaluation of the character, make it possible to evaluate the traits offered. These evaluated traits together make the typing of the character possible. However, this methodology for analysing character still does not hold the possibility for analysing character development. This will be discussed in the next section.

Character Development Analysis

As said above, very little research has been done in character development. Cornelis Bennema is one of the few who has said something about the topic, though still concisely. He suggests that sometimes development is mentioned explicitly.²²³ For example, if it is mentioned that the heart of the disciples was hardened (Mk. 6:52), it implies that at one point it was not so; there has been a development. Sometimes however the development is implicit. According to Bennema, the development is then shown through contrasting traits, when "a new trait replaces another or does not

²²⁰ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 43.

²²¹ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 54.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Bennema, "Character," 403.

fit neatly into the existing set of traits, implying that the character has changed.”²²⁴ In his approach Bennema does not distinguish between development as elaboration and change. He sees development and change as synonyms.²²⁵ Yet his approach offers a valuable insight into character development: it happens when new traits are introduced (either explicitly or implicitly) and the new traits need to be compared with the previously introduced traits.

How then can character development be studied? A methodology for character development analysis can be constructed based on the methodology for character analysis (previous section). As with character analysis, traits are central to the methodology as they are basically the only construct through which one can study character, and thus also character development.²²⁶ Character analysis can be done based on the traits analysis. An extra step is that in both character and traits analysis also development must be considered.

A step-by-step method for considering development is to first look at the characterization of the disciples through traits in smaller units and then see if the characterization stays the same. In this way the character is compared with himself throughout the narrative time. In the Gospel of Mark, there are several options for smaller units; and in this thesis those units will be “episodes” which can stand alone as individual stories. The main indicator for new episodes is a change in setting (e.g. in 5:1 the characters arrive on the other side, a different setting than on the sea), but in several cases an episode surpasses a change in setting when the content does not make sense without what happened in a different setting. Mark is known to use several ‘sandwich’ structures (3:20-35; 4:1-20; 5:21-43; 6:7-30; 11:12-21; 14:1-11, 17-31, 53-72).²²⁷ The framing passages often cannot be fully understood without the

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 404.

²²⁶ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 108.

²²⁷ Marguerat and Bourquin, *Récits bibliques*, 50–51; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 55.

framed passage.²²⁸ For example, the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-21) is a complex passage that seems to make little sense. However, when the cleansing of the temple – the included story – is considered, the hermeneutical key for understanding this frame is given: the fig tree refers to what the temple represents.²²⁹ In such a case the framed passage with the framing passages will be considered to be one episode.

Looking at both intra- and inter-episodic level will be done for both traits and whole characters. This is in order to avoid jumping to conclusions. If conclusions about character at an inter-episodic level are made based on traits at an intra-episodic level, it is likely that those conclusions will not take the possible nuances in character evaluation into consideration. In order to avoid this, four steps are taken. The first step looks at traits on an intra-episodic level to identify all the different traits. The second step looks at traits on an inter-episodic level to consider how traits develop in the narrative whole. This step helps to determine which traits weigh more heavily on the character composition, since the narrator stresses often-occurring traits through repetition. This is only visible through examining how traits develop. The third step looks at character composition on an intra-episodic level to determine how the combination of traits results in the depiction and evaluation of the entire character. The final step looks at character composition on an inter-episodic level and makes it possible to draw conclusions on character development.

Trait Analysis and Comparison. First, each episode is studied to uncover traits of the disciples. This study is similar to what Bal suggests, but excludes the comparison with other characters' traits. This identification of traits is done by using the division discussed above for showing and telling: what the disciples do and say; what the other characters do and say to and about them; and what the narrator says about and does with or to them. Every 'qualifying adjective' (see above) found is a potential trait, but as said before, traits are only traits if there is a degree of repetition.

²²⁸ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 52. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie make a distinction between framing episodes (e.g. the blind men in 8:22-26; 10:46-52 frame the episodes on teaching) and sandwiching episodes (like the examples of Resseguie above).

²²⁹ Marguerat and Bourquin, *Récits bibliques*, 50–51.

Besides finding the traits through showing and telling, the traits are also evaluated. For this, the pre-existing beliefs, the rhetoric and the point of view are considered. In an episodes table (see Appendix), a '+' will be used for positive presence of a trait in that episode, a '-' for negative presence, and a 'ø' for absence. This step will be termed the *intra-episodic trait analysis*.

The second step in the traits analysis is to look at how each individual trait develops over the episodes. The focus lies on comparing traits between episodes. Is the evaluation of trait X the same in episode A and in episode B? Are new traits being introduced in episode B? This step results in an overview of different traits in Mark and will be named the *inter-episodic trait comparison*. Here, the persistence and/or permanence of the traits should be considered. Persisting or permanent traits are a strong indication for *non-development*. If the traits stay the same throughout the Gospel, then the character (the combination of the traits) also remains the same. If the narrator keeps repeating that the character is hungry and has brown hair and these are the main focal points, the character will be constructed as a brown-haired hungry person. However, non-contrasting new traits (e.g. the character has blue eyes) and contrasting new traits (e.g. the character changes to a blond hair colour) are an indication of character *development*. At the same time, new traits are broader than contrasting traits. When a trait disappears from the text and/or is replaced by other non-contrasting traits, this does not mean that it has disappeared from the character. Although the trait is not mentioned in the text, the narrator can still assume it. Only actual contrasted traits imply a *change* in character. New non-contrasting traits suggest an *elaboration* of the character. Thus, inter-episodic analogies can be identified. In Mark 7:24-30 the disciples are not mentioned, but the character of the Syrophenician woman can still communicate some traits of the disciples if she displays them as well or contrasts them.

Character Analysis and Comparison. The second aspect of the analysis combines the studied traits into character snapshots. Through the combination of different traits an image can be formed per episode. The plusses and minuses help to the researcher to determine whether the overall image is positive or negative. This is

not a matter of simple maths or counting plusses and minuses. It is likely that certain traits will weigh more heavily on the passage than others. As seen above, three main aspects contribute to the weight. First, an explicit mention (telling) is stronger than an implicit trait (showing). Second, the point of view gives weight to the evaluation. The points of view of the narrator, God and Jesus weigh more heavily than other points of view, in that order. So for each trait in each episode the most explicit point of view is given. If the disciples contradict something the narrator has already stated they are contra his point of view. Third, the frequency of the traits plays a vital role.²³⁰ Traits that keep recurring in the narrative are more essential than other traits. The analysis of the character per episode will be named the *intra-episodic character analysis*.

A second step in this part is a comparison of the different images that are formed in the different episodes. Here the focus is on the overall image of the disciples and not so much on individual traits. This step will be named the *inter-episodic character comparison*. If the character keeps receiving the same overall evaluation, this is an indication for either *non-development* in character if the inter-episodic trait analysis also shows no development; or *elaboration* if the inter-episodic trait analysis shows a change in traits without strong contrasts. If the character receives a different evaluation, this suggests a *change* in character and this will also be visible in contrasting new traits suggested by the inter-episodic trait analysis. There is also a possibility that there is no contrast in traits, but that some traits disappear while the remaining traits are evaluated differently. This would be the case if, for example, in the beginning of the Gospel many positive traits were present while at the end more negative traits occurred, but these negative traits were not the antonyms of the positive ones.

This combination of the traits and character analysis and comparison results in the following number of possibilities (see Table 1).

²³⁰ Here it becomes clear that the intra-episodic and inter-episodic steps overlap. Frequency and repetition can only be determined when looking at other episodes.

		Trait		
		Same	Non-contradictory difference	Contradictory difference
Character	Same evaluation	Status quo (1)	Elaboration (2) / Change (3)	(unlikely) (b)
	Other evaluation	(unlikely) (a)	Change (4&5)	Change (6)

Table 1. Possible conclusions

To explain these possibilities an example will be used where the initial dominant trait is being hungry and this is evaluated positively. (1) If there is no difference between the traits presented throughout the narrative, there automatically will be no change in evaluation of the character. In that case, there will be no development of the character; it is a *status quo*. In the example, the character remains hungry and no other traits are introduced. (2) It is possible that, the earlier traits still being present, non-contradictory new traits are presented in the narrative, but there is no change in character evaluation. In that case, the character's traits presented later are a further *elaboration* of their character presented at the beginning of the narrative. In the example, the character remains hungry and new positive traits are introduced (e.g. being athletic). (3) It is possible that the traits introduced earlier disappear and that non-contradictory new traits are presented in the narrative, but with no change in character evaluation. In that case, the character's new traits in combination with the disappearance of earlier traits suggest a *change* in the character, which does not come with a different evaluation; it is a mere shift in focus. In the example, being hungry is no longer mentioned and new positive traits are introduced (e.g. being athletic). (4) It is possible that non-contradictory new traits are introduced throughout the narrative, but with a different character evaluation, despite the continued presence of the earlier traits. This implies a *change* in character. In the example, the character remains hungry and new negative, but not-contrasting, traits are introduced (e.g. being unathletic). (5) It is possible that non-contradictory new traits are introduced throughout the narrative, but with a different character evaluation, and at the same time the earlier traits disappear. This implies a *change* in character as well. In the example, being hungry is no longer mentioned and new negative, but not-contrasting, traits are introduced (e.g. being unathletic). (6) It is possible that there are contrasting traits throughout the narrative. This will automatically result in a

different character evaluation. In the example, the character is no longer hungry, which contrasts the earlier situation. Since it contrasts the earlier situation, which was evaluated positively, the evaluation has become negative.

There are two unlikely situations. (a) It is unlikely in the rather simple storyline of the Gospel that the traits stay the same and that the overall character evaluation changes. If the character is hungry and that is positive, the evaluation of that character will not change. The only situation where this is possible is if the point of view within the story changes; i.e. if being hungry is suddenly evaluated as negative. However, in a short story like the Gospel of Mark, which mostly follows Greco-Roman standards, this is unlikely. (b) It is unlikely that there are contrasting traits and no difference in evaluation. In our example, being hungry and not being hungry could both be identified as positive. However, being hungry is a descriptive and not a prescriptive trait. Based on the research history, it seems unlikely that the Gospel has many descriptive and thus rather neutral traits.

The combination of the traits and the character analysis and comparison thus helps to answer both research questions. The next two chapters contain the trait analysis and comparison and the character analysis and comparison, made using the methodology described above.

Chapter 2. Trait Analysis and Comparison

This chapter analyses the disciples' traits in the Gospel of Mark. First, attention is given to the traits that are present in each passage or episode. Second, the development of those traits is studied and compared throughout the Gospel.

Before this can be done, the episodes in Mark's Gospel must be further delimited. As discussed earlier, "episodes" can stand alone as individual stories. The main indicator for new episodes is a change in setting, but in several cases an episode transcends a change in setting when the content does not make sense without what happened in a different setting. The division Focant uses in his recent commentary is adopted here, with a few alterations.¹ Focant uses a narrative approach,² and is attentive to narrative elements in the structuring of the Gospel.³ Focant is not followed in the following episodes: 4:1-34; 6b-30; 8:10-21; 8:27-9:1; 9:2-13; 9:33-50; 11:27-12:12; 12:13-34; 12:35-44; 13:1-37; 14:53-72; 15:16-32. In each of these cases Focant further divides the episodes based on setting markers. However, in 4:1-34 the parables are so closely tied together that they cannot be understood without the other parables and Jesus' explanation. Mark 6b-30 and 14:53-72 are a sandwich structure. In 8:10-21; 8:27-9:1; 9:33-50; 11:27-12:12; 13:1-37 Jesus' teaching in the last part of the passage is occasioned by events in the first part of the passage. Focant splits the first part from the discourse, but the discourse can only be properly understood in light of the first part. In 9:2 there is reference to the going up the mountain and in v. 9 the coming down is mentioned. If the mountain is considered to be the setting then the upward and downward movement can be included in the same episode. Mark 12:13-34 could have been split up, but the three smaller sections in this passage all have a similar structure: Jewish leadership comes

¹ Camille Focant, *L'évangile selon Marc*, Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament 2 (Paris: Cerf, 2004), passim.

² Ibid., 48.

³ E.g. *ibid.*, 53.

to question Jesus and Jesus replies wisely. In v. 34b it is summarized that “no one dared to ask him any more questions.” The same goes for the next episode (vv. 35-44) where in similar sections the topic of honour is highlighted in Jesus’ teaching. Finally, though in 15:16-32 there is a clear shift in setting, here the theme of mocking Jesus closely ties the two sections in it together (see for example the ‘king’-motif, vv. 18, 32; though this also occurs in vv. 2, 9, 12, in those verses it is not used as a mocking term, at least not explicitly).

The study of the intra-episodic traits is organised according Focant’s macro-structure for pragmatic reasons: since his episode-structure is followed it is reasonable to follow his macro-structure as well.

Intra-Episodic Trait Analysis

Mark 1:16-3:6

The first appearance of the disciples is in Mark 1:16-20. Simon and Andrew, and John and James are called by Jesus and they respond to Jesus’ call. In both instances the brothers respond instantly (ἐὐθὺς, vv. 18, 20). There are several aspects of the disciples expressed in this passage. First of all, the disciples are selected by Jesus. The initiative comes from him.⁴ The disciples immediately respond to the call of Jesus and start following Jesus.⁵ Simply being present in the mission of Jesus, following Jesus on his way, is not to be neglected as a major trait.⁶ This trait is shown by the actions of the disciples and by the speech of Jesus. Second, the disciples are promised a new task in God’s kingdom; they will be “fishers of men”

⁴ Élian Cuvillier, *L’évangile de Marc*, Bible en face: Traduction et lecture (Paris: Bayard, 2002), 36; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 52; Boring, *Mark*, 58.

⁵ John Reumann, “Mark 1:14-20,” *Int* 32, no. 4 (1978): 407; Shiner, *Follow Me*, 192; Jean-François Baudoz, “Prendre sa croix”: *Jésus et ses disciples dans l’évangile de Marc* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 33.

⁶ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 65; see also: John Painter, *Mark’s Gospel*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1997), 36; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, SacP 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 77.

(v. 17).⁷ They have a part in God's bigger plan.⁸ This mission has been established in the first episodes of the Gospel and now the disciples are shown to have a role in it.⁹ This trait is shown by the words of Jesus. Finally, the passage ascribes family ties to the disciples: they are brothers (vv. 16, 19) and sons (v. 19-20). This shows the impact of their immediate response.¹⁰ The Four leave their familiar world behind them in order to follow Jesus.¹¹ Giving priority to following Jesus through making sacrifices is thus a third trait found in the Gospel of Mark.¹² This trait is given implicitly and is shown by the actions of the disciples. All these aspects are in accordance with Jesus' point of view, as the disciples respond to his call and make sacrifices to do so.¹³ This implies that there is a positive evaluation of each of the traits mentioned.

In Mark 1:21-28 the third person plural in εἰσπορεύονται can include the disciples, but that is not necessary so this episode will not be discussed here. At most it could be said that the disciples are still with Jesus, but even that is not clear.¹⁴

In Mark 1:29-34 Jesus enters the house of Simon and Andrew, and John and James are with "them." Though it is never explicitly said that Simon and Andrew are actually included, it is very likely that they are since it is their house and the other

⁷ Shiner, *Follow Me*, 176; Wilfried Eckey, *Das Markusevangelium: Orientierung am Weg Jesu; ein Kommentar* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998), 71; Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 85.

⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 59; Driggers, *Following God*, 31; Culpepper, *Mark*, 54; Fischer, *Disciples*, 43.

⁹ Iersel, *Mark*, 131; Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 77; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 160; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 65.

¹⁰ Iersel, *Mark*, 133; Boring, *Mark*, 60; Fischer, *Disciples*, 45.

¹¹ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 72; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 86; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 53; Jean Mansir, *L'évangile en marche: Une nouvelle lecture de l'évangile de Marc* (Namur: Fidélité, 2011), 28.

¹² Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2008), 80.

¹³ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 63.

¹⁴ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 191; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 90; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 54.

two called disciples are there. Besides this continued presence, the Four are the first persons who ask Jesus for help in healing (v. 30). They put their faith in Jesus.¹⁵ This is rewarded as Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law.¹⁶ The mention of this mother-in-law, however, creates a tension with the fact that the disciples left their families behind at their initial calling.¹⁷

In Mark 1:35-39 the disciples seem, for the first time, not to fully grasp who Jesus is.¹⁸ Jesus has gone away to connect with God; this connection is a strong one, as has been established in the first part of the Gospel.¹⁹ Jesus has also come to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near, which the narrator established in vv. 14-15 and underlined with the amazement of the people in vv. 21-28.²⁰ Simon and those who were with him (which is probably an abbreviated version of referring to the other disciples through the use of καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ²¹) come looking for Jesus and urge him to come back (vv. 36-37).²² They do not focus on Jesus' teaching ministry, which also extends to the other villages (v. 38). So there is a lack of understanding, after the disciples have been apart from Jesus (otherwise there is no need to go find him). However, Jesus still invites them to join him in his ministry.²³ So again there is a positive invitation from Jesus.

¹⁵ Iersel, *Mark*, 138; Culpepper, *Mark*, 59.

¹⁶ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 45. "They" might be broader than just the disciples (cf. Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 101).

¹⁷ Cuvillier, *Marc*, 37; Collins, *Mark*, 175.

¹⁸ Culpepper, *Mark*, 60; Baudoz, *Prendre sa croix*, 38.

¹⁹ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 84; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 56.

²⁰ Cf. Dennis O. Wretling, "Jesus' Philosophy of Ministry: A Study of a Figure of Speech in Mark 1:38," *JETS* 20, no. 4 (1977): 321.

²¹ Focant, *Marc*, 97.

²² Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 203; a negative use of καταδιώκω may suggest a first friction according to Marcus (contra Stein, *Mark*, 101).

²³ André Couture and François Vouga, *La présence du royaume: Une nouvelle lecture de l'évangile de Marc*, Essais bibliques 36 (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2005), 41; Culpepper, *Mark*, 60.

Like the healing of the leper (1:40-45), Jesus' healing of the paralytic and his first public discussion with the Jewish authorities (2:1-13) are marked by the absence of the disciples.²⁴

Next, in 2:14-17, the calling of Levi is mentioned. This calling is similar to that of the Four.²⁵ First, Jesus takes the initiative.²⁶ Second, Levi follows Jesus immediately.²⁷ Third, the narrator explains Levi's working situation.²⁸ Thus the narrator may be implicitly suggesting that Levi is making sacrifices to follow Jesus, although this is not a given.²⁹ At the same time the narrator makes a distinction between Levi and the first Four Jesus called, not giving Levi a task.³⁰ Here, the narrator introduces the term "disciple" (μαθητής, vv. 15-16, plural). By using the term for the first time after some are called with a specific task and one is called without such a task (apart from following Jesus), the narrator seems to make clear that the disciples include more than just those with a people fishing task. Thus, the Four are part of the μαθηταί, but not every μαθητής is a member of Jesus' intimate group.³¹ In v. 15 the disciples are associated positively with following Jesus, and it is probable that in this verse Levi is a type for the disciples and that the features of his

²⁴ Contra Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 64. Moloney suggests that they have been present since the calling in 1:16ff., but the lack of response after their initial misunderstanding (v. 35-39) is suggesting the opposite, unless αὐτῶν is considered to include the disciples' presence. This is an indirect argument as the pronoun could also refer to the towns in Jesus' speech.

²⁵ Not mentioned in the text because it is not a trait, even the context, the sea (1:16, 2:13), is similar in both episodes. See Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 229; cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 123.

²⁶ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 56; Boring, *Mark*, 80.

²⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 229.

²⁸ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 56.

²⁹ Iersel, *Mark*, 150; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 134; see also: Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 63; Boring, *Mark*, 80.

³⁰ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 63; Culpepper, *Mark*, 82.

³¹ Cuvillier, *Marc*, 60.

calling apply to disciples in general.³² In addition, in v. 16 scribes of the Pharisees, who are clearly opposing Jesus, ask the disciples for the reason behind Jesus' actions. The narrator does not explain why they do this, but by letting this happen to the disciples he shows that the disciples receive criticism from Jesus' opponents.³³

In vv. 18-22 the disciples are not actors in the event, but they are the object of discussion between Jesus and the people (who are not defined here).³⁴ Jesus does not defend his disciples through a positive argument; they grasp who Jesus is: the bridegroom.³⁵ Though Jesus does not say it explicitly, it seems that he is affirming that his disciples have at least a basic correct understanding of who he is. He has already shed light on his identity in 2:10 and the narrator has done so in the opening of the Gospel.³⁶ The disciples apparently grasp something of that identity. It is also clear here that Mark does not only use the term disciples for Jesus' disciples, but also for those of John and those of the Pharisees.

In the next episode (vv. 23-28) the disciples are a little more active, but they are still largely the object of discussion between Jesus and his opponents, here the Pharisees. As in the previous passages, Jesus' harsh response shows his relationship to his questioners: he opposes them. Here again, Jesus refers to his identity in defence of the disciples, thus suggesting that the disciples understand that identity better than the Pharisees.

In vv. 14-28, though they are not addressed directly, the disciples encounter criticism from Jesus' opponents.³⁷ This also implies that they are in the presence of

³² Cf. Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 99; Iersel, *Mark*, 153. Painter suggests that it is clear Mark does not count Levi to be one of the disciples (i.e. the broader group), but he does not argue why it is so clear (Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 57).

³³ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 57; Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 100; Couture and Vouga, *Présence du royaume*, 51; cf. Boring, *Mark*, 81.

³⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 197.

³⁵ Boring, *Mark*, 85; Jesus is of course not just defending the honour of his disciples. As their instructor he is responsible for them (Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 106).

³⁶ Boring, *Mark*, 91.

³⁷ Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, EKK II/1 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1978), 120; Driggers, *Following God*, 40; Mansir, *Évangile en marche*, 43.

Jesus.³⁸ That presence and their following are stressed by the fact that Jesus is going the way (cf. v. 23) and they are simply mentioned.

In Mark 3:1-6 the disciples are not mentioned.

Mark 3:7-6:6a

In Mark 3:7-12 Jesus withdraws with his μαθηταί (v. 7). Here, the disciples are suddenly mentioned again. Narratologically, this only makes sense if the disciples are assumed in vv. 1-6. In v. 7 the disciples are clearly distinguished from others who follow (ἀκολουθέω) Jesus.³⁹ In making this distinction, the narrator focuses on two aspects. First, the disciples are in the presence of Jesus again and following him. Second, Jesus gives the disciples a special privilege as they are selected to go with him. It now seems to be taken for granted that his disciples are with him.⁴⁰ Later in the passage the disciples are given a task: Jesus asks them to find a boat so he is not crushed by the crowds while healing many of them (v. 9).

In the next episode (vv. 13-19) the setting changes to *the* mountain. Mountains are traditionally seen as places of revelation.⁴¹ Jesus goes up the mountain and he calls to himself (here προσκαλέομαι and in 1:20 καλέω, having the same root though) those whom he desires.⁴² There is a strong connection between this episode and the first calling of the Four.⁴³ Just as then, the story introduces a sequence of

³⁸ Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 109.

³⁹ Ibid., 143; Boring, *Mark*, 97; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 77.

⁴⁰ Collins, *Mark*, 211.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*, *New Voices in Biblical Studies* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), 84–89; Dale C. Allison, “Mountain and Wilderness,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 563; Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 117; contra Stein, *Mark*, 168.

⁴² In both other call stories (1:17 and 2:14) there is an imperative. In both cases a different verb is used.

⁴³ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 76.

episodes that are thematically related.⁴⁴ Again, it is Jesus who takes the initiative.⁴⁵ Not only are the disciples called to be with him, they are also given a task in the kingdom: preaching and casting out demons, things Jesus has been doing since the start of his public service.⁴⁶ The authority given to these selected ones is a strong indication of their privileged situation. In v. 14 there is a first mention of δώδεκα. The number twelve probably points to the special aspect of their selection and the task that will be given to them; they are being sent (ἀποστέλλω, v. 14).⁴⁷ Next the names of the Twelve are mentioned (v. 16-19). There are a few instances where some information is added to the names: Simon is called Peter (lit. “rock”) by Jesus; James is the son of Zebedee and John is his brother; the brothers are called Boanerges or “Sons of Thunder”; James is the son of Alphaeus; Simon is the Cananaean; and Judas Iskariot is a betrayer. A few of those aspects can be linked to the need for clarification because of double names; i.e. son of Zebedee, son of Alphaeus, the Cananaean, and possibly Iskariot (see below). “Peter” could also hold that function as there is a second Simon. It is however impossible to determine whether the nicknames of Peter, James and John are positive or negative and what they mean exactly. Several suggestions have been made, but none are conclusive.⁴⁸ Whatever the focus, Jesus does create a smaller group of three by the name giving and by the fact that Simon and Andrew are separated.⁴⁹ The list closes with Judas Iskariot. It is

⁴⁴ Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 125; Boring, *Mark*, 99.

⁴⁵ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 266; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 77.

⁴⁶ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 66; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 267; Cuvillier, *Marc*, 74; Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 127; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 77, 79; Francis J. Moloney, *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 69; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 66.

⁴⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 268; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 151; Culpepper, *Mark*, 106; Collins, *Mark*, 217; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 83; Stein, *Mark*, 169.

⁴⁸ E.g. Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 119; Focant, *Marc*, 143; Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 218.

⁴⁹ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 120; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 79; Focant, *Marc*, 143; Culpepper, *Mark*, 108–109.

not clear to what exactly Iskariot refers.⁵⁰ It might be used to prevent confusion with Judas the brother of James in 6:3.⁵¹ The list of the Twelve is closed off by the anticipation of Judas Iskariot's future betrayal (v. 19). Even within the most intimate group of people around Jesus the narrator already points out that it is a fallible group. It is a dramatic ending of the list.⁵² After this, apart from the Four and Judas, none of the disciples are mentioned by name.

In the next episode (vv. 20-35) the disciples are not explicitly mentioned, but they are assumed to be present (“*they* could not even eat” v. 20).⁵³ The three sections together form a sandwich structure where the accusation against Jesus (vv. 22-30) is surrounded by passages on Jesus' family (vv. 20-21, 30-35).⁵⁴ The focus here lies on Jesus' new family: those who are with him. It becomes clear that neither the scribes nor his own family understand who he is, as they went out to restrain him.⁵⁵ By contrast, the narrator is pointing out that the crowds (including the disciples here) understand Jesus better. Jesus' original family is literally reported to stand outside (v. 31).⁵⁶

Mark 4:1-34 can be considered as one episode, although with at least two slightly different settings (v. 10).⁵⁷ Interesting here is that in v. 10 “those around him with the Twelve” are mentioned, which is a combination of the Twelve in 3:14, 16 and those around him in 3:34. This is thus a broader group than the Twelve. Further,

⁵⁰ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 264; Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 125; Boring, *Mark*, 103.

⁵¹ Gundry, *Mark*, 169.

⁵² Collins, *Mark*, 223.

⁵³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 279.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 279–287; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 155; Cuvillier, *Marc*, 76; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 80–81; Collins, *Mark*, 226.

⁵⁵ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 70; Susan Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, JSNTSup 259 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 41.

⁵⁶ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 285; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 83.

⁵⁷ Collins, *Mark*, 241. For a more detailed argument and discussion, see: Greg Fay, “Introduction to Incomprehension: The Literary Structure of Mark 4:1-34,” *CBQ* 51, no. 1 (1989): 66.

in 4:34 the narrator explains that Jesus only clarifies the parables to his disciples, something he had done to “those around him with the Twelve” earlier. It suggests that “those around him with the Twelve” and the “disciples” can here be considered synonymous.⁵⁸ In vv. 10 and 13 the disciples are for the first time explicitly depicted as not understanding something. Jesus teaches the disciples, but they ask him what his teaching means, and Jesus’ second question shows the danger of not understanding.⁵⁹ Jesus, however, makes clear that it is not the intention that they do not understand (vv. 11, 22).⁶⁰ Here the disciples are also contrasted to those outside, those who are not in the close presence of Jesus (cf. 3:32).⁶¹ The disciples thus again are depicted as a select group.⁶² By asking Jesus their question the disciples express their dependence on Jesus (God’s Son, v. 1); this is a good thing as Jesus affirms through the parable in vv. 26-29.

In the next episode (vv. 35-41), the disciples (“them” in v. 35 and “they” in v. 36 refer to the disciples in v. 34) take Jesus upon the sea and a storm breaks loose (vv. 35-37). Jesus gives the order to go across, the disciples then follow his orders and take up their task.⁶³ In the midst of nature’s violence, Jesus is sleeping while the disciples by contrast are panicking (v. 38).⁶⁴ Jesus displays great power and afterwards asks the disciples: “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” The two questions seem to be parallel.⁶⁵ In that sense fear is opposed to having faith.⁶⁶ It

⁵⁸ Collins, *Mark*, 256.

⁵⁹ John Paul Heil, “Reader-Response and the Narrative Context of the Parables about Growing Seed in Mark 4:1-34,” *CBQ* 54, no. 2 (1992): 277.

⁶⁰ Joel Marcus, “Mark 4:10-12 and Marcan Epistemology,” *JBL* 103, no. 4 (1984): 567; Tolbert, *Sowing*, 161; Klyne Snodgrass, “A Hermeneutic of Hearing Informed by the Parables with Special Reference to Mark 4,” *BBR* 14, no. 1 (2004): 75; Collins, *Mark*, 253.

⁶¹ F. C. Synge, “A Plea for the Outsiders: Commentary on Mark 4:10-12,” *JTSA* 30 (1980): 53; Snodgrass, “Hermeneutic of Hearing,” 68; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 100.

⁶² Boring, *Mark*, 127.

⁶³ Gundry, *Mark*, 238; Boring, *Mark*, 144.

⁶⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 260.

⁶⁵ Focant, *Marc*, 191.

is not clear what exactly is meant with being afraid and having faith. The only other use of the root of πίστις was in 1:15, where Jesus calls for belief in the Gospel. Earlier (v. 1), the narrator had stated that the Gospel is that of Jesus. Having faith thus implies believing in Jesus' Gospel. This includes his words, but probably also his identity. At first it looks like the disciples have at least a degree of faith in Jesus, otherwise they would not have wakened him and ask for his care in the storm. Jesus' response, however, shows that it is not faith at all that they are displaying.⁶⁷ The reaction of the disciples is to become even more afraid and they display a lack of understanding about Jesus' identity, despite the teaching they have received earlier that day about the importance of understanding.⁶⁸ By the way the narrator structures the passages, he shows that the disciples do not understand Jesus. Here they fail to acknowledge his identity, which is central to believing the Gospel.⁶⁹ They call him "teacher" (v. 38) but that does not come close to covering his whole identity.⁷⁰

In the fourth chapter, a tension has arisen in the Gospel. The disciples are insiders, but at the same time lack understanding.⁷¹ The teaching about not understanding indicates an ambiguity in the disciples: they are insiders who are still excluded.⁷² The disciples are following Jesus and are part of his intimate entourage, but at the same time they fail to have proper faith.

In Mark 5:1-20 Jesus and the disciples ("they", v. 1) arrive at the other side of the sea.⁷³ The third person plural of ἔρχομαι is the only reference to the disciples in

⁶⁶ Fay, "Introduction to Incomprehension," 78; Culpepper, *Mark*, 156.

⁶⁷ Boring, *Mark*, 147.

⁶⁸ Gundry, *Mark*, 241; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 90, 98; contra Stein, *Mark*, 244.

⁶⁹ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 152; Baudoz, *Prendre sa croix*, 39.

⁷⁰ Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 175.

⁷¹ Ibid., 169; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 91; Camille Focant, "La rôle des personnages secondaire en Marc: L' exemple des récits de guérison et d'exorcisme," in *Marc: Un évangile étonnant*, BETL 194 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 89.

⁷² Driggers, *Following God*, 46.

⁷³ Stein, *Mark*, 250.

this whole episode. Thus, the only explicit trait of the disciples here is that they are in the presence of Jesus at the beginning of the episode. This is followed by Jesus stepping out of the boat (v. 2). It seems like only Jesus goes ashore.⁷⁴ At the same time, the disciples' boat is waiting, because Jesus can go on board again in v. 18-20.⁷⁵ The fact that it is only Jesus who is about to embark, further affirms that the disciples have not gone ashore.⁷⁶ They are not present in this episode.

At first sight, Mark 5:21-43 contains three episodes (vv. 21-24, 25-34, 35-43) but here again Mark is using a sandwich structure.⁷⁷ The healing of the woman who had been suffering of blood flows for twelve years (γυνὴ οὖσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος δώδεκα ἔτη, v. 25) is surrounded by the appeal to Jesus to heal the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus. Here the disciples are mentioned in the centre story (v. 31) and Peter, James and John are mentioned in one bracketing story (v. 37). In the healing of the woman the disciples exercise a role that is rather negative. Jesus has felt someone touching him and the story so far clearly indicates the motives of the woman and that Jesus is rightfully asking who has touched him. The disciples are thus unjustified in questioning him as they do. Again they do not trust Jesus completely. By showing first that Jesus is right, the narrator at the same time indicates that the disciples are wrong in their questioning Jesus. This is emphasized even more by the fact that the disciples pose this question in a rhetorical, almost mocking way.⁷⁸ “[T]hey become an obstacle to Jesus’ desire to know who had touched him.”⁷⁹ They should know better after the time they had already spent with Jesus.⁸⁰ At the healing of Jairus’

⁷⁴ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 154; Iersel, *Mark*, 198.

⁷⁵ Stein, *Mark*, 251.

⁷⁶ Cuvillier, *Marc*, 100; contra Gundry, *Mark*, 248, 253. Gundry thinks that the people who had seen it happening (v. 16) are the disciples, but it seems more logical to think of the herdsmen, who had clearly been present (v. 14) to report the events.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Iersel, *Mark*, 204; Cuvillier, *Marc*, 107; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 234; Culpepper, *Mark*, 163; Fischer, *Disciples*, 58.

⁷⁸ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 108; Moloney, *Mark*, 71.

⁷⁹ Culpepper, *Mark*, 175.

⁸⁰ Stein, *Mark*, 270; see also: Cuvillier, *Marc*, 108; Baudoz, *Prendre sa croix*, 39.

daughter, Peter, James and John are the only ones who are allowed to follow Jesus to the house of the ruler and witness the events there. It is the first time that only these three accompany Jesus and it is not explicitly clear why only they are asked to follow.⁸¹ Maybe it is to point to the importance of the event; it includes a resurrection and thus is the strongest display of power Jesus has made so far.⁸² It could be that this is a first prolepsis to Jesus' own resurrection and that this is the reason that only Peter, James and John are invited.⁸³ Only the Three and Jairus and his wife are taken inside the house (v. 40).⁸⁴ Here they are contrasted with the people that are laughing at Jesus and being critical towards him. Those people are put outside (which again reminds the implied reader of 3:31 and 4:11). The outsiders' response to Jesus is very similar to that of the disciples earlier (v. 31).⁸⁵ Through this analogy, the narrator continues to give an ambiguous depiction of the disciples.

Jesus returns to his hometown (6:1-6a). Of the disciples nothing is mentioned besides their following him (v. 1). There is a contrast between those disciples following him and his 'natural' relatives, the people from his hometown who take offense at him (v. 4).⁸⁶

Mark 6:6b-8:26

Mark 6:6b-30 is another sandwich structure.⁸⁷ It starts with a reference to Jesus teaching (v. 6b), but the disciples are not mentioned here. Next, the Twelve are sent

⁸¹ Iersel, *Mark*, 207; Stein, *Mark*, 272.

⁸² France, *Gospel of Mark*, 239; cf. Mary Ann Beavis, "The Resurrection of Jephthah's Daughter: Judges 11:34-40 and Mark 5:21-24, 35-43," *CBQ* 72, no. 1 (2010): 59n50.

⁸³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 371; Collins, *Mark*, 285; Beavis, "Resurrection of Jephthah's Daughter," 62.

⁸⁴ Iersel, *Mark*, 208-209.

⁸⁵ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 108.

⁸⁶ Stein, *Mark*, 283.

⁸⁷ Jean Delorme, "John The Baptist's Head—The Word Perverted: A Reading of a Narrative (Mark 6:14-29)," *Semeia* 81 (1998): 127; Francis J. Moloney, "Mark 6:6b-30: Mission, the Baptist, and Failure," *CBQ* 63, no. 4 (2001): 647; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 245; Stein, *Mark*, 311.

off (vv. 7-13) and they later return from their journey (v. 30, here ἀποστόλους). In between is a passage telling the story of John's death in which the disciples are not mentioned (v. 14-29).⁸⁸ However, since this story is bracketed by the sending of the disciples, the narrator is implicitly saying something about the disciples. Just like preceding Jesus has serious consequences, the same goes for following him.⁸⁹ In the surrounding verses (v. 6b-13, 30), the Twelve first are called (προσκαλέομαι, v. 7) which recalls 3:13-14.⁹⁰ The first crucial trait here again is the fact that they are with Jesus. This cannot be left out, as is stressed in previous chapters.⁹¹ The disciples then leave, but since this is because Jesus instructs them to do so, it is a good absence. Next, the Twelve are given a special role in the kingdom; they will do the same things that Jesus has done so far (v. 7, 12-13).⁹² They could face criticism, but Jesus is clear that they should not worry too much (v. 11).⁹³ In their journey they must not bring along earthly possessions, but trust on God (v. 8-10).⁹⁴ The bracketed passage is a foreshadowing of the consequences for the disciples. Just like John's disciples were faced with the loss of their leader, the same will happen with Jesus' disciples. Moreover, since John, who also supported Jesus, has died, Jesus' disciples are now to take that place.⁹⁵ However, when the disciples return, the apostles seem to be more

⁸⁸ David M. Hoffeditz and Gary E. Yates, "Femme Fatale Redux: Intertextual Connection to the Elijah/Jezebel Narratives in Mark 6:14-29," *BBR* 15, no. 2 (2005): 221.

⁸⁹ Cuvillier, *Marc*, 127; Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 202; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 128; Hoffeditz and Yates, "Femme Fatale Redux," 221.

⁹⁰ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 97.

⁹¹ Moloney, "Mark 6:6b-30," 652.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 651.

⁹³ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 168.

⁹⁴ Moloney, "Mark 6:6b-30," 653; Boring, *Mark*, 175; Culpepper, *Mark*, 194; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 157.

⁹⁵ Focant, *Marc*, 238.

concerned with what they have done than with glorifying their master (v. 30).⁹⁶ They have not understood Jesus' mission and the centrality of his person in it.⁹⁷

In the next episode (vv. 31-44), Jesus wants to withdraw with the Twelve again (v. 31), but while they are trying to get to a desolate place they are spotted by other people who then run to get to where Jesus and the disciples' are going before the latter can get there (v. 33). Jesus is compassionate and starts teaching them (v. 34). When it gets late, the disciples want to send the crowds away, so they can go and eat. The disciples have come back from their journey and they take over the role of their master as they now give Jesus instructions about what he should do. Jesus orders the disciples to give the people food.⁹⁸ Instead of dealing with the problem himself, Jesus puts the solution in their hands: they can use the powers that they received earlier. However, the disciples respond with a question instead of with actions. The high amount of money they mention in that question suggests that it is meant ironically.⁹⁹ Again they are questioning something Jesus says (v. 38, cf. 5:31).¹⁰⁰ Even if they did have enough money, where would they find enough bread to feed five thousand men?¹⁰¹ The disciples state this after their journey where Jesus has given them so much power; they still do not understand who he is and what his mission is. Jesus commands them to go out and see what they can find. With this Jesus takes some of the responsibility back. They come back with five loaves of bread and two fishes (v. 38). Jesus then takes matters into his own hands and

⁹⁶ Moloney, "Mark 6:6b-30," 659–660.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 660. Most commentators do not perceive this verse as negative, but Moloney make as strong argument for it. Contra e.g. Culpepper, *Mark*, 206; Stein, *Mark*, 312; Gundry also identifies the focus of their report as being on their accomplishments, but links this to the extension of Jesus' power. Moloney's results seem closer to Gundry's initial observations (cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 322).

⁹⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 185.

⁹⁹ Focant, *Marc*, 248.

¹⁰⁰ Herman Servotte, *Marcus literair: De dubbele focus in het tweede evangelie* (Baarn: Gooi en Sticht, 1996), 65; Iersel, *Mark*, 227; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 418; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 266; Culpepper, *Mark*, 209; contra Stein, *Mark*, 314.

¹⁰¹ Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Marcus* (Boxtel: Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1986), 148; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 218; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 266.

performs a miracle. However, during the feeding, the disciples are the ones spreading the bread around. In this whole process Jesus has allowed the disciples to play an active role; they are part of his mission, but at the same time the disciples cannot handle the full responsibility.¹⁰² A returning trait of the disciples is their presence with Jesus. There is a constant interaction between Jesus and the disciples in vv. 35-41.¹⁰³ This presence remains, despite their sometimes very critical attitude.

After this, another episode takes place on the water (vv. 45-53). While the disciples are on the water, Jesus sends the crowds home. Later that night, he sees that the disciples are struggling on the sea. This episode is similar to the previous one on the water (4:35-41).¹⁰⁴ Here the conditions are not life threatening, but the disciples are unable to properly deal with the situation they are in.¹⁰⁵ Then, Jesus wants to pass them by, and the disciples are terrified. Being terrified is a natural reaction to seeing a ghost.¹⁰⁶ However, ghosts were known not to be able to walk on water.¹⁰⁷ “[W]hen the disciples see Jesus walking on water, they believe the impossible rather than the obvious.”¹⁰⁸ They are receiving an epiphany, but they do not acknowledge it. Jesus says to them not to be afraid (φοβέομαι, cf. 4:41; 5:15, 33, 36) and in doing this he points out their continued lack of faith. Explicitly, the narrator says that the disciples do not understand (συνίημι, v. 52).¹⁰⁹ The verb is only used once before, in 4:12, where it is made clear that not understanding is for those outside. The narrator adds that the disciples’ hearts were hardened. It is not exactly clear what they do not

¹⁰² Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 191; Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 203.

¹⁰³ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 180.

¹⁰⁴ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 269; Fischer, *Disciples*, 80–81.

¹⁰⁵ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 271.

¹⁰⁶ Jason Robert Combs, “A Ghost on the Water? Understanding an Absurdity in Mark 6:49-50,” *JBL* 127, no. 2 (2008): 353.

¹⁰⁷ For a more detailed explanation of the “absurdity” of ghosts walking on water, see: *ibid.*, 353ff.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 358; see also: Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 195; Fischer, *Disciples*, 88.

¹⁰⁹ Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship*, 205.

understand or why their hearts were hardened. However, the context suggests that the disciples do not understand Jesus' identity and its implications.¹¹⁰ Maybe the hardened hearts imply that the disciples do not want to understand either: that is why they prefer an impossibility.

They arrive on the other side of the sea. Jesus and the disciples disembark (vv. 54). Apart from this mention, the disciples disappear into the background again.

In Mark 7:1-23 the actions of the disciples are again the source of discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes (cf. 2:18-22, 23-28). In v. 2 it is described that some of the disciples do something that goes against the traditions of the elders (v. 3): they eat with unclean hands. The Pharisees question Jesus' disciples and seem to hold Jesus responsible (v. 5). Jesus however goes against the Pharisees and makes it clear to them that their traditions are often very shallow and hypocritical (v. 6-13). Next, Jesus uses this question of the Pharisees to teach the people (vv. 14-15). Here Jesus uses the same words as in 4:12 where he explains the necessity of understanding (συνίημι) in combination with hearing (ἀκούω).¹¹¹ Shortly after this, the disciples are alone with him in the house and there, very similarly to 4:13, Jesus expresses his surprise that the disciples do not understand.¹¹² In 4:13 οἶδα and γινώσκω are used, but here the language comes even closer to Jesus' instruction in 4:12 as Jesus uses an adjective with the same root as συνίημι (ἄσύνετος, 7:18). Again the disciples fail to understand what Jesus is saying.¹¹³ They seem to be moving into the same category as the outsiders as they hear without understanding.¹¹⁴ At the same time, Jesus takes the time to explain his teaching to the disciples (cf. 4:34).¹¹⁵ Like in 4:1-34, the disciples are in Jesus' inner circle where

¹¹⁰ Williams, *Other Followers*, 118; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 273; Boring, *Mark*, 191; Stein, *Mark*, 327.

¹¹¹ Boring, *Mark*, 201.

¹¹² Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 142.

¹¹³ Williams, *Other Followers*, 118.

¹¹⁴ Boring, *Mark*, 202.

¹¹⁵ Iersel, *Mark*, 243; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 291; cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 355.

they receive special insights. For this they first need to ask Jesus for explanation – and in doing this, they show their dependence on Jesus. It is clear that the disciples are in the presence of Jesus in order to ask those questions.

The next two episodes (vv. 24-31, 32-37) make no mention of the disciples. As will be suggested below, the Syrophoenician woman and the deaf man can serve as analogies to the disciples, but that will be discussed in the inter-episodic trait comparison.

Then, a second feeding takes place, but this time in gentile territory (8:1-9). The two feedings are very similar (cf. 6:33-44).¹¹⁶ Most relevant for this thesis are the following aspects. Jesus expresses his concern for the crowds (in 6:37, by ordering the disciples to feed them). The disciples ask a critical question in which they express the absurdity of Jesus' suggestion. Jesus then responds with the exact same words: "How many loaves do you have?" (πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους;,, only the position of the last two words is reversed in 6:38). A number of loaves are found (five and seven), and a number of fish (two and a few). The crowds have to sit on the ground. Jesus gives thanks for the food and then starts dividing it up. The disciples are the ones who put the bread in front of the people and collect it afterwards. There are a few differences as well. The following is relevant for this thesis: Jesus does not say that the disciples are supposed to give the people bread (cf. 6:37). This might be implied, but the omission can also point to a change of attitude toward the disciples. Jesus seems to lose confidence in the disciples being able to do great things. Basically the same traits of the disciples can be found here as in the previous episode. They are being selected and given a role: they distribute the bread, after Jesus has taught them and the crowds. On the negative side they do not seem to understand whom Jesus is and what power he has. They do not trust him.¹¹⁷ That lack of faith results in the fact that Jesus' miracles are in decline (as introduced in 6:1-6a); the balance of the number of breads and the number of baskets are not as

¹¹⁶ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 212; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 153; Focant, *Marc*, 296.

¹¹⁷ L. William Countryman, "How Many Baskets Full? Mark 8:14-21 and the Value of Miracles in Mark," *CBQ* 47, no. 4 (1985): 651.

impressive as the first time.¹¹⁸ The biggest difference is that Jesus does not expect of the disciples to provide food. He just expresses his desire to feed the people. This can imply that Jesus has less confidence in the disciples' ability to perform a miracle.

The next episode (8:10-21) is very similar to what follows shortly after the first feeding (7:1-23). Jewish leaders question Jesus and the disciples get insider information. Jesus starts teaching the disciples (v. 15), but they are unwilling to be taught, as they do not focus on the content of Jesus' teaching and are worried about their hunger. Jesus again points out explicitly that they do not understand (συνίημι, cf. 4:12; 6:52; 7:14[, 18]).¹¹⁹ Two similar structures can be discovered: Jesus demands hearing and understanding (4:12; 7:14) and the disciples do not understand (6:52; 8:17, 21). While the passages are similar, the characterization in this passage is even more negative than previously since the disciples still do not understand after having seen even more miracles. Instead of asking Jesus for an explanation, they seem to be preoccupied with food.¹²⁰

The following episode (8:22-26) is again marked by the absence of the disciples, apart from the fact that they are with Jesus (v. 22).

Mark 8:27-10:52

Many commentators see the next episode of this chapter (8:27-9:1) as the turning point in the Gospel.¹²¹ After the continued lack of understanding of the disciples, Jesus asks them about his identity. First he asks what other people think, and when he asks them what they think, Peter responds, the Christ (ὁ χριστός). As this is in

¹¹⁸ Countryman has given a well-developed argument for the fact that the narrator is drawing attention to the lack of trust by a decline in the miracles of Jesus. See: *ibid.*, 652.

¹¹⁹ Focant, "Incompréhension," 61; Culpepper, *Mark*, 262; cf. Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 41.

¹²⁰ Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 217.

¹²¹ E.g. *ibid.*, 222; Iersel, *Mark*, 281; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 91, 125; Camille Focant, "La construction du personnage de Simon-Pierre dans le second évangile," in *Marc: Un évangile étonnant*, BETL 194 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 99; Fischer, *Disciples*, 105.

accordance with the beginning of the Gospel (1:1),¹²² it seems that for the first time the disciples understand Jesus' identity. The result is that Jesus starts explaining what being the Christ implies: suffering, dying and being raised. The disciples are given inside information, but immediately after showing an understanding of Jesus' identity, Peter shows a misunderstanding of the implication of that identity and takes Jesus apart. Jesus rebukes him in very strong words. Jesus' rebuke of his misunderstanding draws very negative attention to this aspect rather than to what Peter gets right.¹²³ The teaching of Jesus that follows is contrasted with the fact that Peter apparently is not willing to make sacrifices; Peter does not want a suffering Christ.¹²⁴ However, through his words, Jesus makes clear that he wants Peter to stay close to him, in the right place ("get behind me").¹²⁵ Peter here acts as a representative of the other disciples, as in the parallel misunderstanding of 9:33-34 and 10:35-40; the actors are respectively "they" (referring to the disciples), and James and John. The narrator uses them interchangeably.¹²⁶ At the same time, in this passage, "the disciples" help to soften the negative image, which stands if only Peter were to be considered. After Jesus' rebuke, once Peter is back with the group, Jesus teaches the disciples again and they are given special revelation. Jesus talks to them 'plainly' (παρρησίᾳ, which arguably stands in contrast with ἐν παραβολαῖς, 4:12 cf. 4:33-34¹²⁷).

Six days after Jesus' promise (9:1) he takes Peter, James and John up the mountain (vv. 2-13). Here the Three get a special revelation as Jesus is transfigured and shown in his glory, and Moses and Elijah accompany him. Peter wants to pitch

¹²² Stein, *Mark*, 403.

¹²³ Kelber, *Mark's Story*, 46-49; Iersel, *Mark*, 285; Driggers, *Following God*, 64, 66.

¹²⁴ Narry F. Santos, "Jesus' Paradoxical Teaching in Mark 8:35; 9:35; and 10:43-44," *BSac* 157, no. 625 (2000): 18.

¹²⁵ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 175.

¹²⁶ Cf. Santos, "Paradoxical Teaching," 15; Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 99; Fischer, *Disciples*, 104-105; Culpepper, *Mark*, 269.

¹²⁷ This contrast is also found in Culpepper, *Mark*, 274.

three tents for them because he either wants to prolong the moment or put Jesus on the same (lower) level as the other prophets.¹²⁸ However, the narrator explains that this is a fearful reaction.¹²⁹ Peter does not understand Jesus' mission or how this revelation fits in it.¹³⁰ Given that fear stands in contrast with faith in the Gospel (cf. 4:40-41, 6:50), the Three seem here to lack faith.¹³¹ After this, a loud voice comes from the overshadowing cloud and instructs them to listen (ἀκούω) to Jesus. Again, the Three are reminded of the importance of hearing (cf. 4:12).¹³² While they are coming down, Jesus teaches the Three, giving them inside information about the future. The Three do not understand it.¹³³ This is not only stated explicitly but also shown by the fact that they ask Jesus what the presence of Elijah in the transfiguration meant.¹³⁴ However, even though the Three may be fearful and lack faith and understanding, they are still close to Jesus and he continues to teach them.

When Jesus and the Three re-join the other disciples, they see a troublesome situation (9:14-29). There is a boy who is possessed and his father had hoped that the disciples (here without the Three) could cast the demon out (cf. 6:13), which has resulted in debate.¹³⁵ Jesus' response points to their lack of faith (ἄπιστος, 9:19; cf.

¹²⁸ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 129; Cuvillier, *Marc*, 180; Moloney, *Mark*, 84; Boring, *Mark*, 262; Stein, *Mark*, 418; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27a (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 638; Mansir, *Évangile en marche*, 122.

¹²⁹ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC 34b (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 37.

¹³⁰ Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 638.

¹³¹ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 180.

¹³² Also found in: Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 238; Iersel, *Marcus*, 296; cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 461; Stein, *Mark*, 419. Most commentators see a reference to Deut. 18:15, but very few see the link between this instruction and the importance of "hearing" throughout the Gospel of Mark. Gundry and Stein both say that the focus on Deut. is unnecessary but fail to see the broad importance of hearing. Eckey and Iersel are some of the few that actually mention other references to hearing in Mark. Some of the commentators that link to Deut. 18:15 are France (*Gospel of Mark*, 355) and Culpepper (*Mark*, 298).

¹³³ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Exposition of Mark 9:30-37," *Int* 30, no. 2 (1976): 180.

¹³⁴ Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 264.

¹³⁵ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 51.

4:40; 6:6). His answer continues to show that the disciples are losing faith in Jesus, which results not only in their lack of understanding but also in their lack of power (cf. 6:48).¹³⁶ This lack of faith is intensified by the prospect of Jesus' impending death.¹³⁷ Jesus continues to teach that everything is possible for him who believes (9:23). The passage ends with the disciples asking Jesus in private why they failed to drive the spirit out. The disciples take advantage of their privileged position.¹³⁸ Jesus replies that the driving out requires prayer – the father of the possessed boy had done something similar through his request to God's Son.¹³⁹ The disciples lack faith to perform the miracle, but at the same time this passage also shows that they need the continued support and guidance of Jesus, which they also get.¹⁴⁰ This loss of dependence had started during their first mission and it is clear that it is still present.¹⁴¹ They are part of the insider group while in Jesus' presence. Jesus' teaching shows that they are not excluded from the potential of doing great things and having a part in the kingdom. However, they need faith and understanding in order to do those things.

This insider intimacy is continued in the next episode (9:30-32) where Jesus deliberately avoids the crowds so he can instruct his disciples. Again the theme of resurrection is present, but this time the disciples are so afraid (and thus lacking faith) that they do not ask Jesus to explain, even though they do not understand his teaching. So they are in Jesus' presence after his choice not to include the crowds and they are being taught as a special group. But at the same time the disciples show

¹³⁶ Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 280; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 184; Boring, *Mark*, 272; Collins, *Mark*, 437; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 653.

¹³⁷ Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 659.

¹³⁸ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 185.

¹³⁹ Williams, *Other Followers*, 141; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 665.

¹⁴⁰ F. Scott Spencer, "Faith on Edge: The Difficult Case of the Spirit-Seized Boy in Mark 9:14-29," *RevExp* 107, no. 3 (2010): 423; see also: Boring, *Mark*, 275.

¹⁴¹ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 186.

fear and lack of faith, and miss understanding.¹⁴² In not asking for an explanation they do not take advantage of their insider position.¹⁴³

In the following episode (9:33-50), the disciples are arguing amongst each other about who is the greatest. The disciples seem not to understand that following Jesus implies making sacrifices instead of being the greatest. Jesus takes the Twelve apart and explains the importance of being small.¹⁴⁴ The disciples seem not to have understood this teaching as they want to exclude somebody from casting out demons in Jesus name, right after Jesus has pointed to the importance of being small.¹⁴⁵ Even though he is not following *them* (John does not say “following *Jesus*”), Jesus still defends him, drawing attention to the fact that everyone who shows faith – which is necessary for casting out demons – is part of his group. After this, Jesus teaches about the importance of unity among his followers.¹⁴⁶ This is expressed through Jesus’ concern for the weakest members of that community.¹⁴⁷ The disciples apparently do not yet share this concern, since Jesus’ initial instruction is succeeded by two possible conflict situations.¹⁴⁸ On the positive side, the disciples, including the Twelve, are still following Jesus. Jesus does not question them in public, but goes inside a house before he asks them for information.¹⁴⁹ The Twelve are taught by Jesus, and they are given one-on-Twelve insider information about the importance of unity.

¹⁴² Achtemeier, “Mark 9:30-37,” 180; Collins, *Mark*, 441.

¹⁴³ Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 269; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 670.

¹⁴⁴ Achtemeier, “Mark 9:30-37,” 181; Harry Fleddermann, “The Discipleship Discourse (Mark 9:33-50),” *CBQ* 43, no. 1 (1981): 63.

¹⁴⁵ Fleddermann, “Discipleship Discourse,” 64.

¹⁴⁶ Helmut Koester, “Mark 9:43-47 and Quintilian 8,3,75,” *HTR* 71, no. 1-2 (1978): 152; Collins, *Mark*, 456; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 699; Mansir, *Évangile en marche*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 192; Boring, *Mark*, 281.

¹⁴⁸ Fleddermann, “Discipleship Discourse,” 73-74; Fischer, *Disciples*, 118-122.

¹⁴⁹ Fleddermann, “Discipleship Discourse,” 58.

Jesus now arrives in Judea and here he teaches on marriage. In this episode (10:1-12), the disciples are not mentioned except in v. 10 where it is pointed out that they get insider information; when the disciples are inside with Jesus again (cf. 3:20; 4:10; 7:17; 9:33), they ask him for further explanation and Jesus teaches them.¹⁵⁰ They need this explanation because they do not fully understand.

Next (10:13-16), people bring children to Jesus, but the disciples rebuke the people. This seems surprising after Jesus had earlier said that to receive a child in his name is to receive him and him who sent him (9:37).¹⁵¹ The disciples have not understood the prior teaching.

Jesus is about to continue on his journey when a man kneels before him and asks a question that is the introduction to Jesus' next teaching (10:17-31). After the rich man leaves, Jesus looks around at his disciples (v. 23), suggesting that they were present during the interaction. At first the disciples are surprised at Jesus' response to the rich man. They think it must be impossible to inherit eternal life. They still, despite Jesus' teaching, hold the wealthy high in esteem: if the rich cannot be saved, no one can.¹⁵² The disciples still do not understand the need to make sacrifices. Jesus however points out that for God nothing is impossible. This holds hope for the disciples who keep failing at following Jesus as they should and continue to lack understanding.¹⁵³ Peter reacts and points out that he has lost everything, to which Jesus responds that people who do so shall be rewarded. At the same time Peter's mother-in-law and his house were still mentioned earlier (1:29-31) and he had difficulty with accepting Jesus as a suffering Christ (8:27-9:1); Peter seems to be over-confident and is not so willing to make sacrifices as he thinks.¹⁵⁴ This is

¹⁵⁰ Robert W. Herron, "Mark's Jesus on Divorce: Mark 10:1-12 Reconsidered," *JETS* 25, no. 3 (1982): 281; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 195; Collins, *Mark*, 469.

¹⁵¹ Iersel, *Mark*, 321; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 395; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 192, 197.

¹⁵² Collins, *Mark*, 481.

¹⁵³ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 201.

¹⁵⁴ William J. Carr, "Mark 10:17-27 (28-31)," *Int* 33, no. 3 (1979): 284; Mario M. DiCicco, "What Can One Give in Exchange for One's Life? A Narrative-Critical Study of the Widow and Her

affirmed by Jesus broadening the concept of leaving wealth to include making other sacrifices, including the loss of family ties.¹⁵⁵

Jesus then for the third time teaches about his death, which is instantly followed by the disciples again misunderstanding Jesus' teaching. The reaction to the rebuke of wealthy people is that his followers (here not specified as disciples) are afraid again, and this fear (contrary to faith), sets the context for the next episode.¹⁵⁶ Given the fear that the disciples have already displayed earlier, if the disciples are not included in those who fear, they are at least paralleled with them. Jesus next calls his inner circle to himself: the Twelve (10:32). Jesus explains explicitly what will happen to him (v. 33-34).

Then, James and John come asking for a place in the kingdom (v. 35). They seem to focus on the glory that lies ahead. This is an inappropriate response to Jesus' passion prediction.¹⁵⁷ It is notable that the narrator here again mentions their brotherly ties after Jesus' teaching on leaving family behind (v. 29), as if to indicate that the two brothers cannot leave behind their earthly family structure. Jesus explains to them that they do not understand what they are asking because it is a picture that includes both glory and suffering.¹⁵⁸ Jesus questions whether they are able and their swift response is similar to Peter's self-confident statement earlier (v. 28).¹⁵⁹ The other Ten are indignant at the brothers. It is not a divine anger, however. The Ten do not want to point the two brothers to their wrong interpretation of what is coming; Jesus' saying shows they need teaching on being small and following his

Offering, Mark 12:41-44," *CurTM* 25, no. 6 (1998): 445; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 407; contra Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 203.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Iersel, *Mark*, 329; Culpepper, *Mark*, 340.

¹⁵⁶ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 204; Boring, *Mark*, 299.

¹⁵⁷ Earl S. Johnson, "Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus," *CBQ* 40, no. 2 (1978): 203; Patrick Henry Reardon, "The Cross, Sacraments and Martyrdom: An Investigation of Mark 10:35-45," *SVTQ* 36, no. 1-2 (1992): 105.

¹⁵⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 300; Collins, *Mark*, 496; Fischer, *Disciples*, 126.

¹⁵⁹ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 414; cf. Boring, *Mark*, 301.

example (10:45). In that sense, though the Ten and James and John are mentioned separately, it seems there is no real difference between them: they all misunderstand.¹⁶⁰ They also do not seem willing to make sacrifices; they aim for riches and honour despite Jesus' earlier teachings. At the same time, Jesus keeps instructing them.¹⁶¹ They are on the road with Jesus, and they are part of his insider group that gets special teaching.

In the next episode (10:46-52) the narrator tells the story of a man who does not understand, after he has heard (ἀκούω, v. 47; cf. 4:12; 5:27; 7:14, 25, 37; 8:18).¹⁶² In it the disciples are mentioned only as part of the bigger group of companions (v. 46). The blind Bartimaeus calls for help and while the "many" rebuked him, he keeps shouting. It is not necessary that the "many" are or at least include the disciples; it just shows that again a small one is excluded by Jesus' followers (cf. vv. 13-16).¹⁶³ Apart from the disciples being on the road with Jesus, nothing is explicitly mentioned about their character.

Mark 11:1-13:37

Finally, Jesus and his disciples enter Jerusalem (11:1-11). For this entry, Jesus asks two of his disciples to go and fetch a colt. He tells them what to say when people ask what they are doing. The disciples (or here two of them) are given a role in Jesus' mission again.¹⁶⁴ The two disciples do exactly as told; they obey their master.¹⁶⁵ This shows their will to follow Jesus and do as he tells them. Jesus then enters Jerusalem where people honour him as a king. After what seems to be a grand entry in Jerusalem there is somewhat of an anti-climax when in v. 11 Jesus just goes to the

¹⁶⁰ James D. Smart, "Mark 10:35-45," *Int* 33, no. 3 (1979): 288–289; Boring, *Mark*, 299.

¹⁶¹ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 205.

¹⁶² Cf. Williams, *Other Followers*, 154n2.

¹⁶³ Contra Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 209.

¹⁶⁴ Fischer, *Disciples*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 218.

temple, looks and goes away again.¹⁶⁶ Jesus withdraws with the Twelve to Bethany (v. 11). The Twelve still form Jesus' intimate group.

Next the narrator again uses a sandwich structure to tell what happens in the following days (11:12-25).¹⁶⁷ In the brackets there is reference to a fig tree. Jesus is hungry and curses a fig tree, something the disciples hear (vv. 12-14). When they pass the fig tree the next morning the tree has withered (v. 20). Peter remembers Jesus' teaching and points it out to Jesus. Peter is probably a representative of the disciples again, as in the last verse on the fig tree, it was mentioned that "the disciples" heard, and now Peter remembers, while Jesus answers "them."¹⁶⁸ Then Jesus teaches again that one must have faith in God, and if one has faith one will be able to do miracles. Jesus' teaching reminds the reader of an earlier close connection between faith and prayer (9:14-29), where the disciples were not able to free the boy from the demon because of their lack of faith.¹⁶⁹ The sandwich also calls to mind the intimate teaching the disciples receive (cf. 4:10ff.). The disciples first hear (ἀκούω, 11:14) and are then given explanation of what it means (vv. 22-25, cf. 4:34). In the centre story the disciples are not mentioned.

In the next episodes (11:26-12:12; 12:13-34) the disciples are only mentioned being present with Jesus as "they" came into Jerusalem again (11:27); the disciples are still following Jesus.

After facing challenges from the Jewish leaders, Jesus starts teaching on his identity and how the Jewish leaders exploit the weak. Jesus then calls his disciples and uses one of these weak people as an example: the poor widow is willing to

¹⁶⁶ Fischer, *Disciples*, 154.

¹⁶⁷ Brown has recently argued that the sandwich structure is even broader than that and runs from 11:1-12:12, see Scott G. Brown, "Mark 11:1-12:12: A Triple Intercalation?" *CBQ* 64, no. 1 (2002): passim.

¹⁶⁸ Fischer, *Disciples*, 158n6; see also: Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 103.

¹⁶⁹ Philip Francis Esler, "The Incident of the Withered Fig Tree in Mark 11: A New Source and Redactional Explanation," *JSNT* 28, no. 1 (2005): 59; cf. Culpepper, *Mark*, 383.

sacrifice everything; she gives it all to God (12:41-44).¹⁷⁰ The disciples are present again and they are called by Jesus to receive some special teaching.¹⁷¹

Mark 13 is an episode that mainly consists of a long speech, one of the two longest in the Gospel (vv. 5b-37; cf. 4:1-34, in Mark 13 the speech is continuous).¹⁷² The passage is introduced by one of the disciples pointing to the grandeur of the temple buildings. It is clear that this unnamed disciple has not understood the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus draws attention to this by using βλέπω (see below).¹⁷³ Peter, James, John and Andrew are then alone with Jesus on the Mount of Olives and there they ask for further explanation, which they are given.¹⁷⁴ Though the setting of the first two verses is different than that of the rest, it can be seen as one episode since the content reason for the disciples' question in v. 3 is Jesus' words in v. 2.¹⁷⁵ Contrary to prior events, the Four do not question Jesus' words, nor are they shocked or amazed (cf. 8:32; 9:5, 32; 10:28; 11:21), they just ask for further explanation.¹⁷⁶

What follows is difficult to categorize in the characterization of the disciples. It is at best a prediction, which holds a promise for future characterization. Given how Jesus has been established as God's Son, it is likely that these words will come true, but this is still something that needs to happen in the future. In that future, Jesus' characterization of the disciples is generally positive.¹⁷⁷ The disciples will be in

¹⁷⁰ Gundry, *Mark*, 729–730; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 247; Baudoz, *Prendre sa croix*, 74.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Baudoz, *Prendre sa croix*, 69.

¹⁷² Iersel, *Mark*, 391; Boring, *Mark*, 356.

¹⁷³ Cf. Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 871.

¹⁷⁴ We suspect that the mention of Andrew here might put an extra emphasis on the brother-brother relationship in v. 12. In neither of the previous nor following episodes of the Three being present, the brother relationship is at stake. Here it is, just like in the only other mention after the calling of the Four (1:29), and the narrator can use it to stress the coming suffering. Contra France, *Gospel of Mark*, 507.

¹⁷⁵ Collins, *Mark*, 594.

¹⁷⁶ Iersel, *Mark*, 389.

¹⁷⁷ Boring, *Mark*, 358.

Jesus' presence (v. 24-31),¹⁷⁸ they are selected (v. 20), they are given a role (the speaking),¹⁷⁹ they suffer for him (v. 9, 13), they are given a role in the kingdom (v. 10-11, 34), they will understand – or at least have the potential for this (the use of βλέπω or ἀκούω and the many other exhortations). However, at the same time, the numerous imperatives in the passage also leave open a small chance that the disciples may fail to live up to Jesus' expectations.¹⁸⁰

Mark 14:1-16:8

The next episode (14:1-11) again is a sandwich structure.¹⁸¹ In vv. 1-2 the chief priests and scribes seek to arrest and kill Jesus. In vv. 10-11 Judas proves to be the solution to their problem of how to do it. In between there is reference to the anointing of Jesus. The bracket story depicts Judas explicitly as one of the Twelve, which points to his privileged insider position. At the same time, he is betraying Jesus. It seems that Judas is not willing to make the sacrifices that are mentioned in the previous chapter. He does not understand whom Jesus is or what he came to do.

The following episode (vv. 12-16) mentions the disciples again. Two of them (unnamed) are depicted quite positively in this episode. Their question of where to prepare the Passover shows dependence on Jesus.¹⁸² They wish to follow his lead, but they also are willing to take up their role in Jesus' mission; they are obedient.

In the next episode (vv. 17-25), the Twelve are depicted much more ambiguously. On the one hand, they are selected to join Jesus for the Passover meal.¹⁸³ Jesus shares with them the bread and the wine that stand as a symbol of his suffering. He teaches them again about the near future events. On the other hand,

¹⁷⁸ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 267.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁸⁰ Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 103.

¹⁸¹ Iersel, *Mark*, 413; Miller, *Women in Mark*, 129; Collins, *Mark*, 640.

¹⁸² Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 283; Fischer, *Disciples*, 165.

¹⁸³ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 284.

Jesus also points out that one of the Twelve will betray him. He might be a betrayer, but he comes from the inside group.¹⁸⁴ This man gets a very strong warning.

Next, in vv. 26-31 the Twelve are warned that they will abandon Jesus. Up until now, their being in Jesus' presence has been one of the few consistent positive traits, but now that aspect will come to an end as they will be scattered.¹⁸⁵ In this episode the negative future weighs more heavily than the fact that they are with Jesus at that moment.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, Jesus also promises that he will lead them again after his resurrection (v. 28), thus extending the promise of a positive future again.¹⁸⁷ Peter however asserts that he will not fail. In doing this he puts himself on a pedestal at the expense of the others and shows that he is not depending on Jesus.¹⁸⁸ Jesus maintains that his prior teaching was correct: Peter will deny Jesus. Not just once, but three times. All of the disciples, however, disagree with Jesus and all stress that they will do no such thing (v. 31). This construction (moving from Peter to all of the disciples) makes it clear that Peter is again a spokesperson for the others.¹⁸⁹

In Gethsemane (vv. 32-42), μαθηταὶ (v. 32) is used for the last time in Mark until the very end, where it is used in Jesus' message while the μαθηταὶ are not actually present (16:7). The disciples are asked to be in Jesus' presence while he prays. While they have a very passive role – being there – it is a role they will soon abandon.¹⁹⁰ Peter, James and John are given a special position as Jesus asks them to be watchful. Here, γρηγορέω is used three times (14:34, 37-38) just as it was in the previous chapter (13:34-35, 37).¹⁹¹ The Three were present at this teaching of Jesus,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 285; Fischer, *Disciples*, 169.

¹⁸⁵ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 287.

¹⁸⁶ Fischer, *Disciples*, 179.

¹⁸⁷ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 288–290.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 289; Boring, *Mark*, 394; Collins, *Mark*, 671; Fischer, *Disciples*, 177.

¹⁸⁹ Fischer, *Disciples*, 177.

¹⁹⁰ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 277.

¹⁹¹ Cuvillier, *Marc*, 286; Dean B. Deppe, "Charting the Future or a Perspective on the Present? The Paraenetic Purpose of Mark 13," *CTJ* 41, no. 1 (2006): 95; Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 104–105.

but are not (yet) ready to follow his instructions as they keep falling asleep and do not stay watchful: they are not obedient, despite Jesus' invitation. "The disciples might be able to stay awake and watch for Jesus' coming in glory in chapter 13, but they fail to watch for his passion in chapter 14."¹⁹² Jesus' prayer refers back to the cup in 10:38; where the disciples were focusing on glory, Jesus focuses on obeying the Father even in suffering. It is a big contrast with the disciples' earlier words.¹⁹³ In the previous chapter they were wondering about the time (13:4), but now they seem not to have realized what is happening (13:32; 14:41).¹⁹⁴ They do not understand Jesus' teaching, or his identity and mission. At the same time they are still part of the insider group and they are given a special revelation in the sense that they are close to Jesus when he speaks with his father most intimately.¹⁹⁵

Judas, again it is mentioned that he is one of the Twelve, approaches to betray Jesus (14:43-52). Judas uses a method for his betrayal that shows that he was part of the inner circle, as kissing was a form of respect from a pupil to his teacher.¹⁹⁶ This is further supported by his address of Jesus with Rabbi. One of Jesus' new family members is betraying him (cf. 13:12).¹⁹⁷ Here it is not the disciples nor the Twelve that accompany Jesus, but just "those that stood by." The narrator wants to point out that they are about to lose the most important thing that makes them disciples: following Jesus.¹⁹⁸ In v. 50 all of them flee. They have not understood whom Jesus is and what he came to do and they are now leaving him behind completely, unwilling to make sacrifices or face the crowd. They run and lose their dependence on Jesus in the process. Contrary to Jesus' instruction that people should lose their lives in

¹⁹² Deppe, "Charting," 95; see also: Fischer, *Disciples*, 185.

¹⁹³ Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 293–294.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁹⁵ Fischer, *Disciples*, 182.

¹⁹⁶ Craig S. Keener, "Kissing," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 629.

¹⁹⁷ Boring, *Mark*, 402; Deppe, "Charting," 97.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 297.

order to follow him, the young man flees naked rather than following Jesus.¹⁹⁹ It forms the climax of the story about the followers deserting Jesus.²⁰⁰

When Jesus is being taken to the high priest, only Peter is mentioned (14:53-72). This again is a sandwich structure. The bracket story relates Peter's denial (vv. 53-54, 66-72).²⁰¹ He is following Jesus, but from a distance (v. 54). This already indicates that he is not as close to Jesus as he has been up to this point.²⁰² While Jesus is revealing his identity to the high priest (v. 62), Peter is denying his identity while sitting below in the courtyard (v. 66-71).²⁰³ This is the most explicit revelation of his identity that Jesus gives and it is countered by the most explicit denial of those who belong to him.²⁰⁴ Peter has all the negative traits of the disciples in the previous episode and is not just leaving Jesus, but also actively denying him, thus becoming a Judas-figure.²⁰⁵ Peter then remembers Jesus' words and cries. When Judas betrays Jesus, he displays no remorse whatsoever. Peter on the other hand does realize his failure, but he also distances himself from Jesus: "il bat en retraite, ce qui l'éloigne de Jésus: de l'intérieur (ἔσω, v. 54) de la cour du grand-prêtre il passe au dehors (ἔξω, v. 68)."²⁰⁶ Peter has become an outsider. Peter was the first disciple to be called and he is the last to desert Jesus.²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ Deppe, "Charting," 96.

²⁰⁰ Howard M. Jackson, "Why the Youth Shed His Cloak and Fled Naked: The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 14:51-52," *JBL* 116, no. 2 (1997): 276.

²⁰¹ Miller, *Women in Mark*, 149; Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "The Confession of Jesus and the Curses of Peter: A Narrative-Christological Approach to the Text-Critical Problem of Mark 14:62," *NovT* 53, no. 3 (2011): 258-259.

²⁰² Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 105.

²⁰³ Huizenga, "Confession," 259.

²⁰⁴ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 610-611; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 305.

²⁰⁵ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 619.

²⁰⁶ Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 106.

²⁰⁷ Huizenga, "Confession," 261.

The rest of Mark's Gospel is characterized by the absence of the disciples. The disciples are mentioned again only in 16:7 where a young man dressed in a white robe urges the women at the tomb to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will go before them to Galilee and they will see him again. The Gospel of Mark ends with a painful reminder of the disciples' failure, but also with a promising future: Jesus has not given up on them.²⁰⁸

Summary

The analysis of the episodes has yielded several traits, or repeated qualifying adjectives. They can be formulated as words completing the phrase "the disciples are those": 'following', 'serving', 'being an insider', 'understanding', 'trusting', 'depending' and 'betraying.'²⁰⁹ With regards to the wording, both 'being an insider' (including a noun) and 'betraying' (negative instead of positive) are of a different character, but this choice will be defended below. The traits are summarized in Table 2 (see Appendix). In the next step the development of each individual trait is considered. Jesus' teachings on what it means to be in his new family affirm the importance of each of these traits for good discipleship, as will be stressed below. However, the disciples do not always display the traits in a positive way.

Inter-Episodic Trait Comparison

Before each individual trait is considered, the role of other characters in Mark must be addressed briefly, as those characters contribute to the characterization of the disciples.

Though the minor characters and the Jewish leaders do not explicitly contribute to the characterization, they often do so in an implicit way. In the previous section, telling and showing included what the narrator says, what Jesus says and does to and about the disciples, and what other characters say and do to and about the disciples.

²⁰⁸ Fischer, *Disciples*, 191.

²⁰⁹ For the purpose of unity the traits were formulated so they can actually be used as adjectives to the noun 'disciples.'

Now, what the narrator does to the disciples will also be considered. The narrator often uses other characters as an analogy or contrast to the disciples' character. In Table 2 (see Appendix) all such indirect characterizations will be indicated between brackets. For example, if Bartimaeus in 10:46-52 shows understanding, the narrator implicitly gives a contrast with the disciples. The narrator nowhere explicitly says that the disciples do not understand Jesus' purpose and Bartimaeus does, but the strong similarities between vv. 35-45 and this episode make it clear that the narrator does want to contrast them. In doing this, the narrator gives extra information on the disciples' character, though in an indirect way. Because of this contrasting example, in the table there is a (-) in the column of 'understanding' for the disciples.

Following

A first character trait of the disciples is identified by both Jesus and the narrator in the very first episode where (four of) the disciples are mentioned (1:16-20). Jesus says to Simon and Andrew: "Follow me" (v. 17) and calls the other two brothers (v. 20). The narrator records that they do follow. Later the focus shifts from following Jesus to being in his presence or being present (3:13-19).²¹⁰ At the same time ἀκολουθέω is a recurring verb characterizing the disciples throughout the Gospel. The first general trait can thus be named 'following' (including also presence in general; this is vital). This has generally been accepted as one of the key aspects of the disciples.²¹¹ Not only the initial calling of the first disciples affirms this, but also Jesus' request in 3:14 (εἶναι μετ' αὐτοῦ) and his pointing to those with him in v. 34 affirms its importance. The following is quite consistent throughout most of the Gospel. The disciples follow from the moment they are called and continue to do so for the most part.

However, they are not always in the presence of Jesus. In some instances it seems the narrator simply fails to mention their presence. In 1:21-28, 1:40-2:14 and 3:1-6 the disciples are not mentioned. They are present in the next settings. The

²¹⁰ Henderson discusses this far more in details (see: *Christology and Discipleship*, 88).

²¹¹ Malbon, "Disciples," 105–110; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 78.

narrator seems to take their following for granted. If not, he would have mentioned the fact that the disciples returned to Jesus (as is the case in 6:30 or 8:1). The disciples thus probably were in the presence of Jesus. In 5:1-20, while Jesus disembarks in heathen territory, the disciples stay in the boat. Jesus is by himself while he faces a next storm (this time a man, cf. 4:35-41). The narrator shows that the disciples' fear during the storm results in taking distance from Jesus. They do not follow him further. It is Jesus who in the end returns to them (5:21). This is the first failure to follow Jesus, though it is still rather implicit. In the next episodes, there are other instances where the disciples are not mentioned (7:24-37; 8:10-13; 12:13-34). Of those, their not being mentioned is not problematic in 8:10-13 and 12:13-34. There the focus just shifts to the Jewish authorities as Jesus' conversation partner. In the episodes immediately following the disciples are mentioned again. Mark 7:24-37 is a special occasion since the initiative for the disciples' absence comes from Jesus (v. 24). It is also Jesus who calls them back together in the next episode (8:1). However, in Mk 7:1-23 there is no indication of why Jesus would want to be alone. This had happened before (e.g. 1:35) and thus need not to be seen as problematic.

Later in the story, Judas leaves Jesus to go to the priests to betray him (14:10-11). If the disciples' absence in 5:1-20 is an implicit preview, Judas' leaving Jesus in 14:10 is an explicit one. It shows what will happen in the rest of the Gospel. Mark 14-15 offers a complete anti-climax. In the beginning the disciples are still following Jesus, but slowly they fall away. First, Jesus warns them that they will fail in following him (14:26-31) but here there is still the prospect of Jesus leading them again (v. 38). Later however they end up fleeing from the scene of Jesus' arrest (vv. 50-52) and the hope seems completely gone. The narrator does not even speak of disciples anymore, but of "those who stood by" (v. 47). The narrator wants to show their failing as followers. Peter is the only disciple who keeps following Jesus, but it is from a distance (v. 54). In the end Peter leaves the scene as well, but in this case it is not said that he leaves, the narrator just does not mention him anymore, nor does he mention the other disciples. In the passion narrative in Mark 15 there is only reference to a passerby (v. 21), a centurion (v. 39), the women (vv. 40-41, 47), and a Jewish leader (v. 43). All of them perform actions that one would expect of the

disciples, making their absence even more painful, especially since at least two of them come from the group of Jesus' opponents (Romans and Jewish leaders). Though the disciples do not reoccur in the Gospel, this trait is explicitly present precisely in the absence of the disciples.

At the very end, however there is a promise, which was already precluded in Mark 13, that the disciples will once again follow Jesus – or at least have the opportunity to do so – as Jesus “προάγει ὑμᾶς [the disciples and Peter] εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν” (16:7).

Serving

A second aspect that is mentioned in a calling to serve; the fishermen will be fishers of men (1:17). Though serving is a broad term, it here signifies responding to the task(s) that Jesus gives his disciples. Through the calling to serve at the beginning, the narrator draws attention to how the disciples respond to this call. In the first chapters there is no indication that this actually becomes a trait of the disciples. However, in 3:9 the narrator explains that Jesus gave the disciples a first task: preparing a boat so the many crowds do not crush him.

This smaller task is followed by the institution of the Twelve (3:13-19). Here, their calling is closely associated with the task they receive: being sent out to preach and having authority to cast out demons (v. 14). These are both aspects that Jesus has already displayed in his own service to the kingdom (e.g. 1:14-15, 23-26, 38-39). Then, for the first time, Jesus instructs the disciples to go out and perform the tasks for which he has called them (6:6b-30, cf. 1:17). This is exactly what they do: they preach (vv. 12, 30), cast out demons (vv. 7, 13) and heal people (v. 13). Immediately after this, the disciples assist Jesus in the distribution of the bread in the feeding of the crowd (vv. 37-38, 41, 43). However, the disciples are a bit reluctant in their task. They do it, but not after first having had an argument with Jesus (v. 37b). The same thing goes for the next feeding, the next passage in which the disciples assist Jesus (8:1-9). They again help Jesus in distributing food (vv. 6, 8), but not before arguing with him (v. 4). Both of these episodes show that the disciples continue to serve, but that a certain reluctance has entered their obedience.

The next episode where the disciples serve – or at least attempt to – is while Jesus is on the mountain with the Three (9:14-29). The disciples try to heal a boy with an unclean spirit. However, they do not succeed. Contrary to their previous experience with assisting Jesus, they now try but do not succeed. Though it is not explicitly said why they are not able to serve, what Jesus says to them suggests that they did not have enough faith (v. 19) and they did not pray (v. 29). The narrator seems to indicate that their role in serving diminishes, and that this is related to a lack of faith.

Jesus later teaches the disciples about the importance of serving (10:38-45). This follows right after they have asked Jesus for a share in his future glory. Here Jesus explains that he will give the ultimate example of serving by giving his life. This contrasts with how the disciples have just been characterized. It is clear that the disciples are not very concerned with service – they just want glory. This is a first low for the disciples' service: they are not concerned with it anymore. It is however rather implicit, since it is not stated that their aim for glory contradicts a serving attitude; Jesus' response to their questions makes this connection.

Upon entering Jerusalem this downward development in the trait changes again. In 11:2-3 Jesus instructs two of the disciples to find a colt to prepare his entrance in the city. Jesus gives them an instruction that includes several uncertain factors, but the disciples do not question Jesus' instruction. They just follow his command. The same goes when Jesus gives them a very similar assignment in 14:13-15; the two disciples just follow Jesus' request without debate or argument.

After this, all of the disciples are given only one more task: "Sit here while I pray" (14:32). Because this is the last time the disciples are mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, it is not even certain that the disciples actually sat there. This leaves the reader with an ambiguous picture of the disciples. Peter, James and John are given a more specific task, but they fail at it. In Jesus' most dire moment until now the Three do not grasp the gravity of the situation and do not perform their task: to watch with him (v. 34). This image is nowhere restored in the Gospel. On the contrary, the fact that the women in 15:40-41 used to serve Jesus (διακονέω, ind. impf.) reminds the

reader that the disciples failed at serving Jesus. This image is not restored within the narrative.

In the end, the discourse in Mark 13 holds a possibility that the disciples will serve again. They are the ones who will proclaim the Gospel in Jesus' name (vv. 9-13). They will serve Jesus even in the face of death and suffering and in doing this serve to the fullest (cf. 10:45).²¹² However, serving never returns as a positive trait of the disciples within the narrative.

Self-denying

A third trait that occurs at the very calling of the first disciples is their making sacrifices and denying themselves. The narrator points out that the two pairs of brothers leave their familiar world behind them in order to follow Jesus (1:18, 20); they literally leave behind family. Though it is not made explicit, shortly thereafter the reader is already informed that they did not depart from their old world entirely. Simon still asks Jesus to cure his mother-in-law (vv. 29-30). Though the curing itself is not a bad thing, it does show that he has difficulty with letting go completely. Later, Simon explains to Jesus that everyone is looking for him and thus he is implying that Jesus should return.

However, after these rather implicit references to the disciples' struggle to let go, Levi is called (2:14-15) and his making sacrifices is very similar to that of the Four. Then, the scribes of the Pharisees criticize Jesus to the disciples (v. 16). After this the scribes (v. 18) and the Pharisees (v. 24) question the disciples. Here it is not family ties that are broken, but it must not be taken lightly that the disciples face strong criticism in order to follow Jesus. They are still under Jesus' protection, but it is quite clear that the Jewish authorities are opposing Jesus and those associated with him. Not only do they leave behind their social security, they seem to leave behind their religious security as well. In 7:5 the Jewish authorities again criticize the disciples. Though, like in the last two events of this happening, it is not said that they are addressed, they are probably present and thus are put to the test by the

²¹² Danove, *Rhetoric of Characterization*, 126.

authorities. Jesus however defends them and rewards the fact that they are close to him at the moment.

This overall quite positive, though never very explicit, trait changes drastically in 8:27-9:1. Here Peter first seems to grasp whom Jesus is (see below), but then he rebukes Jesus when Jesus starts explaining the consequences of his mission. That explanation shows explicitly for the first time the gravity of the consequences of doing God's will (v. 31). Here it is not a teaching about the disciples but about Jesus himself, but Peter still does not want to accept that it comes with such harsh results (8:32). He clearly indicates that he does not want to accept this sacrificial side. There are two outcomes of Peter's reluctance. First of all, Jesus explicitly puts him in his place (v. 33); it is the harshest moment toward any of the disciples in the whole Gospel – including Judas. Second, Jesus goes on to teach about how all of his disciples can follow this example. In light of what Peter has done, however, it is quite clear that this is more of a warning than it is an encouragement. Note that after the sacrifice of family ties and the honour of authorities, it is now the denial of self that is at stake (v. 35-38).

Later, the Twelve are arguing about which of them is the greatest (9:33-50). It is exactly this sacrifice of the self that is at stake in the discussions the Twelve are having. They seek honour and glory, which does not concur with the self-denial that Jesus proclaimed. This lack of self-denial is continued throughout the next chapter. The disciples first do not let the children, the small ones, come to Jesus (10:13-16). After this, Jesus teaches about the importance of leaving behind financial means (v. 25). Here the young man is an analogy to the disciples; he is also not able to leave behind his old life. This results in Peter pointing out that he has left everything behind. With the preceding parts of the narrative in mind, however, it is quite clear that the narrator wants to show Peter's wrong mind-set. Jesus' response about leaving behind family and riches are again a strong admonition. The contrast cannot be bigger between Jesus' teaching on denying the self and the attitude of the disciples, shown soon after this when James and John – and the other Ten soon join them – start focusing on glory again (v. 35, 37, 41). Jesus' teaching here contrasts with this, pointing again toward the coming sacrificial aspect of following him,

himself being the example (esp. v. 45). The narrator concludes this seemingly downward spiral by the positive – and thus contrasting – example of Bartimaeus who throws his garment aside in order to follow Jesus. It was probably all that he had.²¹³

So far, this trait has been displayed with a downward evolution. The narrator next uses two minor characters to contrast with this negative trait in the disciples and in doing this stresses the failure of the disciples. First, a poor widow gives what she can (12:41-44) and shortly after a rich woman gives up everything (14:1-11, esp. v. 8).²¹⁴ The latter is surrounded by the story of how Judas fails to deny himself and is promised riches for his betrayal (v. 11).²¹⁵ At this point, despite the failings of Peter and the others, Judas might still be an exception, although the narrator stresses his link to the Twelve (v. 10). However, in vv. 27-31 it becomes clear that all of the disciples will fail at making sacrifices. Jesus' pending death will result in the disciples denying him (instead of themselves); like Judas they are choosing the easy way out.

Then, Judas comes to Jesus with a party sent by the Jewish leaders. The disciples earlier struggled to leave their family and their focus on riches and glory behind, and now they struggle, as Judas had, to deny themselves in the face of the Jewish authorities (vv. 50-52). Peter is the only one who sticks to following Jesus a bit longer, but even he fails when he is faced with the criticism of the servant-girl and the bystanders (vv. 66-71). After this the disciples disappear from the story.

However, when all the disciples are gone, the narrator reaffirms this negative trait through the contrast with Jesus' self-denial. All sorts of authorities criticize Jesus (14:55-65; 15:1-32). He is ridiculed by his own people, the bystanders (15:29) and those crucified with him (v. 32). While Jesus is sacrificing his life, the soldiers are gambling for his garments (v. 24) – the last thing he still had in his possession.

²¹³ For a more detailed discussion of and argumentation of this, see: R. Alan Culpepper, "Mark 10:50: Why Mention the Garment?" *JBL* 101, no. 1 (1982): 132.

²¹⁴ Iersel, *Mark*, 417; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 281; Miller, *Women in Mark*, 138; Boring, *Mark*, 384.

²¹⁵ Iersel, *Mark*, 419.

Jesus has sacrificed everything the disciples have not been strong enough to give up. The narrator creates a strong contrast and further affirms this by showing a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, literally picking up the cross and following Jesus (v. 21, cf. 8:34).

This trait is introduced negatively, but again Mark 13 holds the possibility of the disciples' denying themselves in the future; they will suffer for Jesus and sacrifice everything for him (13:9-13). They will loose their family ties, they will be tried before (Jewish) authorities and they will loose their lives; they will simply be hated by everyone. However, this is not a characterization within the story, but within a discourse about the future.

Being an Insider

A fourth trait the disciples have is their insider position. This is an extremely passive trait; their having an insider position is entirely due to their selection by Jesus.²¹⁶ Though this at first looks like a mere spatial aspect there are at least two strong arguments for considering this position as a trait. First of all, Jesus uses their insider position as a qualifier for the disciples in 4:11 where the Twelve are distinguished from those outside. This implies that being on the inside is typical for his disciples. Second, Mark explicitly mentions Peter's move from the insider to the outsider when he is denying Jesus (14:53-72). Jesus' teaching in 4:11-12 while alone with the disciples and the fact that he only explains the parables to the insiders (v. 34), give two clues for examining the trait throughout the Gospel. When Jesus is alone with the disciples and/or gives them a special explanation (that others do not get) this is an affirmation of their being insiders. Because of the use of the spatial inside and outside, this trait has been named 'being an insider' as a contrast to those outside, which is Mark's terminology. This terminology is maintained here.

Jesus withdraws with his disciples for the first time in 3:7. Shortly after, he calls only those whom he desires to him (v. 13), also suggesting a smaller group. It is however only in 4:11 in combination with v. 34 that the disciples are qualified as

²¹⁶ Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 130.

insiders. Jesus clearly states that “those outside” will only hear everything in parables (4:11).²¹⁷ The remarkable thing is that with what Jesus says next it is assumed that the insiders will have understanding and this is exactly what the disciples often do not have.²¹⁸ However, it does not stop there; Jesus explains his words to his disciples (vv. 13-20, and esp. v. 34). Thus the disciples benefit from their position to become insiders through Jesus’ explanation.²¹⁹ Though the disciples lack understanding in the next episode (vv. 35-41), they are still *in* the boat with Jesus and thus have a special selected position. Next, the Three are invited to share the first of three revelations referring to Jesus’ coming death (5:37-40; cf. 9:2-13; 14:32-42). This pattern of special position where the disciples receive exclusive explanation remains (7:17), and the disciples are given a special epiphany (vv. 48-52). Further, the Syrophoenician woman finds Jesus in a house and makes herself an insider (7:24-25). Also, the healing of the deaf man reminds the reader of the special position the disciples have, as Jesus takes him “aside from the crowd privately” (7:33). In a subsequent episode, the disciples are again *in* the boat with Jesus, where they receive a special warning (8:14-15).

The type of special information the disciples receive gets more specific at their (partial) acknowledgment of Jesus’ identity (8:27-9:1). Here Jesus gives the disciples an explanation about his coming death (8:31-32); he tells them about it “plainly” and continues to do so (the disciples in 9:31; the Twelve in 10:32-33).²²⁰ Surrounding those references to his death, the disciples receive insider teachings on how to be a disciple (9:28-29, 33-37; 10:10-12). This is continued in Jerusalem where Jesus instructs the disciples (11:12-14, 20-25), after having left Jerusalem two nights before with just the Twelve (v. 11). Talking to his disciples Jesus foretells the fate of the temple (13:1-2) and then, when four of them ask him “privately” (v. 3), further elaborates on that (v. 3-37).

²¹⁷ Malbon, “Disciples,” 114.

²¹⁸ Fowler, *Understand*, 211.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

²²⁰ Malbon, “Disciples,” 113.

At the Last Supper, the Twelve are inside with Jesus and given unique information about the betrayal by one of them and receive the institution of the Lord's Supper (14:17-25). He later again gives them a glimpse of the future when he points to their denial (vv. 26-30). Next, the Three are included in a special revelation. This is however the last reference to their insider position. What is more, Peter literally moves from inside, (ἔσω, v. 54) to outside (ἔξω, v. 68).²²¹ Thus the disciples' insider position ends quite suddenly and drastically.

The trait of having insider positions is probably the most passive trait. The disciples completely rely on Jesus for it (even their lack of understanding is not so passive as Jesus often asks them about their role in understanding). There is only one negative reference: Peter's disposition from inside to outside. Peter here symbolises all the disciples as they have left Jesus' group of intimates.

Understanding

The next character trait can be defined as 'understanding.' Rhoads, Dewey and Michie have already affirmed: "Understanding is crucial for the followers of Jesus in this story."²²² However crucial this may be for a theology of discipleship, the narrative of Mark itself shows a different story. The disciples constantly display this trait in a negative way; they simply do not understand. Jesus points out the importance of this trait in 4:11-12. There he makes clear that he is speaking in parables so that those outside – that are not with Jesus – "may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand" (v. 12). Rhoads, Dewey and Michie primarily see a link between fear and lack of understanding and consider it to be rooted in a lack of faith (see next section).²²³ Fear and understanding are tied together by words of Jesus in 6:50 where his affirmation of his identity shows the disciples' lack of understanding. Both the narrator and Jesus (resp. 6:52; 8:17) see

²²¹ Focant, "Simon-Pierre," 106.

²²² Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 123.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 125.

hardened hearts as the cause for this lack of understanding. It is however not explained what is meant by hardened hearts.

How then does this trait of understanding show itself throughout the Gospel? It is first mentioned in 4:1-34. Though Jesus explains the importance in Mark 4:12, the whole surrounding context shows that the disciples are not among those who understand; otherwise they would not need the explanation (vv. 10, 13). The next episode is a clear affirmation of the lack of understanding; the disciples do not understand who Jesus is (v. 41). This theme is continued throughout most of the Gospel. Either through analogy (or contrast), or by pointing to the disciples' failure, the narrator affirms that the disciples lack understanding. The disciples question Jesus' instructions or his actions (5:31; 6:37; 8:4), which shows their lack of understanding. They even seek a more illogical explanation than Jesus' power – and see an impossible ghost instead of an epiphany (6:49-51). The disciples again need an extra explanation of Jesus' teaching because they do not understand what Jesus is saying (7:17-18). All of this shows that they do not grasp whom Jesus is.

Peter's confession in 8:29 is sometimes seen as a turning point because it shows the disciples have understood Jesus' identity. However, right after this Peter shows that he does not understand what that identity entails (v. 32). Rhoads, Dewey and Michie speak of a shift from a lack of understanding to a misunderstanding.²²⁴ Yet in the Gospel not hearing and wrong hearing – or even right hearing without proper response – are put in the same category in the parable of the sower: they are forms of bad hearing. Therefore, the distinction between not understanding and misunderstanding is not a vital one in the narrative: they are both bad. Peter's initial understanding of Jesus' identity mainly underscores his disappointing understanding of Jesus' mission that follows.

After this 'turning point', that is not really a turning point where this trait is concerned, the same characterization continues. First of all, the disciples show a reaction of bad understanding whenever Jesus predicts his future suffering, just as on the occasion of Peter's first rebuke (8:32, cf. 9:32; 10:32). Or they show a wrong

²²⁴ Ibid.

focus, pointing to their misunderstanding (9:34; 10:35, 37, 41). The Three do not understand the epiphany before them (9:5-6). The Twelve also do not grasp the broadness of Jesus' mission as they wish to exclude people (9:38; 10:13), even after being told not to do so (9:36-37).

They still need further explanation on Jesus' teaching (10:10) and they do not understand his words or the priorities of his mission (10:24). Jesus has given the disciples instructions about being attentive to the small ones, but still they are astonished that the rich do not enter the kingdom easily. Next, when leaving the temple and in light of Jesus' teaching about and action in that temple (11:12-25), a disciple mentions the beauty of the buildings (13:1), which shows his ignorance.

Furthermore, Judas does not understand who Jesus is (14:10); otherwise he would not have betrayed him. In Gethsemane the Three fail to see the seriousness of the situation. Jesus has expressed his true needs (14:34), but the disciples do not understand how great his need is. Their fleeing (14:50-52) and denial (14:66-72) affirm this: they have still not understood. This stays the same for the rest of the narrative. Their absence at the burial makes it even more painful: Jesus had said he would be raised after three days. If they had understood that, they would have been present.

In all of this, other characters often are analogous or contrasting to the disciples. The people in his hometown do not understand who he is (6:2-3). The rich young man has wrong expectations about the kingdom and thus fails (10:22). In Jerusalem Jesus is praised as a king (11:8-10), but in light of Jesus' predictions *and* his focus on service (10:45), this is a misunderstanding of Jesus' mission. The disciples might be included in that group of misunderstanding people; they definitely are called to mind as they had falsely interpreted Jesus' entry into Jerusalem earlier (10:37). During the passion, Jesus is ridiculed by several groups, who quite ironically ridicule him for exactly what he is (e.g. 15:9, 18, 32). Their misunderstanding is tragically complete. The women followers join this group as they want to anoint Jesus (16:1) and go to the tomb (v. 2). They clearly did not understand that Jesus would be raised on the third day. All of these people show strong analogies with the

behaviour of the disciples and the narrator uses them to underscore misunderstanding.

Others show how the disciples should have reacted, displaying the understanding the disciples lack. The woman with the blood flow and Jairus properly act on their “seeing” and “hearing” of Jesus (5:22, 27; cf. 4:12). The Syrophenician woman is so strongly convinced about Jesus’ identity and his power that she boldly insists that he heal her daughter (7:28). Bartimaeus (10:46-52) understands who Jesus is (10:52). Next, even an opponent grasps Jesus’ teaching better than the disciples do when he understands the importance of love and unity (12:32-34). The disciples had not understood this (e.g. 10:37, 41). In the centre of Judas’ betrayal Jesus casts a rich woman in an extremely positive light: she has understood what will happen to him (14:6-9). In the midst of the misunderstanding of most people, the centurion (probably) sees it very clearly: Jesus is the Son of God. All of these other characters are an example of how hearing and seeing should result in a proper understanding. Their positive example makes the negative one of the disciples more tragic. Some of the healings also serve as a non-spoken parable in the narrative. The deaf man recovers his hearing (7:31-37) and this holds the promise that the disciples one day might understand (or “hear” as they should, cf. 4:12): “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak” (7:37). Later, a blind man is healed so he can “see” again (8:22-25, cf. 4:12). Again it both contrasts with the disciples’ lack of understanding, and holds a promise that Jesus is able to alter this.

After the trait of understanding is introduced in Mark 4, it is an entirely negative trait and this does not change throughout the whole narrative. This is stressed multiple times through analogies and contrasts with the other characters in the story. Like with the previous traits, Mark 13 holds a promising future (e.g. vv. 5, 7, 9), but this goes beyond the scope of the characterization in this story.

Trusting

Closely related to the trait of understanding, is the trait of having faith or trusting. In Mark this quality is clearly intended as an antonym of fear, as will be shown. The importance of this trait is already introduced early in the Gospel when Jesus asks for

faith in the Gospel (1:15). Miracles are soon after tied to having faith (2:5). In Mark having faith is not the opposite of having no faith. Jesus parallels having a lack of faith with being afraid (4:40). In that sense πίστις in Mark is probably used differently from in Pauline literature; in Mark it is the antonym of fear.²²⁵ While in Pauline literature πίστις is more a term used for depending on God for his saving grace, this not the case in Mark.²²⁶ In Mark it is about facing fears through putting trust in God. The episode in the storm is the first episode where the disciples show a lack of faith and that they are afraid. Next, they do not trust that Jesus is able to feed a large number of people (6:31-44; 8:1-9). Especially the second feeding stresses this problem as they have every reason to expect Jesus to perform a miracle again; the disciples' growing lack of trust can be a reason why the second feeding is less impressive in numbers than the first (see above). They do not have trust enough to do miracles (6:48) and worry about their lives (8:16, 21). In a second event on the water, the disciples again show fear (6:50; cf. 4:40-41). Here, they would rather believe that Jesus is a ghost than believe it is an epiphany.

Later, the disciples fail to cure a possessed boy because of their lack of faith, which they should have expressed through prayer (9:18, 29); the prayer-faith connection is a prolepsis to 11:22b-25 where Jesus makes it explicit. On top of that, the disciples continue to be afraid; the Three are afraid of the epiphany (9:6), and the disciples are afraid because of what Jesus' predicts (9:32; 10:32). In the end, the disciples flee (14:50-52) and Peter is afraid to talk about his allegiance to Jesus (vv. 66-72).

Besides these more explicit characterizations of the disciples, the narrator again uses other characters to stress the disciples' trust, or rather their struggle with trust. The inhabitants of the country of the Gerasenes are afraid and ask Jesus to leave (5:15-17). Jesus is appalled by the lack of faith in his hometown (6:6a) and is unable to perform miracles because of it. The Jewish authorities seek a trust that is the result

²²⁵ Cf. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:375–376.

²²⁶ Cf. Leon L. Morris, "Faith," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 285.

of a miracle and not the other way around – they expect a wrong causal connection (8:11-12). They also show fear on several occasions (11:18, 32; 12:12). Later, they again ask Jesus for a sign to precede their faith (15:32, cf. 8:11). In the end, the women at the tomb respond not with a reaction of faith, but with one of fear (16:8).

However, besides these negative examples, there are also positive examples who underscore the disciples' lack of faith by contrast. The woman with a flow of blood and Jairus show their faith in the face of fear (5:22-23, 27-28, 33), and Jesus affirms that one ought to have faith instead of fear (v. 36). Furthermore, the people from Gennesaret show their faith in Jesus by bringing the sick to him (6:55). The Syrophenician woman, the deaf man and the blind man put their faith in Jesus (7:24-31, 32-37; 8:22-26). The father of the possessed boy is initially similar to the disciples as he shows a lack of faith (9:22), but he quickly overcomes his failure and puts his trust in Jesus (9:24), thus also showing an example to the disciples. Bartimaeus displays great faith, causing Jesus to heal him (10:52). The poor widow (12:41-44) and the rich woman (14:3-9) show a lot of trust by giving everything to God and Jesus.

Trusting is another character trait that is consistently negatively present with the disciples: they are fearful and lack trust. Here, not even Mark 13 holds a promise for the future.

Depending

The insider-trait makes clear how important depending on God and Jesus is, but at the same time the narrator shows the disciples failing at this. The trait is introduced when the disciples express their dependence on Jesus (4:10) and Jesus tells a parable about dependence (vv. 27-29) – the sower is completely dependent on God for the growth of the seed. The trait implies that the character who has it turns to God and/or Jesus in times of need; the character realizes that he cannot face the need without God's help.

The disciples first express their need for understanding and turn to Jesus for this (4:10; 7:17; 9:11, 28; 10:10; 13:3). Even in the storm when the disciples show a lack of faith, they still look to Jesus for help (4:38). A first instance where the

disciples seem to lack this dependence is when they apparently have not turned to God in prayer when dealing with the possessed boy (9:29), after this error they however do turn to Jesus. But as their fear comes to the fore more, they start losing this positive trait (9:32). However, this trait changes again as the disciples soon ask for another explanation (10:10).

Until this point, the dependence trait is quite ambiguous: it is not clear what to expect of the disciples. The consequence is that it is also not clear how the positive (woman with blood flow and Jairus, 5:22-23, 28; Syrophenician woman, 7:25-26; father, 9:24; child, 10:15; Bartimaeus, v. 50) and the negative (young man, 10:22) examples of dependence are to be interpreted. All of these people have a need and most of them turn to Jesus for help with that need.

This is a trait that disappears in the disciples and after that is mostly seen in Jesus who expresses his full dependence on God both in Gethsemane (14:35-36) and on the cross (15:34). Although he cries out in agony at his death, he is still in dialogue with God and thus expressing the fact that he looks to him for a resolution.²²⁷ However, as the depiction of this trait in the disciples has been ambiguous before, Jesus' good example does not change this. 'Depending' can be considered to be a trait of the disciples, because it does qualify them in the middle of the Gospel and it is repeated several times. However, it disappears as a trait and in combination with the fact that the disciples lose their faith, the narrator is probably implying that they lose their dependence as well. However, this is nowhere explicitly developed.

As with most other traits, Mark 13 gives the image of a promising future where the disciples completely rely on the Spirit (v. 11) and trust that God will help and save them (vv. 14-20). However, this is again part of a discourse that does not necessarily qualify the disciples except in the future. It at best makes their overall image somewhat more positive.

²²⁷ Wolfgang Fritzen, *Von Gott verlassen? Das Markusevangelium als Kommunikationsangebot für bedrängte Christen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2008), 341, 348.

Betraying

Closely tied to the lack of dependence, already in 3:19 Judas is identified as a betrayer; he not only distances himself from his allegiance to Jesus – he sells it out. He could be seen separately from the disciples, but then it would be peculiar that all three times that his name is mentioned, it is explicitly within the context of the Twelve (3:16; 14:10, 43). Furthermore, Jesus makes clear that “brother will deliver brother” (13:12, where the same verb for betraying – παραδίδομι – as in 3:19 is used). This chapter makes clear that the disciples will themselves become the object of betrayal, but in the rest of the Gospel one of the Twelve is betraying Jesus (besides earlier references also 14:11, 18, 21, 41-41, 44). The trait of betrayal is negative throughout the whole Gospel, but it is used for the characterization of only one of them: Judas. This is made clear as Jesus singles him out with a woe (vv. 20-21). Though at first the denial of the others might look similar to Judas’ betrayal, Jesus does not condemn the denial like he does the betrayal; it is just something that needs to happen and will not last (vv. 27-28). Thus, denial is a loss of dependence on God, but it is not betrayal. Because of this distinction the trait has been formulated negatively. A positive way to formulate this trait would be “loyal”, but this term is not a direct antonym of betraying. As betraying does not have an unambiguous antonym which excludes denial as the opposite, the negative ‘betraying’ was chosen. This trait is uniquely reserved for Judas and cannot be seen as a trait of the disciples. It was necessary to look at its development to see that it is a trait of one of the disciples, but that in this trait he is clearly distinguished from the rest.

Chapter 3. Character Analysis and Comparison

In the next two steps the different traits are combined into character compositions. These episodic compositions are then compared throughout the whole Gospel.

Intra-Episodic Character Analysis

The first step is to look at the separate episodes and analyse how the individual traits are combined into trait compositions, including their evaluation depending on the explicitness of the trait (telling or showing), the point of view and the frequency. At the same time, though the focus here lies on the intra-episodic analysis, the preceding episodes cannot be denied in evaluating the character. As argued above, character evaluation is normally only changed in rather explicit ways (e.g. through telling, or a clear change in point of view). In the subsequent analysis, emphasis will be put on those episodes where the character evaluation changes.

The following codes will be used in Table 2 (see Appendix) for the character compositions per episode: ‘++’ is an entirely positive image, ‘+’ is a positive image with some nuance in it, ‘=’ is a neutral or balanced image, - a largely negative image and ‘--’ an entirely negative image. The subsections again follow Focant’s division, also found in chapter 2.

Mark 1:16-3:6

In Mark 1:16-20 the picture is generally positive, the traits are all positive and the disciples follow the instructions of Jesus who has been established as a good character. The disciples are in concord with Jesus’ point of view. The fact that the narrator adds the explicit εὐθὺς (v. 18, 20) is a form of affirming the disciples through telling. This trend is continued in vv. 21-28. In vv. 29-31 it seems that Simon has difficulty leaving his family ties since his mother-in-law is mentioned. However, there is no explicit comment on this by either the narrator or Jesus, so this

diversion is not strong enough to alter the character composition. This depiction that puts a little bit of negativity in the whole evaluation is continued in the next episodes.

The image becomes completely positive again with the calling of Levi (vv. 13-17). This calling is very similar to the calling of the Four and this re-establishes the initial depiction of the disciples as fully positive. This is continued in the next episodes.

Mark 3:7-6:6a

Finally, the disciples are given their first explicit task (vv. 7-12). The people are about to crush Jesus and he asks them to serve him (v. 9). Not only are they in the presence of Jesus, they are also serving him, something that Jesus had foreseen earlier (1:17). Though it is not explicitly stated by the narrator that they follow his instructions, it might be assumed. Their image stays positive. The institution of the Twelve is the first real challenge for the characterization (3:13-19). On the one hand the overall image of the Twelve is positive; they are in Jesus' presence, they are insiders and they do as he commands. However, in the same group of followers, Judas is included, and it is mentioned that he is a betrayer. Even though this is a future event, this information lowers the evaluation of the disciples. In the next passage, however, the image is again more positive (vv. 20-35). Here, like before, the Jewish authorities and now Jesus' natural family as well contrast with Jesus' point of view when they oppose him. Those who are with Jesus, including the Twelve, are now appointed as Jesus' new family, since they follow Jesus and thus do the will of God (v. 35). Points of view are the decisive factor here.

After this, the narrator lets Jesus tell several parables (4:1-34). This is a vital, instructive moment in the narrative for understanding the importance of several traits ('being an insider', 'understanding', and 'depending'). Though the disciples do not understand and Jesus points to the necessity of understanding (v. 13), they are given an explanation at the same time and they are affirmed as Jesus' insiders. The narrator explicitly adds that Jesus explains everything to them (v. 34). Not understanding does change the image of the disciples a bit, but not so much that it becomes negative. Rather, their not understanding shows their fallibility, their imperfection.

The image is however corrupted still further when Jesus explicitly rebukes the disciples for not having faith in the storm (vv. 35-41). Jesus has just pointed to the importance of having an understanding faith and immediately the disciples fail again, despite being in Jesus' inside circle. While in the previous episode Jesus helps them to deal with their lack of understanding, he does not help them with their lack of trust. Also the disciples are not completely in harmony with Jesus as they question his care (v. 38). Even so, the disciples are still following Jesus, and this has been the most consistent trait so far. Jesus clearly calls them to be with him again (v. 35). Because of this the image is now more balanced, but it is not negative. The positive is too strong for that. The initial image is challenged, though. The same goes for the next episodes.

This balanced view is contrasted by the negative view on Jesus' family and hometown (6:1-6a). That Jesus is unable to perform miracles in his hometown because of the unbelief of its residents, contrasts with his ability to perform miracles in the disciples' presence and casts the disciples in a favourable light. They may have problems with trust and understanding, but these are not as bad as in Jesus' hometown. This contrast actually makes the disciples' image mostly positive again. They might not understand, but they do not restrict Jesus in their failure.

Mark 6:6b-8:26

Then the Twelve are sent out to do the things Jesus does as well: proclaiming and casting out demons (vv. 6b-30). This shows a very positive image, including the fact that they are actually able to do these things. Not only are the disciples in Jesus' presence as insiders, they also serve him by following his instructions. Afterwards the first of the two feedings occurs (vv. 31-44). The disciples are in the presence of Jesus, but they question Jesus' statements (v. 37). However, Jesus does not rebuke them for this lack of faith, but on the contrary he lets them play a part of the events that follow. The disciples are a bit reluctant in their role at first, but still serve Jesus.

After this, the characterization changes (6:45-53). The disciples have participated in a miracle and have done miracles themselves, but are not able to overcome new struggles on the sea. What is more, when Jesus wants to give them an

epiphany, they are so reluctant that they prefer to believe an impossibility (ghosts do not walk on water) rather than accept Jesus' revelation. Like in the previous episode on the sea (4:35-41), they are afraid. However, while in the previous sea story the narrator merely describes the disciples' emotions (v. 41), he now explains them and in doing so evaluates them (6:52); the disciples should have understood, but they were not able to since their hearts were hardened. This is the first time that the narrator makes an explicit evaluation of the disciples and it is not a positive one. At the same time, the picture is not entirely negative since the disciples are still with Jesus.

The image becomes more positive again in the next episode (7:1-23) where the disciples are again very clearly on Jesus' side (and thus share his point of view as well). However, the disciples do not understand the content of what Jesus is saying and Jesus refers back to his emphasis on understanding. At the same time the fact that they do not understand is shown by their asking for explanation, which also shows their dependence on Jesus. This is a positive trait. This slightly positive evaluation continues in the next episodes.

However, though in the discussion with the Pharisees the reader might still have the impression that the disciples are to be contrasted with them, their failure in the boat (vv. 14-21) drastically changes that image. It shows that the disciples do not understand at all and show a strong lack of faith and understanding. Jesus here uses the same language as the narrator did when he first explicitly evaluated the disciples: "Are your hearts hardened?" (v. 17; 6:52). Here, the culmination of Jesus' rebukes is overwhelming: the disciples are failing strongly. Yet the image of the disciples is not completely negative since they are still in Jesus' presence. The blind man analogy (8:22-26) offers a balanced depiction again; the disciples are in Jesus' presence, but the blindness recalls their lack of understanding and trust.

Mark 8:27-10:52

Although the next episode (8:27-9:1) starts well – the disciples recognize Jesus as the Christ – Peter fails to correctly interpret that identity. And here Peter symbolises all of the disciples. Jesus then uses very strong words to rebuke Peter. He addresses him

as Satan and explicitly adds that he is not taking the point of view of God, putting Peter on the side of his adversaries. This brings the image of the disciples to a new low. However, Jesus does not tell Peter to go away, but to retake his position in following Jesus, so again the picture is not entirely negative. The evaluation is more balanced again in the next passage (9:2-13). Here the Three are given a special revelation, which is positive, but their response to it is one of fear and lack of understanding (v. 6). God himself now intervenes and again points the disciples to the importance of listening to Jesus (v. 7; cf. 4:12). The negativity that has entered the depiction of the disciples remains. However, due to the initiative of both God and Jesus the depiction becomes more balanced. Jesus keeps giving attention to the disciples and now even God points them in the right direction. Despite their fear and lack of understanding, God and Jesus see enough to work with in these people. This is the same in the next episodes.

The disciples remain insiders as Jesus reveals to them again what awaits in Jerusalem (vv. 30-32). Here again, as with the first prediction, the image becomes negative. The disciples' reaction to Jesus' prediction is not one of inquiry or support, but one of fear and lack of understanding (v. 32). The narrator here explicitly tells the readers what is going on in the disciples' heads. Thus the image becomes somewhat negative again. This changes again in the next episodes where there is no explicit negative evaluation of the disciples. The evaluation is not positive either, but rather balanced and this is again mostly due to the initiative of Jesus (cf. vv. 2-13) who continues to teach the disciples.

The third passion prediction follows (vv. 32-34). Here, it is only mentioned that the disciples are afraid, which in this case precedes the prediction (contrary to 9:30-32). The whole is however very similar to the previous predictions; prediction and disbelief or fear go hand in hand. In all three cases either the narrator or Jesus explicitly judges the disciples and this is a strong indicator for a rather negative image. Again this is countered through the initiative of Jesus teaching the disciples in the next episode (10:35-45; cf. 9:2-13, 33-50). James and John seek to evade the suffering involved in following Jesus. Though at first sight they seem to fail again, Jesus takes the initiative and draws them closer into his group as Jesus points to the

fact that they will share in his fate. This balanced image is underscored by the example of Bartimaeus. Unlike the disciples, he does understand who Jesus is and trusts him, and makes sacrifices to show this. However, he like the disciples is also following Jesus. This is reminiscent of the way the disciples have gone with Jesus.

Mark 11:1-13:37

In the next part (11:1-11), references to the disciples are quite positive again. Jesus first instructs two disciples to prepare his entry into Jerusalem and later he retreats with the Twelve; they are following Jesus and his instructions. This rather positive image is continued in the next episodes. It is not completely positive as they still lack understanding and struggle with having faith.

Then follows Jesus' longest speech (13:5-37). It describes what will happen to the disciples in the future. That future holds a positive evaluation, but it is a distant future that stands in contrast with the narrative present of the disciples. This passage is thus difficult to categorize in the characterization of the disciples. On the one hand it offers positive prospects, on the other it contrasts with earlier passages and thus recalls the disciples lack of understanding, trust and dependence. Therefore, this speech is probably best categorized as an ambiguous evaluation of the disciples with positive prospects.

Mark 14:1-16:8

Right after this, Judas' betrayal is mentioned again (14:1-11). The disciples are not mentioned, but it is accentuated that Judas is one of the Twelve. The picture is very negative. Then, the image is quite positive as the disciples turn to Jesus for instruction, and follow him (vv. 12-16). This image is then countered by the fact that Jesus points to his betrayer again (vv. 17-21). The Twelve's concern shows more interest in their own protection than what will happen to Jesus. At the same time, Jesus lets them share as insiders in one of the most intimate happenings of the whole Gospel: the dinner on the eve of his death (vv. 22-25). The result is a balanced image in vv. 17-25.

This balanced image is altered again in the next episode (vv. 26-31). Instead of one person betraying Jesus, it is now all of the disciples who will be scattered. Though Jesus' judgment is not particularly harsh, this is the first time that their following Jesus is explicitly jeopardized. The impact of the future loss of this trait weighs heavily on the image of the disciples. This is stressed even more by their lack of trust in Jesus' words. The next episodes further develop this image of the disciples deserting Jesus. They lack the power to serve Jesus or understand him (vv. 32-42). Jesus' disappointment is made clear through his questions. The narrator indicates that the Three themselves are speechless. Though they are given a chance to come out of the negativity, they fail at this and both Jesus and the narrator judge them, but it is not a strong or harsh judgment.

Then, Judas comes to betray Jesus (vv. 43-52). The image is now entirely negative. The disciples are not even called disciples anymore. The only thing they do is take to force and thus show their lack of understanding. After that they flee. Jesus' prediction has come true. The disciples have now really failed at following Jesus. This is accentuated by Peter's denial (vv. 53-72). Peter still follows Jesus, but it is from a distance, which already shows his failure. This was one of the last traits that was still present in the disciples, but even that is gone now. Then, Peter denies knowing Jesus and while doing this, he moves from the inside (ἔσω, v. 54) to the outside (ἔξω, v. 68). He is not an insider anymore. This was the last trait that had not been explicitly negative and here it changes as well. The disciples' image is now completely negative; on all of the traits they have failed, including those that were mostly good before.

Then however, some of the other followers – some women – go to the grave (16:1-8). The fact that they go to the grave in spite of Jesus' predictions reminds the reader of the disciples' lack of understanding. Jesus is not found in the grave. The fulfilment of Jesus' predictions about himself (8:31; 9:31; 10:34) also helps to bring to mind the other predictions of Jesus: he would go before the disciples to Galilee (14:28) and the evaluation of the disciples would be positive in the future (13:5-37). However, this has not been established in the narrative itself, including the near

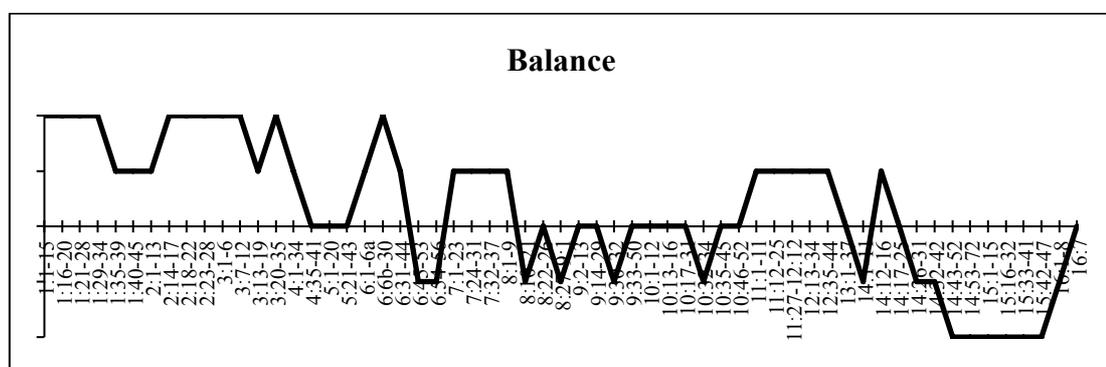
future prospect of the disciples following (16:7). At best this prospect helps to balance the earlier, very negative depiction.

Inter-Episodic Character Comparison

Based on the character analysis of the individual episodes, it is now possible to look at the disciples' character throughout the whole Gospel. For this the evaluation of the disciples in each episode is compared with the other episodes.

Observations

The graph below presents the character evaluations found in Table 2 (see Appendix) to help analyse the inter-episodic evaluation. For this purpose, if an episode had different subcategories of the disciples (e.g. “disciples” and “Twelve”), these were combined into one total evaluation. In cases where the evaluations were not the same, the focal points of the episodes have been chosen (e.g. in 5:21-43 the disciples play a more active role than the Three, thus contributing more to the overall depiction). The result can be summarized as follows:



Graphic 1. Character evaluation development

Several observations can be made on this graph. First, the evaluations start very positively, and gradually lose some of their positivity until the end of chapter 10. This chapter is traditionally seen as the final one of the ‘discipleship discourse’

or the ‘travel discourse.’¹ The first time the image is not positive, but balanced, is during the storm on the sea (4:35-41). This immediately follows a passage that is vital to the installation of several traits (vv. 1-34), as seen above. The discourse can be seen as the central discourse of 1:16-8:26.² The first time the image is negative is again in a passage on the sea (6:45-53), right after the first feeding. The second time it is negative is also shortly after a feeding (8:10-21). In both passages, the disciples are explicitly referred to as having a hardened heart. Both passages also take place in a boat. In the next part (8:22-10:52) the overall image does not become positive, but rather balanced. On a few occasions, the image is negative (8:27-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). In each case the negative image is closely related to Jesus’ passion predictions.

Second, in chapters 11-12 there is a positive depiction again. Although the disciples play a less central role in the Gospel as they are mentioned a lot less, their image nonetheless becomes positive again. Their lack of understanding continues, but they are still close to Jesus as insiders and they listen to his instructions. Chapter 13 is somewhat difficult to classify. The first verses are in line with the depiction in chapters 11-12, but the rest of the chapter refers to the future. It shows positive potential, but also calls to mind what has gone wrong before. Therefore it is quite balanced.

Third, after this the depiction becomes more negative until the most explicit negative depiction from 14:43-52 onwards. This is the passage where the disciples are not called disciples anymore, but “those that stood by him.” Only in chapter 16 does the image become slightly more positive again.

Fourth, though this thesis considers the disciples as the cluster of those named “disciples” and the smaller groups in it (Twelve, Three, individuals, etc.), when those different groups are studied separately in the table and the graph there is little difference between the disciples, the Twelve, the smaller groups and the individuals. Here, Judas is the only exception as he is consistently depicted negatively. Thus, the

¹ E.g. Gnilka, *Markus*, 32; Eckey, *Markusevangelium*, 15; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 19; Focant, *Marc*, 40–41; Boring, *Mark*, 5.

² Iersel, *Mark*, 110–113; Boring, *Mark*, 5.

analysis supports considering the disciples and their subgroups as one character in the Gospel of Mark.³

Interpretations

Based on these observations, several interpretations can be made. First of all, it is possible to structure the characterization of the disciples in several episode clusters. In 1:16-3:37 the depiction of the disciples is positive. Two new traits ('understanding' and 'depending on God') are formally introduced in 4:1-34. This passage serves as a transitional episode. After this there is a first low when the disciples are on a boat. Here, the last trait is introduced: 'trusting.' A second low follows when they are on the boat on another occasion (6:45-53). A third low follows when they are again on a boat (8:10-21). These characterizations on a boat delimitate the second big passage (4:35-8:21). Next, there is again a transition story (8:22-26). Here, a blind minor character serves as both a warning and an encouragement for the disciples, and this indirectly balances their characterization. Then, Jesus starts teaching on discipleship. Throughout this discourse, where the characterization is mostly balanced, there are three exceptions to this, all directly related to Jesus' passion prediction (8:27-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Characterization linked to passion prediction delimitates this third passage (8:27-10:45). Then, another blind model serves as a transition with both warning and encouragement (10:46-52). After this the characterization becomes mostly positive again. Just as the parable discourse (4:1-34) served a transition role, Mark 13 makes the transition between a mostly positive (11:1-12:44) and a negative depiction (14:1-15:47). Finally, in 16:1-8 the disciples are not present, as was the case in the prologue (1:1-15). Just as the prologue is a continuation of what comes before the Gospel (to which the prophecies refer), the epilogue is also a continuation as it looks forward and depicts the disciples more positively again. The characterization can be summarized as follows:

³ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 51; Malbon, "Narrative Criticism," 30; Burnett, "Characterization," 6.

<i>a: 1:1-15</i>	<i>Prophecies: transition from previous to present disciples</i>
<i>A: 1:16-3:37</i>	Good disciples (entirely positive)
<i>b: 4:1-34</i>	<i>Discourse: transition from good to fallible disciples</i>
<i>B: 4:35-8:21</i>	Fallible disciples (mostly positive)
<i>c: 8:22-26</i>	<i>Blind man: transition from fallible to questionable disciples</i>
<i>C: 8:27-10:45</i>	Questionable disciples (mostly balanced)
<i>c': 10:46-52</i>	<i>Blind man: transition from questionable to fallible disciples</i>
<i>A': 11:1-12:44</i>	Fallible disciples (mostly positive)
<i>b': 13:1-37</i>	<i>Discourse: transition from fallible to failing disciples</i>
<i>B': 14:1-15:47</i>	Failing disciples (negative)
<i>a': 16:1-8</i>	<i>Prophecy: transition from present to future disciples</i>

Letters a-b-c refer to transitions between clusters of episodes (referred to by A-B-C) depicting the disciples in a similar way. The small letters form a chiasmic structure, and the capitalized letters form two downward lines (A-B-C and A'-B'). Though this structure is oriented to the depiction of the disciples and the findings are based on a newly developed methodology, it shows remarkable similarities with how both Iersel and Eugene Boring structure Mark.⁴

Second, the characterization is quite coherent. There are almost no surprising turns in the disciples' characterization. The only exceptions to this are the failure of the disciples to have faith in the storm (4:35-41), to recognize Jesus on the sea (6:45-53), their inability to grasp Jesus' power on the sea (8:10-21) and the link between the Twelve and Judas (14:1-11). The first three exceptions help to structure the second part 4:35-8:21; they are three instances that are more negative than the surrounding passages. In this, those instances are very similar to the three negative episodes in 8:27-10:45 that also help structure the passage. Only in the latter case the difference between the lows and the surrounding passages is less significant. If Judas' influence is left out and considered to be exceptional, which we have argued above, then the characterization in 14:1-15:47 is fluent too. It is thus possible to see a line in the whole Gospel as far as the disciples' characterization is concerned. This

⁴ Bas M. F. van Iersel, "Failed Followers in Mark: Mark 13:12 as a Key for the Identification of the Intended Readers," *CBQ* 58, no. 2 (1996): 77-86; Boring, *Mark*, 4-6.

contradicts Shiner's suggestion that Mark did not intend a coherent characterization of the disciples.⁵

Third, the observations support the thesis that the depiction of the disciples is ambiguous. The evaluation of the disciples is not always the same. Though there is consistency in characterization (how the disciples are depicted), there is not always consistency in character (how the disciples are evaluated, or what they are). At some points there is a positive, at other points a negative, and yet other points a balanced depiction. The disciples thus are round characters.⁶

Thus, these observations also contradict the entirely negative views of Weeden, Kelber and Fowler, but also the entirely positive view of Meye. This does not mean, however, that the theories of the other scholars discussed are supported. Most of the consulted authors see a negative spiral. The overall image that these scholars give is not in accordance with the rather positive image of the disciples in 11:1-12:44. At the same time, the traits analysis has proven to be valuable in composing more complete images of the disciples. When single traits are identified, it becomes clear that even where most authors see a negative depiction of the disciples (e.g. in 8:27-10:52) there are still many positive traits present. Henderson is one of the few that made this explicitly clear, but she only focuses on the first six chapters of Mark. She also suggests that the last part is more negative than what comes before.

In sum, the depiction is ambiguous in that it shows two downward spirals: 1:16-8:21 (A-B) and 11:1-15:47 (A'-B'). In between a balanced image of the disciples is given (8:27-10:45, C). This balanced image could also be considered as the bottom of the first downward spiral as it is more negative than the passage before. The last downward spiral begins and ends more negatively than the first downward spiral. At the very end however, there is again a transition. The downward spiral is not the end. Mark 1:1-15 (a) makes clear that the negative spiral of Israel was about to change. The parables and healings in 8:22-26 (c) and 10:46-52 (c') make clear that there is the possibility of breaking out of negative spiral. The

⁵ Shiner, *Follow Me*, 30.

⁶ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 55.

discourses in the middle of both spirals (4:1-34; 13:1-37; b and b') show that people who depend on God have a promising future. Though these transitions might in the first place serve to provoke reaction from the reader, who has to respond to these transitions, they also contribute to the characterization of the disciples. When change is possible for anyone, it is also possible for the disciples. The last episode holds a possible change for the disciples (16:7, c') and thus influences the final image of the disciples in the Gospel; their character has prospects and thus is not entirely negative anymore.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis it is now possible to answer the research questions of this thesis. Is there development? If so, is it elaboration or change? These two questions will now be addressed. After that some suggestions for further research will be made.

Development?

As stated in the methodological section above, the character does not develop only if there is no introduction of new traits and consequently the character evaluation stays the same throughout the Gospel. This is not the case for the disciples in Mark. In 1:16-20 three traits – ‘following’, ‘serving’ and ‘self-denying’ – are introduced. In 3:7-12, 3:13-19, 4:1-34 and 4:35-41 five other traits are introduced. There is thus introduction of new traits.

Not only are new traits introduced, the traits themselves do not stay the same throughout the Gospel. The first clear shift in traits is in 8:27-9:1 when it becomes clear that the disciples struggle with self-denying. Before that, changes in traits are implicit. Later, ‘serving’ and ‘depending’ become negative after having been positive (9:14-29, 30-32). ‘Serving’ however becomes positive again in 11:1-11. Next, all of the then positive traits become negative: ‘serving’ in 14:32-42; ‘following Jesus’ in vv. 43-52 (this had been introduced in vv. 26-31 but that was a future reference); and finally ‘being an insider’ in vv. 53-72. Basically, in vv. 17-72 the disciples lose all of their positive traits one by one, even those that had not been negative before. Finally, ‘following’, which is the first trait introduced in the Gospel is opened up again in the final lines of the Gospel (16:7).

Lastly, the disciples’ character evaluation does not stay the same throughout the Gospel. In the beginning the entire depiction is positive, later it is balanced, then it becomes positive again, then it is negative and finally it becomes balanced again. Such evaluative differences cannot concur with a status quo in the disciples’ character.

All of these arguments clearly add up to the conclusion that there is a development in the disciples’ character throughout the Gospel of Mark. Now this

question has been answered positively, the question of elaboration or change becomes worth asking, which would not have been the case if there were no development.

Elaboration or Change?

The question whether the observed development is elaboration or change is more difficult to answer. The two concepts will be considered separately before integrating them. First, elaboration was defined as the process through which the reader comes to know more about the character. The character is broadened. In the methodology it was suggested that the way an author does this, is by introducing new traits that do not contradict the existing traits. At least at some points, this is the case in Mark's Gospel. As discussed above, three of the seven traits that apply to all the disciples – i.e. 'being an insider', 'understanding', 'trusting' and 'depending' – are only introduced later in the Gospel. The introduction of other traits results in a broader perspective on the disciples, or elaboration. 'Understanding' and 'trusting' are negative traits from the moment they are introduced. However, they do not contradict the existing, positive traits. The strongest argument for this is the fact that the earlier, positive traits are still present in those passages. For example, in 4:35-41 the disciples do not understand or have faith, but at the same time they do have an insider position. If the negative traits contradicted the existing positive ones, logic dictates that they cannot occur together. Since they do, they cannot contradict each other. A further argument is that the introduction of the new traits does not change the coherence in character evaluation. Only if the character evaluation stays the same, can one speak of elaboration. In 4:1-34, the evaluation is still positive. This is a less strong argument. The traits 'understanding' and 'depending' are introduced in 4:1-34, but when they move to prominence in 4:35-41 the evaluation becomes balanced instead of positive. However, there are other episodes where those traits are present, but the evaluation is positive (e.g. 8:1-9). These arguments result in the conclusion that there is elaboration; the disciples' character is broadened throughout the Gospel.

Second, change was defined as a process within the character; the character does not stay the same throughout the Gospel. The observations above suggest that there is change. This can be seen in several ways. The most explicit is that all of the traits are altered at least once throughout the Gospel from positive to negative or the other way round. Most trait evaluations – ‘following’, ‘serving’, ‘self-denying’, ‘being and insider’ and ‘depending’ – are altered at least once. This is a strong argument for a change in the disciples; there is a contradictory difference in traits. At the same time, there is a difference in character evaluation as well. Throughout the Gospel at least four (1-10; 11-13; 14-15; 16), and maybe as many as ten (1:16-3:37; 4:1-34; 4:35-8:21; 8:22-26; 8:27-10:45; 10:46-52; 11:1-12:44; 13:1-37; 14:1-15:47; 16:1-8) different character evaluation clusters can be found. The difference in evaluation is not due to the introduction of new traits, but due to a different balance in traits and the individual traits changing in themselves. For example, in 4:35-41 the lack of trust is much more prominent through the explicit saying of Jesus and the comment of the narrator (both showing and telling) than it is in 6:31-44 where the disciples question Jesus’ words (just showing). The result of this is a more negative overall evaluation in 4:35-41 than in 6:31-44. An example of the individual traits changing can be found in 1:16-20 and 14:43-52. In both cases the trait of ‘following’ is dominant, and the different evaluation of the trait results in a contradictory character evaluation; in the first case the character evaluation is positive, in the latter the evaluation is negative. The fact that there is both a contradictory difference in traits and a contradictory character evaluation clearly suggests that there is a change in development; the disciples do not stay the same throughout the Gospel.

Development through elaboration *and* change

The research in this thesis results in the conclusion that there is development in the disciples’ character in the Gospel of Mark and that the author uses both elaboration *and* change to establish this development. It is not a matter of elaboration *or* change as the methodology of this thesis initially seemed to suggest. The disciples are developed through the addition of new traits, and in doing this the author gives a

broader picture of the disciples. But the disciples are also developed through a change in their character; they do not stay the same.

The proposal of this thesis is that the overall image of the disciples, once most of their traits are introduced (from 4:1-34 onwards), is that of fallible followers, in accordance with Malbon, who coined the term.¹ The disciples are not depicted in an entirely negative way and the downward spiral that most scholars suggest is not completely consistent. The disciples are followers through most of the narrative and are invited to become followers again after the narrative present. During that time the narrator shows both their strengths and their weaknesses. The Gospel starts with their strengths – and that is why it is suitable to use the positive “followers” as the noun – and it then goes into a mostly negative development – the positive “followers” need the correcting adjective “fallible.”

It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to answer the question what this development at the story-level implies at the discourse-level – why does the narrator depict the disciples in this way? Maybe the author wanted to use the disciples as a real-life illustration. Maybe they are just a rhetorical construct. Does the author want to provoke either sympathy or antipathy in the reader?² Maybe the author wants the reader to identify with the disciples. If this was the goal, an ambiguous picture of the disciples was a valid rhetorical strategy because “[r]ound characters elicit identification in a way that flat characters do not.”³ A second and closely related question is what this implies for the readers of the Gospel. However, as said, these questions – the intention of the author and the response of the reader – go beyond the scope of this thesis. In this thesis it was shown how at the narrative level the disciples are depicted; they are both elaborated and changed.

¹ Malbon, “Fallible Followers,” *passim*.

² Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 57.

³ Mark Allan Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 57.

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Appendix

This table and especially the column with the character evaluation cannot be understood without the text of this thesis. In that column, a positive or negative trait is weighed on the basis of telling/showing, point of view, and frequency. It can occur in some cases, for instance, that one minus weighs more heavily than three pluses if those three indicators are taken into consideration. Also, similar passages can play a role in the evaluation of an episode.

Bracketed pluses or minuses include traits that have not been explicitly identified by the narrator or Jesus as important, and traits that are given through analogy or contrast with other characters in the story. A '+' means a positive evaluation of that trait, a '-' a negative evaluation and a '∅' an absence. If two evaluations are given (e.g. +/-), both are ambiguously present, but the first mentioned is more dominant. Round brackets show an implicit characterization, square brackets a potential characterization (characterization to a possibility in the future). For the overall character evaluation '++' means a fully positive evaluation, '+' mostly positive, '=' balanced, '-' mostly negative, and '--' fully negative.

Episode	Character	Following	Serving	Self-denying	Being an insider	Understanding	Trusting	Depending	Betraying	Evaluation
1:1-15	∅									∅
1:16-20	Simon, Andrew, James, John	+	+	+						++
1:21-28	∅ (They?)									++
1:29-34	Simon, Andrew, James, John	+	∅	-						+
1:35-39	Simon and those with him	-/+	∅	-						+
1:40-45	∅									+
2:1-13	∅									+
2:14-17	Disciples	+	∅	+						++
2:18-22	Disciples	+	∅	(+)						++

Episode	Character	Following	Serving	Self-denying	Being an insider	Understanding	Trusting	Depending	Betraying	Evaluation
2:23-28	Disciples	+	∅	(+)						++
3:1-6	∅									++
3:7-12	Disciples	+	+	∅	+					++
3:13-19	Twelve (incl. all names)	+	+	∅	+					+
	Simon, James, John	+	∅	∅	∅					+
	Judas (within context of Twelve)	+	∅	∅	∅				-	--
3:20-35	They (crowds including the Twelve)	+	∅	∅	∅				∅	++
4:1-34	Those around him and the Twelve / Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	-		+	∅	+
4:35-41	They (disciples)	+	+	∅	+	-	-	+	∅	=
5:1-20	They (disciples and Jesus)	(-)	∅	∅	∅	∅	(-)	∅	∅	=
5:21-43	Disciples	+	∅	∅	∅	-	(-)	∅	∅	=
	Peter, James and John	+	∅	∅	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	+
6:1-6a	Disciples	+	∅	∅	∅	(-)	(-)	∅	∅	+
6:6b-30	Twelve / Apostles	+	+	∅	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	++
6:31-44	Them (apostles)	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	+
	Disciples	+	+/-	∅	∅	-	-	∅	∅	+
6:45-53	Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	-	-	∅	∅	-
6:54-56	They (Jesus and disciples)	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	-
7:1-23	Disciples	+	∅	(+)	+	-	∅	+	∅	+
7:24-31	∅				(+)	(-)	(-)	(=)		+
7:32-37	∅				(+)	(-)	(-)	∅		+
8:1-9	Disciples	+	+/-	∅	∅	-	-	∅	∅	+
8:10-21	Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	-	∅	∅	∅	-
8:22-26	They (disciples)	+	∅	∅	∅	(-)	(-)	∅	∅	=
8:27-9:1	Peter / Disciples	+	∅	-	+	-	∅	∅	∅	-
9:2-13	Peter, James, John	+	∅	∅	+	-	-	+	∅	=
9:14-29	Disciples	+	-/+	∅	+	∅	-	+/-	∅	=
9:30-32	Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	-	-	-	∅	-

Episode	Character	Following	Serving	Self-denying	Being an insider	Understanding	Trusting	Depending	Betraying	Evaluation
9:33-50	They (disciples)	+	∅	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	=
	Twelve	+	∅	-	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	=
	John	+	∅	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	=
10:1-12	Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	-	∅	+	∅	=
10:13-16	Disciples	+	∅	(-)	(+)	-	∅	(=)	∅	=
10:17-31	Disciples	+	∅	(-)	∅	-	∅	(=)	∅	=
	Peter	+	∅	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	=
10:32-34	They (disciples)	+	∅	∅	∅	-	-	∅	∅	-
	Twelve	+	∅	∅	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	=
10:35-45	James, John	+	(-)	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	=
	Ten	+	(-)	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	=
10:46-52	Disciples	+	∅	(-)	∅	(-)	(-)	(=)	∅	=
11:1-11	(Two) disciples	+	+	∅	∅	(-)	∅	∅	∅	+
	Twelve	+	∅	∅	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	+
11:12-25	Disciples	+	∅	∅	+	(-)	-	∅	∅	+
	Peter	+	∅	∅	+	(-)	-	∅	∅	+
11:27-12:12	They (disciples)	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	(-)	∅	∅	+
12:13-34	∅						∅			+
12:35-44	Disciples	+	∅	(-)	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	+
13:1-37	One of the disciples	+	∅	∅	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	+
	Peter, James, John, Andrew	+	[+]	[+]	+	[+]	∅	+	[+]	=
14:1-11	Judas	-	∅	-	∅	-	∅	∅	-	--
	(Twelve)			(-)		(-)	(-)			-
14:12-16	(Two) disciples	+	+	∅	∅	∅	∅	+	∅	+
14:17-25	Twelve	+	∅	∅	+	∅	∅	∅	-	=
14:26-31	They (Twelve)	-/+	∅	-	+	∅	∅	-	∅	-
	Peter	-	∅	-	+	∅	∅	-	∅	-
14:32-42	Disciples	+	-/+	∅	+	∅	∅	(=)	∅	-
	Peter, James, John	+	-	∅	+	-	∅	(=)	∅	-
	Peter / Simon	+	-	∅	+	-	∅	(=)	∅	-
14:43-52	Judas (one of Twelve)	-	∅	-	∅	∅	∅	∅	-	--
	Those who stood by (disciples)	-	∅	-	∅	∅	-	∅	∅	--

Episode	Character	Following	Serving	Self-denying	Being an insider	Understanding	Trusting	Depending	Betraying	Evaluation
14:53-72	Peter	-	∅	-	-	∅	-	∅	∅	--
15:1-15	∅	-		(-)		(-)				--
15:16-32	∅	-		(-)		(-)	(-)			--
15:33-41	∅	-	(-)	(-)		(-)		(-)		--
15:42-47	∅	-								--
16:1-8	∅	-				(-)	(-)			-
	(Disciples and Peter)	[+]								=

Table 2. Traits and character analysis