

The Feeding of the 5,000 and The Feeding of the 4,000
Mark 6:30-44 and 8:1-10
“Doublet or Distinct Events?”

William L. Klousia

Hermeneutical Issue

Many scholars view these two miracles as comprising a doublet. They maintain that they are divergent versions of the same account; therefore one (e.g., 8:1-10) is a literary doublet or variant of the other. Is there any legitimate hermeneutical/literary method or combination of methods to be employed in examining the text to ascertain any patterns between the two stories that would settle the issue of doublet claims or separate accounts?

History of Interpretation of These Passages

The two feeding stories have been interpreted in different lights historically.

Irenaeus: Noted for his allegorization of Scripture, but the only mention of the feeding passages in Mark, and in the parallel account in Matthew 14, is his reference to the five loaves which Jesus blessed and with which he fed 5,000 men to show the use of numbers in Scripture in his refutation of the Gnostic heretics' argument derived from numbers, letters and syllables.¹

Augustine: Allegorized both accounts. The seven loaves = the 7-fold operation of the Holy Spirit; the 4,000 men in the second feeding = the Church established on the 4 Gospels; the 7 baskets of fragments = the perfection of the Church.²

¹ “Irenaeus”, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Vol. I), eds. A Roberts and J. Donaldson, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956, 395.

² “Augustine”, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Vol. VI), ed. Philip Schaff, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956, 406.

Chrysostom: Saw the two stories as separate events. In speaking on Matthew 15:32ff (the feeding of the 4,000), he says that Christ left the miracle until the third day when all had been consumed so that they might more eagerly accept his work. The wilderness is mentioned to put the miracle above suspicion lest any should affirm that they obtained the bread from any neighboring village in order that the miracle may be believed. Yet concerning the leftovers, Chrysostom speculates that in the first miracle of the 5,000 Christ makes the baskets full of fragments equal in number to his disciples, whereas in the second he makes the baskets equal to the loaves.³

Calvin: He, along with other Reformers, led a radical attack against the allegorical interpretation of Scripture promoted during the Middle Ages. Calvin emphasized the literary and theological intent of the author. He understood there to be two distinct events that occurred. Concerning 6:30-44, he remarks that Christ has bestowed his whole attention on feeding souls, but now he includes within his duties as a shepherd the care even of their bodies. Christ had purposely delayed the miracle to a late hour so that 1) his disciples might consider it more attentively and thus gain from it greater advantage, and 2) that the very circumstances of the time might convince them that he never ceases to care for his people but has always at hand the assistance which he affords at the very time when it is required. Regarding 8:1-9, “Let us learn from this that the power of God is not restricted to means or outward assistance, and that it is all with him whether there be much or little.”⁴

Twentieth Century: Scholars such as Achtemeier, Branscomb, and many others see the two feeding stories as divergent accounts from the same source or miracle

³ Saint John Chrysostom, “The Gospel of Matthew” (Homily 49), <http://mb-soft.com/believe/>

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. II), Tr. by Rev. William Pringle, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949, 231-36, 273-74.

tradition.⁵ Fowler⁶ proposes that the feeding of the 4,000 is the older narrative and the feeding of the 5,000 is dependent upon it and is a completely Markan creation. Others see only an example set by Jesus and the disciples sharing their food, from which they try to explain away the miracle. Bultmann claims that the miracle itself is illustrated only by its success in the distribution, the eating, and the satisfaction of those fed.⁷ Barclay essentially says “in the hands of Jesus little is always much.”⁸ Other scholars perceive a eucharistic reference within the feeding stories with affinities of language to that of the Last Supper. This view seems to be based on tenuous grounds.⁹

Intention of Paper

It is the intention of this paper to employ methods derived from various literary schools (e.g., structuralism, reader-response) in concert with the grammatico-historical method of interpretation in an attempt to address the issue of whether these two feeding stories are literary doublets or are in fact distinct accounts of separate events.

Genre

A number of scholars studying ancient rhetoric has sought from the Graeco-Roman literary culture a prototype or literary form for the Gospel accounts.¹⁰

⁵ P. J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark with Complete Text from the Jerusalem Bible*, Garden City, N. Y.: Image Books, 1978, 116; B. H. Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark* (The Moffatt New Testament Commentary), New York & London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n.d., 112-113, 136; Ralph P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1972.

⁶ R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark*, (SBL Dissertation Series 54), ed. W. Baird, Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981, 43, 87, 91-92.

⁷ Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, transl. by John Marsh, Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, 217.

⁸ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, (The Daily Study Bible, rev. ed.), Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1975, 159.

⁹ According to William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 230, Mark describes the characteristic procedure at ordinary Jewish meals. Identical language occurs in the *non-eucharistic* context of Acts 27:35, where Paul goes through the same sequence before all those aboard the ship. Furthermore, the two verbs *εὐλογοῦν* and *εὐχαριστοῦν* can be somewhat synonymous and there is in both accounts a total absence of any mention of a cup.

¹⁰ H. C. Kee, “Aretology and Gospel”, *JBL* 92, 1973, 402.

Accordingly, they have proposed that the Gospels are ancient biographies.¹¹ Others maintain they are not biographies but apostolic *kerygma* built into a vivid narrative form.¹² Gundry says that one should not speak of ‘gospel’ as such, although it is legitimate to speak of ‘gospels’ as a group of similar books in the New Testament.¹³ Another scholar notes that for the overall pattern of a gospel, Mark had no literary precedent.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the above positions, the genre of this ‘Gospel’ (and all the Gospel accounts) is by its very nature historical narrative, albeit with certain sub genres included¹⁵ which shows the natural fluidity of generic classification.¹⁶ Accordingly, I would posit that the two feeding narratives belong to a class of miracle genre, yet not simply based on ancient aretalogies.¹⁷ In fact, Kee suggests that it is wrong to speak of

¹¹ C. H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, 1. See also Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., n.d., 33ff; Clyde Weber Votaw, *The Gospels and Contemporary Biographies in the Graeco-Roman World*, (Biblical Series 27, Gen. Ed. John Reumann, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1ff.

¹² *ibid.*, 18, n. 5. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 373-374.

¹³ R. H. Gundry, “Recent Investigations into the Literary Genre ‘Gospel’”, *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, eds. Richard N. Longenecker & Merrill C. Tenney, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974, 114.

¹⁴ Kee, *op. cit.*, 1973, 422.

¹⁵ Peter Cotterel & Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989, 99, define genre as ‘a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing.’ Cf. also Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991, 141, who notes that ‘genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter and structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience).’ Within a canonical ‘Gospel’, historical narrative must express an organization/scheme, a speaking to human needs, and a definable outcome or goal. It must be located in space and time, be consistent with itself, be related to evidence, and have an emphatically public character. It concerns the public life and teaching of a significant person, Jesus, that is composed of selected events/miracles put carefully in thematic order to teach certain moral lessons and to promote the ethics of the kingdom in the context of the Scriptures. It particularly focuses on his death and resurrection. Yet within this narrative genre, the Gospels utilize sub genres such as parables, proverbs, didactic, apocalyptic, and numerous others which couch Jesus’ teaching in poetic or figurative language; this ability to identify differences and classify them presupposes a larger unity (See Osborne, just cited, 150, 410-11); See also William Klein, Craig Blomberg and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993, 323-344.

¹⁶ Tremper Longman, III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, Vol. 3), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, 78f.

¹⁷ Aretalogies were stories of virtue (Greek ἀρετή) of heroic figures.

the Gospels being built on precanonical, pagan aretalogies which he says did not represent divine-man Christology.¹⁸ Graeco-Roman parallels do not support deification by ascription of miracles. Gundry adds that pagan aretalogies differ from that which we encounter in the Gospel accounts because

in Jesus' miracles we note an absence of self-serving and self-glorification, the failure to perform miracles sometimes just for the sake of making an impression, the lack of curiosities, burlesque, and fantasy. These differences . . . leave us doubtful about the aretalogical character of whatever precanonical collections might have supplied stories to the evangelists. Jesus' miracles look more like salvific miracles such as we meet in the Old Testament.¹⁹

The *salient* features of the miracle genre, therefore, that I propose include the Lord, all or some of his disciples, an object whether human or inanimate that confronts or is confronted by Jesus, and a situation which poses a problem that is above mere human ability to contend with.

In developing his Gospel, Mark has combined proposition with historical narrative. Indeed, one is confronted with teaching and propositional truth as well as miracles of healing, exorcisms, and nature miracles which have been placed strategically throughout. This is significant in that, as Longman²⁰ indicates, each genre creates certain expectations in the reader, directs authors as they compose the text, and facilitates communication between author and reader.

Motifs

It is significant that there are several motifs which are advanced throughout the Gospel. For instance, Wrede's controversial acknowledgement of a secrecy motif²¹, a parabolic motif, a main subject of 'looking up'. Two other motifs which have relevance

¹⁸ Kee, *op. cit.*, 1973, 402-22; See also Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977, 17-18.

¹⁹ Gundry, *op. cit.*, 107.

²⁰ Longman, *op. cit.*, 77.

²¹ Martin, *op. cit.*, 92ff.

to the feeding stories are 1) the striking recurrence of the word ‘bread’ (approximately 17 times) throughout the section of 6:14-8:30, and 2) imperception: the disciples’ failure to perceive who Jesus really is. Concerning the latter, Weeden remarks

Despite the continuous manifestation of Jesus’ Messiahship before the disciples in countless healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles, they remain amazingly obtuse and obdurate in the face of their involvement in the Messianic drama. Not even in their own miraculous activity, to which they are commissioned (3:15; 6:7) and in which they are successful (6:13), do the disciples appear to detect their relationship to Jesus and his true identity. In fact, this amazing and unbelievable lack of perception by the disciples appears to increase rather than diminish and becomes more persistent as the narrative unfolds (1:37; 4:10, 13, 38-41; 5:31; 6:37, 51-52; 7:17; 8:4, 14-21). . . The disciples, despite Jesus’ having empowered them to perform miraculous acts . . . and their resulting success with such acts . . . , show an inexplicable inability to recognize Jesus’ miraculous power.²²

Implied Reader

The date attached to this Gospel plays a big part in determining the audience for whom it was written. Dating ranges from about A. D. 40-65, with some scholars settling on the earlier part of this period,²³ while others opt for a later date of A. D. 65-70.²⁴ Internal evidence, however, strongly points to a time of suffering and persecution of Christians for the sake of the Gospel. This Gospel, then, was written presumably for Christians in Rome who were experiencing opposition and persecution at the hands of Nero and his people. Mark desires to encourage them and to spur them on to deeper faith in Christ by showing them that he has been dealt everything that they have from his opposition, even to the point of death, but he is nonetheless Lord over all creation. In other words, they share similar pre-reflective experiences and are therefore in a much

²² T. J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, 26-27.

²³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark* (NTC), Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, 15; Also Donald Guthrie, “Mark’s Gospel”, *New Testament Introduction*, (3rd edition, rev.) Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970, 72-75 who cites **O’Callaghan, Harnack, Allen** on this earlier dating.

²⁴ Lane, *op. cit.*, 21; Lane (17) also cites Eusebius and Irenaeus for this later dating as well as Marxsen (25, n. 47).

better position to empathize with Mark's message. Hence, they can take heart that Jesus knows what they are experiencing and he is with them in all their suffering and trials.

Context of Gospel

The purpose of Mark's Gospel is theological, though not without an historical basis.²⁵ So, from the very beginning, Mark portrays Jesus as the Son of God who fulfills Old Testament prophecy (1:1-3). Time after time he shows Jesus involved in exorcisms,²⁶ in healing miracles, and as Lord over nature. His narrative juxtaposes Jesus' miracles²⁷ with opposition to him and his ministry. By employing these rhetorical devices in his narrative, Mark leaves the reader with no option, as it were, but to recognize and accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Indeed, he leaves the reader/listener with a definite decision to make.

Context of 6:30-8:9

The feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospel accounts. The feeding of the 4,000 is found only here and in Matthew 15:32-39. These two feeding miracles are part of a larger unit (6:14-8:30) which is a structural segment of Jesus' ministry beyond the confines of Galilee.

The narrative shows that the disciples had been commissioned by the Lord to go out and preach the Gospel, cast out demons, and heal the sick (6:7-13). Upon their

²⁵ S. Kistemaker, *The Gospels in Current Study*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972, 110.

²⁶ It is interesting to note that the demons presented in Mark's narrative know the identity of Jesus and serve to keep his divine identity in the forefront of readers' minds. On this, cf. B. D. Chilton, "Exorcism and History" in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus* (Vol. 6), eds. D. Wenham and C. Blomberg, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986, 257ff.

²⁷ Achtemeier, *op. cit.*, 71 notes that more than any other of our four Gospels, Mark fills his narrative with miracles or acts of power by Jesus. He devotes proportionately more space to the miracles of Jesus than any other document we have from the early Christian years.

return, Jesus intended for them all to go away by themselves presumably for rest and so that he might instruct them further about himself and his Messianic mission.

Subsequent to the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus performs another nature miracle (walking on the water, 6:45-53) and more healing miracles (6:53-56). Chapter 7 brings opposition from the scribes and Pharisees whom he denounces because of their hypocrisy and shows what is in the heart of man. Following this account, Jesus performs more miracles to which people proclaim, “He has done all things well” (7:37).

The feeding of the 4,000 is introduced in 8:1. It has been plausibly suggested that the setting of this miracle was the Decapolis near the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the same area where the deaf and mute man was healed in 7:32-37,²⁸ but also in the same vicinity where the Gerasene demoniac of 5:1-20 was healed.²⁹ This man wished to follow Jesus, but the Lord sent him back to his own people to tell them what great things Jesus had done for the man. It is certainly possible that part of this great crowd was due to the missionary activity of the healed man.

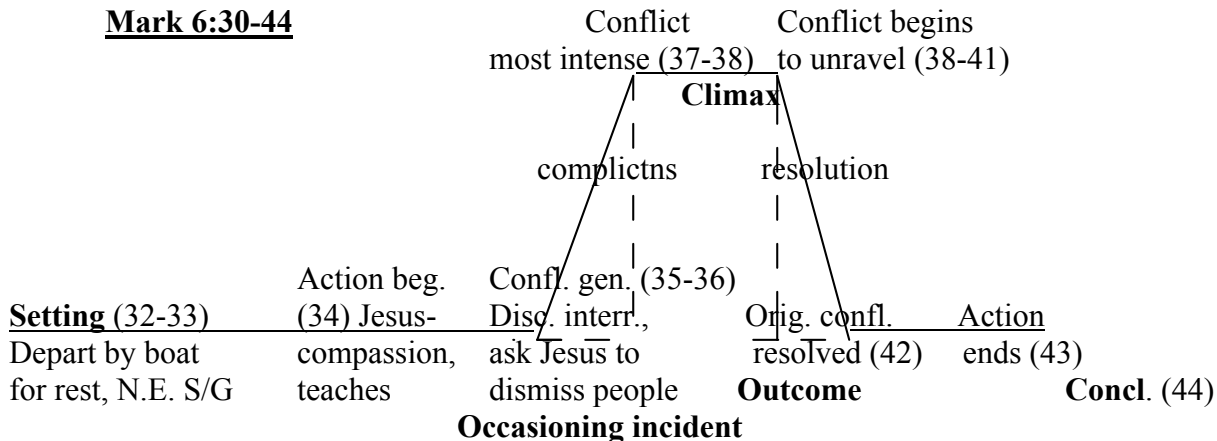
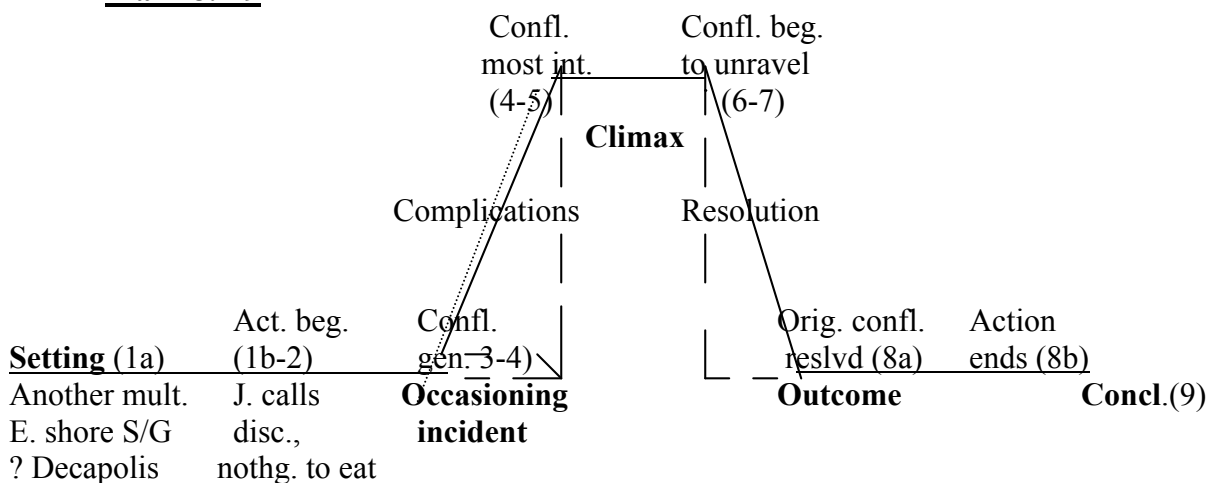
Plot

All narrative has a plot, otherwise it is a chronicle or diary. This means that there is a scene, action, agents, conflict, resolution, and a purpose to the whole. Examining the plots of the two accounts by employing a dramaturgic method³⁰ from structuralism should be helpful in enabling one to see the bigger picture of the deep structure, which should, in turn, manifest the theological truth embedded in the statement or narrative, and any patterns that may exist.

²⁸ Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, 310.

²⁹ Barclay, *op. cit.*, 184.

³⁰ The structure presented here has been borrowed from Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, Vol. 3), Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1987, 102.

Mark 6:30-44**Mark 8:1-9**

From an examination of these two accounts the similarity in plot is patent. In 6:30-44, the setting is the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus and the disciples have arrived by boat (32-33). In 8:1-9, we have a different scene on the eastern shore of the same sea, perhaps in close proximity to the Decapolis (1a). In the prior feeding the action begins when Jesus sees the crowd, feels compassion for them and begins to teach them (6:34). Matthew says he healed their sick (14:14) and Luke notes that he spoke about the Kingdom of God and cured people who needed to be healed (9:11).

The latter feeding shows Jesus summoning the disciples and sharing his concern with them that the people have nothing left to eat after three days (8:1b-2). The incident generating conflict between Jesus and his disciples in the feeding of the 5,000 is clear when the disciples interrupt the Lord during his teaching and ask him to dismiss the people so they may be able to go into the surrounding towns to buy food (6:35-36). The conflict intensifies when Jesus tells the twelve to provide the crowd with food, they respond incredulously, then to Jesus' question of how many loaves they have, the disciples answer, "five, and two fish"(6:37-38).

In the feeding of the 4,000 the conflict is generated when Jesus initiates the dialogue and speaks to the twelve about the lack of food and implies that they need to take the initiative (8:3-4). The conflict heightens with their inadequate response to Jesus' intimations and his question to them regarding the number of loaves, to which they answer, "seven" (8:4-5). Implied here, once again, is a situation which goes beyond the ability of humans to deal with.

The conflict in both settings begins to unravel when Jesus commands the people to sit on the green grass (6:39) and the ground (8:6), blesses the food, then distributes it to the disciples to give to the people (6:38-41; 8:6-7). Once this is accomplished, the original conflict is resolved: they (all) ate and were satisfied (6:42; 8:8a). The action of the narrative ends with the leftovers being gathered up into baskets (6:43; 8:8b). Both accounts close with an enumeration of the people present at the miracle. Indeed, the truth from these narratives is shown to be the same: Jesus is Lord over nature as well and he is perfectly willing and able to care for his people totally, both spiritually and physically.

There is a definitive pattern to the two records which would seem to suggest more than that they are of the same miracle tradition.

Deep Structure and Surface Structure

Here structuralism also assists in determining meaning and significance from a different *perspective*. While its preoccupation with synchrony over diachrony can be taken so far as to deny the importance of history, its methods can help provide evidence for the unity and integrity of biblical texts that have been split into pieces by source critics. A paradigmatic analysis of these two texts elicits remarkable similarity, while a syntagmatic analysis shows both similarities and significant differences.³¹ Here, too, the deep structure pattern can be seen. The following is set forth to show the similarities and disparities in both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures.

<u>6:30-45</u>	<u>Similarities</u>	<u>8:1-10</u>
(34) πολυν οχλον	(1) πολλου οχλου	
(34) εσπλαγχνισθη επ' αυτους	(2) Σπλαγχνιζομαι επι τον οχλον	
(34) ηρξατο διδασκειν . . . πολλα	(2) ηδη ημεραι τρεις προσμενουσιν μοι	
(37b) λεγουσιν αυτω . . . φαγειν?	(4) απεκριθησαν αυτω . . . ερημιας?	
(38a) ο δε λεγει αυτοις Ποσους αρτους	(5a) και ηρωτα αυτους Ποσους εχετε	
	εχετε?	αρτους?
(39) επεταξεν αυτοις ανακλιναι	(6a) παραγγελλει τω οχλω αναπεσειν	
(40: ανεπεσαν)		
(41) και λαβων τους . . . αρτους . . .	(6b) και λαβων τους . . . αρτους	
ευλογησεν και κατεκλασεν . . . και	ευχαριστησας εκλασεν και εδιδου	
εδιδου τοις μαθηταις [αυτου] ινα	τοις μαθηταις αυτου ινα	
παρατιθωσιν αυτοις	παρατιθωσιν	
(42) και εφαγον παντες και εχορτασθησαν	(8a) και εφαγον και εχορτασθησαν	
(43) και ηραν κλασματα	(8b) και ηραν . . . κλασματων	
(45) και ευθυς . . . μαθητας . . . εις το πλοιον	(10) και ευθυς . . . εις το πλοιον . . .	
	μαθητων	

³¹ For an explanation of the terms 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' and their relation to deep structure and surface structure see Cotterell & Turner, *op. cit.*, 1989, 155, 189 (paradigmatic & syntagmatic functions), 203, 228 (deep structure & surface structure). Consult also Osborne, *op. cit.*, 1991, 80-81, 336-37 (surface structure & deep structure), 78, 84-87, 100 (paradigmatic & syntagmatic functions).

The lexical, syntactic and in some cases morphological parallelism, both verbal and substantival, is indeed striking but does not deserve to be relegated to the assumption that the stories are varied renderings from the same miracle source. Certainly lexical analysis needs to be undertaken and comparison made of wording used in quite similar settings that would be difficult perhaps to vary or too general in nature. An example of this follows:

πολυς, οχλος, σπλαγχνιζομαι, λεγω, αποκρινομαι, ερωταω, αναπιπτω,
λαμβανω, αρτος, (κατα) κλαζω, παρατιθημι, εσθιω, χορταζω, αιρω, κλασμα.

Most of these words are very common, some are quite general in nature and some would be unusual to vary at any rate. Although it is by no means conclusive, it could even be the case that the agreements here point to two separate sources which happened to use some common vocabulary.³²

The clauses in 6:34 and 8:2, although dissimilar syntactically, exhibit somewhat more clearly the substitutional or paradigmatic similarity of sense relations in the deep structure of these similar discourses. In 6:34 Jesus saw the crowd, felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and *began to teach them many things*. He shepherds them by teaching them about the Kingdom of God, by instructing them in righteousness which their leaders had no mind to do. In 8:2 Jesus once again felt compassion for the crowd for they had been with him for three days, during which time they were being given spiritual food from his teaching. But the Lord, as Shepherd, also had concern for their physical hunger. So we see here two different aspects of

³² P. W. Barnett, "The Feeding of the Multitude in Mark 6/John 6", *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus* (Vol. 6), eds. D. Wenham & C. Blomberg, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986, 275f.

shepherding: leading and feeding. Furthermore, in 6:41 Mark uses the verb ευλογεω but in 8:6 he chooses ευχαριστεω. It seems as though one could easily have been substituted for the other since these two verbal ideas are basically synonymous.³³

Differences

<u>6:30-45</u>	<u>8:1-10</u>
(34) _____	(1) παλιν
(34) οτι . . . ποιμενα	(2) οτι . . . τι φαγωσιν
(35-36) οι μαθηται. . . ελεγον. . . φαγωσιν	(1b-3) προσκαλεσαμενος. . . λεγει. . . ημεραι τρεις
(36) τους κυκλω. . . κωμας	(3b) τινες. . . μακροθεν ηκασιν
(37) Δοτε. . . υμεις φαγειν	(3a) εαν απολυσω. . . νηστεις. . . εκλυθησονται
(38b) . . . Πεντε, και δυο ιχθυας	(5b) . . . Επτα
(39) επι τω χλωρω χορτω	(6a) επι της γης
(40) . . . πρασιαι πρασιαι. . . πεντηκοντα	_____
(41) αναβλεψας. . . ουρανον	_____
(41a) πεντε αρτους. . . τους δυο ιχθυας	(6b) επτα αρτους
(41b) και τους δυο ιχθυας εμερισεν πασιν	_____
_____	(7) και ειχον ιχθυδια ολιγα. . . ευλογησας. . .
(43) δωδεκα κοφινων	(8b) επτα σπυριδας
(44) πεντακισχιλιοι ανδρες	(9) ως τετρακισχιλιοι

The differences between these two narratives are seen particularly in the detail provided and would seem to indicate that the two stories are not as similar as a cursory glance might suggest.³⁴ Mark uses παλιν in 8:1 to point clearly to another occurrence of a large gathering of people around Jesus, which suggests an entirely different setting. The NIV brings out the sense here, “During those days another large crowd gathered”, better than the NASB, “In those days again . . .” Mark 6:36 relates that the people presumably were close

³³ *Supra*, n. 6.

³⁴ Craig Blomberg, “The Miracles as Parables”, *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus* (Vol. 6), eds. D. Wenham & C. Blomberg, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986, 337.

enough to inhabited places so that they could have gone to buy something to eat. Yet in 8:3 Jesus implies that they are a long way from any place where they might find sustenance.

The Lord tells the twelve, in 6:37, to give the people food, but in 8:3 the narrative implies that he wants the disciples to respond by saying, “Lord, we are unable to provide the crowd with food, but we remember how you fed the 5,000 and we know you are able to do it here as well.” The number of loaves and fish in each case is different, five and two, respectively, in the first instance, but seven and a few small fish in the second.

The Evangelist, in 6:39, specifically refers to the “green grass” which probably would have been provided by the winter rains³⁵ and, as John notes (6:4), the particular time of year was εγγυς το πασχα.³⁶ Bruce³⁷, however, suggests that in any case the feeding was situated in a reedy, marshy place near the mouth of the Jordan at the north end of the lake where grass would most likely be found. Mark refers only to the ground (επι της γης) in 8:6. One could certainly claim that this phrase is only a variation in the detail of an established model,³⁸ yet it is just as likely, if not more so, that the author in the second feeding is indicating a different setting which was much more barren and at a later time of year when there would be no fresh growth of grass, to further highlight the impact that the miracle should have on the readers.

In the first feeding, Mark places the loaves and fish together (6:41), each to be blessed by the Lord and distributed. The second feeding, however, sees the author careful to include a reference to the fish (a few small fish as opposed to two fish) later, after the bread had been fully dealt with. Contra Fowler, who proposes that 8:7 is an editorial addition to the “original” account and that the fish are only mentioned in passing, I would suggest that

³⁵ Lane, *op. cit.*, 229.

³⁶ Barnett, *op. cit.*, 272.

³⁷ A. B. Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospels”, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Vol. 1), ed. W. R. Nicoll, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 384.

³⁸ Fowler, *op. cit.*, 88.

Mark has deliberately delayed the mention of fish in this second account to *awaken* his audience to the fact that such a similar miracle story to the feeding of the 5,000 is missing an obvious reference to fish. The Evangelist indicates that the leftovers were put into κοφίνοι in 6:43; by contrast, he uses σπυρίς in 8:8. This distinction is significantly preserved in 8:19-20.³⁹ These two nouns are hardly interchangeable: a κοφίνοσ was a wicker-type basket shaped like a narrow-necked water pitcher, broadening out as it went down. But a σπυρίς was a basket like a hamper which was big enough to fit a man inside (e. g., Acts 9:25).⁴⁰ Notice also needs to be taken of the disparity in the number of baskets of leftovers: 6:43 gives twelve full baskets of broken pieces and 8:8b indicates seven large baskets full.

Lastly, the number of people in attendance differs markedly. In the first story there were “5,000” men (cf. Matt. 14:21, “besides women and children”). The second miracle had “about 4,000” people present (cf. Matt. 15:38, “4,000 men, besides women and children”).

A further important constituent to this whole matter of the two feeding narratives is their chronological positioning in the ministry of Jesus. It is necessary here to consider when and how far apart in the ministry of the Lord these feeding miracles might have taken place. Did they occur in the first year of Christ’s ministry or perhaps the second year? Certainly the temporal language of 8:1 is vague enough and the time elapsed between 6:31 and 8:1 equally obscure to indicate the possibility that these two miracles took place much further apart than many people have suggested.

Indeed, it would appear that the differences recorded by the author are not only theologically purposeful and significant but historically so as well. Furthermore, subsequent

³⁹ Blomberg, *op. cit.*, 339.

⁴⁰ Barclay, *op. cit.*, 184.

to this second feeding miracle, Jesus is once again confronted by Pharisaic opposition as they continue their harassment of him and his redemptive ministry from 3:22ff where they ascribed his work to demonic activity. For Mark's readers, however, it should be abundantly plain from the narrative that Jesus' authority is not demonic but is in fact from God. His two feeding miracles, along with numerous healings and exorcisms, provide the necessary proof for the claims of the Gospel.

A further pertinent factor with respect to the veracity of two separate miracles is found in 8:17-20. The disciples have been arguing among themselves about the fact that they have no more than one loaf of bread on board their boat, and they seem to misinterpret what Jesus was trying to teach them, namely, that they need to be wary of the teaching and influence (leaven, which refers back to the two feedings) of the Pharisees and Herod.⁴¹ Instead, they are more preoccupied with the temporal problem of the scarcity of food, an ironic twist coming on the heels of the second feeding miracle.

Jesus, therefore, rebukes them (8:17ff), showing from Scripture that they were in no different position to the crowd mentioned in 4:11-12. By a series of leading questions Jesus poignantly reminds the disciples of the two distinct occasions when the multitudes were miraculously fed. Both Jesus and the disciples acknowledge this, a factor that should not be lightly dismissed.

In connection with this, the author provides a point of transition for the discerning reader to appreciate, found in 7:31-36 and 8:22-26, where the opening of the ears of a deaf man and the restoring of sight to a blind man by Jesus signal the opening of the deaf ears and

⁴¹ Cf. Lane, *op. cit.*, 280-81 and Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, 317-19, for a good discussion of leaven in this context.

blind eyes of the disciples. This was a necessary prelude to the confession by Peter before all the disciples of Jesus as Messiah in 8:27-30.⁴²

Another important element within these narratives which helps point toward two historical feeding miracles is the unbiased or unmotivated use of numbers by the author. In the first miracle Mark uses the numbers five, two, twelve, and 5,000. In the second, we find seven used twice, “a few”, and 4,000. We have seen that some Church Fathers down through the Middle Ages tended to allegorize Scripture. Indeed, some passages of Scripture are intended as allegory and must be interpreted as such. Yet a responsible handling of these Markan passages prohibits an arbitrary point-by-point comparison of these numbers with ideas foreign to the context of the narrative. If the author had intended to attach theological importance to these figures, then this would perhaps undermine the thesis of two separate accounts. If he was, indeed, creating another feeding miracle or using a variant from the same source, why would he not use the same numbers in each case? It is clear that the Evangelist was not conveying to his readers some special or secret significance in the numbers which he recorded in these stories, nor was he merely wanting to use this as a reminder to the disciples. As seen above (p. 16), he did this in 8:17-20.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence clearly points to two separate accounts of the feeding of the multitudes. We have seen that Mark’s primary intention was to show who Jesus Christ, the Son of God, really was and to furnish an incentive for living for the glory of God in a

⁴² There is a strong tradition begun by Papias and preserved by Eusebius that Mark was actually Peter’s interpreter or translator and that he wrote accurately about these events and teachings of the Lord as they were related to him by the Apostle. cf. Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, 69ff. Whether Mark wrote the Gospel in its entirety while Peter was still alive or began to write during Peter’s lifetime and completed it after his death does not make much difference. The important factor is that Mark was very close to Peter and the latter in turn was an eyewitness of these things.

context of suffering. He graphically portrays Jesus as the One who reigns supreme in the realms of disease, demons, death, and nature. Indeed, the second feeding miracle has been positioned in such a place that will vividly remind the reader of the previous one.

Mark employs a motif of disciple imperception in relation to the person and mission of Jesus and at every juncture seems to be inviting his readers to assess the narrative and, from this, to make a certain decision about Jesus, particularly as they follow both the ineptitude of the twelve and the teachings and miracles performed by Jesus.

The literary type within which the feeding miracles can be classified has been shown to be some form of miracle genre, yet distinct from the aretalogies of the ancient world. This generic classification, along with the clear probability that some form of the Gospel message would have been familiar to the recipients of this letter, suggests that Mark's readers or listeners would have had certain expectations for the feeding stories and perhaps possessed a shared presupposition pool.

We have seen that the deep structure of both is essentially the same, pointing to the same theological truth, and the surface structure bears both lexical and syntactical affinities as well as significant differences, all of which lend credence to the thesis of two separate historical accounts. Furthermore, the numbers utilized by the Evangelist in each record are done so without any inclination toward esoteric value.

Lastly, we have seen how Jesus himself reminded the disciples of the two distinct events (8:17-20). Along with this, one cannot afford to forget or ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit inspired the writer in such a way that the various pericopae have been assembled in the order in which we have them, regardless of many redaction theories. For someone to impute this or any of the texts to interpolation or to a fabrication based on another account is to call

into question the integrity of the author, the integrity and unity of the Gospel as a whole, and the biblical doctrine of inspiration.

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