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RESTORING THE BROKEN: THE FUNCTION OF MILITARY LANGUAGE IN THE  
FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND NARRATIVE (MARK 6:30–44)

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## RESTORING THE BROKEN: THE FUNCTION OF MILITARY LANGUAGE IN THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND NARRATIVE (MARK 6:30–44)

The Gospel writers sometimes use military language or allusions to militarism<sup>1</sup> in their description of the Jesus narrative. These details are recognized by scholarship and have led some scholars to champion the “Jesus the Revolutionary” hypothesis with proponents beginning from the eighteenth century until today.<sup>2</sup> The main premise of this hypothesis is the argument that Jesus opposed imperial Rome and that his actions and ideology were in alignment with Jewish revolutionaries. A simplified version of this hypothesis argues that Jesus was no different from other Jewish revolutionaries.<sup>3</sup> But after Jesus’ mission failed, his followers reinterpreted his revolution as a sort of spiritual revolution of the heart.<sup>4</sup> The “Jesus the Revolutionary” hypothesis with its argument that Jesus was involved in revolutionary, military, anti-Roman, activities and ideology is rejected by other scholars.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Military language is the use of military terminology in a text. Militarism is the robust support of aggressive military policy and/or actions. See, for example, Luke 22:36, Luke 22:38, 22:49, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:36.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967); George Wesley Buchanan, *Jesus, the King and His Kingdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984); Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *Reimarus: Fragments; Ed by Charles H Talbert* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr, 1970). See also Bammel who surveyed “the revolution theory” from Reimarus to Brandon (see Ernst Bammel, “The Revolution Theory from Reimarus to Brandon,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).). Some of the recent proponents of the “revolutionary hypothesis” are Zev Garber, “The Jewish Jesus: A Partisan’s Imagination,” in *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation*, ed. Zev Garber (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011).; Greg Carey, *Sinners: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009). See also Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*, ed. Coleman A. Baker (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), esp. 116–19.

<sup>4</sup> See Albert Schweitzer’s introductory description in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. William Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), 1–12.)

<sup>5</sup> The edited book, Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984)., presents a collection of 26 essays that were written by 16 authors, of which some argue that Jesus in fact was allying himself with zealots, while others oppose this perspective. Ben

Since it is impossible to deny the presence of military language in the Gospels, another prominent view has emerged. This view argues that Jesus' message as well as his actions were not directed against Romans but toward those with revolutionary aspirations in Israel.<sup>6</sup> The thrust of the argument is that Jesus was calling the Israelites to repent from their nationalistic ambitions and warned them against putting their trust in their own military power because it would lead to bloody conflict with the Romans. Consequently, the debate about whether Jesus opposed the Romans or called the Israelites to repent from their nationalistic aspirations divides the scholarly world.<sup>7</sup> The question remains, however, as to why military language was used in the composition of the Gospels and what function it plays in the discourse.

The feeding of the five thousand is one of the few stories that is remembered and recorded by all four evangelists.<sup>8</sup> Because of this, it is safe to assume that the story had a huge effect on the eyewitnesses.<sup>9</sup> Fascinatingly, military language permeates the feeding of the five

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Witherington III makes significant arguments in respect to the relationship of Jesus towards Jewish revolutionary fervor and the Romans and concludes that Jesus, in fact, opposed the idea of any insurrection and, on the contrary, perceived himself as a humble "shepherd-king" (Ben Witherington, III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 81–119.). See also John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume 3: Companions and Competitors* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 565–69.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael F. Bird, "Jesus and the Revolutionaries: Did Jesus Call Israel to Repent of Nationalistic Ambitions?," *Colloquium* 38, no. 2 (2006); Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984), 185–89; Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context*, Studying the Historical Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 96–97; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 4 vols., vol. 2, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 290–91.

<sup>7</sup> The discussion is prominent today and even an entire issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* in 2014 was dedicated to thorough reassessment of Jesus and his relationship to anti-Roman resistance. See Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "Jesus and the Anti-Roman Resistance: A Reassessment of the Arguments," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, no. 12 (2014).

<sup>8</sup> Though recorded in all four Gospels (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15), this study will analyze the feeding of the five thousand in the Gospel of Mark.

<sup>9</sup> I adhere to the position of Richard Bauckham who argues that the narratives recorded in the Gospels are passed on by the eyewitnesses. See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); "The Eyewitnesses in the Gospel of Mark," *Svensk exegetisk årsbok* 74 (2009). Charles H. Dodd describes the feeding of the five thousand event as a "crisis" in Jesus' ministry that may reflect historical tradition. He states that the feeding incident is especially related with the popularity of Jesus which "impressed its sequence of events on the memory of the followers of Jesus: it was a crisis and a turning point. The vast assembly [at the feeding of the five thousand] [...] represented a high point in his popularity. But this

thousand narrative. This study aims to address the question of the function of the military language in the feeding narrative. The focus of this study is on Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand narrative.<sup>10</sup> This paper will present results of a research and will highlight three observations. First observation is methodological. It proposes that interdisciplinary, narrative-cognitive approach, is heuristic and aids biblical studies. Second observation is exegetical. This observation highlights the *form* of the text and demonstrates military and emotive languages present in the feeding narrative. Third observation is cultural, it reveals the *function* of the text. It demonstrates that the text contains *Kulturkumpf* that subversively critiques concepts of power and suggests new means of "warfare" where "compassion" becomes a solution to the brokenness of war-torn societies.

### **Methodological Observation: Narrative-Cognitive Study**

#### *Narrative Studies and the Feeding Narrative*

The question of the *function* of military language in the feeding of the five thousand narrative can be researched by utilizing the analytic tools of narrative studies with the help of cognitive studies. Both tool sets allow us to explore the relation between the *form* of rhetoric and the *function* that such acts seek to achieve. To give an example, this relationship of *form* and *function* can be observed when the plot develops and points in one direction but then the

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popularity took a disastrous turn when an attempt was made to force his mission into a political channel. When Jesus firmly resisted the attempt, separating his immediate followers from the crowd and withdrawing to the hills, the result was widespread defection, and the Twelve emerged from the crisis as the faithful remnant with which a fresh start was to be made." (Charles H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 222.)

<sup>10</sup> The Gospel of Mark is arguably the earliest Gospel. Burnett Hillmann Streeter presents, perhaps, one of the principal descriptions of the priority of Mark hypothesis and supports it with substantial evidence. (Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, & Dates* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), 151–98.)

unexpected happens and the readers or the characters within the narrative (sometimes both) are surprised by the move in another direction. In the plot structure of the feeding narrative, its revelatory nature is manifested on multiple levels. A potential function of the use of military language could be expressed in the following steps. First, the plot of the story develops in such a way that it leads the reader to believe that Jesus is going to take a military route in order to (1) liberate the people from oppression and (2) establish a new kingdom with the help of his disciples and he will be the true and good leader, the Messiah. The text surprises the reader when Jesus does not lead a newly formed army against the oppressor but disperses the crowd and goes into a solitary place by himself. Second, other ancient biblical texts support this development of the plot since they testify that messianic expectations in the first century Palestine were closely associated with a military Messiah who would reclaim the land and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. So, the milieu further supports that the characters in the narrative could have perceived the event of the feeding of the five thousand in Galilee as a perfect catalyst for military rebellion. But, surprisingly, Jesus does not take this further. Third, this surprising turn is crucial since it serves not merely as a literary tool but as an important device that involves both the author of the text and the reader/hearer in the process of rethinking the event that caused the mismatch between perceptual expectation and actual experience of the event.

That is to say, these steps may reveal how, and here I use Gundry's words, "the objectivities of the text may well mold the subjectivities of writer and reader as curiosity, interest, and engagement build up."<sup>11</sup> This objectivity of the text can be reached by the narrative/literary analysis which aims to understand the meaning of the text, *what the text is about*. The subjectivity of the reader, however, can be understood and analyzed with the help of

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<sup>11</sup> Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, 17.

cognitive research, which tries to analyze the *effect* of the text. Therefore, here we will explore potential processes through the use of narrative literary studies with the help of cognitive studies.

### *Cognitive Studies as an Aid to Narrative Studies*

Over the last decade, the use of cognitive approaches to literature has intensified.<sup>12</sup> This popularity of cognitive literary studies is no accident. Literary scholars have come to the realization that analysis of the text can be enhanced by considering scientific advances concerning human cognition. It was probably also the result of the emphasis on bringing science and humanities to an agreement and cooperation. After the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* in 2015,<sup>13</sup> cognitive studies<sup>14</sup> in literature stepped into the world as its own discipline.

The feeding of the five thousand narrative as well as its immediate context includes an abundance of emotive language. Therefore, cognitive study of emotions logically aids in determining the *function* and of the narrative.

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<sup>12</sup> To name but a few, Jan Auracher and Willie van Peer, eds., *New Beginnings in Literary Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars, 2008); Lars Bernaerts, Luc Herman, and Dirk de Geest, *Stories and Minds: Cognitive Approaches to Literary Narrative* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Mark J. Bruhn and Donald R. Wehrs, *Cognition, Literature, and History* (New York: Routledge, 2013); David Herman, ed. *Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Isabel Jaén and Julien Jacques Simon, *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, Cognitive Approaches to Literature and Culture Series (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013); Paula Leverage et al., eds., *Theory of Mind and Literature* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011); Lisa Zunshine, ed. *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> See *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> First, it is important to understand that cognitive science is a “suitcase word,” it is multidisciplinary in its essence. It includes and brings together a very wide variety of fields such as linguistics, computer science, genetics, neurobiology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and biology. Because of such a plethora of fields within cognitive studies, a person talking about cognitive studies needs to clarify what sub-discipline of the field or what methodology they actually follow. It can also include orality studies, memory studies, studies in the reader’s experience of emotions. Alan Richardson, “Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map ” in *The Work of Fiction : Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, ed. Ellen Spolsky and Alan Richardson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 2. (Marvin Lee Minsky coined the term “suitcase word” in Minsky, Marvin. *The Emotion Machine: Commonsense Thinking, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of the Human Mind*. (United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 109-112.)

### *Cognitive Theories of Emotions*

Even though some emotions can be and are the result of chemical processes in our brain, not all emotions are the result of just these “chemical” processes.<sup>15</sup> Some emotions, and maybe the majority, are the result of more complex evaluative processes. Martha C. Nussbaum is one of the leading advocates of this perspective. In her *Upheavals of Emotions* she states that “emotions are suffused with intelligence and discernment.”<sup>16</sup> This train of thought leads her to argue that we “have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, she argues that literature produces practical emotional benefits. To be more specific, literature with its cognitive, emotional impact stresses the moral training of the person who comes in contact with the text. Literary works produce intelligent emotional responses in the reader with the purpose of leading them to moral sensibility. The majority of good literary texts produce intelligent emotions in the reader and these emotions lead to an improved moral sensibility of the reader. But it is not only the reader who is involved in this emotional effect of the text because the text itself portrays and transmits emotional portraits of the characters within the narrative.

### **Exegetical Observations: Military Language and Emotion of Compassion**

A reader of Mark will quickly discern a dramatic and carefully developed plot in the

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<sup>15</sup> The history of philosophy often considers emotions to be a result of biological changes within our bodies. For instance, a hungry person may become angry easier. That is why some even use the term “hangry,” which made its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2018. This anger is a result of the lack of fuel in the brain which leads to difficulty regulating emotions and anger happens to be the most difficult to regulate. That is why emotions can be defined as impulses or energies that are akin to the “emotions” of animals. In other words, they do not have a clear connection with our cognition (i.e. thoughts, analysis, or imagination).

<sup>16</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

narrative.<sup>18</sup> The development of the plot of this dramatic, and, maybe, even tragic biography<sup>19</sup> follows characteristics of Greek literature. Mark 6:32–44 begins with the reintroduction of the *apostles* with Jesus in the *boat*.

*Boat.* The imagery of the boat<sup>20</sup> in the canonical texts is very important and is presented as a contrast to the image of the sea as an image of danger, death, and chaos.<sup>21</sup> A boat (πλοῖον) is not simply a mode of transport which allows people to cross the lake, but it is also a place that provides safety in the time of turmoil on the lake. It provides an “escape” from the crowds (Mark 4:1, 36–37; 6:32, 45; 8:10). The boat also evokes a vision of a nautical expedition with some tones of a military conquest. The fact that those who are in the boat with Jesus are called the *apostles* further supports this military imagery.

*Apostles.* The twelve are called the apostles (ἀπόστολοι) in Mark’s Gospel only twice, in Mark 3:14 and in 6:30. In other words, they are characterized as the ones who were sent out (from ἀποστέλλω).<sup>22</sup> The apostles were on a mission to promote the ministry of Jesus as soldiers go before the general to prepare the way. In fact, the word ἀπόστολος in its Attic Greek meaning denotes a naval military expedition.<sup>23</sup> Description of the presence of military leaders at the feast

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<sup>18</sup> Best describes Mark’s Gospel as Greek “drama” (Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story*, 128–33.). Bilezikian describes Mark as Greek “tragedy” Gilbert G. Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> There is a consensus that Mark’s Gospel is an ancient biography. See Burrige, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 105–23; Bond, *The First Biography of Jesus: Genre and Meaning in Mark’s Gospel*, “Introduction”; Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels*, ch. 1.8.

<sup>20</sup> Boat,” Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, 101. See also Shelley Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat: An Extraordinary 2000 Year Old Discovery* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> “ἀποστέλλω,” *NIDNTE* 1:365.

<sup>23</sup> Lightfoot indicates that the word ἀπόστολος in its “special sense denoting ‘a naval expedition, a fleet dispatched on foreign service,’ seems to have entirely superseded every other meaning in the Attic dialect” Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations*, 93, 92–100.

of Herod Antipas in the preceding passage presents a further contrast between the military force of the world and the apostles as a different type of military unit (v. 21).

The apostles with Jesus in the boat (6:32) crossing the lake to a desolate place and it ends with Jesus immediately (εὐθὺς) forcing (ἀναγκάζω) his disciples to get into the boat (πλοῖον) and cross to the other side (6:45). In the beginning of the narrative the disciples are getting into the boat voluntarily, while after the feeding narrative Jesus forces (ἀναγκάζω) them to get into the boat. Jesus' action testifies that he was trying to either protect the disciples (as in 6:32) or prevent them from some sort of action (as in 6:45). This suggests the possibility that the disciples along with the crowd wanted to make Jesus their leader in their military attempt to overthrow Roman oppression.

*Deserted Place.* The apostles were going away to a solitary place or desert (ἔρημον τόπον) (v. 32). The Old Testament is clear on the idea of another exodus into the desert<sup>24</sup> and the Messianic age beginning in the desert (Isa 35:1–2; 40:3–5; Hos 2:14–23; Ezek 20:33–44.). The expectation of the Messianic age in the wilderness was taken literally by the Qumran community as they chose to dwell in the desert, fulfilling Isa 40:3–5 (cf. 1QS 8:12–16). Significantly, Isa 40:3–4 is also quoted in Mark 1:3, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” The emphasis in 1:3 is on the voice in the wilderness that proclaims, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” This is what the LXX suggests. However, the Hebrew text is clear in its punctuation and structure that the reading of Isa 40:3 should be, “The voice of one crying, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.’”<sup>25</sup> That is a very significant detail

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<sup>24</sup> The term that is frequently used is “new exodus.” However, Daniel Smith, in his review of the usage of the term “new exodus” in scholarship, correctly notes that it is a recent creation and the term is not present in the writings of Paul, of Josephus, or of the Qumran community. (Daniel Lynwood Smith, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus’ in New Testament Scholarship: Preparing a Way through the Wilderness,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 2 (2016): 208.) However, the fact that ideas about new exodus were present and prominent in the Old Testament and second temple literature cannot be dismissed.

<sup>25</sup> Klyne Snodgrass argues that it is very likely that the change in the LXX as well as in the Gospels to

since it highlights the importance of the wilderness as the place of preparation of the way of the Lord. This preparation of the way was also perceived as a military activity that involved a preparation for, as Austin Farrer notes, “a conquest of the true Promised Land.”<sup>26</sup> It is possible to argue, that the reading in Mark 1:2 could also emphasize the location not of the voice, but of the preparation of the way of the Lord in the wilderness. The text of Isa 40:3–4 was prominent during the Second Temple period.<sup>27</sup>

This introduction of the “deserted place” serves as the *resolution*<sup>28</sup> to the *problem* of the disciples being tired after fulfilling the task Jesus had sent them on, namely teaching, preaching, and healing people (Mark 6:12–13, 30–31). Also, for the reader (and for the characters) it could also seem as a place of preparation for a military action. While the apostles are on the way to the deserted place (ἔρημος τόπος) to rest they encounter the *complication* of people, “coming and going” and “running on foot” after them (vv. 31, 33). These people are like “sheep without a shepherd” (v. 32).

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emphasize the voice in the desert instead of the location, desert, where the way is prepared is due to the reform-minded groups who saw themselves as forerunners of the coming Messiah (Klyne Snodgrass, “Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 2 no. 8 [1980], 24–25.)

<sup>26</sup> Austin Farrer points out that Mark 1:2 sets the tone for the Gospel of Mark as the connection between the “new exodus” and the exodus from Egypt will be mediated through Isaiah. He states,

Isaiah in chapter [40] is predicting a new return to Canaan from a second bondage, a new Exodus like the old, and so it is very proper that Isaiah’s text should be applied to the Exodus text. Needless to say, St Mark, like all Christians, sees our salvation through Jesus as a spiritual exodus, and a conquest of the true Promised Land (Austin Marsden Farrer, *A Study in St Mark* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 55.).

<sup>27</sup> The desert was understood in the light of Isa 40:3–4 and this understanding of the desert gave birth to the origin of a number of revolts which sprang up from desert settings. See Jewish War 2:259–260; 2:261–263; 7:437–438).

<sup>28</sup> The resolution or the *denouement* (French for “unraveling”) of the plot marks the beginning of the change in direction of the narrative. According to Aristotle, plot includes a complication and resolution, denouement (*Poetics* 18.1–3). Bilezikian demonstrates in great detail how the Gospel of Mark presents complication in (1:1–8:26) and resolution (denouement) in 8:31–16:8) and argues that complication and denouement are the crucial features of the narrative in Mark (Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy*, 51–106.)

“*Coming and going*” and “*running*.” It is possible to draw a connection between “sheep without a shepherd” in Mark 6:34 and Num. 27:17. One interesting detail is that this very verse in Numbers also states that Moses wants to appoint a person who shall “go out before them and come in before them” (ἐξελεύσεται πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν καὶ ὅστις εἰσελεύσεται πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν, LXX) and “who shall lead them out and bring them in” (ὅστις ἐξάξει αὐτοὺς καὶ ὅστις εἰσάξει αὐτούς, LXX). This expression sound very similar to the statement in Mark 6:31, “many were coming and going,” and they are military in their nature.<sup>29</sup> Joshua 14:11, among other references,<sup>30</sup> makes it clear that this is military terminology when Caleb states, “I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming (ἐξελθεῖν καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν πόλεμον, LXX).” It is safe, therefore, to conclude that Mark 6:31, 34 include military language and that it highlights the military nature of people’s gathering around Jesus and the apostles.

This *complication* of the plot leads to another *grand problem* of our pericope, people are “like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34) that is the reason Jesus experienced compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι).

“*Sheep without a shepherd*.” This characterization of the people as sheep is common in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that in the light of Num 27:12–17, the phrase “sheep without a shepherd” refers to people capable of engaging in military actions, but they lack a leader who can lead them.<sup>32</sup> This is further supported by 1 Kgs 22:17 which denotes a leaderless

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<sup>29</sup> See also Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 551.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Deut 31:2–3; 1 Sam 18:13, 16; 29:6; 1 Kings 3:7.

<sup>31</sup> the quote “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34) might be taken from Numbers 27:17 or 1 Kings 22:17 or 2 Chronicles 18:16 or Ezekiel 34:8. Or, perhaps, it masterfully takes the reader/hearer to all four. Arguably, all four passages refer to Israel being without a shepherd in military context.

<sup>32</sup> Budd, *Numbers*, 307.

army.<sup>33</sup> It is important to emphasize that the depiction of the crowd as “voiceless,” “running together,” being like “sheep without a shepherd,” and being “hungry” compels the hearer/reader also to experience the compassion of Jesus. The people do indeed need a shepherd.

Jesus’ experience of compassion leads him to immediate *resolution* to the problem of people “being like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus begins to teaching them (v. 34b). But this solution to the problem faces another *complication*, it is getting late and people are hungry (v. 35a). The disciples are the ones who highlight this *complication* and bring it to Jesus’ attention. This *complication* leads to the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples which becomes a *crisis* of the plot (vv. 35b–38).<sup>34</sup> This almost fiery exchange of imperatives between the disciples and Jesus points to ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of the disciples.<sup>35</sup> This *crisis* is followed by a *development* of the plot in which the identity of Jesus is reemphasized and the disciples are taught a very important lesson regarding what it means to be a disciple (vv. 39–41).

*Jesus commands.* The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples is perplexing since military terminology is used in an atypical setting for such language. First, Jesus commands (ἐπέταξεν) his disciples to have them (people) all recline (Mark 6:39). The same word, ἐπιτάσσω, is also used in the previous passage in Mark 6:27 when the king commands (ἐπέταξεν) the “courier” (σπεκουλάτορα) to bring the head of John the Baptist. Also, taking into consideration other uses of the term ἐπιτάσσω,<sup>36</sup> it is safe to assume that it was used primarily by either kings,

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<sup>33</sup> See also France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 261. Cf.

<sup>34</sup> Bultmann points to the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples and argues that it serves to increase the tension of the narrative. (Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 217.)

<sup>35</sup> Malbon correctly notes that conflict is the key to the Markan plot. She argues that there are multiple conflicts along several lines in Mark, but all of them have to do with power and authority. “The kingdom of God is in conflict with all other claims to power and authority. Jesus is in conflict with demons and unclean spirits. Jesus and the Jewish authorities are in continuing conflict over issues of authority and interpretation of the Law (Torah). Jesus and the disciples are in conflict over what it means to be the Messiah and thus what it means to follow him.” (Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?,” 33.)

<sup>36</sup> “τάσσω,” *NIDNTTE* 4:459.

military leaders, God, or those who had very special authority entrusted to them. By utilizing this term, Mark characterizes the disciples as obedient and ready to follow the command of their master. Jesus is characterized as a general who organizes the crowd in the form of military units.

*Hundreds and fifties.* He organizes the crowd in groups (συμπόσια συμπόσια) by hundreds and fifties (κατὰ ἑκατὸν καὶ κατὰ πενήκοντα). This is reminiscent of the organization of Israelites by Moses (Exod. 18:25; Num. 31:14) in order to lead the Israelites to “conquer” the Promised Land, “Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens” (Exod. 18:25).<sup>37</sup> The same division was also used in the Judean Desert Documents to describe the organization of the armies of the Sons of Light when they stand against the enemy (1QS 2:19–23; CD 13:1; 1QM 4:1–5:17; 1QSa 1:12–17, 28–29).<sup>38</sup>

After obeying the command of Jesus, the disciples participate in the distribution of the bread and fish. They are involved in shepherding the people and taking care of them. Finally, we see *resolution*, all the people are fed and there is an abundance of food left over (vv. 42–44).<sup>39</sup>

*Jesus the Shepherd.* Having analyzed the plot of the pericope we argue that the main problem of the pericope is the fact that the people who followed Jesus and his disciples are “like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34). Guelich rightly concludes that this introduces an important Old Testament motif. This phrase is so important that it “places the miracle under the motif of Jesus as the good shepherd, the promised eschatological shepherd, who feeds the sheep (cf. Ezek 34:23).”<sup>40</sup> This idea of one shepherd leading one people is present in the Old Testament (see Mic

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<sup>37</sup> Montefiore, “Revolt in the Desert: (Mark 6:30ff),” 137.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 324–26.

<sup>39</sup> According to Bultmann, the narrative makes its impact by demonstrating the abundance of food left and a large number of those fed. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 217.

<sup>40</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 340.

5:3–5; Jer 3:15; 23:4–6; Ezek 34:23–24),<sup>41</sup> but is even further developed in later Jewish literature (see Pss. Sol. 17:24, 40; CD 13:7–9; 2 Bar. 77:13–17).<sup>42</sup> It is in the feeding narrative that this aspiration and motif is presented to be fulfilled.

Jesus is presented as a resolution to the problem since he becomes the shepherd for the people by teaching them.<sup>43</sup> However, the crisis of the plot, the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples (vv. 35–38) shows that there is a huge misunderstanding in what the responsibility of the shepherd should be. This leads to another resolution to the problem of the crowd being without a shepherd, Jesus feeds them all (vv. 42–43). The reader may thus conclude that teaching is not the only resolution to the problem. When the disciples point out the late hour and the hungry crowds, another resolution is required, that of feeding.<sup>44</sup> Thus the problem of “the sheep without a shepherd” is addressed through two resolutions: teaching and feeding. The resolution of *teaching* comes from Jesus, but the resolution of *feeding* involves the disciples. It is not only Jesus who is meant to be a shepherd, but also the apostles who are the ones sent by him. Most importantly, the catalyst of this resolution is *compassion* (σπλαγγίζομαι).

Jesus’ actions were likely to have been perceived to be military-like in nature by the people and the disciples. However, strangely, Jesus reinterprets this idea of war and gives it a

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<sup>41</sup> Ignatius M. C. Obinwa, “I Shall Feed Them with Good Pasture” (Ezek 34:14): *The Shepherd Motif in Ezekiel 34: Its Theological Import and Socio-Political Implications*, *Forschung Zur Bibel* 125 (Würzburg: Echter, 2012); Thomson, “Shepherd-Ruler Concept in the Old Testament and Its Application in the New Testament.”

<sup>42</sup> Joachim Jeremias, “ποιμήν,” *TDNT* 6.485-502. See also Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1996), 138. Contrary to this, Jørn Varhaug argues that in Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek works this metaphor is remarkably more common in pre-exilic literature than in the later Greek and Roman literature, where it is almost absent. Varhaug, “The Decline of the Shepherd Metaphor as Royal Self-Expression.”

<sup>43</sup> Aus notes that first feeding the crowd’s spiritual needs with the bread of the Torah and its interpretation before satisfying their physical needs with actual bread is the expression of Jesus’ compassion. He also argues that the “haggadic motif stands behind the representation of Jesus as ‘teaching’ ‘a great crowd’ ‘many things/extensively’ in Mark 6:34.” (Aus, *Feeding the Five Thousand: Studies in the Judaic Background of Mark 6:30-44 Par. And John 6:1-15*, 44.)

<sup>44</sup> R. T. France also notes that feeding is a resolution to the “crisis.” (France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 266.)

very different definition. In other words, Jesus was reenacting and telling what his contemporaries were longing to see and hear, but he was also giving his military talk and actions a radical new twist.<sup>45</sup> A warrior leader will not be able to resolve the conflict. Only a *compassionate* leader will be able to do it by demonstration of what it takes to really “conquer.” Jesus demonstrates compassion towards the people who expected a “strong” leader. He sets an example. *Compassion* is a weapon of this warfare.

*5,000 men.* The author emphasizes the exact number of the people who were fed, 5,000, πεντακισχίλιοι ἄνδρες (6:44). R. T. France acknowledges that “a strong case can be made for a political and indeed military character to the gathering” based on the “striking specification” such as “the five thousand who were fed were ἄνδρες.”<sup>46</sup> Mark could have omitted the specification ἄνδρες as he did in 8:9. This could open this number for men, women and children. But, Mark is very clear. There were 5,000 *males*. Guelich rightfully points out that “[n]ot only does the lexical force of ἄνδρες support this, but the grouping of the people in companies (6:40) reminiscent of Moses’s grouping of the men of Israel in the wilderness and the grouping of the males at Qumran in their eschatological community provide a conceptual parallel.”<sup>47</sup> Both of those groupings have military contexts.

It is also possible to consider this number of 5,000 men as the number of soldiers in one legion. Between the first century BC and the first century AD the number of soldiers in a Roman

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<sup>45</sup> I agree with N.T. Wright when he comments on the reenactment of the history of Israel in Jesus’ ministry, “Jesus’ kingdom-announcement consisted of his telling and reenacting the story his contemporaries were longing to hear but giving it a radical new twist.” (N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 48.)

<sup>46</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 261. Though he agrees that the case for a military reading can be made, he disagrees that this is what Mark intended. He argues for the Eucharistic banquet as the key for the interpretation of the feeding narrative. (Ibid., 263.)

<sup>47</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 644.

legion was anywhere from 4,800 to 5,280.<sup>48</sup> Polybius, Greek historian, and Livy, Roman historian, each describe two types of legions: standard and “larger strength.” The “standard” legion consisted of 4,000 infantry and 200 cavalry. The “larger strength” legion of 5,000 infantry and 300 cavalry. The latter was raised in emergencies (Polyb. III.107.11, VI.20.8–9, Livy XXII.36.1). James Jeffers estimates that a legion consisted of 6,000 soldiers.<sup>49</sup> Historians and scholars disagree on the number of soldiers in a legion.<sup>50</sup> We can assume that the same problem existed at the time when the Gospels were written. Therefore, the number 5,000 perhaps could have been a conventional number that would be used to describe a legion.

*Galilee.* Although Galilee is not mentioned in our pericope, the reader of the Gospel is expected to know that Galilee was the location where the story takes place (cf. Mark 1:14; 3:7; 6:21). Much has been said about Galilee,<sup>51</sup> but it is important to highlight the role Galilee played in revolts against Rome and other oppressive powers.<sup>52</sup> During the Maccabean period, Galilee became a battlefield where Jews fought Gentiles under the leadership of Simon Maccabeus (1

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<sup>48</sup> G. L. Thompson, “Roman Military,” *DNTB* 991.

<sup>49</sup> James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 174.

<sup>50</sup> Roth masterfully describes how difficult it is to give the exact number of soldiers in one legion. But 5,000 is perceived as a number that constitutes one legion. Jonathan Roth, “The Size and Organization of the Roman Imperial Legion,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 43, no. 3 (1994): 347.

<sup>51</sup> See an excellent review of literature as to the study of Galilee R. Alan Culpepper, “The Galilee Quest: The Historical Jesus and the Historical Galilee,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2018). Also Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, Snts 134 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Scott D. Charlesworth, “The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-Examined,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 3 (2016); James G. Crossley, “Class Conflict in Galilee and the Gospel Tradition: A Materialist Suggestion,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 36, no. 1 (2019); Culpepper, “The Galilee Quest: The Historical Jesus and the Historical Galilee.”; Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 Bce to 135 Ce; Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*; Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Galilee and Jerusalem: History and Literature in Marcan Interpretation,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1982).

<sup>52</sup> See Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations*.

Macc 5:14–23; 11:63; 12:47–49). The main goal of these battles was to deliver the Jewish population from the oppressor.<sup>53</sup> At the time of Jesus, Galilee was a prosperous and populated area that boasted strong agricultural production. It was a region of pomegranates, figs, olives, fish, and bread. In fact, the Jerusalem Talmud suggests that Sepphoris and Tiberias were some sort of central markets for wheat.<sup>54</sup> In spite of Galilee's agricultural wealth, the majority of the population belonged to the lower class. Three social classes which inhabited Galilee are especially highlighted in the New Testament.<sup>55</sup> At the top were the elites, which consisted of land owners, merchants, judges, and other prominent people.<sup>56</sup> The middle class was significantly larger and consisted of lawyers, professional scribes, teachers, carpenters and other manual workers, household managers and the likes.<sup>57</sup> The bottom of social ladder consisted of poorer and unfortunate people such as tenant farmers, day workers, shepherds, slaves, beggars, sick, and the underprivileged (cf. Matt 9:36; 13:24–30; 24:45–51; Mark 12:1; Luke 12:35–48).<sup>58</sup>

Significantly, Mark 6 portrays a picture which includes the upper class of Galilee (τοῖς πρώτοις τῆς Γαλιλαίας) at the feast of Herod (6:21), while the other two classes and perhaps mainly the lower class, may be assumed to have been present at the feast of Jesus (6:33–44). This contrast is striking and suggests that readers' awareness of the situation is presupposed in the

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<sup>53</sup> See 1 and 2 Maccabees, esp. 1 Macc 4:15; 5:21–23.

<sup>54</sup> *y. B. Qam.* 6D

<sup>55</sup> See Crossley, "Class Conflict in Galilee and the Gospel Tradition: A Materialist Suggestion." Bruce Longenecker lists seven categories, but they apply mainly to the economic strata in the Roman Empire in general and specifically in the cities of Roman Empire (See Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).)

<sup>56</sup> These groups are mentioned in the New Testament. See Mark 12:16–21; Matt 25:14–30; Matt 13:45–46; Luke 19:1–10; Matt 5:25)

<sup>57</sup> In the New Testament these are mentioned in Matt 2:4; 8:19; 20:1–16 Luke 18:9–14; 12:42–46; 16:1–8.

<sup>58</sup> Mordechai Aviam, "People, Land, Economy, and Belief in First-Century Galilee and Its Origins: A Comprehensive Archaeological Synthesis," in *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

text.

Jesus' actions of sending out the twelve into towns of Galilee as well as his act of feeding the five thousand men in the desolate place in Galilee could be perceived as some sort of military move by the peasants. Needless to say, contemporary scholars are divided as to the nature of the Jewish revolutionary movements in Galilee. The first argument is that the revolutionary movements were socio-economic in nature.<sup>59</sup> The second argument is that these revolutionary movements were religious in nature and are perceived as following messianic-apocalyptic motivation.<sup>60</sup> Having said that, the mission of Jesus was directed towards the peasant population of Galilee. Therefore, some scholars identify Jesus as a "Mediterranean Jewish peasant."<sup>61</sup> This assumption is based on the fact that Jesus lived in a predominantly rural area and his mission was primarily directed towards the peasants of Galilee. So, Jesus' message was inevitably influenced and interpreted in the light of a peasant context. Jonathan A. Draper notes, taking into consideration research in anthropology,<sup>62</sup> that

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<sup>59</sup> See Richard A. Horsley, "The Zealots: Their Origin, Relationship, and Importance in the Jewish Revolt," *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1985): 159–92; "Menahem in Jerusalem: A Brief Messianic Episode among the Sicarii—Not 'Zealot Messianism,'" *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985): 334–48; *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (New Voices in Biblical Studies; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Terence L. Donaldson, "Rural Bandits, City Mobs and the Zealots," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 21 (1990): 19–40; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 168–206 ("Bandit or Messiah?").

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Grünewald, *Räuber, Rebellen, Rivalen, Rächer: Studien zu Latrones im Römischen Reich* (Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei 31; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), esp. 130–56; on "ΛΗΣΤΑΙ in Judäa: Antike Sozialbanden?" Grünewald's result is clear: "in no way were the Jewish λησται social bandits" (p. 156). See also William Klassen, "Jesus and the Zealot Option," in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 131–49; Richardson, *Building Jewish*, 17–38 ("Jesus and Palestinian Social Protest in Archaeological and Literary Perspective"); Roland Deines, "Zeloten," *TRE* 36: 626–30; Deines, "Gab es eine jüdische Freiheitsbewegung? Martin Hengels 'Zeloten' nach 50 Jahren," in Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten: Untersuchungen zur jüdischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Zeit von Herodes I. bis 70 n. Chr.* (ed. and rev. Roland Deines and Claus-Jürgen Thornton; 3rd rev. ed.; WUNT 283; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 403–48.

<sup>61</sup> See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>62</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

“central to a peasant society is a functioning system of power and control, without which it would not be possible, despite the claims of the ruling elite that it is natural or divinely ordained. Indeed, such relations of domination are not self-sustaining, but only continue by virtue of continuous efforts at reinforcement, maintenance and adjustment of coercion.”<sup>63</sup>

Peasant society is characterized by the geographical or social setting. That is, peasants live in villages and small towns and the purpose of their existence is often characterized by support of the city dwellers. In other words, peasants were under the control of the elite. The goal of many peasants was to revolt and break from this power and control.<sup>64</sup> Being Galileans and mainly peasants, it is possible that the participants of the feeding miracle could have perceived Jesus as one who would be the leader of another revolt that would finally see a victorious end.<sup>65</sup> But Jesus disappoints the crowd and his disciples when he forces his disciples to get into the boat and dismisses the crowd (6:45). It is possible that Jesus does this in order to contain military aspirations of the disciples and the crowd since he was perceived as the one who could potentially bring freedom to Galilee and the entire land of Israel (cf. John 6:1-15).

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<sup>63</sup> Draper, "Wandering Radicalism or Purposeful Activity?: Jesus and the Sending of Messengers in Mark 6:6-56," 185.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel K. Eddy has noted that “Among the Jews there was a persistent tradition that the peasant should remain free from exploitation, and that as prophet, like Amos the shepherd, he might talk back to his would-be oppressors ... men of slight social standing took an important part in resistance to the Greek kings. These were men like the authors of Zech 9–14, the compiler of Daniel, and Eleazar the Essene.” (Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead: Studies in the near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334–31 B.C.* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 325.)

<sup>65</sup> Five thousand men anticipated a military leader. Horsley notably, argues that “Mark ... can be seen to stem from and represent the hidden transcript of (what started as) peasant movements.” (Richard A. Horsley, "Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the “Arts of Resistance”: Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).)

### *The compassion of Jesus*

The text narrates that Jesus experiences the emotion of compassion (ἐσπλαγγνίσθη) when he gets out of the boat and sees the crowds as “sheep not having a shepherd” (6:34). In the first half of the Gospel Jesus is presented as compassionate and exhibiting kindness towards those who are sick (1:41; 9:22) or hungry (6:34; 8:2). Several times Jesus’ compassion is connected with the spatial marker of the desert or the wilderness (6:34; 8:2).<sup>66</sup> Jesus’ compassion taking place in the wilderness (Mark 6:32–34) calls for the recognition of the connection with the beginning of the Gospel (1:2–3) and by extension with the Isaianic description of the comforting Lord (Isa 40:1–11).<sup>67</sup> Isaiah 40 begins with the imperative that reminds people about God’s tenderness and kindness. It is especially striking to recognize how this emotion of “compassion” (נחם) is also closely connected with the mentioning of the “warfare” (צָרָה) and the “wilderness” (מִדְבָּר) in Isaiah 40:1–3,

“Comfort, comfort (נחם) my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare (צָרָה) is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: “In the wilderness (מִדְבָּר) prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

This “comfort” (נחם) of the people is defined as a statement that “warfare (צָרָה) is

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<sup>66</sup> James Edwards in a few examples shows how the desert played an important role in connection with the compassion of Jesus. James R. Edwards, "The Servant of the Lord and the Gospel of Mark," in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels Vol 1 the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Thomas R. Hatina, Library of New Testament Studies 304 (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 56–57..

<sup>67</sup> Mark, in the very beginning of his Gospel (1:2–3) presents a connection with Isaiah 40. So, Isaiah 40 becomes some sort of programmatic for the Gospel narrative. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 46–47; Snodgrass, "Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament," 40. But, the evangelists were not alone to utilize Isaiah 40 in their writings. See 1QS 8:12–16; Sir. 48:24; Bar. 5:7; As. Mos. 10:4; 1 En. 1:5.

ended.”<sup>68</sup> John D. W. Watts explains this reference to warfare stating that Jerusalem’s “term of military enlistment is at an end.”<sup>69</sup> He continues that “warfare was an inescapable part of national existence” of Israel, but in Isaiah 40:2 we read that “Jerusalem will be free to fulfil her new role in God.”<sup>70</sup> From the perspective of Isa 40:1–3 “comfort” or “compassion” is manifested in the fact that the war is over. In fact, Isa 40:1–11 highlights Yahweh’s might as a military conqueror (v. 10).<sup>71</sup> Therefore, compassion and comfort in Isa 40:1–3 are closely connected with the military motif.

Another passage in Isaiah states that the function of the Temple is to be a gathering place where God’s ways are learned,

and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isa 2:3–4)

The message of Isaiah is clear, the time of the Lord will be signified by the end of war since God will be the judge of the disputes.<sup>72</sup> These similarities with the feeding narrative in

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<sup>68</sup> Philip B. Harner, "Salvation Oracle in Second Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (1969): 426.

<sup>69</sup> Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 608. Contra Oswalt, who argues that אָזְזָה refers “to hard service that was entailed by Israel’s sin” (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 50.)

<sup>70</sup> Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 609.

<sup>71</sup> John Goldingay, "The Man of War and the Suffering Servant: The Old Testament and the Theology of Liberation," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976): 95.

<sup>72</sup> The paradigm of the “holy war” in the Old Testament presupposes God’s involvement in conflicts and often human inaction. (See Millard C. Lind, "Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament," *Biblical Research* 16

Mark cannot be merely a coincidence. Jesus is the one who exhibits compassion, and he teaches in the wilderness, and both narratives use military language. Yet, Jesus' expression of compassion is counter-cultural.

### **Cultural Observation: Counter-Cultural “Compassion”**

Those who we call heroes today are predominantly promoters of peace, like Martin L. King, Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi. For the first audience of Mark, for the Jewish and the Greco-Roman audiences alike, on the other hand, war was a necessary and even important part of life. That is why heroes were characterized first and foremost, as warriors.

The Messiah, was expected to be a warrior who will free the nation of Israel. Needless to say, in Greco-Roman literature we also read about heroes who are described as men and women of war.

Gregory Nagy, in his outstanding work on the ancient Greek heroes, especially highlights that there was a deep preoccupation in descriptions of Greek heroes in the context of war.<sup>73</sup> In fact, for the most part their heroism was confirmed by dying a death of a warrior.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Nagy argues that without war and death in war there can be no hero in Greek literature.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, the Markan Jesus does not seek death in war, he avoids war by all means.<sup>76</sup>

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(1971).). See also von Rad, who dominated discussion on “holy war” in the Old Testament Gerhard von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg Im Alten Israel* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1951), 9, 10, 45–47. Also, Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1–39*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 11.

<sup>74</sup> Nagy also states that “Achilles the hero gets included in the *Iliad* by dying a warrior’s death.” (ibid., 29, 110, 34.)

<sup>75</sup> “When a warrior is killed in war, he becomes a *therapōn* or ‘ritual substitute’ who dies for Arēs by becoming identical to the war god at the moment of death; then, after death, the warrior is eligible to become a cult hero who serves as a sacralized ‘attendant’ of the war god.” (ibid., 158.)

<sup>76</sup> The true war Jesus engages in is a war against the demons as he also sends out the twelve to cast demons out (Mrk 6:7).

Greek heroes are also presented as possessing “strong” emotions.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the very first word of the *Iliad* is *anger*, “Anger [mēnis], goddess, sing it, of Achilles son of Peleus” (*Iliad* I.1). The *Iliad* is a song about the anger of Achilles. All *Iliad* is summarized in this one word, *Anger*. It is Achilles’ anger that causes countless woes for Greeks and Trojans and culminates in the destruction.<sup>78</sup> Jesus, in contrast, is described in the feeding narrative as having compassion.

In addition to that, it has been established that Hellenistic philosophers interpreted Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, especially their heroes morally.<sup>79</sup> Homer’s epics were not the only literary works that provided moral examples in Antiquity. Virgil, in his *Aeneid* continues Homer’s established tradition of creating epic with moral examples. In fact, as was pointed out, Virgil “combines this approach with the concept of the good king that had a long tradition in the Mediterranean World.”<sup>80</sup> Virgil praises Caesar Augustus by drawing parallels between Caesar Augustus and Aeneas and tracing Caesar’s lineage all the way to the protagonist of *Aeneid*. Furthermore, studying moral implications of Virgil’s depiction of Aeneas, Polleichtner concludes,

It seems that Virgil wanted to do what the various schools of philosophy did. They agreed in their willingness to help individuals answer questions about their emotional

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<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, Downes notes that the word “emotion” originated in France in the 16th century. It was used to describe “political or social upheaval” and was commonly linked to physical violence. For that reason, some scholars argue for considering war as an emotion. They argue that emotions can lead to both assistance in social cohesion, forming emotional community, and they can also lead to conflicts and provoke antagonism. (Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O’Loughlin, “Introduction — War as Emotion: Cultural Fields of Conflict and Feeling,” in *Emotions and War. Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions*, ed. Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O’Loughlin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.)

<sup>78</sup> Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Treggiari in her study of Cicero emphasizes that in Greco-Roman culture it was a custom to imitate and emulate virtuous men. Susan Treggiari, “Ancestral Virtues and Vices. Cicero on Nature, Nurture and Presentation,” in *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome : Studies in Honour of T.P. Wiseman* ed. David Braund and Christopher Gill (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003), 157, 63..

<sup>80</sup> Wolfgang Polleichtner, “Aeneas’ Emotions in Vergil’s “Aeneid” and Their Literary and Philosophical Foundations: An Analysis of Select Scenes” (Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 5, n. 25.

life and in their desire to transform themselves according to ideals that were recognized as reasonably following from the general approach of a given school to all aspects of life. Virgil wanted to write an epic poem that was just as offensive or unoffensive, but just as helpful to any philosophical school as was Homer's poetry.<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, Homer's and Virgil's epics were instructional and edifying. Their heroes were perceived as examples for the construction of morality in the Greco-Roman world. Homer and Virgil were achieving this also by depicting emotions of the characters and evoking emotions in the reader. This is what Mark is also trying to do in his depiction of Jesus.

Aus, in his detailed study of the feeding of the five thousand study argues that the narrative aims to present Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, who surpasses and contrasts with Jewish heroes.<sup>82</sup> He continues to argue that the narrative also describes Jesus as greater than Greek and Roman heroes, including emperors.<sup>83</sup> MacDonald, who looked at the Gospel of Mark through the prism of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, mainly argues that "by replacing ancient Greek myths with myths of his own, Mark was doing what he was supposed to do: adapting cultural monuments to address new realities."<sup>84</sup> Though I disagree with his assumption that Mark borrowed from Greek myths, I argues that Mark did try to compete with Greco-Roman ideologies, engaging in the so-called *Kulturkampf*, arguing for superiority of a new, Christian culture. In other words, Jesus may appear to be a "warrior" leader, but instead of leading his "soldiers" in war, he expresses another strong emotion of *compassion*.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>82</sup> Aus, *Feeding the Five Thousand: Studies in the Judaic Background of Mark 6:30-44 Par. And John 6:1-15*, 142-45..

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>84</sup> MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, 190.

## Conclusion

Sadly, it is an anthropological and historical fact that warfare and coercion have been omnipresent in human history. Needless to say, ancient literature often centers on war, since for many, especially in the Greco-Roman world, warfare was a fundamental fact of daily life. In fact, moments of peace were considered extraordinary.<sup>85</sup> That was true for the ancient world. Our world, however, was thought to be moving into the right direction of peace not war, healthcare not weapons, agriculture not tanks. In fact, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) military expenditure was going down dramatically since the end of the Cold War (1985).<sup>86</sup> But it changed today – military expenditure today does not allow us to focus on education, climate issues, healthcare, spirituality, and our children. Instead of our conversation about healing, we are talking about brokenness. I saw children’s lives been broken by the war in Ukraine when my wife and I travelled there after the war started. Military language is a part of everyday rhetoric.

In my recent conversation with Dr. Gilbert Valentine he noted that during his “research on the biography of Heppenstall, [he] noticed in the reported language of exhortation sermons and chapel talks in the months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of the US into WW II that militaristic language and metaphor began to be used by Heppenstall and others.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Tejada José Vela, "Warfare, History and Literature in the Archaic and Classical Periods: The Development of Greek Military Treatises," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 53, no. 2 (2004): 129.

<sup>86</sup> (SIPRI), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. "Sipri Yearbook 2022: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Summary." In *The SIPRI Yearbook, 2022*.

<sup>87</sup> Valentine, Gilbert. Email Communication, October 28, 2022. Valentine also mentioned that Heppenstall was “talking about the need to “enlist for Christ.”” (*College Criterion* December 17, 1941, 4.) Before this the ministerial club had begun to call themselves “The Crusaders.” And, “in March 1941 the College president urged the students to “dig in to the trenches.”

“Doing what can be done.” said President Cossentine. “is the joy of life.” He urged the Students to “dig into the trenches (of study)” thereby digging themselves out of the ditch of those undesirable grades such as I's, F's and E's.” (*College Criterion*, January 28, 1941, 4.)

I remember how when I was growing up the narrative of the victory of the Soviet Army was drilled into my young brain. Movies and novels that praised the Soviet heroes were part of our education. The same was true about most popular and educational texts of the Greco-Roman world. They were war-centered.<sup>88</sup> Just as contemporary authors, Hellenistic philosophers interpreted Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, especially their heroes morally. Virgil combines this longstanding approach with the concept of the good king and praises Caesar Augustus by tracing his lineage all the way to the protagonist, Aeneas. Roman soldiers, also heroes of their kind, were advancing *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), but this advancement was done through war. This trajectory in Greco-Roman epics points to the fact that heroes were depicted and praised as men and women of war. The same is true about contemporary Russian invasion of Ukraine. Azov Unit is praised for their resilience, bravery, and strength. Ukrainian army is full of heroes. Yet, we also notice and praise compassion and empathy that competes with military rhetoric.

Mark tried to compete with Greco-Roman ideologies. He engaged in the *Kulturkampf* and argued for the superiority of a new, Christian culture. In Mark, the true hero, Jesus, may appear to be a "warrior" leader, but instead of leading his "soldiers" in war, he expresses a strong emotion of compassion.

In the Jewish context, war was also a permanent reality. Yet, in the middle of all present and anticipated conflicts, one promise of Isaiah the prophet to Judah served as hope for the future, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa 2:4, cf. Mic 4:3).

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<sup>88</sup> Homer's *Iliad* describes the last days of the Trojan War, a war initiated by love for Helen. The second volume of Homer, the *Odyssey*, revolves around Odysseus' ten-year journey home from the Trojan War. Since war was a reality for people, bravery and strength were often emphasized and praised. Simon Hornblower, "Warfare in Ancient Literature: The Paradox of War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare: Volume 1: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Hans van Wees, Michael Whitby, and Philip Sabin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

These hopes expressed in Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–4 are clear; there will be no need for a regular army nor for any type of army. The soldiers will, in fact, become farmers again, just as it was in the very beginning before the tower of Babel.<sup>89</sup> Universal peace will be established and instead of learning the craft of war, people will be learning the ways of God. Paradoxically, these ideas and hopes of peace were still often perceived as the result of the final war that will eventually establish peace.<sup>90</sup> That is the reason for the common belief that the anticipated Messiah would be a military leader who would lead the nation against the oppressor and establish the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). The rationale was clear: peace can only be established by another war. This rationale was challenged in the Gospel of Mark.

The narrative in Mark's Gospel moves with purpose and intention to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah (the Christ), even the Son of God (Mark 1:1). Jesus was reenacting and telling what his contemporaries were longing to see and hear, but he was also giving his "military" talk and actions a radical new twist. The message of the narrative is clear, a warrior leader would not be able to resolve the conflict, since war cannot eradicate war. Only a complete cessation of war is the solution (Isa 9:5). This is how the long-awaited peace will be established. Jesus, as a compassionate leader, demonstrates what it takes to really "conquer" by compassion. Leading the people of Israel into another conflict would only begin another wave of conflicts. It would be absolutely against the compassion of Jesus to lead the five thousand in war. In war, lives are lost, not gained. Jesus, on the other hand, restores lives. This is why Jesus' solution is to teach and to feed, not to fight. This is what the disciples need to learn. The kingdom is established by caring and compassion.

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<sup>89</sup> Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 32, 37.

<sup>90</sup> For more on the development of military and the war and peace in ancient Israel see Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 84–96.

Climactically, the death of Jesus in Mark is the triumph of the hero. Just like the compassion that he expresses, his death was a counter-cultural message of self-denial and servanthood. This is what he was emphasizing in his teachings (8:22–10:52). Finally, one of the final confessions at the cross was voiced by a man of war, a centurion, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (15:39). This statement testifies that Jesus was the Son of God, not Caesar. Jesus is a true leader, he is a true general and king. It is Jesus who advances true peace (*pax*) not Caesar.

To summarize, the feeding narrative in Mark 6 aims (1) to lead the reader to re-think the role of the Messiah, the leader and the hero of the narrative; (2) to emphasize the identity of Jesus as a compassionate, counter-cultural, leader; (3) to instruct all followers of Jesus as to their mission in the light of the compassionate ministry of Jesus.