Jesus Stills the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Wayne Slusser

My remembrance of Dr. Bill Arp: It was an honor and a privilege to be a doctoral student of Dr. Arp. His passion and care for the text, along with expressions of uncanny humor, were exhibited to his students both inside and outside the classroom. As a doctoral student who was taking courses at BBS and away from my family, I found myself on numerous occasions invited either to his house for dinner or to the Waverly deli for lunch. It is at these moments I realized that he didn't *just* teach his students God's word; he also lived it in front of us (Titus 2:1).

Although I cannot possibly alliterate quite as well as he could, I will nonetheless express my gratitude through three powerful take-aways. First, I learned to have a greater appreciation for the text itself. It is literally the creative breath of God (2 Tim 3:16). Second, I learned to expound with an exegetical passion, always looking to discover the author's intended meaning within its given context. His simple, yet profound statement comes to mind, "What does the text say?" Third, I learned that the goal of the interpretation, or meaning of any text, was its significance to me and others. The study of the text should ultimately be for the church and her growth. He would help his students balance their academic pursuits with a reminder, "Keep your people in mind."

It is with great respect and admiration for Dr. Arp that I pen this article. Two courses come to mind, NT-8 (Seminar in Gospel Studies) and NT-1 (Seminar in NT Hermeneutics and Exegetical Method), courses that generated a love for discourse analysis and the Gospel of Mark. These subjects eventually were woven together to serve as my dissertation. The article below is an example of discourse analysis applied to a miracle episode within the Gospel of Mark.

Wayne Slusser, Ph.D., is Interim Seminary Dean and Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Baptist Bible Seminary in South Abington Township, Pennsylvania. Wayne can be reached at wslusser@ClarksSummitU.edu.

T he Gospel of Mark seems to be the "go-to Gospel" when one discusses a passage within the synoptic Gospels.[2] Although this is often the case, the decision made to choose Mark 4:35-41 for this article is due to its theological significance within the narrative of Mark, not due to Mark's position as source.[3] For no other reason, this miracle episode presents an example of Jesus' authority, a theme Mark intends to communicate by answering the question, "Who is he?" Hooker claims that the central issue of Mark concerns itself with the identity of Jesus.[4]

This article suggests that episodes within the story or narrative of a Gospel can make an impact on the intention of the story as a whole.[5] To discover this impact one must first

---

[2] Those that typically assume the use of Mark's Gospel in this way are convinced that Mark is the gospel that lies at the basis of both Matthew and Luke. This is known as Markan priority. Carson and Moo present five important arguments (brevity of Mark, verbal agreement, order of events, Mark's awkward style and vocabulary, see 96-98) that "while not all of equal weight, these arguments taken together make a strong case for thinking that Matthew and Luke have independently used Mark's gospel in writing their own" (D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, eds., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 98).

[3] McKnight states, "Source criticism attempts to identify the written tradition behind the Gospels in order to determine the relationship of the Synoptics" (Scot McKnight, "Source Criticism," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery [Nashville:: Broadman & Holman, 2001], 76). The fact that scholars look for potential clues to determine priority and sources, illustrates the reason for their initial start with Mark's gospel. The author of this article, however, is not advocating this kind of criticism nor does he hold to Markan priority.

[4] Morna D. Hooker, "Who Can This Be: The Christology of Mark's Gospel," in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 81.

[5] Narratives are stories and often difficult to interpret. There is a tendency to interpret episodes individually rather than understanding them as they relate to entire books. For a brief treatment of some of the problems related to interpreting narratives see Walt Russell, *Playing With Fire: How the Bible Ignites Change in Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress,

understand the location of the episode within the larger context. In other words, how does Mark 4:35-41 fit within 4:35-5:43?[6] Second, the exegete must examine the episode in its totality as well as its parts. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to examine Mark 4:35-41 both in its context as well as in its parts using the discipline known as discourse analysis. This article claims that discourse analysis assists the reader to discover Mark's intent both within the passage as well as within the narrative as a whole.

This article consists of three parts. Part one is the introduction that includes two parts. First, discourse analysis is defined and/or described. Second, the context of Mark (i.e., genre, theme/purpose, and context of 4:35-41 within the story) is summarized. Part two of this article analyzes Mark 4:35-41 at the discourse level including a translation, a verb and conjunction analysis, and a diagram discussing the grammatical and syntactical role of the various words and phrases of the passage. A concluding note concerning the words and phrases and their contribution to the meaning and significance of this episode is also included. Part three provides some concluding implications regarding discourse analysis and its contribution to the exegetical process.

Discourse Analysis: A Definition and Description

Some exegetes tend to analyze passages at the level of the sentence; others in an incomplete manner, analyze at the word

---

2000), 195-209; and Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 151-52.

[6] This author follows other scholars who assume 4:35-5:43 as a unit. See William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 29-30, 173; James A. Brooks, *Mark*, NAC, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 86; David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 189-91; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 219-20.

level.[7] However, Carson suggests that responsible exegesis is that which focuses on "linguistic analysis, both lexis (analysis of the vocabulary) and syntax (analysis of the way words are related to each other) . . . . It will also analyze the text at the level of the clause, the level of the sentence, the level of the discourse, and the level of the genre"[8] Not only is Carson's point well stated, it is also important that the exegete understand that communication rarely occurs at the word level or simply in isolated sentences. Rather, communication occurs in larger units called discourses.[9] Although discourse can refer

---

[7] Richard A. Young states that this is unfortunate: "This calls our attention to an inherent weakness of traditional sentence grammars for exegetical purposes. Because they focus only on isolated sentences, they cannot possibly be considered definitive to analyze meaning" (*Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 247).

Daniel B. Wallace is a proponent of sentence-level exegesis. He does not include a discussion regarding discourse analysis in his grammar. See his grammar for reasons as to why there is no discourse analysis discussion: *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), xv.

[8] D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian S. Rosner, T. Desmond Alexander, and Carson Goldsworthy, 89-103 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 91. See also *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 458-61; and Richard J. Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis: Taking the Fear out of the Critical Method* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 63-93.

[9] William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard provide understanding as to how communication is developed. They state, "In one sense language consists of combining various elements, as building blocks, to construct meaningful communication. In simple terms, combining morphemes (minimal elements of meaning, like the plural –s in English) produces words; putting words together produces phrases, clauses, and sentences; and combining sentences results in texts, passages, or discourses" (*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Nashville: Word, 1993], 201).

to the word, sentence, and paragraph levels, typically discourse consists of more than one sentence and more frequently refers to the paragraph or pericope level.[10] Therefore, "discourse analysis shifts the focus of biblical exegesis from individual words, and even passages, and places it on whole discourses."[11]

This shift in emphasis from words to discourses provides the exegete with a better understanding of the text as a whole. The discipline of discourse analysis examines such a shift. Discourse analysis is an "attempt to see how a text coheres, how it fits together as a unified whole, and how the relationship between its sentences constitutes the 'text.'"[12] Discourse

---

[10] See Stanley E. Porter and his discourse pyramid. The pyramid demonstrates the various levels of discourse as well as a representation of the discourse as a whole (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1999], 298-99).

[11] George H. Guthrie also states, "This does not mean that the individual words, sentences, and paragraphs are any less important than in traditional approaches to exegesis. Rather, discourse analysis moves the 'text' or 'discourse' from a place of ambiguity, and often obscurity, to a place of rigorous consideration and analysis" ("Discourse Analysis," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001], 256).

David Alan Black confirms Guthrie's point. He writes, "Just as we are seldom interested in isolated morphemes, so we are rarely concerned with words as separate entities. A spoken or written word in isolation may have many different possible meanings, but a discourse, which is the environment in which words exist, imposes limitations on the choice of possible meanings and tends to shape and define the meaning of each word" (*Linguistics For Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 138).

[12] David Alan Black, "Introduction," in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 12.

Jeffrey T. Reed defines discourse analysis as the "sub-discipline of modern linguistics that seeks to understand the relationships between language, discourse, and situational context in human communication"

analysis is an expression of the text. It is an understanding "of the organization of material as related to a given context."[13] The emphasis of the relationship between words and phrases and paragraphs brings about an analysis of discourses. But how is one to implement discourse analysis?

Discourse analysis is not just a "bottom-up" or "top-down" approach. It incorporates both. It moves from the micro-level (word) to the macro-level (paragraph) and back again. This helps to understand the intent of the discourse and therefore also enhances the understanding of the unit and its parts. On the one hand, the exegete must not forfeit the most basic level of exegesis (i.e., translation, word studies, analysis of sentence-level syntax, etc.). This is important. But on the other hand, the exegete must also consider the literary context of the whole and how the most basic parts impact it as well as how the whole impacts the parts. This is discourse analysis.

In sum, discourse analysis provides the exegete with the answer to the question, "how has the author organized his statements into a coherent whole to convey his intended meaning to his target audience?"[14] Discourse analysis does not replace exegesis but includes and complements it. Implementing discourse analysis provides the exegete with the appropriate context for an investigation of both the parts within a given context and the whole context. This article illustrates

---

("Discourse Analysis," in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 189).

[13] Guthrie, "Discourse Analysis," 255. Stanley E. Porter states, "the distinctiveness of discourse analysis and the concern of discourse analysts is to be able to provide as comprehensive a description as possible of the various components of a given discourse, including its meaning and structure, and the means by which these are created and conveyed" ("Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey," in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, JSNTS 113 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1995], 19.

[14] Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 53.

discourse analysis through an examination of Mark 4:35-41. Before attending to this examination, a few contextual matters must be considered.

Context of Mark: Its Genre

Today's reader has the difficult task of interpreting the biblical author's communication that originated in another language, time period, and culture; that is addressed to different recipients and unites two unique authors, the divine and human. Given these characteristics of the text, part of the reader's responsibility is to know how the author communicated to his original recipients. What basic framework was used? The author's style of writing typically represents the culture and history of his time period. In other words, the interpreter must know the genre that was used to communicate the text.

Genre is the basic framework in which communication occurs. Written communication, or literature, is not packaged in neutral containers but reflects the social and cultural conventions of the time in which the text is written. Literary genre therefore affects how writing is to be interpreted.[15]

---

[15] The interpreter is to keep in mind, however, that genre is simply a guide or framework for interpretation; never is it to impose a rigid set of requirements to one's exegetical study. For example, Paul's letters are often interpreted by scholars through the application of categories from classic rhetoric (see Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990]; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]; and F. F. Forrester Church, "Rhetorical Structure and Design in Paul's Letter to Philemon," *HTR* 71 [Jan-April 1978]: 17-33). The suppositions that underlie this interpretation are twofold; that is, the ancients themselves would have been familiar with and recognized these categories of rhetoric and Paul would have intended to use them. Porter's contention is "Thus, although categories of ancient rhetoric may have been 'in the air' of the Greco-Roman world, their use in the writing or analysis of letters cannot be substantiated. . .. The above conclusion does not preclude exegeting the Pauline letters in terms of the categories of ancient rhetoric, however, as long as it is kept in mind that these categories, especially those regarding the arrangement of the parts of the speech, probably did not consciously influence the writing of the letters

Literary genre of all kinds is interpreted differently (e.g., epistles versus Gospels), for each possesses genuinely unique features.

Sub-genre, on the other hand, is a sub-category of the larger genre framework in which the text is to be understood. In other words, a sub-genre facilitates a more distinct category that possesses similarities to the genre category yet does not possess all the defining characteristics of the larger category. Sub-genre is its own unique category. Therefore, the interpreter of literature must identify the literary genre and in the case of the Gospel accounts, the literary sub-genre, and analyze how the elements of both provide an understanding of the whole.[16]

---

and almost assuredly did not figure significantly in their earliest interpretation (Stanley E. Porter, "Exegesis of the Pauline Letters, Including the Deutero-Pauline Letters," in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 542-43). Although this is an example of Pauline literature, it serves to demonstrate simply the value of genre in the interpretive process without imposing outside guidelines to determine meaning; rather genre provides help to discover meaning.

[16] Grant R. Osborne sees the significance of genre identification for interpretation because "all writers couch their messages in a certain genre in order to give the reader sufficient rules by which to decode that message. These hints guide the reader (or hearer) and provide clues for interpretation" (*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev and exp. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 26). David E. Aune emphasizes that "the original significance that a literary text had for both author and reader is tied to the genre of that text, so that the meaning of the part is dependent upon the meaning of the whole" (*The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* [Philadelphia : Westminster, 1987], 13). Early E. D. Hirsch Jr. claims that "an understanding of all verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound" (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1967], 76). Richard A. Burridge, states, "We have seen that genre functions by providing a set of expectations as a sort of contract between author and reader. It is constituted and mediated through a variety of different generic features, none of which need be peculiar to the genre; however, when they are taken all together, they reveal a particular pattern, which enables us to recognize the genre" (*What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, SNTSMS 70 [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992], 109).

The genre of the Gospels is a matter that is widely discussed among evangelicals, and rightly so. Although there seems to be somewhat of a consensus as to the content of the Gospels (i.e., life, death, and resurrection of Christ, etc.), there does not seem to be an agreement on the overall classification of these writings (i.e., Are they biographies? Are they types of Greco-Roman literature? Are they narratives, stories, etc.?). William Arp proposes that due to the Gospels' content, "Gospels may be a unique type of Christian writing, not explainable to any other type of literature in the ancient world."[17] Stanton provides his understanding of how one can define the Gospel. He writes,

> The Gospel writers give both the story [words and works] of Jesus and the significance of his story to their hearers AND readers. . . . Story and theology are intertwined. They tell the 'story' of Jesus in order to address the needs of the Christian communities to which they are writing. . . . The evangelists inform us both about the 'past' story of Jesus of Nazareth and also about the 'present' significance that they attach to Jesus who, they claim, is the Messiah—Christ, the Son of God.[18]

With many ways to consider, define or characterize a Gospel, a single characteristic, such as biography or theology, potentially leads to an incomplete picture of a Gospel as a sub-genre. Therefore, it is best to incorporate both characteristics. This article incorporates biography and theology, such that the definition also incorporates the genre, of which it is a part; that

---

[17] Arp, course notes for NT8, 3. They possess a form and function that makes them unique. "Formally, a Gospel is a narrative account about the public life and teaching of Jesus which is composed of discrete tradition units which the writer placed in the context of Scriptures." This keeps the Gospels at the biography-level. "Functionally, a Gospel consists of the message that God was at work in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection affecting the promises found in the Scriptures." This makes them unique and unlike any other biography.

[18] Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford U P, 2002), 3-6.

is, narrative. The sub-genre of the Gospels is theological narrative biography.[19]

The theological narrative biography is defined as a sub-genre of narrative that encompasses the Gospel accounts. The Gospels are theological narrative biographies written as stories, or narratives, that catalogue episodes centered around one unifying character, Jesus Christ. These episodes are written in such a way that they serve to awaken and subsequently strengthen the faith of the reader.

The Gospel accounts fit into the larger category of narrative. They do so based upon the possession of the common elements of narrative, for both the Gospel accounts and narratives have structure, plot, setting, characters, and point-of-view. The Gospel accounts, however, are a unique sub-genre. They possess more than a biographical characteristic. They also have a theological purpose. A description of the theological narrative biography follows.

First, the Gospels are constructed as stories. The literary medium, by which the Gospels are communicated, is narrative. They are constructed through unified communicative acts known as episodes or events. Theological narrative biography accounts for the literary medium, or *how* the author's intended message is communicated. The author is selective and purposeful in the writing and placement of each episode regarding those aspects of Jesus' life that help to communicate his message to his intended audience. The organization of episodes contributes to the whole and does so through narrative. Therefore, the definition incorporates *narrative* in its sub-genre category.

Second, the Gospels are illustrations of the public life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of a unifying figure; the biography of Jesus Christ as it is set in a historical context. The historical context and the sayings and stories of Jesus are true, though they may not contain all the details of any one

---

[19] For a more detailed explanation regarding the defining of the Gospel accounts see Wayne Slusser, "(Re)Defining the Gospels: Mark as a Test Case, Part One," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 2 [Fall 2017]: 42-76).

episode. Therefore, the definition incorporates *biography* in its sub-genre category.

Third, the Gospels have a theological purpose. The Gospels are not written to simply chronicle biographical information within a historical context. Rather their purpose is for the reader to learn who Jesus is and how to live in light of knowing Him. The Gospels are history and theology intertwined. They are written to awaken faith. They are disciplinal; that is, geared to be disciple-oriented. Therefore, the definition incorporates *theological* in its sub-genre category.

In sum, Mark is a theological narrative biography. The Gospel of Mark communicates a history and theological understanding of the person and work of Christ. Using discourse analysis, this article seeks to analyze Mark's theological rationale within Mark 4:35-41 to discover the meaning and significance of this passage as well as understand how this passage fits into the context of the whole story.

Context of Mark: Its Theme and Purpose

Mark's story contains a theological emphasis. It is more than a biography and history. The theological emphasis is the unique feature of the Gospel accounts that serves as the basis for its sub-genre category, theological narrative biography. Mark's story emphasizes two aspects. He declares, defines, and affirms the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God throughout his story. This is the formal aspect. Mark also emphasizes the role of the disciples, thus providing the significance and application of Jesus' identity to the reader. This is the functional aspect. In other words, Mark identifies who Jesus is and in light of this, what Jesus' disciples ought to do. Mark is concerned with the life of Jesus and his disciples' response to it. His narrative is a story that is put forth through three sections. They are Jesus' Galilean Ministry (1:14-8:21), "on the way" to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52), and Jerusalem (11:1-16:8) (see table below).

Aspect of Mark's Story	Jesus' Galilean Ministry (1:14-8:21)	"On The Way" to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52)	Jerusalem (11:1-16:8)
Formal Aspect "Who Is Jesus?" Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ	*Illustrates and Declares Jesus' Identity* (Son of God) 1:1, 11 (Son of God) 3:11; 5:7 (Messiah, the Christ) 8:29	*Defines Jesus' Identity and Mission* First passion prediction (8:31-33) Second passion prediction (9:31-34) Third passion prediction (10:32-34)	*Affirms Jesus' Identity* Jesus speaks to his identity (14:61-62) Jesus suffers and is killed (15:16-41) Jesus rises again, after three days (16:1-6)
Functional Aspect "What Are His Disciples to Do?"	*Actions of the Disciples* Follow Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-17)	*Characteristics of the Disciples* Loyalty to Jesus (8:34-9:1) Service to others	*Failures of the Disciples* Failure of obedience (14:32-42)

		(9:35-37)	Failure of following (14:50-54)
	Service on behalf of Jesus (3:13-19)		
		Humility and Self-sacrifice (10:41-45)	
	Obedience to Jesus (6:7-13)		Failure of loyalty (14:66-72)

The Gospel of Mark narrates the story of Jesus; thus expressing, through the episodes of Jesus' life, the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But the Gospel of Mark is not just about knowing Jesus; it is also about following Jesus, for the purpose of the theological narrative biography is to awaken and subsequently strengthen faith. This enables the reader/hearer to connect the "what' and "why" of Mark's intent. In other words, Mark writes his story not only with a Christological emphasis but also with a theological significance to the readers'/hearers' life.

Mark answers "who is Jesus" through the opening Christological statement (1:1), the confirmation of God, the confession of Peter, the commentary of others, and through Jesus himself. All of this supports the declaration and confirmation that Jesus' identity is the Son of God. Mark also answers "what are his disciples to do" through the actions of a disciple, the characteristics of a disciple, and the failures of a disciple. The connection between form (Jesus' identity) and function (discipleship) enables the reader/hearer to see how Mark ties together the 'what' of his story with the 'why.' Thus, it seems clear that Mark utilizes the narrative structure (genre) of the story and more specifically the theological narrative biography (sub-genre) to communicate and connect the doctrinal emphasis of knowing (identity) Jesus with the practical emphasis of following (discipleship) him. Mark makes this connection throughout the whole story. One way is with scenes of authority (i.e., Jesus cleanses a leper, 1:40-45; forgives sins, 2:1-12; appoints twelve disciples, 3:13-19; etc.)

that further illustrate the claim of verse one, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The story about Jesus is also seen through miracle stories (i.e., Jesus controls a legion of unclean spirits, 5:1-20; restores life, 5:21-43; feeds thousands, 8:1-9; etc.), one on which this article focuses, the controlling of the wind and the sea (4:35-41). Both the scenes of authority and the miracle stories provide information about the identity of Jesus. It is this identity that Mark wishes to communicate as the basis for the cost of discipleship.

Context of Mark: 4:35-41

The "stilling of the storm" episode is found within Mark's presentation of the second part of Jesus' Galilean ministry (3:7-6:13). Within this unit, Mark speaks of different events that serve to illustrate various aspects of Jesus' ministry (i.e., Jesus' teachings at the seaside, his choosing of the twelve, his parables regarding the kingdom of God, his use of power, etc.). This block, 4:35-5:43, forms the climax of 3:7-6:13 in which Mark shows Jesus' use of power.[20]

The miracles in 4:35-5:43 serve as signs revealing the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. This block therefore fits into Mark's overall intention. This article concludes that Mark 4:35-41 communicates the greatness and power of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Jesus' actions in this episode serve to validate his words, namely, that he is the Son of God in whom the Father is well-pleased (1:9-11).

---

[20] Carson and Moo state, "Each of them [four miracles] represent one of the characteristic types of Jesus' miracles: the calming of the storm (a nature miracle, 4:35-41); the casting out of a 'legion' of demons from a man in the region of the Gerasenes (an exorcism, 5:1-20); the healing of a woman with a flow of blood (a healing, 5:25-34); and the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead (a resurrection, 5:21-24, 35-43)" (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 170).

Garland states, "We learn in these scenes that Jesus is not only sovereign over the demonic forces and debilitating and defiling illnesses, but he is also sovereign over the potent forces of nature and of death" (*Mark*, NIV Application Commentary, 189).

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MARK 4:35-41

This article now analyzes the "stilling of the storm" episode using discourse analysis. Although this article does not apply every stage of discourse analysis, the selected stages are as follows: a translation, a verb analysis, a conjunction analysis, and a role analysis of the various words and phrases of the passage. It is not the purpose of this article to provide an interpretation of this episode, but simply to state the contributions that a discourse analysis offers toward an understanding of its meaning and significance.

Translation: Mark 4:35-41

35. And   He says to them in that day
          when the evening was come
          "Let us cross over[21] to the other side"

36. And   They sent away the crowd
          they took him
          as he was in the ship
          but also, there were other little ships with him

37. And   there arose a great furious storm
          and the waves were beating into the ship
          therefore, the ship was now filling up

38. And   he [himself] was in the stern of the ship
          sleeping on a pillow [cushion]
          and they awake him

---

[21] Daniel Wallace classifies Διέλθωμεν as hortatory subjunctive. "The subjunctive is commonly used to exhort or command oneself and one's associates. This function of the subjunctive is used 'to urge some one to unite with the speaker in a course of action upon which he has already decided.' This use of the subjunctive is an exhortation in the *first-person plural*. The typical translation, rather than *we should*, is *let us*. . .." *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 202.

and saying to him, "teacher, is it of no concern to you that[22] we are in the process of perishing"[23]

39. And   after awaking
           he rebuked the waves
           and he said to the sea "be silent, be silenced and [keep it silenced/be muzzled]"[24]
           and the wind ceased
           and there became a great calm

40. And   he said to them,
           "why are you without courage,
           how do you have no faith?"

41. And   [the disciples] were terrified[25]

---

[22] Wallace claims this is a substantival ὅτι clause. He states, "A ὅτι (+ indicative) frequently functions substantivally. It is known as a noun (or nominal) clause, content clause, or sometimes a declarative clause (though we prefer to use this last term for indirect discourse clauses). In such instances the translation of the ὅτι is usually 'that'" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 453).

[23] The use of ἀπολλύμεθα is probably progressive present. Wallace states, "The present tense may be used to describe a scene in progress, especially in narrative literature. . . . The progressive present normally involves *continuous* action" (*Greek Grammar*, 518-19). See also Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 75. They state, "Progressive pres. vividly describing the process."

[24] Rogers and Rogers suggest that the present imperative Σιώπα is in contrast to the perfect imperative πεφίμωσο which denotes the command and the continuous action of the command (*The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key*, 75).

Lane notes that the muzzling of the sea is reminiscent to the muzzling of the demon in 1:25. Φιμώθητι is the aorist form of φιμόω, whereas the perfect imperative form πεφίμωσο is used in 4:39. (*The Gospel of Mark*, 176).

[25] "Feared a great fear," or "greatly feared" translates ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν. Richard Young states, "The φόβον in Mark 4:41 is a cognate accusative of manner. . . . It is not that they feared a great fear, as if φόβον

and [they] said to one another,
"who, therefore is this,
that even the wind and the sea
are obeying him?"

Verb Analysis: Mark 4:35-41

35. And   He <u>says</u> to them in that day
            PRES act ind
            when the evening <u>was come</u>
            AOR mid part
            "<u>Let us cross over</u> to the other side"
            AOR act subj

36. And   after They <u>sent away</u> the crowd
            AOR act part
            they <u>took</u> him
            PRES act ind
            as he <u>was</u> in the ship
            IMPF act ind
            but also there <u>were</u> other little ships with him
            IMPF act ind

37. And   there <u>arose</u> a great furious storm
            PRES mid ind
            and the waves <u>were beating</u> into the ship
            IMPF act ind
            so that the ship <u>was already filling up</u>
            PRES pass inf

38. And   he [himself] <u>was</u> in the stern of the ship
            IMPF act ind

---

were the object, but they feared with awe and terror at the possibility of a divine visitation. It could be rendered 'They were terrified.' The cognate accusative is sometimes said to convey emphasis, but perhaps any emphasis comes from adjacent words, as in the above example" (*Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 17-18). See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 189-90.

<u>sleeping</u> on a pillow [cushion]
PRES act part
and they <u>awoke</u> him
PRES act ind
and <u>said</u> to him, "teacher, is it of no concern to you
PRES act ind
that we are in the process of perishing"

39. And <u>after awaking</u>
AOR pass part
he <u>rebuked</u> the waves
AOR act ind
and he <u>said</u> to the sea
AOR act ind
"<u>be silent</u>,
PRES act impv
be silenced and [<u>keep it silenced/be muzzled</u>]"
PERF pas impv
and the wind <u>ceased</u>
AOR act ind
and there <u>became</u> a great calm
AOR mid ind

40. And he <u>said</u> to them,
AOR act ind
"why are you without courage,
how do you have no faith?"

41. And [the disciples] <u>were terrified</u>
AOR pass ind
and [they] <u>said</u> to one another,
IMPF act ind
"what, therefore <u>is</u> this,
PRES act ind
that even the wind and the sea
are <u>obeying</u> him?"
PRES act ind

The verb analysis indicates the prominence of clauses in relationship to the larger paragraph or discourse.[26] Each tense indicates a plane of discourse (i.e., aorist is the background tense, present and imperfect is the foreground tense, and perfect is the frontground tense).[27] These planes of discourse communicate the story to the reader. The planes of discourse involving the tense forms of verbs are accompanied by discourse aspects. Verbal aspect also contributes to the idea of prominence within a narrative.[28]

The analysis illustrates that the aorist tense-form is used ten times. Mark is using the aorist tense to present details/events. This "is the principal tense for structuring the narrative and sketching the background events which carry the storyline."[29] This is important to note because details/events are essential for

---

[26] Jeffrey T. Reed defines prominence as "emphasis, grounding, relevance, salience, i.e. by drawing the listener/reader's attention to topics and motifs which are important to the speaker/author and by supporting those topics with other less significant material" ("Identifying Theme in the New Testament: Insights from Discourse Analysis," *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek,* ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, JSNTS 113 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1995], 75).

[27] Porter explains the planes of discourse in this manner: "The aorist is the background tense, which forms the basis for the discourse; the present is the foreground tense, which introduces significant characters or makes appropriate climatic references to concrete situations; and the perfect is the frontground tense, which introduces elements in an even more discrete, defined, contoured and complex way" (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 23).

Young agrees, "The imperfect paints a picture of the unfolding, progressive nature of a past event. The aorist tells the simple story; the imperfect draws the picture. It helps you to see the course of the act. It passes before the eye the flowing stream of history" (*Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 113).

[28] Reed states, "Background prominence is often signaled by clauses using the aorist tense (perfective aspect). Thematic prominence may be signaled by the present and imperfect tenses (imperfective aspect), as well as sometimes the future tense. Focal prominence is signaled by the perfect and pluperfect tenses (stative aspect)" ("Identifying Theme in the New Testament," 84-85).

[29] Arp, course notes for NT8, 15.

the storyline (i.e., initial setting, v. 35; and silencing of the sea, v. 39) but not necessarily used for prominence or emphasis. Mark's use of the aorist tense is simply to catalog events within an episode.

The analysis also points to two other tenses, present and imperfect, which Mark uses to indicate prominence.[30] He employs these tenses ten and five times respectively. The present, typically known as historical present in narrative, is used to draw added attention to the action to which it refers. Wallace states, "The *reason* for the use of the historical present is normally to portray an event *vividly*, as though the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds."[31] Fanning claims that the historical present occurs with discourse-functions in Mark. They are to begin a paragraph, to introduce new participants, to show participants moving to a new location, and to begin a specific unit.[32]

Fanning's discourse-functions correspond to Mark's uses here. For example, ("he says to them," v. 35) begins a new paragraph; ("they took him," v. 36 and "there arose a great storm," v. 37) introduces new participants; ("therefore the ship was now filling up," v. 37 and "sleeping," "awake," and "saying," v. 38) draws attention to important events and highlights scenes or participants.

The other prominent tense, imperfect, is used to portray the unfolding, progressive nature of a past event. The imperfect is also used in narrative when an action is selected to dwell upon.[33] The change in tense from aorist to imperfect signals the author/speaker's emphasis. This writer suggests that Mark uses the imperfect in three different ways in order to signal emphasis to the reader. They are progressive or descriptive imperfect,

---

[30] Porter states that although "the imperfect is similar in function to the historic use of the present [and] they share the same verbal aspect, the present is used to draw even more attention to an action" (*Idioms*, 34).

[31] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 526. He goes on to say, "Such vividness might be *rhetorical* (to focus on some aspect of the narrative) or *literary* (to indicate a change in topic)" (526).

[32] Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 232.

[33] Porter, *Idioms*, 34.

iterative imperfect, and instantaneous imperfect, also known as punctiliar imperfect. The progressive imperfect "is used to describe an action or state that it is in progress in past time from the viewpoint of the speaker."[34] The iterative imperfect "is used for *repeated* action in past time."[35] The instantaneous imperfect "is typically restricted to ἐλεγον in narrative literature."[36]

The progressive, iterative, and instantaneous imperfects correspond to Mark's uses of the imperfect here. For example, ("he was in the ship," and "but also there were other . . .," v. 36 and "he himself was in . . .," v. 38) are progressive imperfects. These examples describe events from Mark's viewpoint. They merely describe an action that is in the progress of happening. An example of the iterative imperfect is in verse 37 ("the waves were beating"). It is a continual or repeated action that ultimately results in "the ship filling up." The last way Mark uses the imperfect is in verse 41. It is the instantaneous imperfect. Here the disciples use the phrase "said to one another," which is the imperfect form ἐλεγον.[37]

The final verb tense Mark uses is the perfect tense. This tense-form indicates focal prominence. It characterizes the verb as being in the state of affairs or condition that exists. Mark reports that Jesus awoke and silenced the sea (v. 39), therefore, indicating the sea was in a state of calm.

In summary, the verb analysis suggests that Mark emphasizes three events within the episode. First, Mark describes a great furious storm (v. 37a). This storm is so great that the waves were beating into the ship resulting in the ship filling with water (v. 37b). It is here that Mark emphasizes the helplessness of the situation for the disciples. Second, he describes Jesus' position as ("sleeping on a pillow," v. 38a). He

---

[34] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 543. See also Porter, *Idioms*, 34.

[35] Ibid., 546.

[36] Ibid., 542.

[37] Steven E. Runge reports that the use of the imperfect of λεγω here could be used "to record the responses of multiple groups to one thing" (*Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010], 159).

is emphasizing Jesus' calm response to the great furious storm (v. 37a).[38] As a result, he describes the disciples' fear (v. 38b). They are concerned that their safety is not Jesus' priority. In fact, one could render Διδάσκαλε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα as "Teacher, are we to drown for all you care?"[39] Third, Jesus silences the sea (v. 39b) and it remains in a silenced state.

These three events, therefore, draw attention to Mark's emphasis. He is stressing the contrastive element between Jesus' calm composure with the disciples' fear in a helpless situation. The verb analysis, of which is one component within discourse analysis, assists the interpreter to bring together the micro-structure (4:35-41 episode) and the macro-structure (Mark's overall intent) in order to ultimately demonstrate and identify Jesus as the Son of God, for who else has the authority and power to keep the sea in a silenced state?

Conjunction Analysis: Mark 4:35-41

35. Καὶ[40] He says to them in that day
when the evening was come
"Let us cross over to the other side"

36. καὶ They sent away the crowd
they took him
as he was in the ship
but also, there were other little ships with him

37. καὶ there arose a great furious storm
and the waves were beating into the ship
therefore, the ship was now filling up

---

[38] Gundry makes a helpful comment here. He writes, "The emphatic αὐτὸς, 'he himself,' contrasts the calmness of his sleep with the raging of the sea. Since he will not call on God to still the storm but will still it himself, we would do wrong to interpret his sleep as one of trust in God. . . . He trusts in his own abilities as God's Son" (*Mark*, 239).

[39] Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 176.

[40] Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 301-02. He states that καὶ is used with the historical present as a discourse boundary.

38. καὶ   he [himself] was in the stern of the ship
             sleeping on a pillow [cushion]
             and they awake him
             and saying to him, "teacher, is it of no concern
             to you that we are in the process of perishing"

39. καὶ   after awaking
             he rebuked the waves
             and he said to the sea "be silent, be silenced and
             [keep it silenced/be muzzled]"
             and the wind ceased
             and there became a great calm

40. καὶ   he said to them,
             "why are you without courage,
             how do you have no faith?"
41. καὶ   [the disciples] were terrified
             and [they] said to one another,
             "what, therefore is this,
             that even the wind and the sea
             are obeying him?"

The conjunction analysis indicates that καὶ is the predominant conjunction in this episode. Καὶ usually functions within a narrative episode to join elements that continue the main line of the plot.[41] καὶ is also typically used in discourse narratives as a joiner of clauses of equal grammatical rank.[42] Mark's use of καὶ is simply to provide the reader with a plot

---

[41] Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 188. Wallace calls these connective conjunctions. He writes, "This use simply *connects an additional element* to a discussion or adds an additional idea to the train of thought" (*Greek Grammar*, 671). Young also sees καὶ; as a discourse boundary, one that "simply holds the narrative in place"(*Intermediate NT Greek*, 254).

[42] Kermit Titrud, "The Function of kai; in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter," in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 246-47. See also Porter, *Idioms*, 211-12.

line. It connects one event to another, therefore providing cohesion to the episode as a whole.[43]

To this point, the analysis of Mark 4:35-41 consists of understanding the parts of the episode. How is one to classify these discourse parts? What is the relationship between these parts? How does the relationship therefore contribute to the meaning and significance of the episode as a whole? These questions and others are considered in the role analysis of the discourse parts.

Role Analysis: Mark 4:35-41

35. And   He says[44] to them in that day
           BEGINS EPISODE
           when the evening was come
           SETTING
           "Let us cross over to the other side"
           SAYING-ACTIVITY

36. And   They sent away the crowd
           ACTIVITY
           they took him
           ACTIVITY
           as he was in the ship
           but also, there were other little ships with him

37. And   there arose a great furious storm
           EVENT-1
           and the waves were beating into the ship
           ACTIVITY
           therefore, the ship was now filling up
           RESULT

---

[43] Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 26.

[44] The historical present of λέγει signals a new start, a new episode (Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, 237). Guelich states, "'And he said to them' (Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς) occurs as an introductory formula sixteen times in Mark" (*Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, 263).

38. And   he [himself] was in the stern of the ship
             sleeping on a pillow [cushion]
             EVENT-2
             and they awake him
             RESULT
             and saying to him, "teacher, is it of no concern to
             SAYING ACTIVITY
             you that we are in the process of perishing?"
             QUESTION

39. And   after awaking
             RESPONSE INTRO-1
             he rebuked the waves
             ACTIVITY
             and he said to the sea "be silent, be silenced
             SAYING ACTIVITY
             and [keep it silenced/stay muzzled]"
             EVENT-3 (Focal Point)
             and the wind ceased
             and there became a great calm
             RESULT

40. And   he said to them,
             SAYING ACTIVITY
             "why are you without courage?
             QUESTION
             how do you have no faith?"
             QUESTION

41. And   [the disciples] were terrified
             RESPONSE INTRO-2
             and [they] said to one another,
             SAYING ACTIVITY
             "who, therefore is this,
             QUESTION
             that even the wind and the sea
             are obeying him?"

The role analysis suggests that this paragraph is a complete episode (4:35-41) beginning with Jesus talking to his disciples and ending with his disciples questioning his identity and authority, especially since the wind and the sea obey his voice.[45] The analysis also suggests that Mark emphasizes three events. He also wishes to highlight two responses corresponding to the events.

The analysis also points to a particular structure (i.e., setting, event, and response).[46] Mark begins with the setting of the episode (4:35) and the activity and characters involved (4:36). He moves to three events (4:37-39) drawing the reader's attention by highlighting crucial scenes within the episode. Mark then communicates two responses (4:39-41) that serve to provide answers/results to a helpless situation. It is in these responses that Mark is able to convey Jesus' role, namely, that he has both the power and the authority as the Son of God.

Contribution to Meaning and Significance: Mark 4:35-41

What then do these elements of discourse analysis contribute to understanding the meaning of Mark 4:35-41? How do these elements provide the significance to its readers and hearers? This analysis helps the reader to pay attention to selected details that emphasize Mark's intent within the episode.

The parts of discourse analysis contribute some helpful points for understanding this episode. First, the three events within the episode draw added attention to the helpless situation that has risen for Jesus' disciples (4:37-39), as well as pointing to the event of focus, Jesus' power over nature. Mark highlights

---

[45] Gundry states, "The question magnifies the figure of Jesus: he looms too large for the disciples' comprehension. The ὅτι-clause ("[seeing] that . . .") puts the emphasis on his authority rather than on their ignorance" (*Mark*, 241).

[46] See Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 248-50. Although Young uses different terminology for genre structure (schema), the idea is similar. The divisions of discourse are still communicated but are done so in relationship to the episode as here. The author of this analysis chooses setting, event, and response.

these crucial events so that the reader can realize the seriousness of the disciples' situation (a great furious storm resulting in the ship filling with water). It is the seriousness of the situation that requires radical action. Jesus and his disciples respond to the helpless situation.

Second, the three events of emphasis relate to two distinct developments or responses. Jesus responds to both the great storm and the disciples' fear by silencing the wind and muzzling the sea (Response Intro-1). As a result, there is a great calm. The other development rests within the disciples' response to Jesus' power and authority (4:41). They were terrified (i.e., "feared a great fear"). As a result, to Jesus' radical action, the disciples are awe-struck (Response Intro-2) and they ask one another, "Who therefore is this?

Third, the relationship between the events and responses emphasizes the greatness of the episode. The great storm (λαῖλαψ μεγάλη) is the reason for Jesus' response, thus creating a great calm (γαλήνη μεγάλη). The great storm and its quietness are the reason for the disciples' response, a great fear (φόβον μέγαν). They are terrified. Mark's intent is to demonstrate the greatness of the problem (a furious storm) solved by Jesus' authoritative and powerful response (the great calming of the storm) followed by the disciples' response (fearing a great fear). This relationship points to the greatness and power of Jesus as the Son of God. This is Mark's purpose for writing this episode. This episode also validates Mark's main purpose for writing his gospel, namely, to affirm that Jesus is the Son of God.

The relationship between the events and responses to the events has significance for the hearers and readers. Mark writes an episode that speaks of a helpless situation involving Jesus' followers. By no means is Mark communicating Jesus' response as an "I'll save you guys" attitude. Rather Mark is demonstrating the power, words, and deeds of the Son of God even in a helpless situation. Garland states, "The miracle of the storm does not teach us how to endure adversity patiently because Jesus immediately eliminates the problem. The emphasis in this story is the identity of Jesus, not on how he rescues fretful disciples from danger whenever they cry out to

him."[47] Those who are followers of Jesus can be assured that he truly is the Son of God and it is this one Jesus whom they serve.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EXEGETE

This study demonstrates the importance of discourse analysis. Although discourse analysis is not the only method of interpretation nor is it the final method the exegete is to use, it does provide the exegete with an understanding of the relationship between narrative structure and the grammar of the language used by the author. It helps the reader to view the episode as a coherent whole and not just its parts. Discourse analysis understands that language is not used in isolated words or sentences, but rather occurs in larger discourses; therefore, discourse must be analyzed in this manner.

---

[47] Garland, *Mark*, 200.