

Mark 14.1-52: Narrative Structure and Reader-Response

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ABSTRACT: The nine scenes of Mk 14.1-52 are laid out in an alternate progression of seven interlocking segments. The intimate union of the disciples with Jesus who goes towards his suffering and death compensates for and even dominates the opposition and separation. This narrative sequence gives the reader strength and courage to closely remain with Jesus and, by his prayer of submission to the divine will, to take part in Jesus' final triumph over suffering and death.

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The goal of the following investigation is twofold: First, we want to illustrate the narrative structure formed by the nine scenes comprising the beginning of the Marcan passion narrative in Mark 14.1-52. This will involve the demonstration of how these scenes are arranged in a pattern of literary sandwiches in which each successive scene is contrastingly framed by two other mutually related scenes('). And secondly, we want to determine the significance of this narrative structure in terms of its rhetorical effects on the implied reader.

I. Narrative Structure of Mark 14.1-52

We begin with a schematic representation of the network of literary sandwiches formed by the nine scenes in Mark 14.1-52:

- (1) 14.1-11: Jesus anticipates his death by Jewish leaders
 - a¹ 14.1-2 Jewish leaders plot arrest and death of Jesus
 - A b¹ 14.3-9 Death of Jesus is anticipated during a meal
 - a² 14.10-11 The disciple Judas plans to betray Jesus to death
- (2) 14.12-25: Jesus prepares disciples for his death
 - b² 14.12-16 Jesus directs disciples to prepare Passover meal
 - B a³ 14.17-21 During meal Jesus predicts betrayal by a disciple
 - b³ 14.22-25 Jesus and disciples share in his triumph over death through the Passover meal

- (3) 14.26-52: Jesus accepts death through prayer
 - a⁴ 14.26-31 Jesus predicts abandonment/denial by disciples
 - A' b⁴ 14.32-42 While still with disciples Jesus accepts death through prayer
 - a⁵ 14.43-52 Jesus is arrested, betrayed by Judas and abandoned by disciples.

As the above schema illustrates, the nine scenes comprising Mark 14.1-52 divide themselves into three sets of intercalations. In

(¹) For a discussion of the literary device of “sandwiching”, see J. R. EDWARDS, “Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives”. NT 31 (1989) 193-216.

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the first set the story of Jesus’ anointing for burial by a woman during a meal at Bethany in 14.3-9 is framed between the mutually related scenes of the Jewish leaders plotting the arrest and death of John in 14.1-2 and of Judas offering to betray Jesus to these leaders in 14.10-11. This first sandwich is grouped together by the literary inclusion formed by the temporal notices that it was “two days before the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread” as the introduction to the first scene (14.1), and that Judas was seeking “an opportune time” (*eukairôs*) to betray Jesus as the conclusion to the final scene (14.11). The geographical focus for this first sandwich is the village of “Bethany” (14.3), the place of Jesus’ anointing and the only explicit geographical reference in this sandwich. But as a dramatic expansion of his anointing in the privacy of the house at Bethany, Jesus projects a future geographical focus in the public, domain when he announces that “wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (14.9).

In the second set (14.12-25) Jesus’ prediction that one of the Twelve will betray him in 14.17-21 is sandwiched between the mutually related scenes of Jesus directing his disciples to prepare for him to eat the Passover meal with them as their Teacher in 14.12-16 and of Jesus eating the Passover with his disciples as an anticipation of his triumph over death in 14.22-25. A literary inclusion formed by temporal notices again serves to group together this second sandwich: The notice that it was “the first day (*hêmera*) of the feast of Unleavened Bread” introduces the first scene (14.12), and the notice that Jesus will never again drink of the fruit of the vine “until that day (*hêmeras*)” when he drinks it in the kingdom of God concludes the final scene (14.25) (²). The geographical focus for this second sandwich is Jerusalem, which, as the traditional place for the celebration of Passover, is the obvious reference for the “city” in which Jesus sends two of his disciples to prepare the Passover meal (14.13-16). But Jesus again expands the horizon beyond the present focus when he promises to drink on “that day” of the fruit of the vine anew “in the kingdom of God” (14.25).

In the third set (14.26-52) Jesus’ acceptance of death through prayer while still with his disciples in 14.32-42 is sandwiched

(²) In 14.17 the temporal notice, “when it was evening”, introduces the second scene (14.17-22) of this sandwich.

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between the mutually related scenes of Jesus predicting the disciples’ total abandonment of him and Peter’s denial of him in 14.26-31 (³) and of Jesus being arrested by agents from the Jewish leaders, betrayed by Judas and abandoned by his disciples in 14.43-52. The temporal focus for this intercalation is

provided by the references to “this very night” in the first scene (14.30) and to the climactic “hour” in the central scene: After Jesus prays that “the hour” (*hê hôra*) might pass by him in 14.35, he announces that “the hour” (*hê hôra*) has come in 14.41. The references to the “Mount of Olives” at the beginning of the first scene (14.26) and to a place named “Gethsemane” at the beginning of the second scene (14.32) establish the geographical focus for all three scenes in this sandwich. But once again Jesus extends the horizon of both the temporal and geographical focuses beyond the present “hour” and beyond Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, when he promises that “after I have been raised up. I will go before you to Galilee” (14.28)⁽⁴⁾.

Although the above schema portrays the primary set of intercalations in Mark 14.1-52, there are still others. Indeed, the entire pattern of nine scenes is arranged in the following interlocking network of seven sandwiches:

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|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) Mark 14.1-11: | a ¹ 14.1-2; | b ¹ 14.3-9; | a ² 14.10-11. |
| (2) Mark 14.3-16: | b ¹ 14.3-9; | a ² 14.10-11; | b ² 14.12-16. |
| (3) Mark 14.10-21: | a ² 14.10-11; | b ² 14.12-16; | a ³ 14.17-21. |
| (4) Mark 14.12-25: | b ² 14.12-16; | a ³ 14.17-21; | b ³ 14.22-25. |
| (5) Mark 14.17-31: | a ³ 14.17-21; | b ³ 14.22-25; | a ⁴ 14.26-31. |
| (6) Mark 14.22-42: | b ³ 14.22-25; | a ⁴ 14.26-31; | b ⁴ 14.32-42. |
| (7) Mark 14.26-52: | a ⁴ 14.26-31; | b ⁴ 14.32-42; | a ⁵ 14.43-52. |

Now that we have illustrated the sequence of scenes within the narrative structure of Mark 14.1-52, what is its purpose? What does this alternating pattern of contrasting scenes accomplish as they are heard by the audience?

⁽³⁾ Marcan exegetes are divided on whether the transitional verse 14.26 belongs to the conclusion of the previous scene or introduces the next scene. We feel that the reference to the Mount of Olives in 14.26 is better viewed as the introduction to a new setting rather than as the conclusion to the scenes of the Passover meal, which take place in Jerusalem (14.12-25).

⁽⁴⁾ For a full discussion of the geographical references in Mark, see E.S. MALBON. *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco 1986).

II. The Response of the Implied Reader to Mark 14.1-52

We understand the “implied” reader to be a theoretical construct and purely textual reality distinct from any actual reader ⁽⁵⁾, “Reader-response” concerns the “rhetorical effect” that the text produces for its implied reader⁽⁶⁾. By the “implied reader”, then, we mean the reader or audience that the text presupposes in order to be actualized as a communicative event; it is “the reader” generated by the text when it is read. In accord with this approach we will focus upon the responses of the implied reader as determined by the various presuppositions, strategies and indicators within the Marcan narrative. More specifically, we will examine what the alternating pattern of contrasting scenes in Mark 14.1-52 does to, and how it affects, its reader or audience, that is, what this intricate narrative structure of successive intercalations causes its reader to experience in order to produce the meaning latent in the

cessive intercalations causes its reader to experience in order to produce the meaning latent in the text and thus to bring its act of communication to completion (7).

A. *Mark 14.1-11: Conspiracy and Anointing for Burial*

1. a¹ 14.1-2: *Jewish leaders plot [the] arrest and death of Jesus*

The opening announcement that “it was two days before the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread” leads the reader to place the events now to be narrated within the context of this important festival, when Jewish pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem to commemorate not only their participation in the past saving deeds of God on behalf of Israel, especially their exodus from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12), but also their hopeful anticipation of participating

(⁵) For more explanation of this type of reader-response criticism, see B.C. LATEGAN, “Reference: Reception. Redescription and Reality”. *Text and Reality. Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* (ed. B.C. LATEGAN. W.S. VORSTER) (Atlanta 1985) 67-75; J. L. STALEY. *The Print’s First Kiss: A Rhetorical Investigation of the Implied Reader in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 82; Atlanta 1988) 21-49; R.W. FUNK. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma 1988) 34-38; W.S. VORSTER, “The Reader in the Text Narrative Material”. *Reader Perspectives on the New Testament* (ed. E.V. MCKNIGHT) (Semeia 48; Atlanta 1989) 21-39.

(⁶) K. A. PLANK. *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta 1987) 9.

(⁷) J.P. HEIL, “Reader-Response and the Irony of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in Luke 22:66-71”. *CBQ* 51 (1989) 272.

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in God’s future and final salvation (⁸). That this great double feast is imminent plus the fact that the chief priests and scribes had earlier failed to undermine the authority of Jesus in the temple (11.27-33) and to “trap him in his speech” (12.13) in order to discredit his teaching before “the crowd” has now moved them to resort to “deceit” (*dolos*) in their attempt to arrest Jesus and have him put to death. They must now resort to deceit if they are to avoid a “tumult” (*thorybos*) of the “people” (*laos*) during the festival, which would further lessen their status among the Jewish” people” as their authorized leaders.

This represents a development of what has previously been reported about the attempt of the Jewish leaders to eliminate Jesus: In 11.18, after Jesus had condemned the temple cult and by implication its Jewish leadership (11.15-17), the chief priests and scribes “were seeking” (*ezêtoun*) how to destroy him, for they feared him because the whole” crowd” (*ochlos*) was astounded at his teaching. And, in 12.12, after the chief priests, scribes and elders realized that Jesus had directed the parable of the wicked tenants (12.1-11) against themselves, they “were seeking” (*ezêtoun*) “to arrest” (*kratêsai*) him, but they feared the “crowd” (*ochlon*) (see also 11.32). But now, in 14.1-2, these Jewish leaders “were seeking” (*ezêtoun*) how “to arrest” (*kratêsantes*) Jesus “by deceit” (*en dolôi*) and are concerned not just with “the crowd” attracted to Jesus in the temple but with causing a “tumult”, a riot or commotion (see 5.38), among “the people”, that is, the “people” composed of Jerusalem residents and Jewish pilgrims who have come to celebrate the Passover, and who thus represent “the people” (*ho laos*) of Israel as God’s specially chosen “people” in the history of salvation (⁹).

(⁸) On the significance of this double feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread for the events regarding Jesus’ passion, see F. LENTZEN-DEIS, “Passionsbericht als Handlungsmodell? Überlegungen zu Anstößen aus der ‘pragmatischen’ Sprachwissen-

schaft für die exegetischen Methoden". *Der Prozess gegen Jesus: Historische Rückfrage und theologische Deutung* (ed. K. KERTELGE) (QD 112; Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1988) 208-209.

(⁹) The only other use of the word *laos* in Mark occurs in the quotation of LXX Is. 29.13 in Mark 7.6, where "this people" (*houtos ho laos*) clearly refers to the salvation-historical people of Israel. For a discussion of the narrative progression from "the crowd" (*ho ochlos*) in 11.18,32 and 12.12 to "the people" representative of the entire people of Israel in 14.2, see E. MANICARDI. *Il cammino di Gesù nel Vangelo di Marco: Schema narrativo e tema cristologico* (AnBib 96; Rome 1981) 133-135.

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From Jesus' previous predictions of his passion, death and resurrection (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34) the reader knows that the chief priests and scribes will succeed in arresting Jesus and having him put to death, but considerable dramatic tension is now aroused with regard to exactly how this will happen, how it is related to the salvific significance of the Jewish Passover festival, and what is involved in their treacherous "deceit". The cautious desire of the Jewish authorities thus raises the suspenseful query: Will the "deceit" of the chief priests and scribes enable them to prevent God's plan for the inevitable arrest and death of Jesus from being related to the Jewish "people" while they are celebrating the past saving deeds of God and looking forward to his final salvation?

2. *b¹ 14.3-9: Death of Jesus is anticipated during a meal*

While the chief priests and scribes are plotting how to arrest and kill him by deceit (14.1-2), Jesus is "in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper" (14.3a). That Jesus is "in Bethany" begins to indicate the strong contrast the reader experiences with the previous scene, as it continues to express Jesus' radical separation from the condemned Jerusalem temple and the Jewish leaders responsible for it (11.15-19; 13.2). Rather than stay in Jerusalem during his controversial teaching Jesus spent his nights with his own followers in Bethany (11.1,11,19). His opposition to the chief priests and scribes is further underlined as he "is reclining at table", participating in table fellowship with his own followers; "in the house of Simon the leper". In Galilee the Jewish leaders objected to Jesus' eating and thus establishing a communal bond with such social outcasts as public sinners and toll collectors (2.15-17). That Jesus is now in the house of "Simon the leper" means he is again associating with social outcasts and those who "need a physician" (see 2.17), to the displeasure of the chief priests and scribes, since the Jewish leadership banned anyone with leprosy from worship in the temple and full participation in the community (see 1.40-44). In contrast to the Jewish leaders seeking to deceitfully, arrest and kill Jesus (14.1-2), his own followers, who include social and religious outcasts, are enjoying table fellowship with him in the communal and secure setting of the "house" of an outcast. Simon the leper.

The strong contrast continues as Jesus gives the proper interpretation of the woman's hospitable anointing of him with

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expensive ointment, which has infuriated some of the participants of the meal (14.3b-6). Rather than an extravagant "waste" of money and a missed opportunity for exercising almsgiving as an important duty of Jewish piety, the woman's gesture was designated by Jesus as a "good work" (*kalon ergon*), that is, an act of charitable love also highly valued by Jewish piety, which she performed not "for the poor" but "for me", Jesus himself (14.6) (¹⁰). Her "good work" of devoted love toward Jesus thus stands in pointed contrast to the Jewish leaders' "deceit" (*dolos*) toward him in their attempt to arrest and kill

him (14.1). Further explaining the woman's generous gesture toward him, Jesus emphasizes the uniqueness of his situation of need by pointing to his imminent absence through death, which the woman's anointing of him for burial anticipates (14.7-8). The reader is thus further assured of Jesus' awareness of the deceitful death plot against him by the chief priests and scribes.

With the solemn introductory words, "amen I say to you", Jesus further extols the woman's loving acknowledgment of his approaching death by announcing that in the future, world-wide proclamation of the gospel her act of love in anointing him will be told as part of the gospel message in "memory" of her (14.9). This authoritative pronouncement of Jesus brings the contrast with the previous scene (14.1-2) to an ironic climax. Whereas the chief priests and scribes are deceitfully trying to avoid involving "the people" of Israel in the death of Jesus while they are celebrating the Passover feast (14.2). Jesus announces that his death will have an impact not only for "the people" of Israel but for all peoples of the "whole world". The "memorial" (*mnêmosynon*) of what this woman has done in reverently anticipating the precious value of Jesus' death will thus continue and far surpass the "memorial" of the Jewish Passover festival, which commemorates the saving event of the exodus as well as all of God's other saving deeds, past, present and future⁽¹⁰⁾. The global proclamation of the gospel will memorialize

⁽¹⁰⁾ As a practice of Jewish piety the value of this "good work" (*kalon ergon*) surpasses that of almsgiving in three ways: It is performed for a specific person (Jesus) rather than a general group (the poor); it requires and demonstrates a personal commitment of love rather than just an impersonal giving; and it is occasioned by a particular situation and time of urgent need rather than by the general and continual condition of the poor. See LENTZEN-DEIS, "Passionsbericht", 216-217.

⁽¹¹⁾ LXX Exod 12.14 states in regard to the Passover (see Exod 12.1,13): "This day shall be a memorial (*mnêmosynon*) for you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for all your generations; as a perpetual institution you shall celebrate it".

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forever and everywhere this woman's anticipation of the death of Jesus as the definitive saving deed of God for all peoples.

In sharp contrast with the previous scene (14.1-2), then, Jesus' anointing for burial as the woman's "good work" (14.3-9) assures the reader that, although the chief priests and scribes are trying by "deceit" to arrest Jesus and have him quietly put to death in separation from "the people" and their Passover festival, the precious and enduring value of Jesus' death as the saving event for all peoples, now anticipated in the celebration of table fellowship with his followers, will be proclaimed forever and everywhere "throughout the whole world" (14.9).

3. α^2 14.10-11: Judas plans to betray Jesus to death

As the final scene of the first sandwich, Judas' offer to betray Jesus (14.10-11) not only contrasts the middle scene of the sandwich 1 (14.3-9), but also develops the thematic of the opening scene (14.1-2). First of all, in ironic contrast to the anonymous woman who has just compassionately anointed Jesus (14.3-9), a named, male disciple, Judas Iscariot, who is one of Jesus' specially chosen "Twelve" with the privilege of "being with him" (3.14), now leaves the table fellowship with Jesus at Bethany (see 11.11) with the intention of betraying him (14.10). Judas, unlike the hospitable woman who anticipates Jesus' death, refuses to remain in fellowship with Jesus on his way to death. Whereas Judas, along with the other disciples called to form the Twelve, had earlier answered Jesus' summons as they "came to" (*apêlthon pros*, 3.13) him in order "to be with him" (3.14) in a close bond⁽¹²⁾, he now breaks that bond

with Jesus as “he went to (*apêlthen pros*) the chief priests”, the enemies seeking how to deceitfully arrest and kill Jesus (14.1), with the purpose of betraying him to them.

Furthermore, that the chief priests promise to give Judas money for his betrayal of Jesus (14.11) underlines how both the chief priests and Judas stand in ironic contrast to the nameless woman who generously anointed Jesus (14.3-9). Whereas the woman expended her costly ointment worth more than three hundred days’ wages

(¹²) K. STOCK. *Boten aus dem Mit-Ihm-Sein: Das Verhältnis zwischen Jesus und den Zwölf nach Markus* (AnBib 70; Rome 1975) 7-70.

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(14.5) to demonstrate her appreciation of the precious value of Jesus’ death, the chief priests will spend their money not for devotion to Jesus but for deceitful betrayal leading to his death. And whereas the woman donated “all that she could” (14.8) as a “good work” (14.6), an act of love toward the dying Jesus. Judas, a specially chosen disciple (3.19), will take money in return for a treacherous act of betraying Jesus to death.

But Judas’ offer to betray Jesus also advances the “deceit” against Jesus introduced in the first scene (14.1-2). When the chief , priests hear Judas’ offer, they are pleased because they have now found a way to arrest and kill Jesus “by deceit” to avoid a disturbance of “the people” during the Passover feast. The “deceit” will take the form of secret betrayal by Judas, “one of the Twelve”, a member of the group closest to Jesus.

From the time that Jesus chose the Twelve the reader has known that Judas would be the one “who betrayed him” (3.19). That Judas is now offering to “betray” (*paradoi*) him to the “chief priests” means that the necessity that Jesus be “delivered” or “betrayed” (*paradidotai*, 9.31; *paradothêsetai*, 10.33) in accord with God’s salvific plan, as repeatedly predicted by Jesus (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34), is now being fulfilled. The reader can be assured that, although a tragic betrayal by one of the Twelve, Judas’ wicked intentions against Jesus are embraced within God’s salvific plan. Paradoxically, Judas, who refuses to remain in fellowship with Jesus as he approaches death, will play a prominent role in bringing about that death by betraying Jesus in accord with God’s plan.

And so Judas becomes the bribed agent of the Jewish leaders in their plot to arrest Jesus and have him put to death. As the chief priests and scribes were “seeking how” (*ezêtoun pês*, 14.1) to arrest and kill Jesus by deceit, so now Judas enters into their treacherous plot and is “seeking how” (*ezêtei pês*, 14.11) to opportunely “betray” him. The suspense for the reader regarding whether Jesus will be arrested and put to death during the feast of Passover and whether it will affect “the people” (14.1-2) now focuses upon Judas’ plan to advance the “deceit” of the chief priests and scribes by betraying Jesus to them.

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B. Mark 14.12-25: Passover Meal and Prediction of Betrayal

1. ^b 14.12-16: Jesus directs disciples to prepare Passover meal

Forming an intercalation with the two previous scenes, the disciples’ preparation for the Passover meal (14.12-16) not only contrasts Judas’ offer to betray Jesus to death (14.10-11), but also develops the thematic of close union with Jesus introduced by his anointing for death during a meal (14.3-9). The reader

experiences a suspenseful contrast with the previous scene and its developing thematic with the notice that it is already “the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread” (14.12). That the Passover has already begun stands in suspenseful opposition not only to the attempt by the chief priests and scribes to arrest Jesus and have him put to death apart from the Passover feast (14.1-2), but also to Judas’ attempt to betray Jesus to them “at an opportune time” (14.11), that is, when taken in conjunction with the attempt of the chief priests and scribes, at a time separate from the Passover feast and “the people” celebrating it.

In contrast to Judas, the disciple who left table fellowship with Jesus (14.3-9) and “went away” (*apêlthen*, 14.10) to the chief priests for the purpose (*hina*) of betraying him to them, the disciples who remained in table fellowship with Jesus ask him where he wants them to “go away” (*apelthontes*, 14.12) and prepare for the purpose (*hina*) of his eating the Passover meal. Whereas Judas has broken his communal bond with Jesus, the reader is assured that there are still disciples with him who are concerned with continuing their bond of table fellowship by preparing for Jesus to eat the solemn Passover meal with them.

But the disciples’ preparation for their Passover meal with Jesus also advances the theme of intimate fellowship with Jesus begun by his anointing for death during meal fellowship in Bethany (14.3-9). That Jesus sends two disciples into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover meal with authoritative instructions demonstrating his superior prophetic knowledge of the future indicates his strong desire and intention to eat the Passover with his disciples in view of his impending death (14.8), despite the concern of the Jewish leaders to prevent that death from taking place during the Passover (14.2) ⁽¹³⁾. That Jesus has already been anointed for his burial (14.8)

⁽¹³⁾ Jesus’ instructions to two disciples here recall his similar instructions to two disciples sent to procure the colt for his entrance into Jerusalem and the temple (13.1-11).

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lends added significance to this particular Passover meal, as it places the impending death of Jesus in the salvific context of the Passover feast, which celebrates the past, present and future saving deeds of God. The reader thus realizes that Jesus has a prophetic foreknowledge of God’s plan for his death superior to the enemies plotting it.

Jesus’ prediction that a nameless “man carrying a jar of water” (14.13) will meet the disciples complements the nameless “woman” with her “alabaster flask of perfumed ointment” (14.3) from the previous scene of table fellowship (14.3-9). As the “woman” with her flask of ointment performs a prophetic gesture anticipating the burial of Jesus, so the “man” with his jar of ordinary water will serve as a distinctive sign leading the disciples to the room where Jesus will share the table fellowship of the Passover meal with them in view of his death ⁽¹⁴⁾.

As part of his instructions to the disciples Jesus empowers them to use his authority as “the Teacher” (*ho didaskalos*, 14.14). They are to tell the master of the household in Jerusalem: “The Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” (14.14). Whereas many have addressed Jesus as “teacher” throughout the narrative ⁽¹⁵⁾, this is the first time Jesus refers to himself as “teacher”, indeed, as “the Teacher”, the one who “teaches” a “new teaching” with divine “authority” and “not as the scribes” (see 1.21-28). By identifying himself as *lithe* Teacher”, Jesus not only brings to a

climax the previous references to him as “teacher” but confirms the divine authority of all of his previous teachings⁽¹⁶⁾. Not only is this the first and climactic time that Jesus refers to himself as “the Teacher”, but it is the first and only time that he refers to his disciples as “my disciples” (*tôn mathêton mou*, 14.14). This underlines the close teacher/disciple bond uniting Jesus with his followers, a bond Jesus strongly desires to deepen with “my disciples” through the table fellowship of this special Passover meal, which will anticipate his death (14.8,13-14)⁽¹⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁾ R. PESCH, *Das Markusevangelium: Kommentar zu Kap. 8.27-16.20* (HTKNT 2/2; Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1977) 343.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Mark 4.38; 5.35; 9.17,38; 10.17,20,35; 12.14,19,32; 13.1.

⁽¹⁶⁾ This is the last reference to Jesus as “teacher” in Mark. For the previous references to his “teaching”, see Mark 1.21-22,27; 2.13; 4.1-2; 6.2,6,34; 8.31; 9.31; 10.1; 11.17-18; 12.14,35,38.

⁽¹⁷⁾ On Jesus as “teacher” in the gospel of Mark, see V. K. ROBBINS, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia 1984).

It is through the prophetic predictions of Jesus and his authority as “the Teacher”, then, that the disciples are able to “prepare” (see 14.12,15,16) for this special Passover meal with its intimate table fellowship before the death of Jesus, already anointed for burial (14.8). That everything happens exactly as Jesus has foretold (14.15-16) underscores his superior knowledge of the future events of God’s plan and further assures the reader of the truth of all that Jesus, “the Teacher”, has taught and predicted, especially the predictions he taught about his passion, death and resurrection (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34).

2. α^3 14.17-21: During Passover meal Jesus predicts betrayal

Forming a sandwich with the two previous scenes, Jesus’ prediction of his betrayal by a disciple (14.17-21) not only stands in tragic contrast to the preparation for the celebration of the teacher/disciple bond between Jesus and his Twelve disciples within the table fellowship of the Passover meal (14.12-16), but also advances the thematic of the scene about Judas’ offer to betray Jesus to those seeking his arrest and death (14.10-11). The tragic contrast to the theme of close union with Jesus develops as Jesus predicts that “one of you will betray me” (14.18). He then reinforces the incongruity of this serious offense so with the intimacy of table fellowship as he adds, “one who is eating with me” (14.18; see Ps 41.9). That one who is “eating” the Passover meal “with Jesus” will betray him represents a grievous violation not only of the bond of table fellowship within the sacred Passover meal but of the special privilege of the Twelve “to be with” Jesus (see 3.14).

After the disciples’ reaction of “sadness” (14.19) Jesus emphasizes that the betrayer is “one of you” with the scandalous statement that he is “one of the Twelve”. And he accentuates his betrayer’s grave violation, as one who is “eating with me (*met’ emou*)” (14.18), of the intimacy of table fellowship and of the privilege of being one of the Twelve” with him (*met’ autou*)” (3.14) by adding that he is “the one who dips with me (*met’ emou*) into the dish” (14.20). The betrayer is so closely associated with Jesus that he even “dips “bread with him “into the dish”. And so the reader feels the tragedy of Jesus’ prediction, during the very sharing of table fellowship in the sacred Passover meal prepared by disciples (14.12-16), of a disciple violating the privilege of intimate union with him, “the Teacher”.

Furthermore, the negative example in this third “a” scene of the one member of the Twelve who should “never have been born” for betraying Jesus to death (14.21) stands in contrast to the positive model in the first “b” scene of the woman who will be forever and everywhere memorialized in the proclamation of the gospel for anointing the body of Jesus for death (14.9).

But Jesus’ prediction of betrayal also develops the scene of Judas’ offer to betray him (14.10-11) by assuring the reader of Jesus’ superior knowledge that the conspiracy against him is embraced by the necessity of God’s salvific plan. With complete foreknowledge and acceptance of his role in God’s future plan of salvation, Jesus proclaims that as the “Son of Man” he indeed will be “delivered/betrayed” to suffer, die and rise, “as it is written of him” in accord with God’s plan recorded in the scriptures (14.21; see also 9.12,31; 10.33; 14.10).

3. *b³ 14.22-25: Jesus and disciples share in his triumph over death through the Passover meal*

Concluding an intercalation with the two previous scenes, the sharing by Jesus and his Twelve disciples in his triumph over death through their special Passover meal (14.22-25) not only contrasts Jesus’ prediction during the meal of his betrayal by one of the Twelve (14.17-21), but also develops the theme of the close teacher; disciple relationship between Jesus and the Twelve introduced in the scene of preparation for the Passover meal (14.12-16). The contrast between the scenes in 14.17-21 and 14.22-25, each of which occurs while Jesus is sharing the table fellowship of the Passover meal with the Twelve— “as they reclined and were eating” in 14.18 and “while they were eating” in 14.22, becomes evident in the reader’s sequential experience of Jesus’ solemn “amen” pronouncements in 14.18 and 14.25: That one of the Twelve who is “eating with” Jesus will betray him (14.18) and thus break his close union of “being with” (3.14) him means that Jesus will no longer drink wine, the festive drink produced from the “fruit of the vine” (14.25). This indicates not only that his death is very imminent but that it will prevent him from partaking of the joyous meal fellowship he has continually shared with his followers. But the death of Jesus through betrayal by one of the Twelve will not bring a definitive conclusion to the festivity of his table fellowship with his followers. On the contrary, the reader is assured through Jesus’ “amen” pronounce-

ment in 14.25 that “on that day” (*tês hêmeras ekeinês*) of God’s end-time fulfillment of his salvific activity (see 13.24-27,32 [*tês hêmeras ekeinês*]), after Jesus’ triumph over death through his resurrection, he will drink “new” festive wine and thus again be united in joyous meal fellowship with his followers in the “kingdom of God”.

And so through Jesus’ contrasting “amen” predictions (14, 18,25) the reader realizes that the death of Jesus will not only take place within the salvific context of the Passover festival despite his betrayer’s assistance (14.10-11) to the Jewish leaders’ attempt to prevent this (14.1-12), but that it will have a future and definitive salvific effect beyond this particular Passover feast. And furthermore, the symbolic significance that Jesus places upon his last Passover meal with the Twelve as an anticipatory sharing in his salvific death (14.22-25) assures the reader that the death of Jesus will have a salvific effect not only for “the people” of Israel but for all peoples, despite and in ironic contrast to the betrayer’s conspiracy with the Jewish authorities (14.1-2.10-11,17-21) to prevent the death of Jesus from causing a “tumult of

the people” (14.2). Jesus’ designation of the wine of this unique Passover meal as “my blood of the covenant” (14.24), that is, of the “covenantal” relationship by which God united himself to Israel as his chosen people, the pledge of mutual fidelity according to which God would be their God and they would be his people, indicates the salvific effect of Jesus’ death for “the people” of Israel. And that the sacrificial “blood” of Jesus’ death “will be poured out for many” (14.24) points to the salvific effect of Jesus’ death not only for “the people” of Israel but for “all” peoples, since the term “many” (*polloi*), a common Semitic expression for “all” people, has a universalistic connotation ⁽¹⁸⁾.

But the sharing by Jesus and his Twelve disciples in his triumph over death through their special Passover meal (14.22-25) also develops the theme of the close teacher/disciple relation between Jesus and the Twelve introduced by the preparation for the Passover meal (14.12-16). In his last Passover meal with his Twelve disciples, Jesus, as their Teacher and host (14.12-16), transforms the meaning of this meal for them as he places a new symbolic interpretation upon the bread and wine. After directing them to “take” the bread

⁽¹⁸⁾J. JEREMIAS, “*polloi*”, TDNT 6.536-545.

which he has blessed and broken for them, Jesus designates it as the symbolic equivalent of his “body”: “this is my body”. The “bread” thus becomes the very “body” or person of Jesus (*to sôma mou*, 14.22), which “body” (*to soma mou*, 14.8) has already been anointed for death and burial. By giving them the Passover “bread”, which is his “body” destined for death, to eat, Jesus enables his disciples to sacramentally share in his death as the salvific event which climaxes all the past saving acts of God for his people commemorated in the Passover meal which arouses hope for God’s future and definitive salvation. The Twelve’s special privilege “to be with” Jesus (3.14) thus reaches its high point in this unique Passover meal as they eat the bread/body of Jesus, which unites them in table fellowship “with him” on his way to death.

The ritual gestures of “taking-blessing-breaking-giving” that Jesus performs in offering the “bread” which is his “body” to his disciples (14.22) recalls the exactly corresponding gestures he used in both of the previous miraculous meals with the crowds (see 6.41; 8.6). In the miraculous meals the pattern Jesus established by his gestures of taking-blessing-breaking-giving the bread concluded with his disciples distributing the bread to the crowds, thus making them intermediary distributors to the people of the bread they received from Jesus. This pattern within the miraculous meals implies that when the disciples “take” the Passover bread/body which Jesus “gives” them, they are not only to feed themselves but to once again distribute it to the people in future celebrations of this new Passover meal. The very nature of the Passover meal as a repeatedly celebrated commemorative feast indicates that the disciples are to repeatedly celebrate this new Passover meal of Jesus. In giving them the Passover bread which is his very person destined for death, Jesus has not only left his disciples a new way “to be with him” (3.14) after he has died, but he has enabled them to feed, satisfy and unify other people “with him” and his saving death.

That “all drank (*epion*) from the cup (*potêrion*)” (14.23) Jesus gave them fulfills for “all” of the disciples on the literal level the previous promise Jesus made to James and John that they would “drink (*piesthe*) the cup (*potêrion*)” (10.39) that he “drinks”, as a metaphor for sharing in his suffering and death before

they enter into “glory” with him (10.35-40). The literal “drinking” from “the cup” that Jesus gives all the disciples, then, indicates to the reader that this new Passover meal enables those who celebrate it to

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sacramentally participate in the suffering and death of Jesus and thus prepares them for their own future sufferings and deaths (see 13.9-13).

C. *Mark 14.26-52: Abandonment and the Power of Prayer*

1. *α⁴ 14.26-31: Jesus predicts abandonment/denial by disciples*

Forming a sandwich with the two previous scenes, Jesus’ prediction of his disciples’ abandonment of him (14.26-31) not only contrasts with but also develops the thematic of the previous scene of Jesus uniting his disciples with his death through the Passover meal (14.22-25), and it not only develops but also contrasts Jesus’ prediction or betrayal by a disciple (14.17-21). First of all, in stunning contradiction to the meal fellowship of the special Passover they have just shared with him (14.22-25), Jesus foretells his disciples that “all of you will fall away” (14.27). “All” of the disciples who have just been closely united to Jesus on his way to death as they “all” drank from the Passover cup of wine designated as the very blood of Jesus (14.23) will ‘: fall away” and be separated from Jesus.

Furthermore, although the disciples have just anticipated the suffering and death of Jesus. Peter, in what functions as dramatic irony for the reader (¹⁹), protests Jesus’ prediction of his denial (14.30): “Even if I must die with you. I will not deny you” (14.31). Peter ironically does not seem to realize. what the reader knows, namely that a disciple “must” indeed “die with” Jesus. Unable to fulfill Jesus’ demand that a disciple must “deny” (*aparnêsasthō*) oneself, “take up one’s cross” and follow Jesus on the “way” to suffering and death (8.34). Peter will fail miserably as a disciple ‘by “denying” (*aparnêsêi*, 14.30) Jesus rather than himself. Not only will Peter not prove to be an exception to the desertion by all the disciples (14.29), but he will sharpen his separation from Jesus by blatantly “denying” him (14.30). Ironically, it is precisely because Peter has not grasped the necessity of suffering and “dying with” Jesus (8.32-33; 9.5-8; 10.28-31) that he will “deny” him. For the reader the irony expresses the paradox that the necessity for a disciple to die with Jesus does not preclude denial of him— both

(¹⁹) For a discussion of “dramatic irony”, see HEIL, “Irony in Luke 22:66- 71”, 273-274.

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dying with Jesus and denying him, as illustrated in Peter, are embraced by God’s plan as predicted by Jesus.

And although Peter insistently maintains that he will be the one exception to desertion of Jesus by all the disciples (14.29), “they all spoke similarly” (14.31), likewise protesting their abandonment of Jesus. And so “all” (*pantes*) of the disciples, despite having anticipated the suffering and death of Jesus by eating his bread/body and drinking his cup of wine/blood (14.22-23), fail to understand that they cannot avoid abandoning Jesus because “all” (*pantes*) of them “will be scattered” in accord with the “written” plan of God. The close union that Jesus as “shepherd” has just established in his last Passover meal with his disciples will be broken as they “will be scattered” like “sheep” who disperse when their “shepherd” is killed (14.27).

But Jesus' prediction of abandonment and denial (14.26-31) also further develops for the reader the theme of Jesus' close union with his disciples through their Passover table fellowship (14.22-25). The "scattering" of the disciples will only be temporary. After Jesus, the "shepherd", has been raised from the dead, he will "go before" his disciples, the "sheep", and return "to Galilee". As Jesus had earlier "gone ahead" (*proagôn*) of his followers, leading them on the "way" to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die (10.32), so he will "go before" (*proaxô*) his disciples to Galilee (14.28) with the implication that they are to follow him. In Galilee, then, the risen Jesus will renew the bond broken by the deserting disciples. And so, the reader realizes that Jesus will not only ultimately re-establish the intimacy of table fellowship with his disciples when he drinks of the new fruit of the vine in the kingdom of God (14.25), but, before that, after his resurrection from the dead, he will rejoin his disciples in Galilee (14.28), where they may follow anew his "way" of salvation.

As expected in the sandwich pattern, Jesus' prediction of abandonment by all his disciples and denial by Peter (14.26-31) advances the theme of Jesus' prediction of betrayal by Judas, one of the Twelve (14.17-21). Not only will "one" of the Twelve eating the Passover meal with Jesus violate his bond with Jesus by betraying him to death (14.18-20) in accord with God's "written" (*gegraptai*) plan (14.21), but "all" of the disciples who have just participated in that meal fellowship will also impede their union with Jesus by "falling away" from him in accord with God's "written"

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(*gegraptai*) plan (14.27). Furthermore, the leader and spokesman of the Twelve, Simon Peter (see 1.16,29-30,36; 3.16; 5.37; 8.29-33; 9.2,5; 10.28; 11.21; 13.3), will three times "deny" Jesus "this very night" (14.30).

But in addition to this development of the theme of separation from Jesus by his disciples, the reader also experiences a strong contrast and difference with regard to this theme in the scenes of Jesus' prediction of Judas' betrayal (14.17-21) and of the disciples' abandonment and Peter's denial (14.26-31). In contrast to each of the Twelve's question, "surely it is not I?" (14.19), after being distressed by Jesus' prediction that one of them would betray him (14.18). Peter, and later "all" of the rest (14.31), protest his prediction of their abandonment and denial (14.29,31), even though it must happen in accord with scripture (14.27). And whereas Jesus declares that it would have been better for Judas if he had never been born in view of his betrayal and separation from Jesus (14.21), the reader is assured that Jesus will re-establish his close union, now to be temporarily interrupted in accord with God's plan (14.27), with Peter and the rest of the disciples in accord with his promise to "go before" them to Galilee after he has been raised from the dead (14.28).

2. *b⁴ 14.32-42: While still with his disciples Jesus accepts death through prayer (20)*

Related to the two previous scenes in an intercalation, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane with his disciples (14.32-42) not only contrasts but also develops the theme of separation from Jesus in the previous scene of Jesus' prediction of his disciples' abandonment and denial (14.26-31), and it not only develops but also contrasts the theme of union with Jesus in the scene of Jesus' Passover table fellowship with his disciples (14.22-25). Whereas in the previous scene (14.26-31) Jesus predicts abandonment and denial by his disciples despite their contrary pledges of loyalty, in the Gethsemane scene (14.32-42) Jesus, through his powerful prayer, enables his disciples to "get up" and "go" with him (14.42) now that the

(²⁰) For a recent exegetical discussion of the Marcan Gethsemane scene, see R. FELDMAYER, *Die Krisis des Gottessohnes: Die Gethsemaneerzählung als Schlüssel der Markuspassion* (WUNT 2/21; Tübingen 1987).

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“hour” (14.41) and his betrayer have arrived despite their inability to “watch and pray” (14.38) with him during his crisis with approaching death. The contrast between these two scenes is especially evident in Jesus’ two reproachful questions to Peter: “Simon, are you asleep?” and “Could you not watch for one hour?” (14.37). These poignant questions, along with the disciples’ inability to “know what to answer him” (14.40), stand in ironical contrast to the previous promises of Peter and the disciples not to desert Jesus (14.29,31). That Peter cannot watch for even “one hour” while Jesus prays for deliverance from death contradicts his boast that even if he must die with Jesus, he will not deny him (14.31).

But the Gethsemane scene also advances the theme of the disciples’ separation from Jesus, Jesus’ prediction of abandonment and denial (14.26-31) prepared the reader for the disciples’ temporary separation from him in accord with God’s scriptural plan until after his resurrection and reunion with them in Galilee (14.27-28). But now the Gethsemane scene (14.32-42), in which Jesus commands the three disciples (Peter, James and John) to “watch” while he “prays” (14.32-34), foreshadows and serves as a paradigm for the reader’s situation of separation from Jesus after his resurrection and before his final, triumphant coming, Jesus’ command for these three disciples to “watch” (*grêgoreite*, 14.34) recalls his earlier command for the disciples and for “all” (13.37) others to “watch” (*grêgoreite*, 13.35,37) in the period after his resurrection and before his coming in glory (13.32-37). To “watch” means to be alert and ready for the critical “hour” (13.32) leading to God’s final and definitive salvation. But when Jesus returns to the three disciples after his prayer, he “finds them sleeping” rather than “watching” as he had commanded (14.34). That he “finds (*heuriskei*) them sleeping (*katheudontas*)” in 14.37 is precisely what he warned them against in his discourse preparing them for the time before his final coming in 13.35-37: “Watch, therefore; for you do not know when the lord of the house will come... lest he come suddenly and find (*heurêi*) you sleeping (*katheudontas*). What I say to you. I say to all: ‘Watch!’.” The disciples’ “sleeping”, then, not only indicates their inability to stay awake and “watch” during this critical time while Jesus prays before his suffering and death, but also points to their and the reader’s potential failure to be prepared for Jesus’ final coming by “sleeping” rather than “watching”.

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The Gethsemane scene also advances the disciples’ anticipation of the salvific effects of the death of Jesus through their union with him in their Passover meal (14.22-25). The Twelve disciples’ unique privilege of being “with him” (*met’ autou*, 3.14), which reached a climax in their Passover meal with Jesus, is now intensified as Jesus took “with him” (*met’ autou*, 14.33) the special group of three within the Twelve (see 3.16-17). That Peter, James and John again accompany Jesus as he goes to pray prepares the reader for another special revelation by Jesus of his more profound character (²¹). Although Jesus separates himself from Peter, James and John a short distance as he “goes forward a little” and prays (14.35) his praying has significance for the disciples, who, though separate, are still in close vicinity to Jesus. His exhortation to the disciples after he has prayed while they were sleeping, “get up, let us go!”, indicates the powerful effect his prayer has for them. Before he withdrew to pray, Jesus commanded his disciples to “sit here” (14.32) and “remain here” (14.34) while he prayed. But after he prayed (14.35), Jesus empowers his disciples to “get up” from their sleeping position and enables them to “go” *with*

him— “let us go!” (14.42). Now that Jesus has been strengthened through his prayer, he and his disciples can “go” *together* to play their respective roles in God’s plan— the disciples to be “scattered” (14.27) and Jesus to be betrayed (14.42).

Jesus’ special commemorative Passover meal (14.22-25), then, gave, his disciples, and by implication the reader, the opportunity of sharing in the salvific effects of Jesus’ death (14.24), as they look forward to sharing in his triumphant meal in the kingdom of God (14.25). And now Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer (14.32-42) furthers this theme of union with Jesus as it enables his disciples and thus the reader to overcome, in and through their union with the powerful praying of Jesus, their inability to stay awake and “watch” for the “hour” of his triumphant coming (13.32-37). Within the network of intercalations in Mark 14.1-52, then, the Gethsemane scene

(²¹) This is indicated by the previous narrative: Only these three disciples were chosen to accompany Jesus to witness the revelation of his power to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead (5.37-43). Jesus took only these three with him to witness the revelation of his heavenly glory in his transfiguration (9.2-8). And it was to these three along with Andrew that Jesus revealed the events to take place after his resurrection and before his coming at the end of the world (13.3-37).

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brings to a climax the thematic of solidarity with Jesus on his way to death as developed by the sequence of alternating “b” scenes (14.3-9,12-16,22-25,32-42).

But the Gethsemane scene also presents the reader with a startling contradiction to the Passover meal. Not only had Jesus assured James and John that they would “drink the cup (*potêrion*)” that he “drinks” and thus share in his suffering and death (10.38-39), but he also gave the Passover “cup” (*potêrion*) of his wine/blood to all the disciples to drink as a sacramental participation in his suffering and death (14.23-24). But now Jesus entreats his Father to “take this cup (*potêrion*)” (of suffering and death) “away from me” (14.36). In accord with his prayer of lament, that Jesus wants God to remove “this cup” brings to a climax the expression of his deep dread and distress at the prospect of death (14.34-36).

A consideration of the introduction to Jesus’ prayer in 14.36 indicates how critically serious, profound and real his urgent request is. Acknowledging the absolute power of God, Jesus first proclaims that “all things are possible for you!” He thus demonstrates his faith in the unlimited power of God to save, a faith which he earlier exhorted others to exhibit. With the words, “all things are possible (*panta dynata*) for one who believes!” (9.23). Jesus called the father of the boy with the mute spirit, which the disciples could not expel, to acknowledge his faith in the power of God at work in Jesus to cure his son (9.14-29). With the words, “all things are possible (*panta dynata*) for God!” (10.27), Jesus invited his disciples to place their faith in the power of God to bring people, even the rich, to salvation (10.17-31). In addition, Jesus urged his disciples to “have faith in God!” (11.22), assuring them that “all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be done for you” (11.24). And so, when Jesus proclaims in prayer that “all things are possible (*panta dynata*) for you!”, he expresses his knowledge and firm belief that God’s deliverance of him from death is a distinct and very real possibility (²²).

But the tension of the contradiction between the divine necessity that Jesus suffer and die and his quite human trepidation to undergo that suffering and death is resolved for the reader

(²²) S.E. DOWD, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta 1988) 157-158.

through the very praying of Jesus as he utters the words, “but not what I will but what you will!” (14.36), Jesus’ acceptance of God’s will over his own will in prayer, even though he knows and believes that God has the power to take away this “cup”, develops his earlier teaching about prayer. Although disciples are to pray with faith in God’s absolute power to grant their request (11.22-24), they must realize that God, though he possesses unlimited power, does not always choose to exercise that power to remove suffering and death. The will of God remains sovereign. But the prayer of Jesus illustrates how one can voice one’s deepest fears and concerns with firm faith that God can alleviate them, and yet ultimately submit one’s own will to God’s will precisely in and through such prayer. Jesus thus demonstrates the power of prayer to enable one to “deny oneself” (8.34) and conform his own will to the sovereign will of God.

The significance of Jesus’ resolution through prayer of his crisis over impending death for his disciples and the reader is illustrated by his command for them to “watch and pray” (14.38)⁽²³⁾. After having directed the disciples to “sit here while I pray (*proseuomai*)” (14.32) and “remain here and watch (*grêgoreite*)” (14.34), now that Jesus has resolved his anguish over death through prayer (14.35), he can authoritatively command his disciples to likewise “watch” (*grêgoreite*) and “pray” (*proseuchesthe*). That Jesus is able to “pray” precisely while the disciples are only able to sleep and are unable to “watch” indicates that the prayer of Jesus is not only the model for the disciples and the reader to emulate in their own prayer but also the empowerment for their own praying. The sleeping disciples and the reader will be able to “watch and pray” only because Jesus himself has prayed. Although the praying of the disciples and the reader will not guarantee the elimination of their future sufferings and distress (see 13.9-13), the powerful prayer of Jesus has demonstrated how they, only in and through his praying, can conform their wills to the sovereign will of God through their praying, and thus withstand the “test” (*peirasmon*, 14.38)⁽²⁴⁾.

⁽²³⁾ Jesus’ command to “watch and pray” (*grêgoreite kai proseuchesthe*, 14.38) is in the second person plural, indicating that it is directed to the group of disciples.

⁽²⁴⁾ On the similar function of Jesus’ praying in Luke, see L. FELDKAMPER, *Der betende Jesus als Heilsmittler nach Lukas* (Veröffentlichungen des Missionspriesterseminars St. Augustin bei Bonn 29; St. Augustin, West Germany 1978) 224-250.

The contradiction that the Marcan readers experience between Jesus’ giving his disciples the “cup” of his wine/blood (14.22-25) and his urgent plea that his “cup” of suffering and death be taken away by the God for whom “all things are possible” (14.32-42) enables them not only to empathize with Jesus’ crisis over death but also to overcome the similar crises that they will face in and through Jesus’ prayer of subordination to God’s will.

3. α^5 14.43-52: *Jesus is arrested, betrayed and abandoned*

Concluding a sandwich with the two previous scenes, Jesus’ betrayal, arrest and abandonment (14.43-52) not only contrasts but also develops both the thematic of union with Jesus in his prayer with his disciples (14.32-42) and the thematic of separation from Jesus in his prediction of his disciples’ abandonment of him (14.26-31). In contrast to the bond that Jesus established with those members of the Twelve (14.32-42), especially the privileged three who remained “with him” (*met’ autou*, 14.33), Judas,

having separated himself from Jesus instead of “being with him” as befits “one of the Twelve” (3.14), is no longer a follower with Jesus but a leader of those against Jesus, who now has “with him” (*met’ autou*, 14.43) a crowd with swords and clubs. Judas is then designated as “his betrayer” (14.44) confirming Jesus’ announcement (14.42) and underlining the tragedy that one of the trusted Twelve (14.43) is the betrayer. That Judas had previously arranged a signal with the armed crowd, whereby he would “kiss” Jesus as the one they should seize, intensifies the treachery of his betrayal and separation from Jesus. He will betray Jesus with a deceitful demonstration of affection, abusing the bond he enjoyed with Jesus as “one of the Twelve”. After he comes up to Jesus and addresses him as “Rabbi”, betraying him with a title of respect (9.5; 10.51; 11.21), Judas gives the signal for the arrest as he not only “kissed” him but “kissed him with affection”, thus bringing the treachery that separate’ him from Jesus to a climax (14.45) ⁽²⁵⁾.

⁽²⁵⁾ Note the intensification of affection in the progression from “I shall kiss” (*philêso*, 14.44) to “he affectionately kissed (*katēphilêsen*) him” (14.45). M. ZERWICK — M. GROSVENOR, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, I (Rome 1974) 158, suggests for *kalephilêsen* the translation: “he kissed him with every show of affection”.

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But Jesus’ arrest, betrayal and abandonment (14.43-52) also develops the theme of union with Jesus in his Gethsemane prayer with his disciples (14.32-42). Jesus’ prophetic call for “the scriptures” (*hai graphai*), the recorded will of God, to be “fulfilled” (*plêrôthôsin*) (14.49) further demonstrates his subordination to God’s “will” that he achieved through his prayer, which serves as a model for how his disciples and the reader can join Jesus in his submission to God’s salvific plan. Jesus’ exclamation for the scriptures to be fulfilled explains why the armed crowd sent by the Jewish leaders can only now arrest him (14.46). It is not that they have triumphed over Jesus, nor that he is a “robber” (14.48), but that they are playing their role in fulfilling God’s scriptural plan (9.12; 14.21). His vigorous proclamation thus echoes and reinforces his previous powerful prayer:

14.36 “but (*all’*) not what I will but what you will”.

14.49 “but (*all’*) let the scriptures be fulfilled!”

That Jesus has allowed himself to be arrested without violent resistance on his part (14.46-48) further illustrates how his prayer has enabled him to submit to the will of God as recorded in the scriptures. And his mighty exclamation serves as the signal for the disciples to now fulfill their role in God’s plan by abandoning him (14.49-50).

In contrast to Jesus’ pronouncement that all of the disciples will fall away from him in accord with the scripture that “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (Zech 13.7 in 14.27), “one of the bystanders”, in reaction to the violent arrest of Jesus by the crowd wielding “swords (*machairan*) and clubs” (14.43), attempts to thwart the metaphorical “striking” of Jesus which will fulfill the quotation, as he draws his own “sword” (*machairan*), “strikes” and cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant (14.47). This anonymous bystander retaliates the forceful arrest of Jesus by violently striking an important member of the arresting crowd, the very “servant of the high priest”, and cutting off his ear, thus inflicting him with a painfully humiliating wound ⁽²⁶⁾. But such retaliation exhibits a misunderstanding of Jesus’ arrest. That the bystander “strikes” (*epaisēn*) the high priest’s servant with his

⁽²⁶⁾ B.T. VIVIANO, “The High Priest’s Servant’s Ear: Mark 14:47”. *RB* 96 (1989) 71-80.

“sword” indicates his unwitting and futile resistance to the scriptural will of God, according to which Jesus (not the priest’s servant) is the “shepherd” whom God (not a bystander) will metaphorically “strike” (*pataxô*) with suffering and death (14.27)⁽²⁷⁾. The bystander’s retaliation thus shows his confused and inappropriate response to the arrest of Jesus, which would contradict the necessity for the disciples to “scatter” and separate from Jesus in accord with God’s plan.

But Jesus’ betrayal, arrest and abandonment (14.43-52) also develops the theme of separation from Jesus in his prediction of his disciples’ abandonment of him (14.26-31). As soon as Jesus calls for the scriptures to be fulfilled (14.49), the disciples answer by all running away and abandoning him, thus fulfilling Jesus’ prediction that they would all fall away from him and be “scattered” in accord with the scripture (Zech 13.7 in 14.27). That the disciples all “leave” Jesus signals a renunciation of their discipleship. When the first disciples were called by Jesus, they “left” (*aphentes* in 1.18.20; *aphêkamen* in 10.28) behind their occupations, families and everything to follow him. Now they “leave” (*aphentes*, 14.50) behind Jesus and run away.

The emphasis that “all” (14.50) fled further underlines the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction that they would “all” fall away from him (14.27) despite the objections and protests of “all” (14.31). And that they “all” ran away stands in contrast to the fact that “all” of them drank from the Passover cup of Jesus’ wine/blood, sharing the bond of fellowship with Jesus on his way to suffering and death (14.23).

Although all the disciples had deserted Jesus, an anonymous “young man” was still “following with” Jesus and he was “wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body”, meaning that he is not armed with weapons to resist the arrest of Jesus and thus stands in contrast to the anonymous bystander armed with a sword (14.47). The armed crowd “arrested” (*kratousin*, 14.51) the young man just as they had “arrested” (*ekratêsan*, 14.46) Jesus. This young man, then, stands as a possible candidate to fulfill the role of an ideal disciple. All others have fled, but he is still “following with” (*synêkolouthei*) Jesus, indicating his chance not only to be an ideal disciple of Jesus, but also, because he is unarmed and has been

⁽²⁷⁾ In Zech 13.7a a “sword” strikes the shepherd.

“arrested with” Jesus, to fulfill Peter’s and “all” the disciples’ forsaken promise to “die with” (*synapothanein*) Jesus (14.31).

But alas, even this would-be follower of Jesus fails to be the ideal disciple who follows Jesus on his way to suffering and death (8.34). Panic-stricken, he leaves behind his only piece of clothing, escaping his arrest with Jesus, shamefully running away naked (14.52). This young man’s abandonment of Jesus reinforces that of all the disciples and illustrates the radical failure for anyone at all to “follow with” Jesus at this most critical time on his way to suffering and death. In accord with the mysterious paradox of God’s scriptural will, it is necessary that all the companions of Jesus desert him to die alone. But that all abandon Jesus in fulfillment of his prediction (14.27) reinforces for the reader the certainty of his promise to go before his disciples to Galilee and renew communion with them after his resurrection (14.28) ⁽²⁸⁾.

That Judas has now betrayed Jesus (14.44-45) climaxes both Jesus' prediction of betrayal (14.17-21) and Judas' offer of betrayal (14.10-11). And that the crowd has "arrested" Jesus (14.46) finally accomplishes the "arrest" that the chief priests and scribes have been seeking in their plot to destroy Jesus (11.18; 12.12; 14.1-2). Within the network of sandwiches in Mark 14.1-52, then, Jesus' betrayal, arrest and abandonment (14.43-52) brings to a preliminary climax the thematic of opposition to and separation from Jesus on the part of the Jewish leaders. Judas and the disciples as developed by the sequence of alternating "a" scenes (14.1-2,10-11,17-21,26-31,43-52) ⁽²⁹⁾.

Conclusion

We have attempted to demonstrate the intricate narrative structure of Mark 14.1-52, according to which the Marcan implied reader experiences a succession of alternating scenes which form a network of intercalations involving the theme of opposition to and separation from Jesus on his way to death on the one hand, and the

⁽²⁸⁾ C. MAZZUCCO, "L'arresto di Gesù nel Vangelo di Marco (Mc 14.43-52)". RivB 35 (1987) 7-282.

⁽²⁹⁾ The death of Jesus sought by the Jewish leaders (14.1) and the predicted denial of Jesus by Peter (14.30) are yet to be fulfilled in the narrative.

theme of close union with Jesus on his way to death on the other hand. In the reader's experience of these alternating intercalations the thematic of intimate union with Jesus developed in the "b" scenes offsets and predominates over the thematic of opposition to and separation from Jesus developed in the "a" scenes. The succession of "b" scenes in contrast to "a" scenes repeatedly and progressively reassures the reader that, despite the opposition to and separation from Jesus on his way to death by the Jewish leaders, Judas and the disciples, Jesus will ultimately triumph over this opposition and separation because of the intimate bond that he has established and will continue to establish with those who follow him.

And so, despite the plot of the Jewish leaders to arrest and destroy Jesus (14.1-2) and of Judas to betray him to death (14.10-11), the reader is reassured that Jesus' anointing for burial will become part of God's saving activity to be commemorated in the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world (14.3-9). The preparation for (14.12-16) and sharing of (14.22-25) the Passover table fellowship between Jesus, the authoritative Teacher, and his special group of Twelve disciples predominate as a sandwich over the prediction of the betrayal of Jesus to death by one of the Twelve (14.17-21) to reassure the reader that this unique Passover meal not only unites the disciples with the saving death of Jesus but promises them a share in the triumphant table fellowship with Jesus in the kingdom of God (14.25). And despite the opposition to and separation from Jesus on his way to death, as demonstrated by his betrayal by Judas, arrest by Jewish leaders, and abandonment by disciples (14.26-31,43-52), the reader is reassured and encouraged both by the promise of the disciples' future reconciliation with the risen Jesus (14.28) and by the powerful Gethsemane prayer of Jesus (14.32-42), which empowers the disciples and thus the reader to remain united with Jesus in their future encounters with opposition, suffering and death in and through his prayer of submission to God's will.