BREAD OF SATISFACTION:

A NARRATIVE-CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TOPIC

OF BREAD IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

A PAPER

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I. Introduction

The Gospel of Mark brings good news (euangelion – Mark 1:1) to both Gentiles and Jews, as the narrative reveals that those outside the Jewish religious boundaries are included along with the Jews as partakers of the kingdom of God. This paper proposes that one of the ways Mark presents this good news is through a deliberate narrative development using the topic of bread.

The repetitions of the word *bread (artos)* are frequent in a section of the Gospel that forms a climax (Mark 6:30-8:26) before the clear revelation of the identity of Jesus (Mark 8:27-29) and subsequent passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). There are twenty-two appearances of the word *bread (artos)* in Mark, and nineteen of them occur in the climactic section of Mark 6:30-8:26, a section that concludes the first half of the Gospel and introduces the second half, which concentrates on Jesus’ sufferings and Passion. These repetitions are indicated in the following chart:

![Bread Occurrences Chart](image-url)
II. **Bread in Mark 2:26; 3:20; 6:8**

Before turning to the passages that are the core of the study (Mark 6:30-8:26), brief considerations are pertinent regarding the first, second, and third occurrences of the word *bread* (*artos*) in the Gospel of Mark.

The first instance is recorded in 2:26, in the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus regarding what is lawful to do on the Sabbath day. Jesus answers the Pharisees’ question with another question concerning their reading of a narrative in the historic books about David:

“Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?” (Mark 2:25-26).¹ This event is recorded in 1 Sam 21:1-6. David asks for *five loaves of bread* to feed those who are with him. Ahimelech informs him that there is no ordinary bread, only the consecrated bread² to which Jesus is referring in Mark 2:25-26. It is not within the scope of this study to analyze why Jesus used this example to answer the Pharisees’ question. However, this first use of the word *bread* initiates an *inclusio* for the topic of bread in Mark: at the beginning of the Gospel David *gave* (*edoken*) the loaves of the bread of the Presence (twelve loaves are implied; cf. Lev 24:5-9) to those who were with him, and at the end of the Gospel (14:22), Jesus *gives* (*edoken*) the bread to the twelve. This saying in Mark 2:25-26 thus foreshadows the Eucharist, where the son of David gives bread to his companions.

¹ The biblical quotations are taken from the NASB.
The second instance of the word *bread* is found in Mark 3:20: “And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat *bread*.3 This verse, which seems to be a circumstantial statement that moves the narrative from one pericope to the next, is in fact an anticipation of the later development of the topic of bread, as the conglomeration of the bread passages starts in 6:31 with a parenthetical reminder in 3:20, even though the word *bread* is absent. This narrative link reiterates the topic of bread, to which the narrative will return in chapter 6, where the hearer/reader is reminded, through the Markan style of retrospection,4 that the disciples are still too busy to eat (bread).5

The third time the word *bread* is used in this Gospel is in 6:8, now narratively closer to the central development of the topic: “And He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff—no *bread*, no bag, no money in their belt.” The mission given to the twelve is of a spiritual significance, emphasized by an *inclusio* regarding the authority given to the twelve over unclean spirits that frames this account (6:7, 13). Jesus instructs them not to focus on temporal things, such as bread and money; they are to focus on the spiritual dimension. Later on in this study it will be pointed out that the disciples constantly struggle between these two dimensions (temporal and spiritual) in the Gospel of Mark, as they seem to lack insight regarding the words of Jesus. Mark portrays the disciples engaging in a conversation about “having no bread” later on in 8:14-17. In this conversation, their need for only the “one” loaf of bread is emphasized, implicitly recalling the previous instance (6:8) in which the disciples

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3 The italicized word represents a change from the NASB, which reads “a meal.”
4 “Foreshadowing (which anticipates later events) and retrospection (which recalls earlier events) are major forms of repetition in Mark,” D. Rhoads, J. Dewey and D. Michie *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 48.
5 “That Jesus and his company cannot eat (literally ‘eat bread’) indicates that the bustle of the crowd interferes with their daily routine, but that it is said in this way—just as later in 6:31—is remarkable and makes the reader think.” B. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 168.
are told not to focus their attention in their need for physical bread. The disciples seem to disregard this command, as this paper will point out in the character analysis of the first feeding. The dullness of the disciples to understand and perceive Jesus’ words regarding spiritual bread vs. physical bread aids in the narrative development of the “bread plot,” a development that will introduce the scope of the good news of Jesus’ identity and mission.

III. Bread in Mark 6:30-8:26

There are eighteen occurrences of the word bread (artos) and its cognate terms in this section, and they are intertwined in a narrative development that appears to be deliberate. This core section, which has been proposed as a “section of Eucharistic teaching texts,” contains six different stories and a summary statement of Jesus. In each pericope, the topic of bread is prominent. The structure of the narrative about bread may be outlined as follows:

| 6:30-44  | Feeding bread to 5,000 | A |
| 6:52     | Lack of insight about bread in the boat | B |
| 7:1-23   | Handling of bread with unclean hands | C |
| 7:24-30  | Crumbs of bread for the unclean | C’ |
| 8:1-9    | Feeding bread to 4,000 | A’ |
| 8:14-17  | Lack of insight about bread in the boat | B’ |
| Summary  |                           |   |
| 8:18     | Lack of insight about bread exposed | B” |
| 8:19     | Feeding bread to 5,000 recalled | A |
| 8:20     | Feeding bread to 4,000 recalled | A’ |
| 8:21     | Lack insight about bread reiterated | B’’’ |

Mark uses the two feeding accounts as “framing episodes.” The deliberate “bread plot” in this section of the Gospel may be understood by focusing on the use of the word bread

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7 “In Mark, two similar episodes may frame a large section of the Gospel. In addition to delimiting what they frame, the two episodes can be read in relation to each other and in comparison or contrast with the material they frame.” Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark as Story, 52.
(artos) in the “frame/doublet stories”⁸ (both feeding stories in 6:30-44; 8:1-9 and the disciples lack of understanding of the feeding stories in 6:52; 8:14-17) and the account of the Syrophoenician woman as the center of the material they frame (7:24-30). It is not the scope of this paper to analyze the source of the doublet. Narrative-critical analysis will be used to discern more accurately the author’s intention in creating a frame to aid in the understanding of the “bread plot.”

The bread narrative resumes after Jesus invites the disciples to a secluded place. The text reminds the hearer/reader that the disciples still have not found time to eat (6:31-32; cf. 3:20); therefore, “they went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves” (6:31-32).

A. Feeding Bread to 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44)

1. Characters

“By themselves” (Mark 6:32) turns out to be wishful thinking, as “the people” run ahead of Jesus and his disciples. The Markan narrator sets the scene for three main types of characters in this story: round, flat, and stock.

Round characters. A round character exhibits a variety of qualities and traits. Jesus is the only round character in this story: he gives commands, asks questions, blesses the food and breaks the bread. Jesus is a round character throughout the Gospel⁹; Jesus is introduced as the central character in the first verse of Mark: Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

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⁹ “Jesus is a ‘round’ character with many and varied traits. What Jesus ‘does’ reveals primarily the extent and nature of his authority from God. What Jesus ‘says’ discloses his understanding of himself as agent of God and his purposes. Both what Jesus does and what he says express his values and show his integrity in living up to those values.” Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, Mark as Story, 104.
Jesus is very active at the beginning of this story: he sees the large crowd, he feels compassion for them, and he begins to teach them (v. 34). Jesus feels compassion for the crowd, “because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34), and he will take the role of the shepherd and feed them as the new Davidic shepherd prince (Mark 2:26; cf. Ezek 34:23-24).

In this account, Jesus does not initiate the need to provide something to eat; the disciples initiate the dialogue (v. 35). Jesus answers by giving them the responsibility to “give” (dote) something to the crowd (v. 37a). The disciples answer with a question regarding how much they are to spend to buy bread (v. 37b). Jesus then asks them to count how many loaves of bread they have (v. 38). “How many” is a very significant question in the narrative; this question will be repeated several times and will be used to summarize the meaning of the feedings (Mark 8:19-20). The character of Jesus fully controls the narrative: Jesus commands the crowd to sit on the green grass. He takes the bread and fish, and looking up to heaven he blesses, breaks and gives the loaves of bread to the disciples.

The actions of Jesus become significant verbs throughout the narrative. These verbs are repeated in Mark 8:6, 19, 20 and 14:22. Of special interest is that he breaks the bread, as highlighted in the doublet and conclusion. Jesus’ actions foreshadow those that will come later in the Gospel. Jesus is the one who gives the bread to his disciples; the disciples are to set it before the people. In this manner, Jesus enables his disciples to fulfill his original command: “You give them something to eat” (6:37). The narrative alludes to “a deserted place,” “groups of hundreds and fifties” (6:40), and “sheep without shepherd” (cf. Num 27:17; Ezek 34:23-24).
These are implicit references to Jesus as the expected prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18) and the Davidic king that was to come (Ezek 34:23-24).10

When the feeding is over, Jesus makes the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side. When the disciples fail to recognize Jesus walking on the water, the narrator explains that the failure relates to a lack of insight gained from the “incident of the bread” (Mark 6:52).

Flat characters. Flat characters act repeatedly in the same manner; their words and actions are highly predictable. In Mark, the disciples are flat characters, constantly missing the deeper insights of the parables and miracles of Jesus (e.g. Mark 4:10, 13, 40, 41). The disciples struggle to understand the spiritual dimension of Jesus’ actions and mission, and they do not discern who Jesus really is. In the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples are flat characters, acting as they have previously in this Gospel: dull and without insight. The disciples lack spiritual insight, but they are quick to realize temporal needs, and they become aware of the people’s need to buy something to eat (6:36). They take the initiative to present the situation to Jesus. They seem startled by Jesus’ reiteration of the same sentence with a change of subject: “you give them

10 “The passage emphasizes that this feeding of the five thousand happens in a deserted area, this location being mentioned three times (6:31, 32, 35). If this is intentional, Mark may have meant to draw some parallel between this feeding and the supply of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses (Exod. 16). This connection of Jesus’ feeding miracle with Moses is further substantiated by the reference to the people as like sheep without a shepherd (6:34), which seems to be an allusion to Numbers 27:17, where Moses prays for God to supply a leader after him to take his role. This description of the people also brings to mind Ezekiel: 1-31, where God promises to feed his “sheep” by sending a king like David to be their shepherd (esp Ezek. 34.23). In other words, this allusion to these OT passages by Mark suggested to the reader that Jesus is here fulfilling the role of the longed-for king of Israel, the Messiah, who, like Moses, teacher (6:34) the people and feeds them. Even the little note that the people were organized into groups of hundreds and fifties (6:40) may allude to Moses’ organizing of the Israelites similarly during the wilderness march (Exod 18:21…) The effect of these characteristic, not found in the parallels or in the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10), is to show that the event here is not to be seen simply as a great miracle but also as full of particular prophetic significance. The way the event is described depicts Jesus as Messiah, the divinely sent provision for Israel and the fulfillment of OT prophecies of a future salvation. Jesus’ action is here ‘dressed’ in OT imagery to make the point.” L. Hurtado, Mark (NIBC 2; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 100.
(something) to eat” (6:37). The disciples then calculate that to buy bread for all the people will cost 200 denarii. Would the disciples actually have this kind of money? Jesus, instead, commands them to count not money, but loaves: “how many loaves do you have? Go look!” (6:38a). The plot of “counting bread” will develop until they are left with “one” true loaf (8:14).

The disciples find five loaves and two fishes. The narrative emphasizes the bread; the fish are circumstantial, stock data in the bread plot. The reader/hearer is not told where the disciples find the bread, how long they looked for it, or why they stopped looking when they found five loaves. After Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it, he kept giving bread to the disciples to give the people. They fulfill Jesus’ original command (6:37) with the bread that Jesus himself gives to them.

Stock Characters. Stock characters are needed for the narrative to flow. They do not have a main role in the story, but are necessary for the plot to go on. In this story, the people are the stock characters. The “crowd” (6:34) has insight, perhaps even more than the disciples, because when they see Jesus and his disciples going, “many recognize them” (6:33). The people run on foot from all the cities and get “there” (to the desolate place) before Jesus and his disciples do (6:33). The people become the recipients of Jesus’ teaching and compassion (6:33). They sit in groups of hundreds and fifties (6:40); there are 5,000 men who will eat the bread (6:44). This is a large size crowd, taking into consideration that they are in a “desolate” place (6:31, 35). The most significant statement regarding the crowds is a summary of the outcome: “They all ate and were satisfied” (6:42). The inclusiveness of the word all (pantes) indicates that the disciples

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11 Fowler argues that “the disciples’ possession of bread and money in 6:37-38, after having been expressly ordered not to carry such, is yet another indication of the failure of their mission; they are ultimately callous to his wishes and blind to the significance of his teaching and mighty deeds.” Fowler, Loaves and Fishes, 118.
and the people ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments (6:43), twelve baskets full. “They” continues to make reference to “everyone/all.” At the end of the story “everyone” is satisfied (6:42). This last statement is significant because it will aid in the understanding of the bread plot development.

2. Setting

“There” is the setting given for this pericope (6:33), but the narrator does not specify the location. It is a *desolate* place (6:31, 35), located at traveling distance from the surrounding countryside and villages (6:36). The setting is introduced in socio-religious terms; the geographical data is secondary. The narrator offers a *Jewish* setting by the numbers and terms that are introduced in the narrative: the number 5 (5 loaves and 5,000 men), the number 12 (leftover baskets), and the word used for basket (*kophinos*) belong to the Jewish culture. The number *five* belongs to Israel’s history: the Torah is divided in five major books, David requests five loaves of bread to feed his men (1 Sam 21:3; cf. Mark 2:26), the prophet Elisha miraculously feeds 100 prophets with 20 loaves of bread (a 5 to 1 ratio) (2 Kings 4:42-44). The number *twelve* corresponds to the core identity of the people of Israel: they are divided in twelve tribes, and Canaan was divided into 12 distinct territories (Joshua 13) as Israel’s inheritance. As previously discussed, there are many allusions to the Jewish Scriptures through Mosaic and Davidic terms (e.g., “desolate/secluded place” in 6:31, 35; “groups of hundreds and fifties” in 6:40; “sheep without shepherd” in 6:34 [cf. Num 27:17; Ezek 34: 23-24]). At the end of

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the story, Jesus commands his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida (6:45). In doing so, Jesus is asking the disciples to go beyond the socio-religious boundaries in which this first feeding miracle takes place. Malbon explains, “The east side of the lake is, of course, outside the Galilean homeland of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus, in asking his disciples to go before him to Bethsaida (6:45), is asking them to move out to others, to move beyond their own people, their own religious tradition—not that this is something Jesus has not already done himself.”14 The bread plot will further develop between Jesus’ command to go to Bethsaida in 6:45 and the confirmed arrival to Bethsaida in 8:22.

3. Literary Devices

The Markan narrative contains important literary and rhetorical tools15 that aid the reader/hearer in the understanding of the overall narrative development. Of particular interest in the study of bread in Mark are repetition, retrospection, foreshadowing, and key words.

Repetition. The word bread (artos) is repeated five times in the feeding of the 5,000 (6:37, 38, 41, 44), and one time in its aftermath, when the narrator explains that not much insight was gained by the disciples from the miracle of the bread (6:52).

Retrospection. An important literary tool in this section is the implicit recalling of the command given by Jesus in 6:8: the disciples were instructed not to take money or bread. In the narrative, the disciples ask Jesus if they should go and spend 200 denarii on bread (6:37), thereby explicitly failing to heed his command.16

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15 “The Markan episodes are intertwined with each other by the repetition of words and phrases, the occurrence of foreshadowings and retrospections, similarities of scenes and situations and the clustering of episodes in concentric or parallel.” Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 47.
Foreshadowing. Many literary devices are employed in this pericope to anticipate Jesus’ Passion and Eucharist. The two instances of the word *hour* (*hōra*) in 6:35 foreshadow Jesus’ Passion; the remaining ten occurrences of the word *hour* in this Gospel will appear after Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem.¹⁷

The most important foreshadowing of the Eucharist and Passion occurs through the verbal links that unite both feedings and the Eucharist account: *took, blessed/gave thanks, broke and gave* in Mark 6:41; 8:6; 14:22. A retrospection related to the manner in which David behaves as he feeds his men (2:26) is also implied.

**Key Words.** The word *satisfied* is a climactic word because it summarizes and concludes this event. This account emphasizes the satisfaction and overflowing produced by the bread: “they all ate and were *satisfied*, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the *bread*”¹⁸ (Mark 6:42-44). This word will be repeated in the second feeding incident (8:4, 8) and in the pericope the two feeding stories frame (7:27).

4. *Bread Plot*

From this brief narrative analysis of Mark 6:30-44 the following observations regarding the bread plot in the feeding of the 5,000 may be drawn:

The narrative starts with a reminder that the disciples are in great need of going to a secluded place to eat (6:31). *The crowd* anticipates the arrival of Jesus and his disciples and

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¹⁷ “In Mark *hōra* is used 12 times; twice in the present pericope, and the rest all appearing after Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem, the place of his Passion, … it becomes clear that, except in the two occurrences in this account of the miracle of the bread, it is used only referring to the Passion and the Parousia of the Son of Man, … this pregnant usage of *hōra* in relation with the Last Supper coincides with Mark’s interest in bread as seen in the redactional verses 8:19-21.” S. Masuda, “The Good News of the Miracle of the Bread: The Tradition and its Markan Redaction” *NTS* 28 (1982): 193.

¹⁸ The italicized word represents a change from the NASB, which reads “loaves.”
become the recipients of Jesus’ teaching (6:34). When the hour comes, the disciples realize that the crowd is in need of food, and they suggest to Jesus that he may send them away. Jesus, in response to their suggestion, answers that the disciples should be the ones to feed them. The disciples, instead of recognizing the impossibility of such a mission, calculate the sum of money needed to feed bread to the people (6:37), once again missing the spiritual dimension of Jesus’ teaching. They disregard Jesus’ previous command of not carrying money or bread with them (6:8) and try to find a solution that violates his explicit instructions. Jesus teaches them through an enacted parable using bread. He will do more than Moses in the desert (Exod 16) and than David for his men (1 Sam 21:1-6); he will use five loaves of bread to feed 5,000 people, a ratio of 1 to 1,000 that surpasses even Elisha’s miraculous feeding (2 Kings 4:42-44). Bread is the focus of this narrative; this may be observed in Jesus asking about the bread (not the fish) in 6:38. Jesus commands the crowd to sit and they form groups of fifties and hundreds, as in the time of the Mosaic camp (Exod 18:21). The miracle itself is not explicitly narrated; the reader/hearer is not told how Jesus multiplies the bread for all. The development of the story focuses on the bread: Jesus took the bread and looked toward heaven; he blessed it, and broke the bread (this action is highlighted in the conclusion found in 8:19-20). Jesus gave the bread to the disciples to give to the crowd. The bread is not in the “countryside and villages” (6:36). It is found at Jesus’ side. And yet, the disciples do not fully comprehend it. The disciples set the bread before the people. They all eat and are satisfied (6:42). There are twelve full baskets (kophinoi) left (one for each disciple and/or tribe of Israel). Now that everyone is satisfied on this side of the lake, it is time to go to the other side of the lake, to Bethsaida (6:45). The bread riddle has just been presented to the reader/hearer. Whatever is the meaning, the disciples fail
to recognize it (6:52). They continue to misunderstand Jesus’ identity and mission: “they had not gained any insight from the incident of the bread.” Bethsaida represents Gentiles and outsiders. Is Jesus commanding his disciples to cross forbidden boundaries and go “to the other side”?  

B. Bread for the Unclean (Mark 7:24-30)

In spite of Jesus’ command to go to Bethsaida (6:45), when Jesus and his disciples got out of the boat they were in Gennesaret (6:53), in Galilee. “Immediately the people recognized Him” (6:54) and brought those who were sick to be healed by Jesus. Everyone seems to know who Jesus is, except his disciples and the Pharisees and scribes, who in 7:1 gather around Jesus and pick up the topic of eating bread from the previous pericope through questions that set the stage for the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman. Mark 7:24-30 is the central event framed by the two feeding stories, but the episode with the Pharisees and scribes (7:1-23) and the story of the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman are parallel incidents in the narrative structure of this section and therefore interpret each other:

| 6:30-44 | Feeding bread to 5,000 | A |
| 6:52 | Lack of insight about bread in the boat | B |
| 7:1-23 | Handling of bread with unclean hands | C |
| 7:24-30 | Crumbs of bread for the unclean | C’ |
| 8:1-9 | Feeding bread to 4,000 | A’ |
| 8:14-17 | Lack of insight about bread in the boat | B’ |

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19 The italicized word represents a change from the NASB, which reads “loaves.”
21 Malbon asks the question about the possible state of mind of the disciples when Jesus commands them to get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, “are the disciples, according to Mark, also distressed, fearful and not understanding about going to Bethsaida?” Malbon, Narrative Space, 28.
The first two occurrences of bread in chapter 7 appear in the controversy with the Pharisees and scribes; the third occurrence appears in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman.

Both stories (7:1-23; 7:24-30) relate to clean and unclean categories. The Pharisees guarded social and religious boundaries. Mark emphasizes that the Pharisees “had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed” (7:2). This statement is followed by a parenthetical explanation of the boundaries observed by the Pharisees and “all the Jews” (7:3-4). Following this explanation, the Pharisees and the scribes ask Jesus: “why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” (7:5). To this challenge, Jesus answers with a greater challenge: the Pharisees accuse the disciples of Jesus of not walking according to the tradition of the elders; Jesus accuses the Pharisees of neglecting the commandment of God in order to keep the

22 “In Mark’s portrayal, the leaders of Israel see boundaries as lines to be guarded in order to protect the holiness of God’s people against the pernicious influence of impurity.” D. Rhoads, Reading Mark, Engaging the Gospel (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 86.
tradition of men (7:6-13). Jesus then offers a detailed explanation of the meaning of clean and unclean (7:14-23): “there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man” (7:15). After a parenthetical narrator comment that declares all foods clean (7:19b), Jesus lists the unclean things that defile a man (7:20-23). The parenthetical statement in 7:19b is an important one in Mark’s perspective on Gentiles, omitted by Matthew in 15:10-20, because it seems that “once Jesus has abrogated the food laws, the door to contact with Gentiles is wide open.”

What follows is the narrative analysis of the “breakthrough” event (Mark 7:24-30): the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman.

1. Characters

Round characters. This pericope has been cited as an effort on Jesus’ part to instruct his disciples in solitude, but the disciples of Jesus do not appear in the Markan version of this story. There are two round characters in the story: Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman.

The pericope starts with Jesus crossing a boundary that would place him in unclean territory. Tyre (7:24) qualifies not as profane, but as impure/unclean territory, and its inhabitants as the least, the fourteenth stratum in the Jewish perspective. Gentiles are the

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24 Rhoads, Reading Mark, 87. Rhoads explains the significance of this statement in the overall plot, “In the narrative, Jesus crosses many culturally established boundaries internal to Israel. However, the external geographical and social boundary separating Israel from the Gentiles is the boundary against which all internal boundaries are hedges. Once Jesus has abrogated the food laws, the door to contact with Gentiles is wide open. Immediately after Jesus declares all foods clean, he goes to (unclean) Gentile territory and encounters the Syrophoenician woman,… Just as the Cornelius episode is the breakthrough in the Acts of the Apostles, so Jesus’ contact with the Syrophoenician woman in Mark is the point at which the fundamental social boundary is crossed. The subsequent feeding of 4,000 Gentiles in the Decapolis is the outcome of this breakthrough.” Rhoads, Reading Mark, 87.
last of the genealogical categories of persons from an Israelite perspective in Second Temple Judaism.

Jesus appears as an unusually complex character, unsuccessfully trying to remain in solitude (7:24), and seemingly changing his mind due to the woman’s response (7:29). His efforts to be in seclusion remind the reader/hearer of the previous instance in which Jesus intended to take his disciples to a secluded place (6:31-33). As in the previous instance, he is not able to keep his incognito status (7:24c; cf. 6:33). When approached by the woman, Jesus speaks in a riddle: “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” (7:27). Jesus reminds the woman that she does not belong to the children, and that the bread is supposed to go to the children first until they are satisfied. He even adds a moral value to the possibility, emphasizing that “it is not good” (7:27) to take the children’s bread and give it to the dogs. When Jesus encounters great spiritual insight in the words of the woman as she responds to the bread riddle, he utters a causal statement and performs a remote miracle: “because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter” (7:29). The confirmation of the miracle is given in the following verse. Jesus is ready to dispense bread to the dogs. He either had a change of heart or the humble claim of the dogs to eat crumbs that fall from the children’s table allows him parallel missions to the Jews and Gentiles. Jesus is addressed as “Lord” by the pagan woman (7:28), and it is the only time this term is used addressing Jesus in a confessional manner in the Gospel of Mark.28

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28 Guelich explains the significance of the term kurie in this context, “This ‘title’ of ‘Lord’ that consistently comes on the lips of ‘believers’ in Matthew occurs only this one time with confession overtones in Mark and sets the stage for Jesus’ concluding remark and his offer of help to the woman.” R. Guelich, Mark 1-8:36(WBC 34A, Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 388.
The woman is introduced as “a Greek, of the Syrophoenician race” (7:26). Not only is she a woman, but a Gentile, and that of the “worst” kind, a Syrophoenician. The woman takes the place of the crowd in the previous story. She finds Jesus, she comes to him, and she is fed with bread. The woman comes with a request. She has heard of Jesus, and now she “immediately came and fell at His feet” (7:25) because she has a little daughter with an unclean spirit. She “kept” asking (7:26) Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. A complex character, she is shown to act with urgency (7:25), persistently (7:26), filled with humility and insight (7:28), and ironically contrasted with the lack of insight from the disciples in previous instances (6:52). Strikingly, she understands Jesus’ riddle and argues not for the first place, but for the humble place of a little dog that eats bread from the children’s overflow. She is the one that in her riddle-like answer proposes “crumbs” (7:28). She is not asking for the children’s bread, or to be fed first, or even to be fully satisfied. The children can be satisfied first with the bread; all she wants is the crumbs of bread that fall from the table. The pericope ends as she finds her daughter lying on the bed, now healed. Rhoads argues that the Syrophoenician woman is a stock character, because she appears as the typical suppliant with faith. Nevertheless, Rhoads must concede that “She is a rather complex stock character!”

Stock characters. There are no flat characters in this story. There are two stock characters: the daughter and the demon. These are stock characters because the daughter and the demon are not addressed directly, implying that the miracle itself is not the narrative climax or even the pivotal idea in this narrative. Perhaps the house’s owner could be considered a

29 The italicized word represents a change from the NASB, which reads “Gentile.”
30 Rhoads, Reading Mark, 81.
31 Ibid, 83.
stock character, but he/she is not explicitly mentioned. Also, the “children” and the “dogs” in the riddle (7:27-28) imply stock characters, but are not analyzed as such due to the parabolic frame in which these terms become symbols of socio-ethnic groups.  

2. Settings

The phrase, “from there” (7:24) does not explicitly define the place. In the Markan style, Jesus is once again moving. “There” could mean the area of Gennesaret, which is the last geographical location mentioned in the narrative (6:53), or it could relate to the house in which Jesus explains to his disciples the previous conflict with the Pharisees (7:17). Nevertheless, Jesus leaves a house and enters another (7:24). He is now clearly in Gentile territory (7:24); and not only that, he has just entered pagan territory: “... with a long history of antagonism to Israel. The region of Tyre (formerly Phoenicia) had been the home of Jezebel, who in Elijah’s day had nearly subverted the Northern Kingdom with her pagan prophets and practices (1 Kings 16:31-32).” Perhaps the setting proposed recalls another Syrophoenician woman many years before, whose future radically changes for herself and her offspring when she meets a prophet of God (1 Kings 17:7-24). The setting of this event is important, as it is not only geographically unclean, but socially impure. The socio-religious-political implications of Jesus ministering in this setting would be unbearable to the legalistic Pharisaic mind. Wefald points out the descriptions given to the reader/hearer to highlight that Jesus is in a purely Gentile setting: “The reader is signaled that Jesus is on Gentile territory, for the woman was a ‘Greek’, a Syrophoenician by birth (7.26), who admits she is not one of the children (a Jew), but is a dog (a

32 Van Iersel proposes that “the ‘children-little dogs’ relation is a metaphor for the relation between Jews-the children of Israel- and Gentiles.” Van Iersel, Mark, 250.
33 Edwards, Mark, 217.
34 Malina explains that “persons of all other ethnic groups (-Gentiles) were an abomination, simply off the purity scale altogether.” Malina, New Testament World, 175.
Gentile) (7.27-28)." The geographical journey of Jesus that follows this event is most striking when observed in a map. Jesus goes to Tyre, then through Sidon (7:31) to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis, a most unusual trajectory (v.31). This verse offers a conglomeration of Gentile geography, proposing a journey of inconceivable scope for one who is the Messiah incognito.

3. Literary Devices

There are several rhetorical devices employed by Mark to affect the reader. The following are some of the most prominent:

*Juxtaposition and Contrast.* The fact that Mark juxtaposes this story that takes place in Gentile territory with the previous story that relates to a question concerning defilement is less than coincidental. The juxtaposition highlights Jesus’ inclusiveness: “If ‘unclean’ foods such as pigs and dogs were no longer unclean (7:16-19) neither were Gentiles.” Furthermore, the juxtaposition between the disciples’ lack of insight (6:52; 7:18-19) and the woman’s insightful perspective into the parabolic saying of Jesus (7:28) contrasts the faith of one considered by the Israelites unclean, a *dog*, with the lack of faith of the *children* of Israel.

*Framing and Foreshadowing.* There is a very intentional framing placed by Mark around the two stories that take place in Gentile territory, and it relates to the *bread* being fed to the multitudes. The feeding of the 5,000 that precedes the story, which is defined as “the incident

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35 E. Wefald, “The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms.” *JSNT* 60 (1995): 11. In his article, Wefald points out the distinct narrative signals that give the reader confirmation regarding Jesus’ journeys in Jewish and Gentile territory: “1) Jesus encountering Jewish religious leaders, 2) the presence of Jewish worship centers, 3) obvious Gentile markers such as ‘swine’, and 4) a non-exclusive understanding of Kelber’s signals of ‘to cross over’ and ‘the other side’.” Wefald, “Separate Gentile Mission,” 12-13.

of the loaves” (6:52) and whose meaning is not fully understood by the disciples, seems to be an intentional frame to the story of bread and crumbs falling from the children’s table (this proposition is further discussed in the plot section). Furthermore, this pericope (7:24-37) is then followed by the feeding of the 4,000, which, once again, carries a deep meaning that the disciples fail to understand (8:21). The foreshadowing of the eucharistic words of Christ (14:22) in the framing episodes is emphasized.

**Pivotal Words and Progression.** The first word in v. 25 is a strong adversative that “introduces an incident that results from his [Jesus’] failure to stay incognito and thereby adds emphasis to that failure.” This word is pivotal in the story. The Pharisees and Jesus’ disciples are not fully recognizing Jesus’ mission, but this Gentile woman brings the Messiah incognito to light in Gentile territory. The words employed by Jesus and the woman that are translated as “children” in the parabolic exchange (vv. 27-28) are significant. Jesus uses the word *teknon* to refer to children. The woman uses the word *paidion* to respond, which is the word that Mark employs for the woman’s own child (7:30) when healed. Mark, in this pericope, uses progressions of words that are designed to affect the reader, such as the one found in verse 26, which “reads like a crescendo of demerit: she is a woman, a Greek Gentile, from infamous pagans of Syrian Phoenicia.”

**Key Words.** Two of the key words in this pericope reflect an on-going emphasis in the context of the narrative: “bread” (and crumbs as symbol of bread) and “satisfied,” words that the narrator has emphasized in the previous pericope (6:41-42). There were twelve leftover baskets full of broken pieces after the crowd was satisfied (6:43). These key words make vv. 27-

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28 the climactic verses in this pericope. There are many other rhetorical devices in this narrative, but these will suffice to draw some conclusions as to the narrative dynamics in these stories and the intentional tools designed to involve and affect the reader.

4. Bread Plot

The story of the Syrophoenician woman moves mainly through conflict. This conflict, between the woman and Jesus, centers on the core understanding of Jesus’ mission, and there seems to be a prioritization implied: the bread is for the children (Israel) first; they are to be satisfied first (7:27). The woman does not engage in a conflict about position, but simply appeals to the right of “the dogs” to get some bread pieces/crumbs under the table (not first). The Markan narrative implies that there might be enough bread for children (Jews – feeding of the 5,000) and for dogs (Gentiles – the feeding of the 4,000 that will follow). She seems to win the conflict as she steps out of the scene obtaining what she came seeking.

The miracle itself is not what carries the weight of the plot. The emphasis is placed in the interaction between Jesus and the woman. The narrative starts by informing the reader through a two-step progression that Jesus is determined to leave non-Gentile territory and to enter Gentile territory: “Having arisen, he departed” or “he got up and went away” (7:24). The reader has been prepared to enter into enemy territory, into the core of geographical defilement. Mark, having placed the dialogue on defilement immediately before this pericope, has set the context for the reader to accompany Jesus into forbidden territory: “From a socioreligious perspective, Jesus’ visit to Tyre universalizes the concept of Messiah in terms of geography, ethnicity, gender, and religion in a way entirely unprecedented in Judaism.”

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39 Edwards, Mark, 217.
narrative emphasizes Jesus’ desire to stay incognito in a rapid journey from one house to another (7:17; 7:24). But the narrative dynamic slows down when the reader encounters the first defiled person that breaks the silence and frustrates Jesus’ intentions of solitude. The woman is introduced to the reader in detail; furthermore, the reader is given a progression of details that would repulse the Jewish reader and fill the Gentile reader with joy. The description of the woman seems to be designed to bring greater levels of shock: “woman... Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race” (7:26).

This woman keeps asking Jesus for a healing miracle for her daughter, and Jesus responds in an unusual parabolic saying that portrays the social treatment expected from a Jew to a Gentile. Furthermore, Jesus clarifies that the bread (the bread riddle has not yet been fully revealed in the narrative, but so far it seems to related to Jesus’ identity and mission), even though not yet accepted and highly misunderstood in the previous stories, is first for the children (of Israel). The reader, who has prepared himself/herself to meet a dog, finds a humble, insightful woman, who responds to Jesus in the same parabolic terms in which she is addressed and claims not the first place at the feeding table, but a place, even if it is under the table, receiving the spill-over from Israel’s bread. Her attitude deeply affects the reader: if the reader is Jewish, he/she does not feel threatened by the woman’s response, because she is not competing with Israel’s first place. If the reader is a Gentile, he/she celebrates the revelation that the Messiah’s mission is understood as including Gentiles. Jesus’ response to her is causal: “because of this word” (7:29), because she had insight into the inclusiveness of the Messiah’s mission, her desire is granted. At this point in the narrative, the hearer/reader has grown both

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sympathetic to the woman and shocked at the new understanding that the Messiah’s mission knows no socio-religious boundaries. The confirmation of her faith is given through the miracle that happens remotely, emphasizing Jesus’ authority to exorcise demons. The woman’s daughter is now receiving the bread.

The narrative continues in an unusual conglomeration of Gentile geography. Jesus moves fast, and the narrative slows down when Mark encounters another opportunity to exalt the Messiah incognito. The reader is confronted with a crowd that assumes the same attitude as the Syrophoenician woman: they “implore” (7:32) Jesus to heal the deaf-mute. This is the Messiah, and the scope of his ministry is beyond all expected boundaries. The narrative offers details of the miracle in which Jesus has a very close interaction with the deaf-mute, a defiling interaction that ends in the total healing of this man, who “began speaking plainly” (7:35). The astonishment felt in the crowd is so that they are not able to conceal Jesus’ messianic identity, and they proclaim the news that “he has done all things well” (7:37; cf. Gen 1:31 LXX). The impact of this story is of such magnitude that the reader is faced with a decision: he/she either accepts Jesus’ as Messiah with this proposition of unprecedented inclusive ministry or he/she rejects Jesus as the Messiah “in order to keep the tradition” (7:9). The messianic era has been ushered in, first for Jews and then for Gentiles. Its force is so great that the attempts to conceal its effects are constantly frustrated. The Messiah has authority over demons, diseases, and defiled territories. Jesus brings bread for insiders and outsiders. The breakthrough is the understanding that there is enough bread on the table for all those who want to eat, even for the “dogs” (7:28), who now are being fed along with the children.
C. Feeding of Bread to 4,000 (Mark 8:1-9)

Rhoads observes that “the subsequent feeding of 4,000 Gentiles in the Decapolis is the outcome of this breakthrough.”41 The second feeding story (8:1-9) is the closing framing episode, strategically positioned in the narrative.

1. Characters

Round characters. Jesus, once again, is the only round character. Unlike the previous feeding (6:35), this time it is Jesus who initiates the need for feeding the people; Jesus is the one who raises the problem of lack of food. Jesus feels compassion for this crowd, as he did for the previous crowd, but for very different reasons. In the first feeding, Jesus feels compassion for the crowd because “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34). In the second feeding, Jesus feels compassion for the crowd because they have nothing to eat (8:2). Jesus will ask the disciples the same question he asked in the previous feeding: “How many loaves do you have?” (8:5). After being told that there are seven loaves, Jesus again performs four actions: he takes the bread, and after giving thanks (eucharistēsas, cf. blessed in the previous account), Jesus then breaks the seven loaves and gives them to His disciples to serve to the crowd (8:6). Jesus again directs the crowd to sit down, this time on the ground, not on the green grass, and he does not give instructions for specific groups of fifties or hundreds, as in the previous feeding (6:40). In this incident, not only does Jesus initiate the feeding, but he does not ask the disciples to fulfill the need, as he had done previously (6:37). Jesus takes it upon himself to give these Gentiles bread until they are satisfied. Jesus gives the bread to the disciples to feed the people

41 Rhoads, Reading Mark, 87.
(cf. 6:41). Perhaps Jesus takes the initiative to feed the crowd in Gentile territory because the
disciples never would have.

*Flat Characters.* The disciples are flat characters, missing the deeper insights, and
resisting the feeding of the Gentiles when they ask “where will anyone be able to find enough
bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?”42 (8:4). The disciples do not take the
initiative; they do not offer possibilities; they just resist the idea of feeding the Gentiles. The
disciples only speak once in this event, aside from answering “seven” to Jesus’ question (8:5). It
is verse 8:4 that gives a complete picture of the disciples’ perception of this event. This
perception is clearly stated in Wefald’s article:

The disciples’ question in 8.4 is to be understood in part as, ‘How can one feed
these people, these Gentiles who are not part of the people of God, with bread here in
the desert?’ The disciples never questioned Jesus about how one could feed the Jews in
the first feeding of 6.30-44, but in fact they volunteered to go and buy bread for that
Jewish crowd, something which they do not volunteer in the second feeding of 8.1-10.
The Jewish disciples are resisting the Gentile mission every step of the way. The
question in 8.4 about the bread is but another instance of the disciples not
understanding about the loves in 6.52 and also later in the conversation in 8.14-21. They
do not understand that the bread which Jesus has to give is not only for the Jews, but
also for the Gentiles.43

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42 Wefald notes, “the Jewish disciples resist the second (Gentile feeding 8.4) and not the first (Jewish) feeding. This
is similar to the disciples’ responses in 4.35-41, 6.45-53 and 8.14-21, when the disciples are crossing the sea from
west to east to the Gentiles. In each case the Jewish disciples give evidence of resisting the Gentile mission Jesus is
As the narrative continues, the disciples are not gaining a deeper insight about the bread. On the contrary, Jesus will eventually address the fact that they do not understand the meaning of the bread feedings (8:17-21).

Stock Characters. A “large crowd” takes the role of the stock characters in this story. The crowd takes the place of the Syrophoenician woman in the previous account. This crowd is introduced as “they had nothing to eat” (8:1). The Jewish/Old Testament characteristics of the crowd in the previous feeding (6:34, 40) are not present in this incident: the crowd is not addressed as “sheep without a shepherd” (6:34), and they do not sit in groups of fifties and hundreds (6:40). They sit on the ground instead of green grass. On the other hand, they also have left-over baskets and are satisfied (8.4, 8). “About four thousand were there” (8:9).

2. Settings

The temporal setting for the current pericope is “in those days” (8:1). These words provide more than a time line; in this case they provide the clue for the geographical setting:

We are on much firmer ground when we turn to Mark’s own setting for the story. Despite those who would argue that he has placed this Feeding in Galilee by having Jesus reach the Sea of Galilee in 7:31, we found that the healing of the deaf-mute took place in the area of the Decapolis after the evangelist sketched an extended journey for Jesus from Tyre through Sidon to the Decapolis. He does not change the venue for this miracle but links it with what has happened ‘in those days’ (8.1).44

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44 Guelich, Mark, 402.
Not only is the Gentile setting defined by the geographical narrative, but by the Hellenistic words used,\textsuperscript{45} such as *spyridēs* for baskets (8:8) as opposed to *kophinoi* in the previous account (6:43). This difference in words is extremely important, as it will be repeated in Jesus’ summary of the event in 8:19-21: “‘When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets [\(kophinōs\)] full of broken pieces you picked up?’ They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets [\(spyridōn\)] full of broken pieces did you pick up?’ And they said to Him, ‘Seven.’ And He was saying to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’” This summary also brings to our attention the difference in the quantity of baskets left over after each incident. In the first incident, the Jewish geographical setting is enriched by twelve leftover baskets (6:43-the twelve tribes of Israel could be satisfied and have left over one basket per tribe). In the current event (8.8), the baskets full of leftovers are seven. In the Gentile geographical setting, seven symbolizes one basket per pagan nation displaced by Israel in the land of Canaan: “When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he distributed their land as an inheritance” (Acts 13:19). Seven is used in other Hellenistic settings, such as the choosing of the seven deacons with Greek names in Acts 6:1-6 in response to the accusation of the “Hellenistic Jews” (Acts 6:1). All these narrative clues set the second feeding in a non-Jewish/Gentile setting.

\textsuperscript{45} Hurtado explains, “the term basketfuls is a different Greek word from that translated in 6:43, the latter being a small basket more associated with ancient Jewish life and the term here representing a larger basket more familiar in the general culture of the time” Hurtado, *Mark*, 130.
3. Literary Devices

**Framing.** The second feeding story (8:1-11) completes the framing\(^{46}\) in the narrative, thereby providing the whole picture to interpret the first feeding for the 5,000 and the bread riddle about feeding to the Syrophoenician woman.

**Repetition.** The word *bread* is repeated three times in this incident (8:4, 5, 6). Also the word *satisfied* is repeated twice (8:4, 8). These key words and their equivalent (broken pieces are equivalent to bread), along with some of the key phrases and numbers, highlight verse 8:8 as the climactic verse in this incident. The number *seven* is repeated three times in the second feeding.

**Key Phrases.** There are two key phrases that the narrator has used in the previous feeding pericopes and will use again in the summary (8:17-21). These are “How many loaves?” (8:5) and “left over” baskets (8:8). Both of these phrases will be used by Jesus to draw the conclusion for both framing episodes (8:17-21).

**Retrospection.** Some of the words mentioned under “repetition” and “key phrases” serve as reminders of the previous events because these words have been used in those narratives: *bread* (6:37,38,41,44,52; 7:2,5,27), *satisfied* (*shortazō*, 6:42, 7:27), “How many loaves?” (6:38), and *he took, broke and gave* (6:41; 8:6).

**Foreshadowing.** Many literary devices are employed in this pericope to anticipate Jesus’ Passion and Eucharist. *Taking, giving thanks, breaking and giving of bread* (8:6) are to be highlighted as the bread riddle unfolds in 14:22-24. Furthermore, the phrase “How many

\(^{46}\) “In Mark, two similar episodes may frame a large section of the Gospel. In addition to delimiting what they frame, the two episodes can be read in relation to each other and in comparison or contrast with the material they frame” Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 52.
loaves?” and the response “seven” (8:5) will be recalled in the upcoming summary made by Jesus in the narrative conclusion (8:17-21).

5. Bread Plot

In “those days” (8:1), when Jesus is traveling through Gentile territory, there is, once again, a large crowd that did not have anything to eat. Jesus feels compassion for the bread-less crowd and initiates the feeding through the highlighting of their need: “If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way” (8:3). This comment does not impress the disciples, who resist the idea to find any bread to satisfy this crowd. The disciples act very differently than they did in the previous feeding, when they actually proposed to buy the bread themselves to feed the Jewish crowd. In spite of the disciples’ resistance, Jesus asks them, “How many loaves do you have?” (8:5), to which they answer “seven.” Jesus, after directing the crowd to sit down, takes the seven loaves of bread and gives thanks, breaks them, and gives them to the disciples to give to the crowd. Jesus takes the initiative and is the primary character responsible for the feeding of the crowd. He also blesses the fish, and the comment is added as an afterthought without any specific number given (8:7). The people in this crowd, as the previous one (6:42), eat and are satisfied (8:8). The sentence “and they ate and were satisfied” (kai ephagon kai echortasthēsan) is identical in both accounts, except that in the first “Jewish” account the word everyone (pantes) is added (6:42). The absence of everyone in 8:8 might signify the fact that not all Gentiles receive Jesus’ bread, or that the disciples are not eating. After eating to satisfaction, they pick up seven large baskets (spyrides) of fragments (klasmata). Even though the terminology of the baskets changes from one feeding to the other, the word for fragments does not, as the same bread is being served in both feedings. Klasma (fragment)
“is used in Didache, ix. 3 f. of the broken bread of the Agape and the Eucharist.”47 One basket per pagan nation displaced by Israel is left over (Acts 13:19). There are many indications that the feeding of bread to the 4,000 is for non-Jews,48 thereby completing the development of the bread feeding for both Jews and Gentiles. Immediately after this latest feeding Jesus and the disciples enter the boat and cross to an area inhabited by Jews, because the Pharisees come out and again begin to argue with him (8:11). After this brief scene, Jesus gets into the boat and starts warning the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15), that they were adding to the bread of their own making.49 This is the second lack of insight about bread in the boat (the first instance happened in 6:52). “And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And he was giving orders to them, saying, ‘Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’ They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.” (8:14-16). This brief description of the scene in the boat highlights once again the fact that the disciples are not understanding the deeper spiritual meaning of the incidents with the bread. If they had no bread, they were actually heeding Jesus’ original command (6:8); but somehow the disciples worry that again they have forgotten the bread. The narrator is quick to point out that there was “one loaf of bread in the boat with them” (8:14), giving the reader a clue to solving the bread riddle. But the

47 Taylor, Mark, 325.
48 Wefald explains: “All of the reasons put forth above- (1) the narrative geographical markers which show that the five thousand feeding was on the west shore and the four thousand feeding on the east shore; (2) the two different words used for ‘basket’ in each feeding and their exact correlation with the bread conversation of 8.14-21; (3) the public Jewish blessing at the four-thousand feeding which is absent in the five-thousand account; (4) the different basis for Jesus’ compassion at each feeding: the five thousand were sheep already, but the four thousand had been long without any food; (5) the Jewish disciples’ resistance to feeding Gentiles in 8.4, in line with their resistance in 4.35-41, 6.45-53 and 8.14-21 (whereas the Jewish disciples had offered Jesus a suggestion on how the five thousand Jews could be fed in 6.360 – all of these reasons point to the first feeding of the five thousand as being for the Jews, and the second of four thousand for the non-Jews” Wefald, “Separate Gentile Mission,” 20.
49 Mark says that the Pharisees and the Herodians conspired together as to how to destroy Jesus (Mark 3:6).
disciples continue to misunderstand; they are blind to the spiritual realities and once again begin to discuss with one another the fact that they have no bread. There are three uses of the word bread in this brief interaction in the boat (8:14 [2x], 16). The narrative must now address the lack of insight displayed by the disciples, and it will do so through the words of Jesus, who will summarize the two episodes that frame the bread conglomerate (6:33-8:11—the main focus of this paper).

**D. Jesus’ summary of Framing Stories (Mark 8:14-26)**

“Who gets the bread?” is the question that Jesus is answering as he addresses the lack of insight displayed by the disciples as he summarizes the two framing feeding miracles (8:14-21). Countryman addresses this specific pericope (8:14-21), and his presentation of the problem and possible solution are accurate: “It is likely, then, that this [8.17-20] is where Mark wishes to concentrate our attention. Two themes are central here: (1) the disciples have failed to perceive something important in what Jesus has just said to them; (2) their best chance to perceive it will come from paying careful attention to the details of the two miracles of feeding the multitudes.” If the solution is found in the numbers, then the different sums in the miracles cannot be dismissed. Jesus will explain the profound meaning of the bread feedings by juxtaposing the two events. In doing so, Jesus will use the word *bread* twice, and he will imply it a third time (8:20).

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes,

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50 This is a question posted by Wefald in his article. He proposes that the narrative of the Gospel of Mark addresses this question. Wefald, “The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark,” 20.

do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven” And He was saying to them “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:17-21).

By quoting Isaiah 6:9, Jesus highlights the condition of Israel, God’s messenger/witness who has become deaf and blind (Isaiah 42:18-20). Furthermore, the disciples are described in the same manner as the “outsiders” (4:12) who lack insight to understand the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (4:11-12). Guelich adds: “The questions specifically address their lack of understanding and perception, even invoking prophetic language once addressed to unbelieving Israel (8:18).” The lack of understanding creates an inclusio around the summary of the two feeding accounts: “do you not yet understand?” (8:17, 21). In the narrative outline, the lack of insight is clearly observed:

| 8:18 | Lack of insight about bread exposed | B” |
| 8:19 | Feeding Bread to 5,000 re-called | A |
| 8:20 | Feeding Bread to 4,000 re-called | A’ |
| 8:21 | Lack of insight about bread reiterated | B’’’ |

The main verb used by Jesus to enlighten the disciples is broke (eklasa), which foreshadows the Eucharist (14:22). He then juxtaposes the leftover baskets, and uses the two different words for baskets, as in the original accounts, but uses the same words for fragments (klasmata) in both

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52 Marcus explains: “the five critical questions all concern the disciples’ lack of understanding. For readers of Mark, the most resonant of them is the penultimate one, ‘Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears, do you not hear? (8:18), which strongly echoes the terrible judgment pronounced on the ‘outsiders’ in 4:12” J. Marcus, Mark 1-8 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 511.
53 Guelich, Mark, 427.
incidents. Furthermore, if the amount of leftover baskets is supposed to provide the disciples with insight about the actual meaning of the feedings, then the fact that there is enough bread to satisfy the Jews and that there are twelve leftover baskets (kophinoi) with fragments for the twelve tribes of Israel, and the fact that there is enough bread to satisfy the Gentiles and seven leftover baskets (spyrides) with fragments for the seven pagan nations of Canaan displaced by Israel, will become the summary of the breakthrough of the “bread plot” which the disciples continue to miss, as in the inclusio of Jesus words.54

Wefald notes, “All these numbers start to make sense when the accounts and the bread conversation are read with an understanding of the separate and parallel mission to the Gentiles. Somehow one set of numbers is associated with the feeding of the Jews, and the other set of numbers with the separate feeding of the Gentiles.”55 Jesus’ words place “see” and “understand” in direct apposition (8.17), an this pericope is followed by the two-step progression of a miracle that gives sight to a blind man when they finally arrive at Bethsaida (8.22; 6.45). Malbon observes:

At Bethsaida, Jesus enables a blind man to see by working a two-stage healing. Narratively, it would appear that Jesus works in at least two stages to enable the disciples to ‘see’, to perceive the scope of his ministry, to understand that there is bread for the people on the

54 Marcus proposes: “Perhaps an initial step forward is to acknowledge Rau’s point (Markusevangelium,2123 n. 226) that the emphasis in our passage falls neither on the numbers in the respective crowds (five thousand and four thousand) not on the number of loaves initially present (five and seven) but on the number of baskets of fragments left over, twelve and seven. It is these baskets of fragments that are the subject of Jesus’ question, and the latter elicits the disciples’ answers, ‘Twelve’ and ‘Seven’ – answers that Jesus’ final question (8:21) suggests are self-explanatory.” Marcus, Mark, 513-514. Furthermore, Marcus proposes that the number twelve is for the tribes of Israel and the number seven for the seven days of creation (Marcus, Mark, 514). I disagree with the second part of his proposition on the basis of a common denominator of groups of people such as tribes and nations instead of tribes and days.

east as well as on the west of the sea, for Gentiles as well as for Jews. In the detour from the journey commanded by Jesus, the disciples display their blurred vision.\textsuperscript{56}

This miracle is then juxtaposed with the two-step progression of the revelation of Jesus’ identity (8:27-30). The revelation of Jesus’ identity will then be followed by the three clear passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:33). This revelation of Jesus’ identity and mission is preceded by the bread conglomeration in preparation for the breakthrough revelation that Jesus’ identity and mission are for both Jews and Gentiles. There is enough bread for both groups to eat, to be satisfied, and to have leftovers. One question remains: What, exactly, is the bread? Do we not yet understand?

IV. Bread Riddle Revealed (Mark 14:22-25)

The pericope that unravels the mystery of the on-going Markan “bread riddle” starts as follows: “on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed” (14:12). The Passover feast has arrived and Jesus finally reveals the meaning of the “bread of satisfaction.” The occurrence of the word \textit{bread} (\textit{artos}) in 14:22 is the last mention of bread in the Gospel of Mark; the bread riddle is finally understood in its full light. The Passover \textit{haggadah} is about to be modified by Jesus in a climactic revelation through his eucharistic words.

Once again, and for the last time, Jesus takes \textit{bread}: “While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them and said, ‘Take it, \textit{this is My body}.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’” (14:22-

\textsuperscript{56} Malbon, \textit{Narrative Space}, 29.
The bread is his body, and it is about to be broken as he is sacrificed as the Passover lamb. This revelation, that the bread is Jesus’ broken body, is preceded by the verbs now known through repetition by the hearer/reader of this Gospel: he took, broke, and gave the bread as he had done in both feedings. The mystery is solved: the sacrifice of Jesus is for all, Jews and Gentiles.

The scope of this revelation is explained by van Iersel: “unlike the bread of the presence in the Temple, which only the priests are allowed to eat (2.25-26), this bread and this wine are meant to be eaten and drunk by ‘many’ of both Jewish and non-Jewish descent, as was already clear in 6.35-44 and 8.1-9, where Jesus had pity on the multitude and broke the bread for many.” The inclusio of bread is completed (cf. 2:25-26); the Son of David (cf. Mark 10:47-48; 12:35-37) is now the one who feeds the bread, and he is the bread himself. There is enough for children and dogs, for the 5,000 and the 4,000; there are small baskets (kophinoi) and there are large baskets (spyrides) filled with broken bread. All can be satisfied with the provision made on the cross. And there are leftovers for the twelve tribes of Israel and the seven pagan nations. This is truly good news. This good news (euangelion) is the core message of the author of the Gospel of Mark: “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). The scope of the good news is greater than anyone imagined. There is enough bread for those on one side of the lake as there is for those on the other side.

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57 “It is certain that the interpretation of the Passover lamb belonged to the Passover haggadah. How did Jesus interpret the Passover lamb? Since he interpreted the bread and wine in terms of himself, as the words of interpretation show, it is a likely assumption that in the preceding Passover devotions he had also interpreted the Passover lamb in terms of himself.” J. Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1976), 222.
58 Van Iersel, Mark, 425.
59 The NASB reads “gospel” for “good news.”
V. Re-envisioning Adventism through the Markan Paradigm

This paper demonstrates that the good news in Mark transcends any particular socio-religious group, while still allowing for the celebration of group identity. Under the Markan paradigm, Adventism may be re-envisioned, celebrated, and challenged in the following areas:

A. Whether the leftovers are gathered in twelve baskets, seven baskets, or twenty-eight baskets, the socio-religious identity of a Christian group is valid because it carries in its baskets the broken body of Jesus. Adventism’s main goal should be to offer bread: the broken body of Jesus.

B. Group identity may be celebrated and Adventist gospel heritage cherished without negating the identity of other groups, an identity found in Jesus’ broken body.

C. Adventism contributes to the evangelical table through its baskets as instruments for the feeding of the broken body of Jesus. The baskets are in service to the gospel, not the gospel in service to the baskets.

D. Adventism must seat humbly at the evangelical banquet and be fed the divine bread, along with all “broken body” groups, to the point of satisfaction and overflow.

E. Adventism should analyze its twenty-eight baskets in search of bread, and propose a hierarchical model of beliefs, because not all Adventist “doctrines are created equal.”

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61 George Knight proposes the need for a hierarchical model of beliefs for the SDA church, and appropriately claims that “Not every doctrine is created equal!” G. Knight, “Twenty-seven fundamentals in search of a theology,” Ministry International Journal for Pastors (February 2001): 5-7.
It is written, “humankind shall not live by bread alone” (Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4/Luke 4:4; my translation), except when “bread” is the type of the broken body of Jesus. Then Mark proposes that all humankind shall live by bread alone, for Jesus came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
Bibliography


