

Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel

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How should an interpreter approach the study of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark?¹ For the most part, recent studies on the topic have focused on Mark's portrayal of the disciples along with Jesus' teaching to His disciples. In discussing past research on this subject, Malbon states, "Discipleship—that is, following Jesus—has been recognized as a central theme or motif in the Gospel of Mark. Understandably enough, the portrayal of the disciples in Mark has often been the focus of scholarly investigation of the theme of discipleship."² Malbon points out that past scholarly investigations are inadequate because "what Mark has to say about discipleship is understood in reference not only to the disciples but also to other Markan characters who meet the demands of following Jesus."³ In other words the study of discipleship in Mark's Gospel is broader than a study of the disciples.

In addition to Mark's portrayal of the disciples he included a number of so-called "minor characters" who followed Jesus and lived in accord with His teaching. An examination of these minor characters is important for an understanding of Mark's view of discipleship, that is, his perspective on what is involved in

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following Jesus and living up to His demands and ideals.⁴

The main character groups in Mark's Gospel are the disciples, the opponents of Jesus, and the crowd.⁵ In addition to these groups, a number of individual characters are included in Mark's narrative. Some of them, such as Andrew or Peter, are disciples, while others, such as the high priest or Pilate, oppose Jesus. Also a number of minor characters function neither as Jesus' disciples nor as His opponents. Instead, these individuals come from the crowd, in the sense that they belong to the general population, to the group of people outside of Jesus' disciples or opponents. They were not specifically called and commissioned to be Jesus' disciples, and they did not align themselves with the religious and political establishments that opposed Jesus and sought to destroy Him. These minor characters from the crowd appear in the narrative when they meet with Jesus, and after their encounter with Him, they generally disappear from the narrative. Some, such as the leper, come to...

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