

## STORY-SENSITIVE EXEGESIS AND OLD TESTAMENT ALLUSIONS IN MARK

TIMOTHY WIARDA\*

OT allusions play a major role in contemporary Gospel exegesis, presenting interpreters with the twin challenges of first identifying allusions, then determining their functions. Though methodological questions relating to these tasks have received a good deal of attention, one issue has not been sufficiently discussed. This is how scholarly attention to OT allusions relates to exegesis that simply attends to the way narrative details function within the natural flow of stories, taken at their surface level.

I will use the term “story-sensitive exegesis” to refer to this latter approach to Gospel texts. Such an approach treats Gospel narratives as realistically depicted time-of-Jesus scenes and expects them to serve their rhetorical purposes primarily in and through the stories they tell about human actions and motivations. It treats places and objects as concrete entities, and seeks to be sensitive to unfolding plots and nuances of characterization.<sup>1</sup> This is nothing new, of course. Something quite like it might even be described as the default approach of most Gospel readers. But interpreters frequently depart from this kind of story-focused exegesis, or add to it, when other strategies beckon.<sup>2</sup> How might an exegetical approach that focuses on OT allusions affect an interpreter’s appreciation of a Gospel episode’s surface-level story?

I have selected three Markan passages as sample texts for considering these questions. We will look first at Mark 1:11 and 15:34, then at 6:30–44.

\* Timothy Wiarda is professor of New Testament Studies at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 201 Seminary Drive, Mill Valley, CA 94941.

<sup>1</sup> Though narrative critics have introduced new tools and insights that enhance its practice, story-sensitive exegesis cannot be simply equated with narrative criticism. It is quite common for narrative critics to depart from a straightforward, surface-level reading of Gospel stories by concentrating on symbolism or literary patterns that stand somewhat apart from the actual flow of a story, or by focusing on whole-Gospel plotting and character portrayal while lightly passing over details and nuances within individual episodes. At the same time, more traditional scholars sometimes show themselves quite sensitive to realistic detail, story flow, and nuance of characterization.

Story-sensitive exegesis must also be distinguished from ahistorical reader-response approaches that bypass the communicative intentions of the evangelists. The story-sensitive approach I have in mind interprets Gospel narratives as realistically depicted scenes primarily because it assumes this accords with their genre—the way they were designed to work.

<sup>2</sup> See T. Wiarda, “Scenes and Details in the Gospels: Concrete Reading and Three Alternatives,” *NTS* 50 (2004) 233–48. This article also contains further discussion of a story-sensitive approach to exegesis, though there it is termed “concrete reading.”

## I. JESUS AND THE FATHER (MARK 1:11 AND 15:34)

1. *Allusion proposals.* In his portrayal of Jesus' baptism Mark describes how Jesus sees the Spirit descend upon him like a dove at the moment he comes up from the water and hears a voice from heaven that says, "You are my beloved Son, I am pleased with you" (1:11). Most commentators believe this declaration alludes to one or more OT passages and by means of these allusions serves its primary purpose: to identify or affirm Jesus' status and role. The most commonly discerned allusions are these:

1. The words  $\sigma\upsilon\ \xi\epsilon\iota\ \delta\ \upsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$  are often seen as a reference to Ps 2:7. Jesus is thereby shown to be the messianic king, many conclude, because Psalm 2 speaks of the reign of the Davidic king.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars import additional elements from the psalm into their interpretation of Mark's scene, such as the phrase "Today I have begotten you" (7c). Jesus' baptism can then be seen as the moment of his adoption or enthronement.<sup>4</sup>
2. The words  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \sigma\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{\omicron}\kappa\eta\sigma\alpha$  are often held to allude to Isa 42:1 and therefore to Jesus' role as the servant Isaiah describes.<sup>5</sup> Taking this line of interpretation one step further, some scholars discern in the words  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \sigma\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{\omicron}\kappa\eta\sigma\alpha$  something more than just a simple affirmation of approval; they see a specific reference to God's *election* of Jesus. This is because Isa 42:1 sets "chosen" alongside of "in whom my soul is pleased," and because elsewhere in the LXX  $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  sometimes includes the thought of election.<sup>6</sup>
3. The description of Jesus as  $\delta\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\eta\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  is sometimes read as an allusion to Gen 22:2, where Isaac is described as the son Abraham loves.<sup>7</sup> Since the Genesis passage portrays Isaac in the role of a sacrifice, the allusion might then also be taken as a pointer to the cross.
4. Mark sets the stage for the declaration from heaven by saying that Jesus saw the heavens  $\sigma\chi\iota\zeta\omicron\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  (1:10). This leads a number of commentators to bring Isa 64:1 and its literary context into the interpretive picture, since Isaiah offers a parallel picture of God rending

<sup>3</sup> E.g. R. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 51; L. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983) 19–20; J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 162, 166. M. Hooker notes that this link was perceived early in the history of interpretation: the western text of the parallel passage in Luke 3:22 adds Ps 2:7 to the words spoken from heaven (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* [London: A & C Black, 1991] 47). R. Guelich cites Justin Martyr as another early supporter of this reading (*Mark 1–8.26* [Dallas: Word, 1989] 33).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. B. van Iersel, who sees this scene as Jesus' installation (but not his adoption), since in Ps 2:7 the phrase "You are my son" forms part of an enthronement formula (*Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998] 101–3).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Guelich, *Mark* 35; Gundry, *Mark* 51; J. P. Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action: A Reader-Response Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001) 36; Hurtado, *Mark* 20; W. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 57; Marcus, *Mark* 163.

<sup>6</sup> See Guelich, *Mark* 34; Marcus, *Mark* 163. Luke 9:35 should also be noted in this regard.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Marcus, *Mark* 166.

the heavens, with the same verb appearing in the LXX. Because this section of Isaiah deals with themes relating to God's eschatological action and new creation, some interpreters see these motifs entering the Markan baptism scene as well.<sup>8</sup>

5. The expression ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, which would normally mean "my beloved son," is often read instead as "my *only* son." This is because ἀγαπητός carries that connotation in many LXX passages when used in connection with "son" or "daughter." Interpreters who favor this reading consider the example of Gen 22:2, where ἀγαπητός translates יְהִי, to be especially relevant.<sup>9</sup> To assign this nuance to ἀγαπητός shifts the emphasis from Jesus' messianic role to his unique filial status.

Turning to Mark 15:34, when Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he is clearly borrowing words from Ps 22:1. But opinions vary concerning the conclusions we should draw from this. A number of interpreters argue that Jesus' words should be understood to reflect the theology and attitude of the entire psalm from which they are taken. His cry would thus express not simply anguish, but also confidence in God.<sup>10</sup>

If we analyze the methodology underlying these several proposals, at least four factors seem to be at work. First, two of the aforementioned interpretations appear to be guided by *the assumption that a borrowed description suggests an identical object of reference*. I refer to the identification of Jesus as the messianic king based on the assumption that σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου alludes to Ps 2:7, and Jesus' identification as the servant of the Lord based on the assumption that ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα echoes Isa 42:1—the two most common and important allusion-grounded proposals relating to Mark 1:11. In each instance Jesus is described in language similar to that used to depict a particular OT figure. Since the description is borrowed, many interpreters assume that Mark (or God speaking from heaven) identifies Jesus as the figure those words originally described in the OT, the messianic king in one instance, the servant of the Lord in the other.

The idea that borrowed description *suggests* (not *proves*) an identical object of reference seems reasonable. In the case of σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου scholars have at least two reasons beyond the mere assumption of borrowed description for concluding that the text does indeed identify Jesus as the figure spoken of in Ps 2:7. First, the psalm describes an eschatological figure (or a figure with the potential to be interpreted eschatologically). Second, the words σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου do more than just describe; they state an identity-defining relationship. The situation is a little different with respect to ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα and

<sup>8</sup> See especially Marcus, *Mark* 165: against the background of Isaiah 63–65, Mark "implies an irreversible cosmic change with his picture of the torn heavens" (p. 165). See also Lane, *Mark* 55; and Hooker, *Mark* 46.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Guelich, *Mark* 34; Hooker, *Mark* 47; Lane, *Mark* 58.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. J. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991) 211; R. A. Cole, *Mark* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 321; Heil, *Mark* 334–35; Nineham, *Saint Mark* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 427–29; E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (Richmond: John Knox, 1970) 353.

the identification of Jesus as the servant of the Lord. Though Isa 42:1 does speak of one who is arguably an eschatological figure, the words ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα do not so directly define the identity of the person to whom they are applied. They are thus more easily transferable from one figure to another. On the other hand, Isa 42:1 goes on to speak of the Lord putting his Spirit on the servant; this constitutes a second parallel between that passage and Mark's portrayal of Jesus' baptism, thus strengthening the case for affirming that Mark here depicts Jesus as the servant.

Second, several of the allusion-based interpretations listed above are marked by "context carryover," an exegetical step based on the *assumption that when a piece of the OT enters a Gospel scene it brings its literary context with it*. Context carryover underlies the suggestion that Jesus' cry from the cross expresses hope as well as agony. It sanctions the view that σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου marks Jesus' baptism as the moment of his adoption. It enables interpreters to conclude that the description of Jesus as ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός hints at his coming sacrifice, and that σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανούς points to eschatological change. But is context carryover reliable exegetical procedure? Certainly not in every case. We can easily imagine a writer or speaker repeating familiar words with little thought of their original context.<sup>11</sup> One factor to consider when evaluating the likelihood of context carryover is the textual distance between the borrowed words and those parts of their original context they might be thought to bring with them. In the case of Ps 2:7, for instance, the affirmation of sonship and the declaration of adoption stand as adjacent and parallel statements. The eschatological elements in the context of Isa 64:1, by way of contrast, lie much further afield.<sup>12</sup> But even close textual proximity does not completely settle the question of whether an author or speaker who echoes an OT text thereby alludes to its context as well.<sup>13</sup>

A third methodological feature, *word nuance carryover*, appears in connection with the suggestions that in Mark 1:11 ὁ ἀγαπητός means "only" and ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα connotes election. Here the meaning of an individual word occurring within an allusion is determined either by the nuance it carries in the OT passage behind the allusion (Gen 22:2 LXX in the case of ἀγαπητός, Isa 42:1 in the case of εὐδόκησα), or by connotations it carries within the OT more generally. Whether one is convinced by these proposed interpretations

<sup>11</sup> It would be helpful to have clear terms by which to distinguish between mere borrowing of language or imagery and the sort of echoing that adds meaning or sets up a new perspective by linking one text to another. In any case, we must recognize a range of possibilities, from mere language borrowing at one end of the spectrum to intertextual linkage with wide context carryover at the other. "Allusion" is not a satisfactory word when referring to mere borrowing, because it implies at least some degree of meaning-laden connection almost by definition. Terminological distinctions are often made to indicate the degree of explicitness with which one text evokes another, with "quotation" at the high end, "echo" at the low end, and "allusion" somewhere in between (e.g. R. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989] 23). But indicating the level of an evocation's explicitness is not the same thing as indicating the extent of its added discourse value.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus cites Isa 65:17 (*Mark* 165).

<sup>13</sup> The case for context carryover doubtless grows stronger where there is an explicitly identified citation, and stronger still where the narrator speaks of fulfillment.

or not, one should at least remember that a word's meaning is normally determined primarily by *contemporary* usage and the *immediate* communication context in which it occurs.

A fourth factor at work in these proposals gets to the heart of issue this study seeks to address: many interpreters who affirm allusion-based readings *let allusions control their interpretation of entire scenes*. Since this final observation concerns the role allusions and allusion-grounded conclusions are allowed to play in the total interpretation of an episode, we must defer its discussion until we have first examined the narrative contexts in which the allusions listed above occur. We will then be able to compare the emphasis interpreters put on allusions with the emphasis they accord other features of the narrative landscape. With this in mind, let us look again at Mark's portrayal of Jesus' baptism and cry of dereliction, this time giving close attention to the concrete scenes Mark sets before us.

*2. Narrative contexts and connections.* If we set OT connections and their attending theological themes to one side and concentrate instead on the immediate narrative contexts of Mark 1:11 and 15:34, the theme of Jesus' status and role recedes into the background and a somewhat different set of interests gains visibility. Elements of personal drama and inward experience stand out more strongly. The drama and experience that are already unmistakably associated with Jesus' cry from the cross appear yet more poignant, while the milder and sometimes neglected experiential elements in the narrative of Jesus' baptism can begin to receive more notice.

Let us examine these emphases first in Mark's portrayal of Jesus' baptism. The material that precedes the baptism scene (the heading with which Mark's Gospel opens, a quotation from Isaiah, and a description of John the Baptist's ministry and message) focuses primarily on Jesus' objective status and role. He is shown to be the Christ, a figure greater than John who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. With the baptism narrative, however, comes a shift in emphasis. Jesus himself now steps onto the scene, and in various ways the narrative begins to call attention to his own experience of events. Two features in particular highlight Jesus' interior experience of his relationship to God. First, the dramatic sights and sounds that occur as he comes up from the water are depicted from Jesus' point of view. It is Jesus (not John or others) who sees heaven torn open and the Spirit descending like a dove; it is upon him that the Spirit comes; and he is the one both addressed and spoken about by the voice from heaven.<sup>14</sup> When narratives thus present events from the perspective of a character within the scene, they tend to draw readers closer to that character's experience. Second, the terms in which Jesus is addressed not only speak of his objective identity as God's Son but also—perhaps especially—of how the Father feels about him. If we take the language in which Jesus is addressed (*ἀγαπῆτός, εὐδόκησα*) in its everyday

<sup>14</sup> Marcus argues that the heavenly voice is the climactic component of the baptism scene "because of its position at the end, the change from sight to sound, the greater number of words devoted to it, and its role in interpreting the visual elements" (*Mark* 164).

first-century Greek sense, what immediately hits the ear is something rather personal: God telling Jesus, “You are my Son, I love you, I am pleased with you.”

This accent on the personal and experiential is at least faintly reinforced in the unadorned portrayal of Jesus’ temptation that directly follows.<sup>15</sup> Here, as in the account of the baptism, Jesus is not portrayed actively doing things so much as having things happen to him: the Spirit sends him out; he is tempted by Satan; angels serve him. And much of what is said to happen to Jesus is internal. Being tempted by Satan implies an element of internally felt pressure. Being sent or driven out (ἐκβάλλω) by the Spirit, though not further explained, suggests the application of an inwardly felt force or motivation. The wilderness setting and the absence of human company for forty days further hint that this is a period of significant inward experience. The specific nature of that experience, of course, is temptation and struggle.<sup>16</sup>

If the narrative depicts a period of testing directly following the Father’s declaration from heaven, it portrays Jesus’ immediately preceding action, submitting to baptism, as a step of humility. In the context of Mark’s unfolding narrative, Jesus’ baptism appears as a surprising event. Mark has doubly highlighted the nature of the baptism John administers: it is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4); those who come to be baptized do so confessing their sins (1:5). John’s ministry of baptism is also presented as something specifically designed to prepare people for Jesus’ coming. It can only strike readers as odd, then, when Jesus himself comes to be baptized. On top of this, Mark depicts John proclaiming that Jesus is a figure far greater than he, one who brings a baptism greater than his. How is it that this Jesus submits to John’s baptism? Mark does not explain, but the structure of his narrative suggests that Jesus is somehow walking a path of humility.<sup>17</sup> So when the voice from heaven speaks words of approval—or perhaps of assurance—they come in a context marked by the suggestion of self-denial on the one side and inward struggle on the other.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> S. Garrett observes that the sequence of testing following a declaration of divine approval occurs also in Job and the book of *Jubilees* (*The Temptation of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 55–56).

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that in Matthew and Luke’s longer accounts one of the temptations Jesus faces deals specifically with the issue of trust in the Father’s love. (Assuming that the temptation to jump from the temple is designed to challenge Jesus’ confidence in God.)

<sup>17</sup> Matthew clearly sensed the anomaly of Jesus coming to John for baptism and therefore took pains to explain that it represented a step of humble obedience on Jesus’ part (Matt 3:14–15).

<sup>18</sup> Mark does not portray Jesus’ reactions to the events that occur at his baptism or in the temptation scene that follows. Is it legitimate, then, to say that this section of narrative calls attention to Jesus’ experience? I believe it is, though this claim must be carefully nuanced. (1) Narrative that does not directly describe experience, or even indirectly show it, can nevertheless point to an experience-laden moment. Mark’s baptism narrative does this through its use of point of view and its depiction of high impact words of address. The temptation scene does this through the things it shows happening to Jesus and through their setting. (2) Mark’s baptism scene links to later episodes (Gethsemane, the cry from the cross) that explicitly highlight Jesus’ experience. (3) The baptism narrative uses two feeling words (ἀγαπήτός, εὐδοκέω) to depict God’s side of the Father-Son relationship. (4) The interpretation outlined above does not attempt to define or analyze what the heavenly voice meant to Jesus. It only suggests that the narrative leads readers to a point where it will be natural for them to wonder about this.

Read this way, the words Jesus hears at his baptism introduce a theme or narrative thread that will reappear at later points in Mark's narrative. The three key elements in this thread of story (as I hope to show) are Jesus' awareness of his relationship to God, his obedience, and his experience of inward struggle. The combination and interplay of these elements make the story what it is. If we were to analyze it in terms of plot and conflict we might identify two central tensions. First, Jesus' desire to obey comes up against the pressure he feels to abandon the path of obedience. Second, the love the Father expresses stands in tension with the nature of the task he sets before Jesus. To frame this second tension in terms of Jesus' experience, what Jesus hears of the Father's love clashes with what he tastes of the Father's will.

Hints of this cluster of motifs reappear in Mark in 1:35–38. Jesus goes alone to pray in a desert place (relationship with God); he is interrupted by a group who appeal to him to come back to Capernaum (pressure); he resists, affirming that his assigned path lies in another direction (obedience). But the thread only reemerges in full strength at two points toward the end of the Gospel. One is in the portrayal of Jesus' struggle and prayer in Gethsemane, the other in his cry of desolation from the cross.<sup>19</sup>

Though our greater concern lies with Jesus' words from the cross, it will be helpful to highlight those aspects of the Gethsemane scene (14:32–42) that link it backward to Jesus' experience at his baptism and forward to his experience on the cross. (1) The Gethsemane narrative's structure sets the stage for focus on inward experience by accenting Jesus' withdrawal from others: first he leaves the main disciple group, then he moves away from Peter, James and John. The reader's attention is thus directed to Jesus alone in prayer. (2) The language used to describe Jesus' emotions, and the fact that they are described twice (once by the narrator directly [ἤρξατο ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδημονεῖν] and once in Jesus' own words [Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου]) convey the intensity of Jesus' experience, while at the same time defining it as inward distress. (3) The depiction of Jesus falling on the ground reinforces the picture of intense agonizing. (4) The content of Jesus' prayer reveals the source of his struggle: the task the Father has given him. Once again repetition reinforces a point: the narrator first summarizes Jesus' request (Ἰνα εἰ δυνατόν ἐστιν παρέλθῃ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα), then restates it in Jesus' own words (παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ). (5) The qualification εἰ δυνατόν in the narrator's summary of Jesus' request presages the motif of obedience. This submissive attitude is then more forcefully expressed in Jesus' own words, ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ. (6) Jesus' relationship with God, central to the whole scene, is emphasized by the form of address placed on Jesus' lips, the Aramaic Ἀββα, followed by the Greek translation ὁ πατήρ. (7) In the context of his distress and request, the words πάντα δυνατά σοι

<sup>19</sup> Jesus' interchange with Peter in 8:31–33 only partially relates to this line of story. While the elements of pressure and obedience are present in that scene, there is no special focus on Jesus' relationship to God. The words spoken from heaven at the time of Jesus' transfiguration (9:7) might at first glance appear to be the most natural narrative follow-up to the baptism scene, because of the verbal parallel to 1:11. But the function and tone of the two heavenly declarations are quite different. The words spoken in 9:7 are addressed to Peter, James, and John rather than to Jesus.

imply that Jesus thinks the Father is fully able either to stop the painful situation Jesus' faces or allow it to continue. Does this narrative, which so obviously spotlights *Jesus* wrestling with a decision, thus suggest that the Father, too, faces a choice?

The narrative of Jesus' praying in Gethsemane primarily focuses on a conflict that plays out within Jesus, between his desire to obey the Father and his desire to avoid the task the Father has given him. At the same time it foreshadows a second conflict, the tension between Jesus' sense that God is his Father and his experience of God-allowed suffering. This will reemerge more strongly in the crucifixion narrative.

Turning now to 15:34, in its immediate narrative context Jesus' exclamation from the cross appears above all as an intense cry from the heart. First, Jesus' words come at a dramatic moment, following three hours of darkness and just before his final loud cry and death. Second, several features within the saying itself combine to evoke a sense of the depth of Jesus' experience. These include the retention of Jesus' words in Aramaic (as also in the Gethsemane narrative),<sup>20</sup> the doubling of his address to God, Jesus' reference to God as "my God," his use of the word "forsaken," and the question "why?" Though some commentators have suggested that the reference to God as "my God" carries a nuance of underlying confidence,<sup>21</sup> it is perhaps better to see this as the narrator's way of heightening the pathos of the scene, particularly in light of the doubled vocative.<sup>22</sup> The juxtaposition of "my God" and "forsaken" gives final expression to the tension introduced in earlier scenes, between Jesus' awareness of his relationship with the Father and his sense of being left to suffer.

Third, Jesus' cry of abandonment climaxes a picture that has been steadily building ever since the Gethsemane scene, one that highlights Jesus' suffering in combination with his faithful obedience. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and deserted by his disciples. He is falsely accused before the Sanhedrin, saying nothing except to acknowledge his identity as "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One" and assert that they will see the Son of Man sitting at God's right hand (14:61–62).<sup>23</sup> He is spat upon, beaten, and mocked. He remains silent before Pilate and is rejected by the crowd. He is flogged, then mocked by the Roman soldiers; his status as the king of the Jews forms the central

<sup>20</sup> Does the retention of the Aramaic also have the effect of pulling these words away from their original OT textual context and embedding them in the immediate time-of-Jesus scene?

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Lane, *Mark* 573. Garrett holds that Jesus' cry is a prayer in which Jesus continues to reach out to God: "But this word from the cross presaged victory, for it was still a word of prayer. Until he took his last breath Jesus blessed God and did not curse" (*Temptation* 134). This assessment is based in part on patterns of lament and narratives of righteous suffering in the OT and later Jewish writings. Garrett's observations are a helpful reminder that Jesus' cry should not be read as an expression of rebelling against God or giving up on him. Nevertheless, to speak of Jesus blessing God goes beyond what his words themselves and their immediate narrative context suggest.

<sup>22</sup> Jesus is pictured using a doubled vocative several times in Luke-Acts (Luke 10:41; 13:34; 22:31; Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14) in contexts where he is troubled by what he sees in someone he cares for or expects better of.

<sup>23</sup> This latter affirmation represents a note of confidence in the midst of Jesus' suffering, but its textual and narrative-time distance from 15:34 means that it does not greatly impact the immediate meaning of Jesus' cry from the cross.

theme of their derision. He is offered wine mixed with myrrh (apparently having a narcotic effect), but refuses it. The mocking then continues after Jesus is crucified: it comes from those who pass by, from the Jewish leaders, and from those crucified with him. Again, the mockery revolves around his status as king. It is accompanied by calls that he prove himself by saving himself—calls that echo appeals for Jesus to turn aside from the difficult path he is on that were heard earlier in the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> In the narrative leading up to 15:34 Mark thus concentrates on the dual themes of Jesus' suffering and faithfulness. His portrayal of Jesus' cry of dereliction is best understood as a continuation of that emphasis, indeed, as its climactic point. The whole narrative directs the reader to Jesus' experience of pain, even the pain of abandonment by God, in the very midst of his faithful obedience.

Story-sensitive (and allusion-bracketing) exegesis of Jesus' baptism, Gethsemane, and the cry of dereliction has shown these to be thematically connected scenes that portray three stages in a progressing story. Mark first shows us the Father assuring the Son of his love, then the Son struggling to submit to the Father's will, then the obedient Son experiencing abandonment. Jesus' obedience grows until it reaches its final full expression on the cross; God's presence concurrently recedes to a point of disappearance.

3. *Allusions and story-sensitive exegesis.* I now want to return to the observation that interpreters sometimes let OT allusions control their reading of an entire scene. I believe this can be seen in the case of Jesus' baptism. Having discerned scriptural allusions in the words spoken from heaven and discovered hints concerning Jesus' role or status in them, many scholars suppose that the focal point of the narrative is Christological definition.<sup>25</sup> But the narrative analysis outlined above shows that Mark's baptism scene has been shaped to call attention not just to role and identity, but to a moment in a relationship. Why is this latter emphasis often neglected? It would seem that allusion-derived clues have influenced the way interpreters perceive both the focus and tone of the narrative. Words that on a story-sensitive reading call attention to experience and reveal something of God's heart are perceived as a more formal statement or appointment.

In the case of 15:34, most interpreters do not let the Psalm 22 connection exert this same degree of control over their perception of the Markan scene. But a significant minority do. Applying the principle of context carryover they discover a portrait of Jesus that differs from anything the surface meaning of Jesus' words or their immediate narrative context would lead readers to expect. Instead of a fusion of physical and spiritual pain, such interpreters find suffering combined with confidence.

<sup>24</sup> At Capernaum (1:35–38) and especially at Caesarea Philippi (8:31–33).

<sup>25</sup> This could be said of almost all of the commentators cited earlier. Hooker, e.g., warns that "Mark's purpose is not to write a spiritual biography, but to present a Christological statement" (*Mark* 44). While it is necessary to caution against misguided attempts to reconstruct Jesus' inner life and development (Hooker's concern), such warnings should not be framed in a way that inhibits appreciation (on their own terms) of experience-highlighting elements that do appear in Mark's narrative.

What appears to happen (often with 1:11, sometimes with 15:34), is that allusions capture the attention of interpreters and prevent them from fully appreciating the narrative shaping of the texts in which the perceived allusions occur.

Might we *combine* the results of story-sensitive interpretation with those of an approach that emphasizes OT allusions? This would be difficult in the case of 15:34, at least if it means combining an interpretation that grows out of the immediate Markan narrative context with exegesis that brings the whole context of Psalm 22 into the scene. The first approach leads to a story about a sufferer who senses simple abandonment, the second to an account of suffering tempered with hope. When we turn to 1:11, on the other hand, there is no strict antithesis between the results of allusion-based interpretation and those of story-sensitive exegesis. The former finds the text defining Jesus' role, the latter sees it depicting his encounter with an expression of God's love. Theoretically a single narrative scene could do both. Some commentators come close to discerning this dual emphasis.<sup>26</sup> But it is nonetheless difficult to assign the two lines of interpretation equal place. They pull in different directions.<sup>27</sup> The majority of interpreters are probably right, therefore, to give clear preeminence to one emphasis over the other—though I believe they have generally backed the weaker candidate.

Mark's baptism narrative focuses primarily on God's communication of love and Jesus' reception of that communication, though it does also offer secondary reminders that Jesus is the one to whom Ps 2:7, Isa 42:1, and perhaps some other OT texts point. Something similar can be said concerning Jesus' cry from the cross. The concrete scene and its Markan context are primary and exegetically determinative, but alert readers are nevertheless reminded that Jesus is the one to whom Psalm 22 refers.<sup>28</sup>

Our discussion of Mark 1:11 and 15:34 prompts two further observations. First, story-sensitive exegesis tends to work with what is immediately at hand and intuitively perceived. It keeps readers attuned to the scene—its tones, nuances of characterization, and the movement of its unfolding story. The identification and interpretation of allusions, on the other hand, is a more reflective exercise, perhaps requiring study and cross-referencing.<sup>29</sup> It tends

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Guelich: "Well pleased" corresponds with the Markan 'only/beloved (*ἀγαπητός*) son' which also underscores the primary motif of affection, delight, and pleasure inherent in *εὐδοκεῖν*. The voice consistently addresses Jesus both in terms of his role . . . and his relationship to the Father" (*Mark* 34). Nevertheless, Guelich speaks primarily of an essential relationship (one that stands distinct from any assigned role), rather than highlighting a moment of communication and shared experience between the Father and Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Hays cites "thematic coherence" as a criterion for evaluating the legitimacy of an echo-based interpretation of a Pauline text: "How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument that Paul is developing?" (*Echoes* 30). A similar criterion, "narrative coherence," might well be applied to allusion-based readings of Gospel texts: how well does the proposed reading fit the tone and flow of the narrative?

<sup>28</sup> All the more so in light of 15:24.

<sup>29</sup> Would Mark's original audience have perceived these allusions more quickly than Christian readers today? D. Allison speaks of ancient audiences being especially sensitive to such allusions—but he has the readers and hearers of the Gospel of Matthew in view, and pictures a specifically

to lift text elements out of their narrative contexts, at least temporarily. As it does so, interpreters can easily lose touch with scene and story. Second, story-sensitive exegesis can lead to an engagement with the narrative that impacts the whole person. The story thread we have traced through Mark's portrayal of Jesus' baptism, Gethsemane, and the cross, for example, has this ability to touch readers at several levels. Reflection on allusions, by way of contrast, tends to distance interpreters from the world of the story and narrow attention to just one function of Gospel texts, the transmission of information. Stepping back from a story for critical reflection or isolating one of its features for special investigation are legitimate steps in the process of interpretation. But interpreters then need to reengage with whole texts and their whole concerns.

## II. JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES (MARK 6:30–44)

1. *The concrete story.* Let us begin our examination of Mark's narrative of the feeding of the five thousand (6:30–44) by attempting to interpret it in a way that is sensitive to the concrete scene and the flow of the story. We note first that Jesus is the story's central figure. In the opening scene the disciples gather around him, he initiates the action at every stage (the disciples try to initiate action at one point [vv. 35–36] but Jesus overrules them), and it is he who works the great miracle of multiplying the loaves and fish. What does this portrayal of Jesus highlight? Primarily, it is his supernatural power, but also his compassion. Jesus shows concern for the overtaxed disciples,<sup>30</sup> then for the pursuing and intruding crowd. Mark is explicit about Jesus' compassion for the crowd. He even identifies its cause: the people were like sheep without a shepherd (v. 34). Mark also calls attention to Jesus' role as a teacher (v. 34). Hence a number of Christological themes emerge from the story: Jesus has supernatural power; he has compassion for people; and he meets both spiritual (the teaching) and physical needs.

But the narrative also spotlights the disciples. Consider first the setting. Mark links this story to a preceding section that portrays the Twelve being sent out on mission (6:7–13). The Gospel has shown the disciples accompanying Jesus since the opening chapter and the Twelve as a selected group since chapter 3. It marks a new stage in the disciples' story when Jesus sends them out to preach, heal, and cast out demons. These activities have been distinctive to Jesus' own ministry; now the disciples begin to share in his work. The feeding narrative starts with the disciples returning from this

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Jewish audience (*The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993] 18). With respect to Mark, by way of contrast, most scholars assume a predominantly Gentile audience (see Marcus, *Mark* 36). Would even fairly obvious scriptural allusions have impacted them immediately and intuitively? Perhaps one could think in terms of these narratives originating within Jewish Christian communities prior to their incorporation into Mark's Gospel. But one way or another, a discussion of Markan allusions cannot be isolated from the question of Markan audience.

<sup>30</sup> See Guelich, *Mark* 339.

first mission and reporting to Jesus. Mark calls them “apostles” (v. 30), highlighting their special status and involvement in Jesus’ mission.<sup>31</sup>

The disciples then play a role in the lead-up to the feeding—though the full nature of this role is elusive. Because so many people come to them that they have no time even to eat, Jesus proposes that he and the disciples get away for some rest. (The wording of his invitation places emphasis on the disciples.)<sup>32</sup> But a crowd goes ahead of them; Jesus sees the crowd, has compassion on them, and begins to teach them. When it gets late, the disciples call Jesus’ attention to the remote location and the late hour and urge him to send the people away so they can buy food (vv. 35–36). Is it necessary for Mark to bring the disciples into the story in this way if he is simply trying to tell readers about Jesus? The disciples do contribute to the building Christological picture, no doubt: their need for rest provides an occasion for Jesus to show them compassion; their suggestion that Jesus dismiss the crowd sets the stage for his miracle. Nonetheless, these functions seem secondary. The real focus on Jesus’ compassion comes in connection with the crowd, not the disciples. As for setting the stage for the feeding, this might have been done in other ways. Is the narrative then designed to show us things about the disciples themselves? Does their proposal that the crowd be dismissed perhaps imply a contrast between Jesus’ compassion and their own more negative attitude, or between Jesus’ concern for teaching and their concern for physical food?

If the words that begin verse 35, Καὶ ἥδη ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης, suggest that the disciples ask that the crowd be sent away just as Jesus begins to teach them,<sup>33</sup> this would imply direct opposition between the disciples’ attitude and that of Jesus. It might be tempting, in this case, to link the disciples’ attitude to the changing circumstances that have affected them. In rapid succession, they have reported their success in mission; been inundated by crowds; been led by Jesus on a retreat aimed at giving them solitude and rest; and then seen that expectation thwarted.<sup>34</sup> But in fact Mark’s grammar is not so clear about the timing of the disciples’ words in relation to Jesus’ decision to teach the crowd, nor does he particularly emphasize a contrast between Jesus and the disciples at this point. An alternative reading might then see something more positive behind the disciples’ initiative: genuine sympathy for a hungry crowd.<sup>35</sup> Once again, however, the text does not offer

<sup>31</sup> The word occurs only here in Mark, with the possible exception of 3:14.

<sup>32</sup> Δεῦτε ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν (v. 32).

<sup>33</sup> As implied by the translations of the NIV, “By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him,” and Marcus, “And since the hour was already late” (*Mark* 405). The question is whether ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης should be taken as a causal participle phrase and ἥδη given the strong sense “by this time” (which would relate the disciples’ action to the time that Jesus began teaching), or whether the words should instead be taken simply as a temporal participle phrase, as they are in most translations (e.g. NRSV, “When it grew late”). The presence of ἥδη (repeated when the disciples’ own words are depicted) might speak in favor of the first of these alternatives. But Markan usage in passages such as 15:42 shows that the second translation is equally possible, and the parallels in Matthew and Luke do not retain ἥδη.

<sup>34</sup> According to Heil, the disciples’ words hint at their own need for a restful meal, introducing an element of dramatic tension to the scene (*Mark* 143).

<sup>35</sup> Lane, *Mark* 228.

clear direction. While this lead-in section may raise questions in the reader's mind with regard to the disciples, then, it does not provide clear answers. We can nonetheless say two things about the presentation of the disciples at this stage in the story. First, merely by mentioning their proposal Mark keeps them in the foreground. Second, we catch an echo of an attitude the disciples display earlier in Mark's narrative in the episode of the storm on the sea (4:35–41): the disciples feel the need to speak up because Jesus appears oblivious to a situation that is worsening.

Jesus' response, "You give them something to eat," provides the central indication that the narrative does indeed display a major interest in the disciples. The emphatic ὑμεῖς highlights the disciples, as does the surprising content of Jesus' statement. The disciples' reaction reinforces what readers are perhaps already thinking: how can the disciples possibly do this? The disciples' incredulous and perhaps disrespectful reply no doubt shows their lack of faith and understanding, but this is probably not the narrative's primary concern.<sup>36</sup> Rather, this interchange highlights two things: the disciples are assigned a task, and they totally lack the means to carry it out.<sup>37</sup>

The ensuing description of the feeding is as much an account of the disciples carrying out Jesus' instructions as it is of Jesus working a miracle. At Jesus' request the disciples perform three distinct tasks so that the crowd may be fed. First, Jesus asks the disciples to find whatever food they do have. Then he has them arrange the people into groups and have them sit down. Then, after giving thanks for the five loaves and two fish, Jesus breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples to distribute.<sup>38</sup> Thus the disciples do feed the crowd, fulfilling the command that had seemed so incredible. The disciples then perform a fourth duty, gathering up the leftover food. One further narrative detail is that the disciples pick up *twelve* baskets of leftovers. Some take this as an allusion to the office of the twelve apostles (whose number, in turn, bears symbolic significance in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel).<sup>39</sup> Others see it as simple realistic detail: it was customary for Jewish men of that time to carry small wicker baskets; each of the disciples used his to gather the remaining food, thus there were twelve baskets.<sup>40</sup> Either way, the special group that Jesus has selected to be with

<sup>36</sup> The primary disciple focus that some interpreters see in the feeding narrative relates to their failure to understand Jesus (e.g. J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 98–99). But though the disciples do display incredulity at this stage, the story does not stand still. As it moves on, the disciples appear in another capacity. Jesus gives them responsibilities, and they play a part in his work.

<sup>37</sup> The disciples' incredulous response also serves to highlight the greatness of Jesus' coming miracle. Nevertheless, the greater narrative focus is on the disciples' inability.

<sup>38</sup> The disciples' serving role is not mentioned when it comes to the fish. This should not be taken as an indication that they do not pass out the fish in the same way they have distributed the bread. It is simply a matter of narrative style, in which a detail that may reasonably be assumed within the total flow of the narrative is not spelled out.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Marcus, *Mark* 410.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Lane, *Mark* 231.

him is brought to the reader's attention once again. Mark's narrative is not just about Jesus feeding a multitude; it is also a story about the disciples. They stand somewhere between Jesus and the crowd, serving them on Jesus' behalf and by his power.

2. *Allusions, integration, and relative emphasis.* All this emerges from a reading that attends to the immediate concrete scene. But interpreters have also found this text a flourishing garden of allusions. Two dominate. The central event of Jesus miraculously providing food recalls God's provision of manna to the people of Israel at the time of the exodus, while the narrator's comment that the crowd "were like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 34) echoes a number of OT texts.<sup>41</sup> Most scholars conclude that the narrative thus presents Jesus as the eschatological provider, a role prefigured by Moses (through whom manna was given, and who spoke of the need for someone to replace him so the people would not be like sheep without a shepherd [Num 7:17]) or David (when the people of Israel are described as sheep with no shepherd the Lord promises that David will fill that role [Ezek 34:5, 23]), or both.<sup>42</sup>

Interpreters also identify a number of secondary allusions that gather around and support the two dominant ones. These include the wilderness setting (recalling the locale where manna was given), the arrangement of the people in hundreds and fifties (cf. Exod 18:21, 25; Deut 1:15), the green grass (Isa 35:1–2), and the motif of rest (Deut 12:9; Jer 31:2; etc.).<sup>43</sup> Some of the suggested secondary allusions come in symbolic form (the five loaves pointing to the Pentateuch, the twelve baskets representing the eschatological people of God).<sup>44</sup>

How do these proposed allusions relate to the story that emerges from a more purely scene-based reading? Story-sensitive exegesis, as we have seen, shows the primary focus of the feeding narrative to fall on Jesus, who is portrayed as shepherd and supernatural provider. The narrative's most obvious OT allusions (the manna echo, the image of sheep without a shepherd) do not compete with this conclusion. They reinforce it, in fact, and even allow us to define the story's Christological themes more precisely: Jesus is the *eschatological* shepherd and provider. Here, then, is an example of allusion-sensitive interpretation complementing and enhancing story-sensitive exegesis. But can we press these OT connections further to obtain still greater Christological precision? Is Jesus the *new Moses*, for instance, or the *Davidic* shepherd? In my opinion, we should be cautious about these more specific motifs; they

<sup>41</sup> Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chron 18:16; Ezek 34:8; Zech 10:2. The expression also occurs in Jdt 11:19.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Guelich, *Mark* 340; Heil, *Mark* 143; Hooker, *Mark* 164–65; Hurtado, *Mark* 101; Marcus, *Mark* 406.

<sup>43</sup> For varying combinations of these proposals see Guelich, *Mark* 341; Heil, *Mark* 144–45; Hurtado, *Mark* 101; Lane, *Mark* 225ff; Marcus, *Mark* 407ff.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Guelich, *Mark* 343; Hurtado, *Mark* 101–2; Marcus, *Mark* 407. In addition to scriptural allusions scholars sometimes also discern allusions connecting with the wider literature and thought-world of second temple Judaism (cf. Marcus, *Mark* 421).

are less clearly marked in the narrative and appear less central to its concerns.<sup>45</sup> Similar caution is due with respect to exegetical conclusions drawn from the many secondary allusions noted above, where the echoes are faint at best.

But if OT allusions complement and enrich the feeding narrative's concrete story of Jesus, the same cannot be said for its equally important disciple story. The episode's disciple related themes—that Jesus' followers are called to participate in his mission, that he supplies the resources they need to carry out their task—emerge entirely from the immediate narrative and its Markan context. The scriptural allusions that scholars have identified add nothing to these motifs.<sup>46</sup>

In the case of Mark 6:30–44, then, there appears to be no *inherent* conflict between story-sensitive exegesis and a reading that emphasizes OT allusions. For the most part, the two approaches pick up on different elements within the text. Those who emphasize allusions find special significance in details such as the wilderness setting, the green grass, the hundreds and fifties; those who focus on the movement of the story will find other plot elements more meaning-laden: Jesus' initiatives, the Jesus-disciple dialogue, the multiple tasks the disciples perform. This leaves little room for direct conflict. Where the two approaches do both look to the same narrative elements, they usually draw complementary rather than discordant conclusions. This is true with respect to the multiplied bread and the image of sheep without a shepherd. A minor exception relates to the twelve baskets. There is at least a little competition between seeing the baskets as a means of foregrounding the disciples and seeing them as symbols of God's eschatological people. Another exception concerns the allusion to the OT theme of rest some scholars perceive. Despite the way the concrete story begins, does it really go on to portray Jesus granting anyone rest?

When we turn to the realities of exegetical practice, however, scholarly attention to scriptural echoes does seem to compete with reading that highlights the immediate story. At least it is true that allusion-informed Christology controls the agenda of most recent treatments of the feeding narrative, while the discipleship themes that story-sensitive exegesis reveals to be such an important part of the episode suffer a measure of neglect. The neglect is by no means total, but a tendency to undervalue this aspect of Mark's narrative may nonetheless be observed. Some interpreters concentrate almost entirely on Christology, taking little notice of the disciples.<sup>47</sup> Others notice

<sup>45</sup> For example, "sheep without a shepherd" occurs in many OT contexts. Rather than trying to pin down a specific antitype, it is more important to observe the expression's immediate function in the Markan scene. It calls attention to the needy condition of the people (the words focus first on the sheep and only secondarily on the shepherd), thus highlighting Jesus' sensitivity and compassion.

<sup>46</sup> Despite the presence of under-shepherd imagery elsewhere in the NT (John 21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:1–4) and Ezekiel's use of sheep-with-no-shepherd imagery in a context that discusses the role of multiple shepherds (a range of leaders) within Israel, Mark does not develop the feeding narrative in this direction.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. C. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), *passim*.

the disciples' narrative presence but see them as negative figures or simply as foils or plot agents that allow Jesus to stand out more clearly.<sup>48</sup> Some interpreters do point out the disciples' significant and positive role within the story, but nevertheless let the narrative's Christological themes dominate their exposition.<sup>49</sup> Relatively few highlight the disciples' story and the themes emerging from it enthusiastically and ensure that these do not get lost in their discussion of Christology.<sup>50</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

Though enriched by scriptural allusions, Gospel narratives also present readers with whole scenes in which stories unfold. Good exegesis requires that we view these scenes in their wholeness, appreciating the movement that occurs within them. Interpreters must take particular care to integrate allusion analysis with a more comprehensive process of narrative interpretation that includes tracing plots, sensing nuances of characterization, and seeing how small details function within larger scenes.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Guelich, *Mark* 338; Hurtado, *Mark* 101; Lane, *Mark* 227–29. Gundry sees the disciples largely as foils (“their role is kept in the shadows. . . . The spotlight concentrates on Jesus and his miraculous actions” [*Mark* 326]), though in his case this cannot be blamed on over-attention to scriptural echoes, since he downplays the importance of allusions (p. 328).

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Marcus, *Mark* 418ff.

<sup>50</sup> Van Iersel (*Mark* 229–30) stands out in this regard. Noting how the narrator calls the audience's attention to the disciples, he suggests the feeding episode belongs to the Markan story line relating to the disciples, depicting their apprenticeship, rather than to that concerning Jesus and his miracles. W. Kelber also stresses the element of disciple training and preparation (*Mark's Story of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 34–36). Other interpreters who highlight the disciples' participation in Jesus' ministry include K. Stock (*Boten aus dem Mit-Ihm-Sein: Das Verhältnis zwischen Jesus und den Zwölf nach Markus* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975] 199); E. Best, who sees the narrative pointing to the disciples' future role of passing on Jesus' teaching (*Mark: The Gospel as Story* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983] 49); and S. Masuda, who discerns a stress on the disciples' ministry of the Lord's Supper (“The Good News of the Miracle of the Bread: The Tradition and Its Markan Redaction,” *NTS* 28 [1982] 210–11). Heil gives fair place to Mark's disciple-related themes, though he grants primary attention to Christological motifs (*Mark* 146). E. Broadhead highlights the central role of the disciples in 6:35–38, but then sees a shift beginning in 39 in which greater emphasis is given to Jesus' interaction with the crowd (*Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992] 119–20).