

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY - CHARLOTTE

“I AM”  
EXODUS AND EPIPHANY IN MARK 6:48-52

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**Translation: Mark 6:48-52**

48 καὶ ἰδὼν<sup>a</sup> αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους<sup>b</sup> ἐν τῷ  
ἔλαύνειν<sup>c</sup>, ἵνα γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος ἐναντίος<sup>d</sup> αὐτοῖς,  
περὶ τετάρτην φυλακὴν<sup>e</sup> τῆς νυκτὸς ἔρχεται  
πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης  
καὶ ἥθελεν<sup>f</sup> παρελθεῖν<sup>g</sup> αὐτούς.

49 οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ<sup>h</sup> τῆς θαλάσσης  
περιπατοῦντα ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμά ἐστιν,  
καὶ ἀνέκραξαν

50 πάντες<sup>i</sup> γὰρ<sup>j</sup> αὐτὸν εἶδον<sup>k</sup> καὶ  
ἔταράχθησαν.<sup>l</sup> 1ο δὲ εὐθὺς<sup>m</sup> ἐλάλησεν<sup>n</sup> μετ'  
αὐτῶν, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς θαρσεῖτε,<sup>o</sup> ἐγώ εἰμι<sup>p</sup>  
μὴ φοβεῖσθε.<sup>q</sup>

51 καὶ ἀνέβη<sup>r</sup> πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ  
ἐκόπασεν<sup>s</sup> ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ λίαν<sup>t</sup> [ἐκ περισσοῦ]<sup>u</sup>  
ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἔξισταντο.<sup>v</sup>

52 οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν<sup>w</sup> ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ' ἵν  
αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία<sup>x</sup> πεπωρωμένη<sup>y</sup>.

48 And he saw them tormenting to row, for  
the wind was against them.  
About the fourth watch of the night, he came  
toward them walking upon the sea, and he  
was willing to pass by them.

49 And they saw him upon the sea walking,  
and they thought he was a ghost and they  
cried aloud.

50 For they all saw and were terrified. But  
immediately he was speaking with them and  
he said to them “Take heart, I am. Do not  
fear.”

51 And he came down toward them into the  
boat, and the wind ceased, and exceedingly,  
in themselves they were astounded.

52 for they did not understand upon the  
bread, but the heart of them was hardened.

## Justification of Translation

- a) Ἰδὼν is in the aorist tense form, perhaps acting as the typical historical present and may be translated as “saw.” It is often paired with an accusative object and a participle.<sup>1</sup> While the straightforward translation is to “see” what is physically before one, it can also denote a unique perception of an individual. This same word is used throughout the gospels where Jesus specially “sees” someone before he heals them (Matthew 8:14, 9:9).
- b) In the passive participle, as here, βασανίζως most often connotes a literary component meaning harassing, straining, or tormenting.<sup>2</sup>
- c) from ἐλαύνω, literally “to urge” or “to drive” but often translated as “to row” when used in a sea setting.<sup>3</sup>
- d) Ἐναντίος is a predicate adjective describing the wind. As an adjective, it carries a metaphorical sense of opposition “as an adversary, hostile, antagonistic in feeling.”<sup>4</sup>
- e) The fourth watch of the night was the last “watch” of the three-hour blocks of evening tide. It was the darkest hour of the night.<sup>5</sup>
- f) Θέλω can be translated as wish/desire, but a better definition here, according to the BDAG, is “to have something in mind for oneself, of purpose, resolve, will, wish, want, be ready.”<sup>6</sup> There is a greater sense of purpose/finality in Jesus’ action.
- g) From παρέρχομαι, translated as “to pass by” is the compound verb of the preposition παρ (from) + ἔρχομαι (to come), denoting going “past a reference point.”<sup>7</sup> This verb is used in the Septuagint at Exodus 33:18 as a future tense form and v. 22 in the aorist subjunctive. In both these cases, the verb refers not merely to a locative action, but to a divine revelation of God Himself.
- h) In Matthew, this phrase is in the accusative, “point[ing] to the apparent solidity of the water under his feet.”<sup>8</sup> In Mark, the phrase is in the accusative, putting the emphasis on Jesus’ forward movement. Swete writes, “The Lord must be imagined as walking on a seething sea, not upon a smooth surface.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 279.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 168.

<sup>3</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 168, 314.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 213.

<sup>5</sup>R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 183. See also Archibald Thomas Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 319.

<sup>6</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 448.

<sup>7</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 775.

<sup>8</sup>H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (London: Macmillan and Co, 1920), 138.

<sup>9</sup>Swete, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 138.

- i) The BDAG notes that when *πάντες* is used as a noun in the pl., without the article, it may be translated as all people/men, everyone.<sup>10</sup> In the nominative plural, it functions substantively.<sup>11</sup>
- j) *γάρ* (Hom.+) conj. used to express cause, clarification, or inference, and may be translated as “for.” It never comes first in its clause.”<sup>12</sup>
- k) *Εἶδον* is an aorist active indicative third plural with no object. *A Greek-English Lexicon* defines it as to see or perceive, but can also refer to mental sight, as in discerning or perceiving.<sup>13</sup>
- l) *Ἐταράχθησαν* is parsed as an aorist passive indicative third plural from *ταράσσω*. This can be defined as “to be stirred up/troubled” and typically used of water. In the passive, referring to persons and not waters, it is typically translated as “terrified.” For other usages, see Ps 47:6; Is 8:12, etc.<sup>14</sup>
- m) *Εὐθὺς* used throughout Mark. It may be “weakened” to “then,” when inferential, but “immediately” appears a better fit here as Jesus’ swift and compassionate response to the disciples’ fears.<sup>15</sup>
- n) *Ἐλάλησεν* is an active aorist indicative from *λαλέω* translated “he spoke. It ends the phrase, emphasizing the immediacy of his response to the disciples’ fear. The actual words he speaks to them are introduced with another verb *λέγει*, which is in the present active indicative
- o) *Θαρσεῖτε* is an imperative. “Take heart!” to be of good courage, be of good cheer; in the N. T. only in the imperative.<sup>16</sup>
- p) “*I am*” This formula is used by God in the Old Testament as divine self-revelation as in Mark 10:49 Ex 14:13 Joel 2:2 Isaiah 43:10. Many English translations choose to supply the phrase “It is I,” however, the literal translation is the two-word phrase “I am.”<sup>17</sup> *εἰμι* alone is enough to convey the phrase “I am.” The addition of the “I” word makes this phrase emphatic.<sup>18</sup>
- q) From *φοβέω* with a *μή* negation. This is another imperative and may be translated as “Do not be afraid”<sup>19</sup> When a present imperative is paired with a *μή* negation, the “speaker is prohibiting a continuous action.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, , 782.

<sup>11</sup>Bill Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 104.

<sup>12</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 189.

<sup>13</sup>Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1245.

<sup>14</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 990.

<sup>15</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 406.

<sup>16</sup>Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*,

283.

<sup>17</sup>Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, 183.

<sup>18</sup>Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, 183.

<sup>19</sup>Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 125.

<sup>20</sup>Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, 385.

- r) Ανέβη refers to Jesus and is paired with a phrase in the accusative, πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ thus marking Jesus' movement toward the disciples.<sup>21</sup>
- s) Ἐκόπασεν from κοπάζω is also used in reference to wind abating in Matthew 14:32 and Mark 4:39.<sup>22</sup>
- t) Λίαν communicates a generalized, positive degree ('very.') as in ἐθυμώθη λίαν 'he became very angry' Mt 2:16.<sup>23</sup> when the word serves as an attribute
- u) Noted: In the text: The authenticity of the text enclosed in brackets is dubious. This here is an adverbial expression ἐκ περισσοῦ meaning "extremely." Bruce Metzger writes, "The Committee recognized that the double superlative, λίαν ἐκ περισσοῦ, is altogether in the style of Mark and is supported by a variety of witnesses that represent a broad geographical spread. At the same time, however, because ἐκ περισσοῦ is lacking in important witnesses (§ B L Δ 892 al), it was judged appropriate to enclose the phrase within square brackets."<sup>24</sup>
- v) This word may be translated as "to be amazed, be astonished, or of the feeling of astonishment mingled with fear, [especially] caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand." Robert H. Stein writes, "The degree of astonishment is emphasized by the twofold use of the terms 'very' [liav] and exceedingly [ek perissou]" Robertson translates it as "sore amazed," explaining "imperfect tense picturing vividly the excited disciples."<sup>25</sup>
- w) From συνίημι: "to understand with regard to or to gain an insight (into something.)" What the disciples do not understand is revealed by the context ἐπὶ τοῖς ὄπτοις.<sup>26</sup>
- x) Καρδία was thought the seat of the intellect.<sup>27</sup> This same kind of phrasing, translated as heart, is similar to Old Testament Exodus language. καρδία here is in the singular. The disciples share one, hardened heart.
- y) Perfect passive participle from πωρόω is used to mean "harden, petrify, mostly of hearts τὴν καρδίαν τινός make dull/obtuse/blind, close the mind. See also Mark 8:17.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 874.

<sup>22</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, , 558.

<sup>23</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 683.

<sup>24</sup>Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 79.

<sup>25</sup>Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 319.

<sup>26</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 972.

<sup>27</sup>Zerwick & Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 126.

<sup>28</sup>Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 184.

## Introduction

“I like good strong words that mean something.”<sup>29</sup> The miraculous account of Jesus walking upon the sea is well-known among Christians and faithful Sunday school attendees. This narrative is often understood as a display of Jesus’ great power as the Son of God. However, attention is seldom given to His words upon the sea. When examined in the context of Mark’s broader themes and the Old Testament as a whole, these words give the story profound redemptive-historical significance. This paper will examine Jesus’ actions and words in Mark 6:48-52 in light of Old Testament story, particularly in its likeness to the Exodus. Then, the response of the disciples will be explored with this same lens. *In his walking and words upon the sea, Jesus identifies Himself with the God of Israel. Reminiscent of God’s action at the Exodus, Jesus reveals a foretaste of the victory over chaos He came to bring. Yet Mark also makes clear that Jesus must first experience rejection before glory, anticipating what will occur at the cross.*

## Context

At first glance, Mark is an odd choice for studying a story that occurs in several gospels. Scholar James Edwards writes, “Until modern times the Gospel of Mark has received considerably less attention than the other three Gospels. In comparison to John with its lofty theology, Matthew with its narrative structure, or Luke with its inimitable parables and stories, Mark has often been judged as a rather artless and pedestrian Gospel, even by scholars.”<sup>30</sup> Of the synoptic gospels, Mark moves swiftly through the narrative, focusing on the action of the narrative over structure, story, or theological observation.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, Mark writes with a unique and profound purpose. As the narrative rushes along, it heralds the good news that Israel has longed for since the beginning: The Messiah has come. Benjamin Gladd states, “The gospel of Mark plucks at this string from beginning to end; Israel’s long-awaited King has arrived on the scene. More than that, this King will be the Son of God Himself.”<sup>32</sup> Ladd writes, “We have seen that ‘Son of God’ is the title with which Mark introduces Jesus the Messiah in 1:1, and it is generally agreed that this title is at the heart of his

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<sup>29</sup>Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, (London, United Kingdom, Puffin Books; 1st edition, 2023), 41.

<sup>30</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 1.

<sup>31</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), 235.

<sup>32</sup>Benjamin Gladd, “Mark” in a *Biblical Theological Introduction to the New Testament*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 60.

Christological message.”<sup>33</sup> Practically every story in Mark goes to great pains to show the divinity and identity of Christ as the Son of God.<sup>34</sup> But as Mark makes clear, Israel’s King differs from expectations. “His rule is not confined to a plot of land but pushes the boundaries of the cosmos, and his rule is marked not by military triumph, but by physical defeat.”<sup>35</sup> Mark emphasizes that this Savior must suffer before He is glorified, a concept that is continually rejected by his followers.<sup>36</sup> Ladd summarizes, “[Mark’s] is a theology in which rejection and triumph, humiliation and glory, meet in the new scale of values of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>37</sup>

As with other Gospels, this Messiah-ship in Mark particularly takes form in showing Jesus as a greater Moses who inaugurates the New Exodus.<sup>38</sup> While this theme occurs throughout the gospels, it is especially prevalent in Mark. Bryan Estelle writes, “The gospel of Mark, through its prologue, its use of ‘wilderness and ‘way’ terminology, and indeed its overall structure clearly shows Jesus as the new exodus.”<sup>39</sup> This is especially clear in Mark’s usage of Isaiah 40:3 in his prologue, which provides a thesis for the rest of the gospel. In this verse, Isaiah speaks a word of hope to exiled Israel. Just as God delivered their fathers from Egypt in the Exodus, a new Exodus would come.<sup>40</sup>

In the ensuing servant songs, Isaiah testifies to the coming Exodus and the One who will inaugurate it. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “There is no doubt that the exodus event and the

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<sup>33</sup>Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 230.

<sup>34</sup>Watts relates “The mysterious identity of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 in describing the new exodus to “Mark’s New Exodus Way reveals the enigma of the messianic Son of God who is also the suffering son of Man. This suggests that Mark’s primary concern is not so much to describe the path of suffering discipleship...mark’s point appears to be that participation in the Isaiahnic new Exodus way inevitably involves the recognition and affirmation ...that the Markan Jesus is not only Israel’s Messiah, the royal son of God but in a unique and extraordinary sense the divine Son of God,” Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997), 223.

<sup>35</sup>Gladd, “Mark” in a *Biblical Theological Introduction to the New Testament*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 61.

<sup>36</sup>“It seems more likely that Mark’s concern was not with so specific a concept, but with the very natural human reluctance to accept that the promised Messiah could suffer rejection by the Jewish leadersihip and that a Son of God could live unrecognised among human beings and die a shameful death.” R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Critical Greek Commentary(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Publishing Co., 2002), 21.

<sup>37</sup>Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 236 : He notes, “the paradoxical climax is reached when Jesus death on the cros provokes even a Gentile centurion to recognize him as God’s son. Thus, thorugh all the rejection and misunderstanding that Jesus encounters, Mark does not allow his readers to roget who Jesus really is,” 230.

<sup>38</sup>Meredith G Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 181.

<sup>39</sup>Bryan Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 209.

<sup>40</sup>“As in the bygone days of Egypt, God will lead His returning flock through the desert to Israel.”Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 137.

escape from Egypt form a paradigm for redemption in Israel. This is nowhere clearer than in the second half of Isaiah, which focuses on the release from exile and the fullness of salvation.”<sup>41</sup> He references William Dumbrell, who writes, “Isaiah 40:3–5 is a divine herald’s summons for the preparation of a divine way through the wilderness by which the process of comfort will begin. Elsewhere in Isaiah 40–55, the return from exile is depicted as a new Exodus.”<sup>42</sup>

Mark uses the New Exodus as a key lens for understanding Jesus’ role. C. A. Evans writes, “Mark defines the ‘good news’ of Jesus Messiah in terms of the fulfillment of Isaiah’s oracle of salvation and deliverance.”<sup>43</sup> In Mark’s rendition of Jesus’ baptism and the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus is presented as the One who will inaugurate the New Exodus and deliver disobedient Israel from their captivity.<sup>44</sup> Estelle draws these threads together, “In Mark’s gospel, the Exodus motif has been transposed: Christ has introduced a new thing, a way of salvation through his own suffering and crucifixion that leads to the path of pilgrim discipleship, a theology of the cross that leads to the new Promised Land[.]”<sup>45</sup>

The book of Mark communicates that Christ is this promised and anticipated Messiah, the One who will bring about the New Exodus, by showing, not telling.<sup>46</sup> Edwards writes, “The action of the Gospel is all-important to the meaning of the Gospel, for we learn who Jesus is not so much from what he says as from what he does.... Unlike the Gospel of John, for instance, where major themes are made explicit, Mark has much more implicit major themes, requiring readers to enter into the drama of the Gospel [to] understand its meaning.”<sup>47</sup> Mark keeps the spotlight on Jesus’ words and actions.<sup>48</sup> He does not write lengthy discourses or explanations for

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<sup>41</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centred Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Apollos, 2012), 144.

<sup>42</sup>Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centred Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*, 144. See: (42:16; 43:16–19; 49:9c–11; 51:10)

<sup>43</sup>C. A. Evans, “Mark,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 270.

<sup>44</sup>Ulrich W. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, London: SCM Press, 1963), 97–98. See also: Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 220.

<sup>45</sup>Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 225.

<sup>46</sup>“In this respect Mark’s Christology is no less sublime than is John’s, although John has Jesus declaring that he is the Son of God (John 10:36), whereas Mark has him showing that he is the Son of God,” Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 199.

<sup>47</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 12–13.

<sup>48</sup>Stein explains, “What is clear from the beginning, however, is that the central and dominating theme of Mark is christological in nature.” ...seen from opening line ...”every account in Mark focuses the reader’s attention in some way on Jesus” Robert H. Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 21.

Jesus' teaching. Instead, these are encased within the narrative itself.<sup>49</sup> Thus, special attention must be given to Jesus' actions and words to glean Mark's rich messages about the Messiah.

The pericope of Jesus stilling the sea is placed within the third phase of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.<sup>50</sup> Despite Jesus' miracles and teachings, rejection and misunderstanding about Jesus' identity and mission intensifies.<sup>51</sup> Immediately preceding the pericope is Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. After looking upon the people with compassion as "sheep without a shepherd," Jesus provides them with teaching and a miraculous meal. The text then shifts with its distinctive marker, "Εὐθὺς" or "immediately," in verse 45. Sending his disciples before him into the sea, Jesus retreats to the mountain to pray to the Father.

### Exposition

*V. 48-49 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them,<sup>49</sup> but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out.*

#### Divine Power over Creation

In the opening scene, Jesus sees (ἰδὼν) his disciples from the mountain. Although this term is defined as visual sight, it often describes the special attention Jesus has toward someone he is preparing to care for.<sup>52</sup> Struggling against the sea, the disciples are literally "tormenting" (βασανίζως), making no headway.<sup>53</sup> The disciples are in desperate need. To emphasize this dire condition, Mark notes the time as the "fourth watch of the night," the darkest time of night.<sup>54</sup>

In response to their distress, Jesus draws near to his disciples. Marcus notes that Jesus' coming to the disciples is "the turning point of the entire narrative, as is shown by the fact that the verbal tense suddenly shifts from the aorist to the historical present (ἔρχεται, "comes" instead of "has come"). Rather than drawing their boat to him or waiting for their arrival, he goes to

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<sup>49</sup>Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 236.

<sup>50</sup>Gladd, "Mark," *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, 81.

<sup>51</sup>Gladd, "Mark," *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, 81.

<sup>52</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 279.

<sup>53</sup>Edwards writes that this word is elsewhere used to describe desperate situations like "contractions of childbirth, Rev 12:2; suffering in hell, Rev 14:10; or the torment of a righteous soul forced to live among the unrighteous, 2 Pet 2:8," *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 198.

<sup>54</sup>Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 183. See also Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 319.

them, walking upon the water (ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα).<sup>55</sup> James Brooks rejects critical claims that Jesus walked on a sandbar *near* the water. He explains, “The preposition translated ‘on’ in vv 48-49 can also mean beside...that cannot be the case here because ‘on the lake’ is parallel to ‘on the land’ in v. 47.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus comes to His disciples through supernatural action.

For both the disciples and Jewish readers, Jesus’ walking upon the water would denote not merely a miracle, but the presence of the divine. In ancient and Israelite conception of God, authority over nature was a defining feature.<sup>57</sup> Portrayed as the King of Creation, God is designated in Genesis, the Psalms, and the prophetic books as the one who reigns over the created order. Specifically, God is the one who controls the winds and the waves, chaotic forces that cannot be tamed by humans. Brooks writes, “Job 9:8 and 38:16 picture God as one who walks on water. That Jesus did so suggests that he performed divine functions.”<sup>58</sup> The Anchor Bible concurs, it is “consistently God or his wisdom who walks on the waters of the sea and tramples its waves, thus demonstrating that he and no other is divine...in the Old Testament and Jewish traditions it is God alone who can rescue people from the sea”<sup>59</sup> This act of divinity is consistent with Mark’s message about the Christ. Edwards remarks, “Jesus walks where only God can walk. As in the forgiveness of sins (2:10) and in his power over nature (4:39), walking on the lake identifies Jesus unmistakably with God.”<sup>60</sup> Through his actions, Jesus reveals Himself as divine.

### **Passing By: Epiphany and God of the Exodus**

It is curious that the text states Jesus meant to “pass by the disciples” (παρελθεῖν, from παρέρχομαι). A closer look reveals this should not simply be read as a desire to outpace the twelve. Both the Anchor Bible and Robert H. Stein note that the same verb translated “pass by”

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<sup>55</sup>Cole writes, “The cry of the disciples was merely one of fear, and not even necessarily a cry of prayer, let alone a cry of faith directed to Jesus; but it was enough to ensure his instant response. God’s willingness to answer is not limited by the poverty of our asking, and Jesus was often contented with an initial response of what we would consider a totally inadequate nature.” In *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, 183. This is reminiscent of the Israelites, who so often failed to pray to Yahweh. In spite of this, He repeatedly drew near to them to answer their cry with provision more abundant than they could imagine.

<sup>56</sup>James A. Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Volume 23) (The New American Commentary), (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1991), 111.

<sup>57</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 24.

<sup>58</sup>Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 112.

<sup>59</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 432..

<sup>60</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002),, 198. See also: Vern Poythress, *Theophany*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 384-385.

is used to denote a divine epiphany in the Septuagint.<sup>61</sup> Particularly, this phrase calls to mind the divine revelation of God to Moses in the book of Exodus, where the exact word is used in each case (*παρελεύσομαι* in 33:19, *παρελεύσομαι* in 34:6). As God passed by Moses, revealing his glory to Moses on the mountain, so Jesus intends to reveal His deity to the disciples, albeit in an indirect fashion.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Brooks claims that this phrasing is meant to signify a theophany to readers.<sup>63</sup> The language of “passing by” occurs in both Exodus and 1 Kings.<sup>64</sup> In these accounts, God reveals Himself to Moses and to Elijah, two individuals whom Mark presents Jesus as symbolizing and advancing.<sup>65</sup>

Guelich writes that this verb signifies that this story is not just a rescue miracle, but “an epiphany story about Jesus’ self-revelation to his own followers.”<sup>66</sup> Following this statement, he notes that “it may not be mere coincidence that both Moses and Elijah, who experienced an epiphany of God’s ‘passing by’ also miraculously crossed a water barrier.”<sup>67</sup> Yet, Jesus is not

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<sup>61</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 426. See also: Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 322.

<sup>62</sup>This is the same verb used as in Mark 6, but in the future tense form. “We conclude that *παρέρχομαι* In Mark 6:48 is a “hermeneutical pointer” to Exod 33-34. W --note in paper that the same exact phrase is used,” Dane C. Ortlund, “The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45-52).” *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012): 319-37.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001949878&site=ehost-live>, 324.

<sup>63</sup>Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 111. Poythress, interestingly, notes “in his incarnation, Christ is the permanent theophany” [appearance of God] of God,” 23.

<sup>64</sup>The particular verb *Παρέρχομαι* is constructed from the preposition *παρ* (from) + *έρχομαι* (to go/come).

<sup>65</sup>These are also the two who meet with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration in Mark 9. Barclay writes, “Moses and Elijah met with him. Now Moses was the supreme law-giver of Israel. To him the nation owed the laws of God. Elijah was the first and the greatest of the prophets. People always looked back to him as the prophet who brought to them the very voice of God. When these two great figures met with Jesus, it meant that the greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets said to him, ‘Go on!’ It meant that they saw in Jesus the consummation of all that they had dreamed of in the past. It meant that they saw in him all that history had longed for and hoped for and looked forward to. It is as if at that moment Jesus was assured that he was on the right way because all history had been leading up to the cross.” William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*, The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 244.

<sup>66</sup>Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 350. Also, “The note that Jesus “meant to pass by them, which is puzzling if this is a miracle story about a rescue from the storm, makes perfectly good sense if this is the story of a divine manifestation[.]” Lamar Williamson Jr., *Mark, Interpretation*, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 131.

<sup>67</sup>Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26 350. Also: The echo of Old Testament divine epiphany is further set up by the location Jesus departed from. It is no accident that Jesus chooses a mountain as His location of prayer. The Anchor Bible notes that Mark mentions the mountain with “the definite article [τὸ ὄπος] [suggesting] that this is a special mountain with symbolic importance.” Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 422. When Moses met with God in the Old Testament, he ascended the mount. Stein writes, “a mountain is a favorite place for God to appear to his people.” Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 322. Guelich agrees, “The mountain may relate to the epiphanic thrust of the story. God appeared to Israel from the mountain, and Jesus ‘appears to the disciples after being on the mountain with God in prayer.’” Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26, 349. It is likely that the allusions to the Exodus story would become stronger for Jewish readers upon Mark’s mention of the mountain.

simply a greater Moses and Elijah. He is also a richer revelation of *God* than was ever delivered to the two prophets. Moses only ever glimpsed God's 'back.' Now, "The God of Israel, majestic and awesome but unknowable face to face, is "passing by" believers in Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>68</sup> Edwards is worth quoting at length here:

"He was about to pass by them" is baffling, suggesting that Jesus intended to walk past the disciples. In the OT, however, this nondescript phrase is charged with special force, signaling a rare self-revelation of God. At Mt. Sinai, the transcendent Lord "passed by" Moses (Exod 33:22; also 33:19 and 34:6) in order to reveal his name and compassion. Again, at Mt. Horeb the Lord revealed his presence to Elijah in "passing by" (1 Kgs 19:11). The most important antecedent of the idea, however, comes in Job 9:8, 11: [God] alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him."<sup>69</sup> Jesus' walking on the water to his disciples is a revelation of the glory that he shares with the Father and the compassion that he extends to his followers. It is a divine epiphany in answer to their earlier bafflement when he calmed the storm, "Who is this?"<sup>70</sup>

In "passing by" the disciples, Jesus gives a revelation of God Himself, clearer than ever before.

**V. 50: *for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."***

### **Jesus as the Covenant "I AM"**

Verse 50 opens with the fear of the disciples. Rather than the sight of Jesus granting peace, they are terrified (*Ἐταράχθησαν*). This same word is used to refer to a troubled sea.<sup>71</sup> The chaos within their hearts reflects the chaos upon the seas. The reason for their fear is explained in the following phrase. The twelve believe they see a ghost. The disciples' fear stems from their confusion about *who* Jesus is. True to form, witnessing Christ's divine acts only further confuses the disciples.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 200.

<sup>69</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 198.

<sup>70</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 199. See also: "when the disciples were struggling against a stormy sea, Jesus meanted (literally, "wanted") to pass by to show a divine, saving presence," Lamar Williamson Jr., *Mark*, Interpretation, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 131.

<sup>71</sup>Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 990.

<sup>72</sup>Before this account, see their confusion in 4:41 at the stilling of the sea, and later, at Mark 8:31 (Peter's rebuke) and Mark 9 at the transfiguration.

Rather than rebuke or abandon the disciples, Jesus “immediately” (εὐθὺς) stops to speak with them.<sup>73</sup> Similar to his earlier reaction to the hungry crowd, Jesus’ compassion toward the disciples causes him to engage them. Despite their ignorance of His identity, He does not hesitate to approach them. Jesus implores the disciples to “take heart,” immediately providing them with the reason why: “ἐγώ εἰμι.”

The majority of English Bibles translate ἐγώ εἰμι as “It is I.”<sup>74</sup> At face value, this translation seems to simply record Jesus explaining that He is not a ghost. However, in Greek, this phrase is only two words: literally: “I Am.”<sup>75</sup> Such a phrase is bursting with theological significance and Biblical allusion. Brooks acknowledges, “‘It is I’ may be nothing more than a statement of identification, but more likely it alludes to the revelation formula of Exodus 3:14.”<sup>76</sup> Brooks is referencing the same story mentioned earlier. When Moses asks God to reveal His name, God responds with the word יְהִי, literally, “I Am.”<sup>77</sup> In the Septuagint, this phrase is translated ἐγώ εἰμι, the exact wording that Mark records Jesus announcing. Primed for this revelation by Mark’s previous Exodus allusions, Donald English wonders, “How much clearer can he make it without removing the one thing for which he looks, which he seeks to stimulate but cannot and will not impose, trusting faith in himself.”<sup>78</sup>

Robert Stein observes, “In numerous places in the Old Testament, God identifies himself with the words ‘I Am. …as a result, this expression has a solemn and sacral use in the OT.”<sup>79</sup> This is no casual self-acknowledgment, but a divine name.<sup>80</sup> Edwards agrees, “Jesus not only walks in

<sup>73</sup>Emphasizing Jesus’ compassion, Mark uses “μετ’ αὐτῶν. Vincent notes that, “Both Matthew and John give the simple dative, αὐτοῖς, to them. Mark’s with them is more familiar, and gives the idea of a more friendly and encouraging address.” Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 197.

<sup>74</sup>See: Mark 6:50 in ESV, NIV, KJV, NASB, etc.

<sup>75</sup>This phrase is emphatic, since the subject is stated in the phrase even though the verb alone may carry the same meaning and translation.

<sup>76</sup>Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* 113., See also Peter G. Bolt, *Jesus’ Defeat of Death*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.

<sup>77</sup>“יְהִי,” “I am, will be”, concealing identity of Y. Ex 3:14b, → 14a and Comm.; ? n.div. Nab. יְהִי (Cantineau Nab. 2:57; Littmann NIE 1:24; Alt Kl. Schr. 1:61). † Iְהִי: MHb. pi. H,” Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 18.

<sup>78</sup>Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith, The Bible Speaks Today*, (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 139.

<sup>79</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 326. , See also Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, 351, and Brevard Childs in *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Old Testament Library), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 61-70, writes that God’s revealed name in the Old Testament “[denotes] his active, upholding, uncircumscribed, everlasting presence, which allows no rival force to withstand it.”

<sup>80</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 427. See also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land, An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 4th ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,

God's stead, but he also takes his name.”<sup>81</sup> Minear agrees, saying “In answering with the words It is I, Jesus may have been deliberately using the name of God (Exod. 3:14).”<sup>82</sup> In two words, Jesus identifies Himself not only as one *with* divine power, but as *One* with the covenant God of the Old Testament. Boring agrees that this is intended to be Jesus’ divine self-identification. “God speaks with this formula [I AM] especially in Deutero-Isaiah, Mark’s key Old Testament text”<sup>83</sup>

Of course, if the disciples had called to mind this connection and realized they were in the presence of the divine covenant God, all fear would flee. Jesus’ strong prohibition of fear ( $\mu\nu\varphi\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$ ) is as much a statement of reality as it is a command.<sup>84</sup> If Jesus is truly the “I Am,” then eternal security is the state of His people. This pairing of phrases also provides additional parallels with the Old Testament. Watts parallels Jesus’ self-declaration and imperative to not fear with Isaiah’s usage of the same paired with “the promise of Yahweh’s presence ‘when you pass through the waters.’”<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Williamson connects the walking on the sea, the words “I AM” and the “characteristic reassurance in theophanies of ‘Fear not,’” as following the model of a salvation oracle in the Old Testament.<sup>86</sup> There is no reason to fear if the true God is the One whose name is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”<sup>87</sup>

***V. 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded***

**Presence as Peace**

Immediately upon revealing His identity, Jesus enters the disciples’ boat. Mark records that *as soon* as he sets foot in the vessel, “the wind ceased” ( $\epsilon\kappa\pi\alpha\sigma\epsilon\nu\ \bar{\nu}\ \alpha\nu\mu\omega\varsigma$ ), linking Jesus’

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2022), 86-88 for discussion on the implications of Yahweh’s name. God reveals Himself as the eternal God, whose character is not subject to change.

<sup>81</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 198. See also: Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), who notes “When asked in Mark 14:61 if he is the promised Messiah, Jesus answers “I am,” a direct verbal equivalent to Exodus 3:14,” 97, of the same exact phrase Mark employs here.

<sup>82</sup>R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 183.

<sup>83</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 190. See also:

<sup>84</sup>Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 125. Stated with the negation  $\mu\nu$ , the imperative Meant to convey a continuous reality.

<sup>85</sup>Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997), 162. Isaiah 43:1b-3 (ESV) ““Fear not, [μη φοβεῖσθε] for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God.” (ESV).

<sup>86</sup>Williamson, *Mark*, 131.

<sup>87</sup>Read: Exodus, 34:6, Nehemiah 9:31, Numbers 14:18, Psalm 86:15, etc.

action to the miracle with the conjunction “καὶ.”<sup>88</sup> The Old Testament repeatedly asserts that God is the sole director of the wind.<sup>89</sup> As Christ possessed divine power over the waters, He has divine power over the wind. While there is no doubt this is a miracle, there is deeper significance below the surface. Edwards writes, “Being with Jesus (3:14) is not simply a theoretical truth; it has practical and existential consequences, one of which is the safety and peace of disciples.”<sup>90</sup> Jesus not only grants revelation but *deliverance* to the disciples. Such deliverance is granted *through* His presence.

The relationship between God’s presence and deliverance is a key theme throughout the Old Testament. The imperative “do not fear” roots itself in the truth that YHWH is not only the one true God but in His declaration, “I will be with you.”<sup>91</sup> For the people of God, God’s presence is the great hope of salvation and peace. Here, Jesus assures what He has commanded. There is no reason to fear because the “I Am” is now *with* the disciples.

### **Victory over Chaos**

The miracle upon the sea was not an isolated event from the rest of Jesus’ ministry. Rather, it was a powerful revelation of what was yet to come. The sea in the Old Testament was a symbol of chaos and death.<sup>92</sup> The Anchor Bible writes that the sea “became in Jewish apocalyptic literature a standard image of the climactic distress of the end-time, as is illustrated by several passages from the Qumran hymn scroll.”<sup>93</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of this was at the Exodus. Israel was surrounded by death, the Red Sea before them, the Egyptians behind. In splitting the chaos of the sea, YHWH delivered His people unto life.<sup>94</sup> This same language is repeated throughout the Old Testament, linking the parting of the seas to salvation from death

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<sup>88</sup>Kαὶ is typically translated as “and” and here connects two phrases. In his fast moving pace, Mark frequently links together related ideas with this conjunction. Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 495.

<sup>89</sup>Exodus 10:13, Psalm 107:25, Job 28:25-27, etc.

<sup>90</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 200.

<sup>91</sup>See: Genesis 26:3, 31:3, Exodus 3:12, Joshua 3:7, Isaiah 43:2 (ESV).

<sup>92</sup>Morales, *Exodus Old and New*: “As a power that humanity is unable to tame, often dark and turbulent, the sea readily came to symbolize chaos in the ancient world, the forces of darkness and the powers of evil, even death,” 54.

<sup>93</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 430.

<sup>94</sup>Morales, *Exodus Old and New*: “the symbolism of the sea and the darkness of night, along with the impending threat of Egypt’s pounding pursuit, serves to portray Israel’s entrance into and emergency out of the sea as a death and resurrection that encapsulates the exodus: Israel’s descent into and ascent out of Egypt, the watery abode of death...through the waters Israel has died to death and has been reborn, resurrected as the people of Yahweh,” 49-50.

and chaotic waters.<sup>95</sup> Through the Exodus, God enacted a type of resurrection.

When referencing the New Exodus, the Old Testament anticipates One who will again deliver God's people from the waters of death.<sup>96</sup> Watts argues that Mark portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of this hope. Seeing this miracle as support for his claim, Watts states, "These additional correspondences, testifying as they do to Yahweh's self-declaration, his delivering presence, and protection from the threat of the chaos waters offers further support for the presence of an [Isaiahic New Exodus] hermeneutic: Jesus' delivering actions and control over the sea point to the breaking-in, in strength, of Yahweh's kingly reign as he inaugurates the long-awaited [New Exodus]."<sup>97</sup> Ortlund agrees, "Mark, then, seems to be presenting the sea-walking of Mark 6 as a recapitulation of the Exodus."<sup>98</sup> Through this Exodus-esque miracle, Mark gives hope that Jesus could be the promised One who will usher in the New Exodus and deliver God's people from a greater threat.

Marcus writes that Jesus stilling the storm would have been a "profound message of hope...this message would be symbolically reinforced by the fact that the miracle happens in the fourth watch of the night, the time when darkness is beginning to loosen its grip over the earth, in accordance with the common biblical theme of God's help arriving at dawn."<sup>99</sup> Ortlund states, "In Jesus, the new age is dawning that was promised in the OT - not least in Isa 40-55, where ἐγώ εἰμι occurs seven times."<sup>100</sup> As YHWH brought forth light out of darkness and rest out of

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<sup>95</sup>"Reminiscent of the Israelites' crossing of the Sea of Reeds in the Exodus and continues the Passover/exodus/moses typology that characterized the preceding narrative ..."the mosaic and exodus echoes in our passage are unmistakable," Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 431.

<sup>96</sup>See Isaiah 40-55, particularly Isaiah 42:15-16 " I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. (ESV) and Isaiah 43:16-19 Thus says the Lord, "who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick." Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (ESV)

<sup>97</sup>Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997), 162.

<sup>98</sup>Dane C. Ortlund, "The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea (Mark 6:45-52)," *Neot testamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012), 322.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001949878&site=ehost-live>. See also: Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, Second Edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), "Jesus' saving of the disciples from stormy seas recalls the exodus salvation at the sea (Matt. 8:24ff.; 14:24ff.), along with other historic displays of the Creator's sovereign control over the chaotic water," 189.

<sup>99</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 431.

<sup>100</sup>Ortlund, "The Old Testament Background and Eschatological Significance of Jesus Walking on the Sea," 331.

chaos for His people throughout the Old Testament, Mark seems to assure readers that Jesus has come to advance this same mission of God.

#### **V. 52 “For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”**

##### **Rejection of the “I Am”**

The close of verse 51 reveals the disciples’ response: astonishment (‘ἐξίσταντο). This shock is emphasized with the adverb λίαν, or “exceedingly.” Although an optimistic reader might assume the disciples are in awe, Mark terminates such assumptions in the following verse. The twelve failed to recognize Jesus’ true identity because they did not understand his previous miracle at the feeding of the five thousand. Guelich writes that such misunderstanding is a motif in the gospels.<sup>101</sup> However, whereas the disciples are elsewhere depicted as “insiders” who are given understanding, here “they fail to understand the ‘parable.’”<sup>102</sup> Mark presents Jesus’ revelations about the kingdom and His Kingship as met with rejection and misunderstanding. Guelich summarizes that this pericope is ultimately “a story that underscores the disciples’ lack of understanding.”<sup>103</sup>

Such misunderstanding is not isolated from the rest of Jesus’ earthly ministry, but intrinsically involved with it. Mark explains they are confused because “οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις,” or, “they did not understand about the loaves,” referring to the feeding miracle.<sup>104</sup> Wessel writes, “Had they understood about the loaves, i.e., that the sovereign Lord of the universe was in action there, they would have been prepared to understand walking on water and calming waves. Their problem was a Christological one.”<sup>105</sup> The disciples had just witnessed Jesus’ divine power at the feeding of the five thousand. Rather than being prepared by Jesus’ miraculous provision, the disciples are further befuddled by One who does what only YHWH can do. Calvin emphasizes, “The principal charge brought against them is blindness, in allowing so recent an exhibition to fade from their memory, or rather in not directing their mind to the

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<sup>101</sup>Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26, 353.

<sup>102</sup>Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26, 353.

<sup>103</sup>Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 34a*, Mark 1-8:26, 353. Kernaghan identifies the miracle of the calmed sea as a parable, which the disciples are incapable of understanding, Ronald J. Kernaughan, *Mark*, Downer's Grove, IL: 2007, InterVarsity Press, 130.

<sup>104</sup>Walter Wessel, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 239, Gould, *St. Mark*, 122, John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 239, Stein, *Stein, Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 327, Cole, Guelich, etc. all agree that “the loaves” refer to the feeding miracle due to its proximity and Mark’s literary structure. In fact, no argument to the contrary was found

<sup>105</sup>Wessel, Walter W. “Mark,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 676.

contemplation of Christ's divinity, of which the multiplication of the loaves was a sufficiently bright mirror.<sup>106</sup> Yet the disciple's misunderstanding cannot be chalked up to ignorance. Instead, Mark explains their response comes from a hardened heart (ἢν ἀντῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη).

This diagnosis of a hardened heart is not unique in the Bible. In ancient Israel, the heart was always used to refer to the inner man. Thus, a hardened heart revealed "blunted feelings and moral sensibilities."<sup>107</sup> Stein writes, "The clearest negative description of the disciples so far comes in Mark's editorial comment in 6:52...Matthew adds the following words in 14:21 'You of little faith, why did you doubt.'"<sup>108</sup> Their misunderstanding is a problem of faith, stemming from their deadened perception of the truth.

This particular phrase of hardening is unique in its usage since the only other time it is used is in reference to the Pharisees as they sought to kill Jesus.<sup>109</sup> Such a diagnosis is especially grievous when reminded that the disciples were given insider knowledge and relationship with Jesus. Even so, they too are hardened against the truth of Jesus' identity.<sup>110</sup> Despite their insider knowledge, the disciples are blind, one with the Pharisees.

Yet, the disciples should not only be identified with the Pharisees, but with all of Israel. It should be noted that "heart" (καρδία) is in the singular, rather than the plural (καρδίας). The disciples are united as one in their unbelief.<sup>111</sup> Cole clarifies "Smallness of faith and hardness of heart are two constant sins even of the disciples in Mark." He defines, "Hardness of heart is that

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<sup>106</sup>John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 239.

<sup>107</sup>Elizabeth Gould, *St. Mark*, The International Critical Commentary, (London, United Kingdom: T&T Clark, 2000), 123.

<sup>108</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 28.

<sup>109</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 28. See also: Hardened hearts last appeared at the synagogue in Capernaum when Jesus healed the man with a deformed hand (3:5). There it occurred with reference to ostensible "outsiders"—members of the synagogue, Pharisees, and Herodians; here it occurs of "insiders," of Jesus' own disciples, 201. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002),, 201.

<sup>110</sup>Hallur Mortenson picks up on the parabolic nature of Jesus' revelation. He writes, "In Mark's Gospel even the disciples themselves are in danger of being included in the category of those who will indeed listen but will not understand, and who will look but not perceive (4:12). Throughout the Gospel, the failure of the disciples is a running theme." Particularly to this story, he notes, " The concluding comment that they failed to understand about the loaves (6:52) shows that they have indeed been seeing, but still they have not perceived the truth about Jesus, echoing the epistemological key given in 4:11–12. They have already witnessed much, but their faith did not correspond to what they had witnessed (cf. 4:24–25)," in "Seeing is not Believing: Apocalyptic Epistemology and Faith in the Son of God in Mark's Gospel," *Themelios* vol. 48(1), (2023), 100. 92-105. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/seeing-is-not-believing-apocalyptic-epistemology-and-faith-in-the-son-of-god-in-marks-gospel/>

True revelation and faith must be given, not just viewed. See also: Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 201, and Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 221.

<sup>111</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 328.

lack of spiritual perceptivity, that lack of readiness to learn, for which we are ultimately blameworthy ourselves...smallness of faith is a failure to remember God's work in the past and to apply that knowledge of his nature to our present problems.”<sup>112</sup> Spiritual blindness which leads to rejection of God is a core problem of *all* whom Jesus came to save. None are immune from the hardness of heart that their sin brings, even those nearest Jesus.

This hardness of heart stems not only from forgetting the feeding miracle but forgetting their family history. Donald English perceptively writes,

“the clue may rest in the Old Testament background. God is there described as feeding his people, not only with the manna (Ex. 16) but also in other ways and places.<sup>113</sup> He was therefore known as a God who feeds his people (Ne. 9:15; Ps. 78:24–25). In sharing in the feeding of the crowd [the disciples] had first-hand experience of this God feeding his people miraculously yet again, through Jesus. This is the link they ought to have seen, for the Old Testament also speaks of God walking on or through the waves<sup>114</sup>.... any one of these miracles ought by now to be for them an avenue for perceiving that the one with whom they are dealing, Jesus their teacher, is endowed with the kind of power they normally expect only of the God revealed in their Scriptures. For them, it seems, ‘the penny has not yet dropped’.”<sup>115</sup>

Despite being raised in the knowledge of YHWH and His acts, the disciples' lack of understanding about the promised Messiah shackles them in darkness and doubt.<sup>116</sup>

Calvin writes that the disciples' darkened understanding is “no new thing.”<sup>117</sup> Just as Jesus' miracles and words echo the YHWH's revelation in Exodus, so the disciples' response echoes the rejection of their ancestors to God's covenant kindness. The theme of a hardened heart rings throughout the Old Testament.<sup>118</sup> In Exodus, deliverance was followed by God's

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<sup>112</sup>Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, 184.

<sup>113</sup>(1 Ki. 17:8–16; 2 Ki. 4:1–7, 42–44)

<sup>114</sup>(Jb. 9:8; 38:16; Ps. 77:19; Is. 43:16)

<sup>115</sup>Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 139.

<sup>116</sup>“It appears, for Mark, that of all the 'signs' which Jesus performs the miraculous provision in the wilderness should have been the clearest indication that the [New Exodus] was beginning, with Jesus being at least Israel's shepherd-Messiah,” Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*. 232.

<sup>117</sup>“The Lord hath not yet given thee a heart to understand, (Deut. 29:4.) John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 239–240.

<sup>118</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 427.

provision of manna. Directly after these two great acts of faithfulness, the Israelites grumble against God, displaying the same hardened heart as their supposed enemy, Pharaoh.<sup>119</sup> In their hard-heartedness against their Savior, the people set themselves against God. Here, Mark's designation of the disciples' hard heart shows the same posture.<sup>120</sup> Neither the disciples nor the Israelites understood the revelation of their God in the divine, gracious provision of bread.

Even so, although the disciples are identified with unbelieving Israel and God's enemies, Jesus will not leave them there. Stein writes that "Mark at times purposely portrays the disciples in a negative light...yet it is clear that Mark portrays the disciples as chosen by Jesus, and despite their failures, they are reunited with Jesus."<sup>121</sup> The failure of the twelve will only grow more evident as the narrative continues.<sup>122</sup> However, Stein writes, "Mark however does not point out their weaknesses and failures because he is on a vendetta against the disciples."<sup>123</sup> On the contrary, they will be restored, and Jesus will lead his sheep after the resurrection."<sup>124</sup> The disciples' lack of faith reveals their great need and failings. Yet, Mark does not end here. Instead, Mark shows the covenant faithfulness of God in the midst of human failure. Although Jesus knew the hardness of their heart, he chose to draw near to His people, granting deliverance *before* their response of faith. As in the Old Testament, Jesus reveals the heart of God as a faithful Promise Keeper. As 2 Timothy declares, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for he cannot deny Himself."

### **Mark 6:48-52 as Resurrection Story**

For believers today, it is a unique kindness to not only look backward, but forward. While most Biblical scholars agree that the allusions to the Exodus are undeniable, some scholars also claim that there are hints of Jesus' resurrection hidden in the pericope. The Anchor Bible commentary lists nine parallels between this account and Jesus' self-revelation to the disciples after the resurrection.<sup>125</sup> Boring offers, "The epiphany as a whole has several features of a resurrection story, especially as illustrated in Luke 24:36-41: the sudden epiphanic reappearance

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<sup>119</sup>Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 162.

<sup>120</sup>"Even the disciples are part of the hardened lump of Israel," G. K. Beale *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. 697.

<sup>121</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 31.

<sup>122</sup>See especially chapter 8 & 14.

<sup>123</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 329. See also: France reflects "What Mark has done is to allow his readers to trace the weaknesses which led to that failure [of misunderstanding Jesus' identity], so that history might not be allowed to repeat itself." *The Gospel of Mark*, 29.

<sup>124</sup>Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 329.

<sup>125</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 433.

of Jesus to his disciples, who are afraid, have hardened hearts, mistake him for a ghost, but are reassured by Jesus' 'I Am' ...the story is permeated with resurrection imagery and language."<sup>126</sup> He continues, "[This sea miracle] was told in the pre-Markan church tradition *as a pointer* to the Christ-event as a whole focused in the death and resurrection of Jesus...it manifests the language and imagery of the resurrection."<sup>127</sup> Though the disciples may not have connected these two accounts at the time, the parallels are worthy of closer inspection.

First, there is a connection to bread in both narratives. As the multiplied loaves recalled the provisional meal in Exodus, bread also appeared at the institution of the Lord's Supper. The disciples were unable to understand Jesus' revelation upon the sea since they did not understand the loaves. Similarly, the disciples were unable to grasp Jesus' coming suffering since they did not understand Jesus' explanation about the bread at Passover.<sup>128</sup> Throughout Mark, the disciples fail to grasp Jesus' foretelling of his death and resurrection. While Israel spent years anticipating the coming Messiah, Mark implicitly shows that they have no category for a suffering Savior.<sup>129</sup> Mark takes great pains to prove that Jesus does not come as a triumphant Messiah. Instead, Jesus is a Savior who must pass through suffering to bring about deliverance. Although Jesus explicitly prepares his disciples for His suffering, their presuppositions keep them from true sight.

This pericope also hints at the coming suffering of Jesus. As mentioned earlier, the Anchor Bible shows "a strong association between waters, especially the waters of the unruly sea, and death; this association is reflected in Mark's narrative itself in 10:38-39, which speaks allusively of death as a form of baptism...with this association in mind Jesus walking on the sea becomes symbolic of his conquest of death."<sup>130</sup> As the crossing of the Red Sea was symbolic of the death that YHWH delivered the Israelites through, Jesus walking through the stormy sea prefigures the death through which He endured for the sake of His people's salvation. Augustine sees Jesus' entrance into the boat as symbolic of salvation at the cross. He writes, "The wood of the boat prefigured the wood of the cross. The way through the stormy sea was the way of the

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<sup>126</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 191.

<sup>127</sup>Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 191. Emphasis added.

<sup>128</sup>Similarities include: "Epiphany of Jesus who appears suddenly after long separation from disciples," "Disciples think Jesus is a ghost," "Disciples are afraid," "Jesus tells them not to be afraid," "He says 'I am here,'" "Disciples are astonished," "Reference to food," "hardened/doubting hearts," stress that Jesus is not a ghost," Marcus, *Mark 1-8*,433.

<sup>129</sup>Stein explains, "The idea that the Messiah/Christ/Lord's Anointed/Son of David would die by crucifixion was totally foreign to the messianic understanding and hopes of first century Judaism." Stein, *Mark: A Baker Exegetical Commentary*, 31.

<sup>130</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 433.

cross, by whose wood the faithful would be carried to salvation.”<sup>131</sup> True to Mark’s message, Jesus passes through the chaos for the sake of His people.

Christ’s death was necessary for Him to be a true Messiah who could secure salvation for people dead in their sins. In His death, Jesus is understood for who He truly is. Edwards writes, “Only at the cross can Jesus be rightly known, not simply as a great moral teacher or as the most noble person who ever lived; nor only as a miracle worker or as an answer to this or that pressing question of the world. At the cross, Jesus is revealed as the suffering Son of God, whose rejection, suffering, and death reveal the triumph of God.”<sup>132</sup> This is what the disciples cannot grasp. Jesus is not the Messiah that Israel expected. He is something better.

Yet, in this act of suffering and deliverance, the disciples grow more aware of the One they follow. In the storm, the disciples see that “not even the waters of death can put a stop to the compassion of Jesus.”<sup>133</sup> Augustine comments on this narrative, “[Jesus] himself became the way, and this through the sea. For this reason, he walked on the sea: that he might show you that there is a way upon the sea. But you, who cannot in any way yourself walk on the sea, let yourselves be carried by the ship!”<sup>134</sup> Though nothing within the disciples merits their rescue, their Lord’s mercy outpaces their worthiness. Though Jesus could have stilled the storm from afar, he entered into the place of the affliction to save His hard-hearted people.

Finally, this story does not end in death, but illuminates the path to life.<sup>135</sup> At both the sea and the tomb, the disciples are initially afraid (ἐφοβοῦντο) and fail to understand what has occurred. Despite the disciples’ bewilderment at the resurrection, Jesus had *already* delivered them, conquering death and securing their path to salvation. A similar pattern occurs in miniature in Mark 6. Despite their hardened heart at sea, Jesus had already passed through the sea and restored assurance of life to the disciples. The disciples failed to “take heart” in both cases because of their radical misunderstandings of who the Messiah was. Jesus was not the Savior

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<sup>131</sup>Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark (Revised)*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 88.

<sup>132</sup>Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 19.

<sup>133</sup>Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries), 433.

<sup>134</sup>Tractate on John 2.4.3. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark (Revised)*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 90.

<sup>135</sup>“The exodus of Jesus is not just about his death, as the word departure might suggest, but about his glory, authority, revelation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus is not just leaving, he is starting an exodus: a flowing with milk and honey, in which the slave masters are thrown down and drowned in the sea, but the multitude of faith, both Jew and Gentile, find freedom.” Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 133.

they thought they were promised. Instead, he was the Savior they needed. The disciples had no category for a suffering Savior, yet they could not be saved apart from one who brought life by suffering on their behalf. This Jesus did in accordance with the Scriptures.

Jesus was the promised Savior who would bring about the New Exodus. He fulfilled all he came to do and was faithful to all he spoke. J. C. Ryle writes, “He that walked upon the water never changes. He will always come at the right time to uphold His people.”<sup>136</sup> Yet Jesus was not just the One whom God promised, but God Himself.<sup>137</sup> The “I AM” who kept every promise to His people in the wilderness was the same One who drew near to His hardened disciples in their need. In Jesus’ name, the glorious, covenant name of the Old Testament God, His people will find true life and rest.

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<sup>136</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, (London, United Kingdom: James Clark & Co., 1965), 131.

<sup>137</sup>“In Christ, God comes to be 'with us,'" in Poythress, *Theophany*, 414.

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