

Writing & Stylistic Conventions for Biblical Studies/Exegetical Writing

INTRO

This introduction is incredibly concise, summarizing a host of literature on the topic in a few sentences, while stating the main argument using conventions often found in religious studies/New Testament scholarship – such as overtly stating the thesis as such (e.g. "I propose"; "my thesis is this").

After stating the thesis, the author lays out the structure of the entire article: an in-depth description of scholarship on the topic that relate to the thesis of misunderstanding motif, followed by the author's own intervention or re-framing of this motif.

Two motifs in particular have long taken pride of place in Markan scholarship – Jesus' suffering, and the disciples' repeated incomprehension (the so-called 'misunderstanding motif'). Typically, scholars discuss these as isolated themes. However, I propose that the two motifs of Jesus' suffering and the disciples' incomprehension are in fact two sides of the same coin. In brief, my thesis is this: Mark's narrative portrays being misunderstood as a form of social estrangement; as such, the disciples' repeated failures to comprehend Jesus contribute to his suffering. After making several remarks about the presuppositions informing this study, I briefly describe the Markan Jesus' sufferings as they have been treated traditionally, and then lay out the reasons why it is useful to reframe the Markan misunderstanding motif as a form of Jesus' suffering.

The length of the summary of scholarship is concise in that the author only addresses the topic relevant for the article's own thesis; and the summary itself nods to the scholarship done on this particular work while setting down grounds for scholarly interventions.

This is for the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*; the structure and form of the article (even its citational practice) might not totally reflect a typical exegesis paper, but in many ways it does reflect some of the best practices or writing conventions for exegesis or term papers in religious studies.

*Written by Margaret Kearney & Joseph (Sang Wuk) Lee © 2021.

**Source taken from: Dinkler, Michal Beth. "Suffering, Misunderstanding, and Suffering Misunderstanding: The Markan Misunderstanding Motif as a Form of Jesus' Suffering." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 3 (March 2016): 316–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X15621649>.

The paragraph begins with a transition sentence in which the writer briefly rehearses a previous point (ie. the tragic nature of Mark's gospel) in order to set up this paragraph's claim (ie. that the betrayal of Judas is especially tragic because of his closeness to Jesus)

The author quotes very short, relevant pieces of text to support her argument. These short quotes are embedded in the sentences - in other words, the quoted text blends with the author's own words.

Each quote is briefly introduced and contextualized (eg. "an expression of betrayal from the Psalms: 'Even...")

BODY PARAGRAPH

As noted above, scholars have long recognized the tragic elements of Mark's gospel. Judas's betrayal is especially tragic,¹ and the Last Supper story (14.17-21) is particularly poignant. Jesus, while 'with the twelve' (μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα, 14.17), twice predicts that one of these twelve will betray him: 'one of you (εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν) eating with me will betray me' (14.18), 'one of the twelve (εἷς τῶν δώδεκα),² who dips with me in the bowl' (14.20). Many have suggested that Jesus is indicating that he knows which disciple will betray him, but the more important point is that the betrayal comes at the hands of a close associate, a follower. This is buttressed by the note that betrayer and betrayed are at that very moment sharing table fellowship; Jesus' striking image that his betrayer 'dips with me in the bowl' (14.20) recalls an expression of betrayal from the Psalms: 'Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who has shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me' (41.9).³ The rhetoric of Mk 14.17-21 emphasizes that Jesus will be betrayed by one of his inner circle.

The final sentence synthesizes the evidence and analysis presented in the paragraph.

The second sentence summarizes the main topic of the paragraph: the tragedy of Judas's betrayal as illustrated in the Last Supper story

Each quotation is followed by an analysis of the quote's significance and relevance to the author's overall argument. The author contrasts her analysis with a common scholarly reading ("Many have suggested... but...")

In-text, parenthetical citations are used for direct quotations. Footnotes add supplementary information and point to scholarly sources that are not directly cited.

¹ E.g., Pesch 1976: 349; Heil 1990: 305-32.

² The phrase recalls 14.10: 'Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve (εἷς τῶν δώδεκα)'. See also Mk 3.18-19.

³ For Pesch (1976: 349), this allusion reinforces Jesus' portrait as the suffering just one (*passio iusti*).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion begins by briefly summarizing the existing scholarship on Mark as a "Gospel of Suffering."

Next is a summary of the author's own interventions and re-framing of the scholarship thus far.

The paper concludes with implications and questions for further research (this section would likely be much more concise in a shorter exegesis paper).

The Gospel of Mark depicts Jesus suffering physical abuse and martyrdom, as well as spiritual agony – an observation that would be right at home in earlier treatments of Mark as the 'Gospel of Suffering' (Smith and Spivey 1995: 61-96). Where my analysis departs most significantly from traditional discussions is in reframing the disciples' misunderstandings in Mark as a form of social ostracism by insiders and thus as a cause of suffering that Jesus must endure. I explored above several implications of this reframing for our readings of Mark's Gospel, including characterizing Jesus as a rejected prophet who suffers on others' behalf, and deepening the story's tragic pathos and dramatic ironies.

Other questions arise as a result of this reframing: If Jesus' sufferings are meant to be emulated by his disciples, and being misunderstood by 'insiders' is a form of suffering, then does Jesus' call for his disciples to 'follow' him (ἀκολουθέω, 8.34) imply that being misunderstood is constitutive of discipleship? If so, how should disciples respond when they are misunderstood? Further, what would the nature of such misunderstandings be? Would others' incomprehension of the disciples directly parallel Mark's depictions of the disciples' misunderstandings of Jesus, or is Mark's Jesus Christologically unique enough to require differentiation? Or consider the theological implications: if Jesus' sufferings are in some way similar to the Hebrew prophets who are misunderstood, what might this say about the God to whom the prophet and Jesus point? Does Mark's God suffer when the people of God and/or followers of Christ misunderstand? These and other questions suggest avenues for future exploration in light of the view of the Markan misunderstanding motif set forth in this study.