

***“THE ROLE OF THE CENTURION IN THE
CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS”: A SOLDIER’S
READING OF MARK 15:1-39***

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by

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ABSTRACT

The overall goal of this paper is to understand the actions of the Centurion in Mark 15: 33-39, an individual that lives by a code and kills for an Empire, yet breaks rank, confesses and proclaims a truth that becomes the gateway of the Gospel that was once exclusively Jewish, but now made available to the whole world.

This study is subdivided into four chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief historical background of the Gospel of Mark as well as a closer look at the role and responsibilities of a Centurion to understand his function within the narrative. Chapter 2 will provide a brief discussion of narrative criticism. Chapter 3 is the Biblical exegesis of my chosen passage Mark 15:33-39, more specifically within the narrative context of 15:1-39. Chapter 4 provides a discussion and conclusion of my exegetical analysis. This will allow me to bring the story out of the Bible as a contextualization of how I, a former soldier of the United States of America Army, has come to understand this remarkable faith proclamation from a non-Jew, yet more specifically, an enemy of Christ and the Christian faith.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 10,900 words in length, excluding the footnotes and bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

To my Family: My parents Reverend (Retired) Talalelei & Falefusi Fautanu; Reverend Elder (Retired) Iosia & Orepa Evile; who tirelessly prayed day and night for our journey to end in success. My blessings from God; my wife Roselyn, and my children: David, Jade, James, Josiah, Joseph, Jubilee, Joshua and my princess Orepa Fautanu.

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Introduction

Historically, in order to build an Empire, one must have a disciplined, physically strong, and mentally tough military. For instance, The Babylonian Army led by Nebuchadnezzar who sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple; the Persian Empire led by King Cyrus who toppled the Babylonians and freed the Nation of God; the Greeks led by Alexander the Great; and the mighty Roman Empire who ruled the known world for a long time spanning through Jesus' time.¹ All these events were possible because of the military forces each Empire possessed. But when we dig a little deeper within the ranks of these disciplined and strong military forces, we find unsung heroes who were well-equipped with unique skill sets and trained to be military strategists and leaders - physically and -mentally tough to answer the call of their respective nations. Leaders like the Centurions, which was an officer in the Roman Army in command of a century consist of a 100 or more infantrymen or foot Soldiers.²

In the events leading to Jesus' death, Judea was filled with many Jewish people from Jerusalem and diaspora coming together to celebrate Passover. This was also the time of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-10; Mark 11: 1-11; Luke 19:28-39; John 12: 12-19). Furthermore, Jesus' controversial teachings brought together His disciples along with His many followers, who were a thorn in the side of the Jewish priests and the leaders of the synagogues in Jerusalem. All these events combined were strong indicators of the possible disturbance to the renowned "Pax Romana"³, an ideal that was promoted and sustained by the Roman Empire by way of its military might, its army.

Situations as these demanded the presence of an experienced leader and tactician. Someone who was vastly experienced in the art of war with the keen foresight, knowledge

¹ James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 173.

² A. Leo Oppenheim, "Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization," in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, ed. Howard F. Vos Charles F. Pfeiffer, John Rea (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, Inc., 1964), 320.

³ Paul J. Burton, "Pax Romana/Pax Americana: View of the "New Rome" from "Old Europe," 2000-2010," Volume 20, no. Issue 1-2 (2013): 22-25. "The term "Pax Romana" which literally means Roman peace, refers to the time period from 27BCE to 180CE in the Roman Empire. This 200 year period saw unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the Roman Empire, which spanned from England to Morocco in the south and Iraq in the east. The Roman Empire reached its peak in terms of land area, and its population swelled to an estimated 70 million people."

and fortitude to make the correct decision for the Emperor and the Empire.⁴ This required a Centurion who can lead and direct soldiers to move in swiftly and eliminate any threats or mitigate the escalation of violence in order to protect the public, especially his men and to maintain the *Pax Romana* throughout the city.

In other words, a Centurion was the leader on the ground to assure that all people would adhere to the laws of Rome, for his allegiance was always with Rome. But, in Mark 15:33-39; particularly verse 39, it seems the Centurion had switched allegiance and gave unto Jesus what he should have given to Caesar and Rome, as he has done his entire career, which were his loyalty and commitment. The question I raise is why did the Centurion proclaim Jesus to be the Son of God? What did he mean by such a proclamation and what does that say about him as a soldier and leader of men? In all respect, he didn't need to voice his opinion, after all Jesus was a job that needed to be done, so that there *Pax Romana* would exist within Jerusalem.

By voicing his opinion, does the Centurion allude to a role or duty that is authorized for him to perform on behalf of the Empire or, did he step out of his boundaries and crossed into an unfamiliar territory for any soldier with experience. Was this part of his detail, to be present with the prisoners until the prisoner is dead in order to issue a verdict? What was the base of his bold statement? Did the Centurion possess any special skill set that brought foresight and wisdom (thus the ranking of commander of legions) beyond his specialized military training? Was there any divine revelation that the author of Mark encoded in the passage?

In attempting to answer these questions, a look at the other synoptic gospels provide a springboard upon which to compare and contrast his role in order to understand how the Centurion was utilized. In the Gospel of Matthew ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος- Truly this man was the Son of God" (Matthew 27: 54), the Centurion's proclamation is identical to Mark's account "ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν" -Truly this man was the Son of God (Mark 15:39) but the differences are the events before the proclamation.

⁴Mark Cartwright, "'Centurion." Ancient History Encyclopedia,," <http://www.ancient.eu/Centurion/>. Centurions were responsible for training legionaries, assigning duties, and maintaining discipline amongst the ranks. They themselves were expected to display valour in battle and stand resolute when things were not going so well...Centurions were, though, also noted for their sometimes brutal physical discipline...They could also be responsible for escorting prisoners, erecting dedicatory monuments, and involved in logistics such as procuring a supply of provisions when on campaign...responsible for the safety of the legion's standards, and they were often selected for special missions...[like] given the job of commanding

Matthew recorded an earthquake, and the Centurion and those there were described as being terrified and saying “Truly this man was God’s Son. The Matthean account attributes the Centurion’s statement to ‘fear’ of the supernatural power that caused the earthquake. A soldier is trained not to be afraid of any enemy, or death for that matter. But what I find more fascinating is whether or not this is the same Centurion that Jesus in 9:10 stated, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” A reference to the faith of the Centurion that healed his servant.

In Luke, the Centurion proclaimed Jesus to be innocent, and he also praised God. In this account, it seems that the Centurion is familiar with Jesus, particularly His teachings. As, if he sat in the crowd somewhere when Jesus taught to the people who followed throughout the province. It’s fair to say, in Luke’s account, the Centurion was very much abreast with Jesus’ ministry, and he was not sceptical before the crucifixion. For Luke mentions a Centurion whose faith was unlike anyone in Israel (7:10). Yet, although he seems to know so much more about Jesus and his identity, it did not prevent him from carrying out his duties. For he witnessed first-hand, the suffering and the events of Jesus death, and from his experience as a soldier, he understood that no guilty person would go through all this pain and remain true to His conviction.

As a former Soldier and a senior leader of Infantry Weapons Companies, we live by a code of conduct which highlights our commitment to country, mission, and especially unit/infantrymen. Every action taken, orders given, and statements, should not jeopardize this code. I believe my experiences as a military leader of men mirrored those of the Centurion during Jesus’ time. In the Marcan account, there is no concrete evidence of why the Centurion proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. Furthermore, unlike the other synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Luke), Mark did not have another Centurion story to complement his Centurion’s proclamation. Therefore, by examining the Marcan Centurion’s proclamation, I will explore whether or not the Centurion switched allegiance from Caesar and the Roman Empire to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. If so, what does that say about the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to transcend all social and political structures and boundaries in order to implement change?

The overall goal of this paper is to understand the actions of the Centurion, an individual that lives by a code and kills for an Empire, yet breaks rank, confesses and proclaims a truth that becomes the gateway of the Gospel that was once exclusively Jewish, but now made available to the whole world.

This study is subdivided into four chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief historical background of the Gospel of Mark in order to understand the social/cultural context of Mark's writings to understand the characters, plot, setting, and rhetoric, which offers validity to my task of exegesis. Furthermore, it will take a closer look at the role and responsibilities of a Centurion to understand his function within the narrative.

I will end this chapter with a soldier's analysis of the Roman Centurion as the reading lens of the narrative found in 15:1-39. One can argue that this is the climax of the Narrative of Jesus' Ministry according to Mark; the confession by the Centurion.⁵ This expresses who Jesus was as the Son of God, the Messiah.⁶

Chapter 2 will discuss my chosen methodology which is narrative criticism. I will give a brief summary of narrative criticism's overarching reach and purpose in Biblical exegesis. The methodology will focus on four elements: character, setting, plot, and rhetoric in order to understand the selected narrative unit within the overall Gospel of Mark.

After the methodological survey, Chapter 3 is the Biblical exegesis of my chosen passage Mark 15:1-39, more specifically 15:33-39. This chapter will divide the narrative into two units: 1) Mark 15:1-32, the introductory unit to establish the characters, setting, and plot ; 2) Mark 15:33-39, yielding the rhetoric- highlighting some of the key themes of this Gospel, such as making known the Messianic secret; demonstrating the more powerful Kingdom, and what ideal discipleship looks like.

Chapter 4 will provide a discussion of my exegetical analysis and a conclusion to my writing. It will return to the questions raised earlier and how my methodological approach was able to resolve and answer some of the unknown. Finally a conclusion will provide an ending to the process to highlight what has been learned and its impact on my theological studies. I will also include some of my personal experience of the daily duties, roles, responsibilities, and functions of a soldier in our era, as well as some of the experiences I had as a Senior Non-Commissioned Officer which is equivalent to a Roman Centurion.

⁵Tremper Longman III and Raymond B Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 52.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary of the Whole Bible* VI vols., vol. Volume V (Matthew to John) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: MacDonald Publishing Company, 2000), 600.

Chapter 1

General Background of Mark/Role of the Centurion

Introduction

This chapter is a brief historical assessment of Mark's Gospel as it relates to characters, plot, setting, and rhetoric-elements of narrative criticism that will be used to exegete Mark 15:1-39. Furthermore, this chapter will conclude with a soldier's analysis of the Roman Centurion as the reading lens of the narrative found in 15:1-39.

The Gospel according to Mark has many unique features and characteristics like the usage of the Greek language, the pace and energetic style of writing, the handling of his sources, and truthfulness and bluntness of his style.⁷ The result is a rather jagged and ungrammatically Greek wording, compared with Luke, who had a much more polished style of writing.⁸ Although quick to move from Jesus' ministry in Galilee to Jesus' passion in Jerusalem, Mark would slow down his narrative in order to make emphatic and important points. Yet, in totality, Jesus' passion was Mark's overarching emphasis.⁹ Thus, it is important to look at key aspects of authorship, date and social setting, as well as themes to establish context for final writings that we have available to us today.

1.1 Authorship

Many scholars have considered the Gospel of Mark to be written by John Mark; who is well known throughout the Apostle Paul's Missionary Journeys.¹⁰ The earliest reference of this authorship is in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History (326 A.D.). This provides

⁷William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, revised ed. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1975), 45.

⁸Evans Craig A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 8:27 - 16:20*, 48 vols., vol. 34B (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2001), 60-62. Mark used a strong, fresh, and exuberant style of writing. It shows through his frequent use of the historical present tense that expresses action as happening at once. It is also obvious in his frequent use (41 times) of the Greek adverb *εὐθὺς* translated "immediately." The effects as if one reads Mark's Gospel, one feels that he or she is reading a reporter's eyewitness account of the events. However, Mark recorded many intimate details that only an eyewitness could have observed, which he evidently obtained from Peter (1:27, 41, 43; 2:12; 3:5; 7:34; 9:5-6, 10; 10:24, 32))

⁹Dr. Thomas Constable, *Notes on Mark: Appendix 6 Notes on Matthew. In the Commentary of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Zondervan, 2016), 4-5.

¹⁰Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, 20. "Mark wrote it, though he was not a disciple of Jesus during Jesus' ministry or an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. He accompanied the Apostle Peter and listened to his preaching."

a glimpse into the mind-set of a writer in the diaspora, living, witnessing, and dialoguing with the followers of Christ immediately after the time of his death and resurrection. Thus providing ample fuel to pen a narrative with a specific theological perspective that needs to be accepted moving forward.

Mark based his Gospel on the eyewitness account and spoken ministry of Peter while in Rome with Paul.¹¹ Mark did not record his Gospel in a chronological order¹², or rhetorical and artistic order¹³, but he recorded accurately from the experience of Peter's relationship with Jesus'; His words and deeds. He considered himself an interpreter of Peter's content. As the scribe of Peter, Mark knew the pulse of the times having heard first-hand the life, struggles, and possible death of a faithful disciple tasked with carrying forth the Good News. He provides the literary knowledge and skills to connect and weave together a story that begins with the baptism into water and below the earth and ends with a resurrection by means of an empty tomb out of the earth, in order to steer carefully through the Messianic secret between God and his son and conclude with the risen Messiah. A Messiah no longer confined by human structures but lives on through Divine Intervention.

1.2 Date and Social Setting

Although the date of the Gospel is ambiguous as its author, Thomas Robertson stated, "One of the clearest results of modern critical study of the Gospel is the early date of Mark's Gospel."¹⁴ Although it is not certain how early, but some have argued with firmness it was as early as 50 CE. Other leading scholars argued it was after Peter and Paul died in Rome, when Mark composed it. The most probable dates of Peter's martyrdom in Rome are 64-67 CE. Paul probably died as a martyr there in 67-68 CE. However, Clement of Alexandria and Origen both placed the composition of this Gospel

¹¹Douglas J Moo Donald A. Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 193. The Mark in view is the "John Mark" mentioned often in the New Testament (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-39; Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13; et al.). He was evidently a relative of Barnabas, and he accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, but left the apostles when they reached Perga. Mark became useful to Paul during Paul's second Roman imprisonment, and was also with Peter when he was in Rome. Peter described him as his "son," probably his protégé.

¹²Martin Hengel, *"Literary, Theological, and Historical Problems in the Gospel of Mark" the Study in the Gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 48.

¹³Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26. Word Biblical Commentary Series* (Dallas: Word Press, 1989), 27.

¹⁴Archibald Thomas Robertson: Professor of New Testament interpretation in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Louisville Kentucky, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1930), 249.

during Peter's lifetime. This may mean that Mark wrote shortly before Peter died. Perhaps, Mark began his Gospel during Peter's last years in Rome and completed it after Peter's death.¹⁵

Some argument have stemmed from internal evidence found in the text. Firstly, Mark's emphasis on Jesus as the suffering Son of God, while simultaneously emphasising suffering discipleship (8:31-9:1; 13:3-13) suggests that Mark was written to Christians enduring persecution.¹⁶ The latest that Mark could have written his Gospel was probably 70 CE, when Titus destroyed Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that since no Gospel writer referred to that event, which fulfilled prophecy, they all must have written before it. To summarize, Mark probably wrote this Gospel sometime between 63 and 70 CE.¹⁷ The dating fits the time of the Roman emperors and the era of persecution of the Jews and the followers of Jesus Christ. This provides an important context with which to view how Mark carefully traverses the various themes of the Gospel as a platform for the Centurion, a Roman soldier to make such a proclamation regarding a Jewish prisoner and enemy of the Empire.

1.3 Themes

The Gospel according to Mark has a plethora of themes; but my focus for this particular research is the proclamation mentioned in Mark 1:1; which is echoed in the text being researched: "Jesus the Son of God". It was considered a Messianic Secret throughout the Gospel of Mark; but the Centurion's proclamation unlocked and revealed the secret. I have chosen two themes to highlight as part of the focus my research, to unlock meanings found in my selected texts; Messianic Secret and Discipleship.

1.3.1 Messianic Secret

The word *μυστήριον* is translated a 'secret', can be describe as something that is only available to whom it would be revealed. Mark's single use of the term in Ch.4:11 is

¹⁵A.E.J Rawlinson, *The Gospel to St. Mark: Westminster Commentaries Series*, fifth ed. (London Methuen Press, 1995), 21.

¹⁶James R. Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 6. Historically, there were two major persecutions following Jesus' crucifixion. First being Caligula's attempt to build a statue of himself in the temple of Jerusalem, which he died in 41 CE. Second was during Emperor Nero's accusing Christianity for the fire in Rome around 64 CE.

¹⁷William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The International Commentary of the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1984), 23.

an indicator that points to the development of this theme throughout the Gospel and often highlighted as one of the main unique aspects of Mark's account of the Ministry of Jesus.¹⁸ An attempt to keep Jesus' identity from other's for political and personal gains, in order to highlight the correct and appropriate faithful response to him as the Son of God, the Messiah.

One can argue that Jesus' awareness and management of the public response towards him was to avoid any unwanted publicity and disturbance. Moreover, it was to mitigate any hostile intention towards Him, not yet at least. But quieting and muzzling of the demons supernatural testimonies suggested otherwise. He commanded the demons to be silenced stressed the significance of who Jesus was not what He had done. In other words, to keep His secret intact, His Messiahship.¹⁹ Although, much of the time Jesus seems to have no opposition to some that proclaimed and noticed His miracle, he even invites them (2:8-12; 3:2-5; 5:19-20). But it wasn't until His arrival in Jerusalem where Jesus purposely drew attention to Himself and His Mission, as if He wanted to be arrested, he wanted to be made known for His activities in and around Palestine. Even though the secret was told in front of the people during His trial, but it wasn't widely accepted by those in attendance. But the epitome of the Messianic Secret was revealed, proclaimed and accepted by the Centurion after Jesus took His last breath.

1.3.2 Discipleship

The theme of discipleship is very common and prevalent in the Gospels, especially the Gospel of Mark, in which the disciples are depicted as unbelieving and always in the dark when it comes to Jesus' divinity and status as Messiah.²⁰ Discipleship can also be identified as serve, service, servant that is has been engraved in a Samoan from a very young age. It's the faaSamoa (Samoan-way) of serving or servant.²¹ However, a point of emphasis when it comes to discipleship resides with Jesus comment found in Mark 8:34-35:

¹⁸ R.T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Nigt. The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 28-30. It has shown, although unsuccessful in revealing by four attempts by Jesus to prevent the people from speaking freely of the miracles He had done (1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8: 26). In addition, the demons were also prohibited to disclose or divulge the truth about Jesus being God or the Son of God.

¹⁹ Ibid., 31-32.

²⁰ David Rhoads; Johanna Dewey; Donald Michie, *Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Nashville, Tennessee: Fortress Press, 2012), 124.

²¹ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, ed. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon; Jione Havea (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2017), 4.

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

This statement by Jesus takes discipleship to a whole other level, especially if the social setting revolves around the time of persecution and those dying because of their belief in Christ. If losing one's life is part of discipleship as adamantly stated by Jesus, then it adds another dimension to the proclamation of the Centurion, for it comes right after Jesus cried out and took his last breath. Was the Centurion's proclamation not only an affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God,²² but also his confession of discipleship and being a follower of Jesus? Thus the theme of discipleship is important in placing the Centurion within the historical interpretation of the Gospel and within the ministry of Jesus Christ.

1.4 Background and Significance of the Centurion during Jesus' Crucifixion

A Centurion was one of the most legendary officers in the Roman army, because of what he brings to the fight, such as experience, valor, mastery of arms, and a keen insight or vision needed to be successful in military warfare and combat.²³ Furthermore, the Centurion was the backbone of the Roman military organization.²⁴ Historically, the Centurion was established under the Roman Republic. Traditionally, they were working-class soldiers. But by the time Julius Caesar became the ruler of the Republic, Centurions were soldiers of stature for their loyalty and effective leadership skills, hence they were entrusted with much of his battlefields and day to day operations.²⁵ These were men well taught in the tactics and techniques of combat and leadership which made them very effective soldiers. In addition, they served at least 15 to 20 years, before their rise through the ranks, with some being promoted directly by the Emperor himself.

²²Edwards, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark*, 16.

²³ Graeme A. Ward, "Centurions: The Practice of Roman Officership" Ph.D Thesis (University of North Carolina, 2012), 65.

²⁴ Dennis M. Swanson, "Centurion," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman; Allen C. Myers; Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William D Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 228.

²⁵Katharine Doob Sakanfield, ed. *The New Interpreter Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 579.

In a Roman Army, there were a total of 25 legions during the time of Jesus (1-30 CE), and a single legion consisted of 6000 soldiers. A legion is compared to the modern day United States Army Brigade (6000-7000 soldiers), and within that Brigade are 5 to 6 Battalions (800-1000 soldiers). And a Battalion consist of 5 to 6 Companies (100-150 soldiers).²⁶ There were a total of 60 Centurions within one legion. Each legion was charged with the conquered provinces during the expansion of the Roman Empire, and one of the major provinces was Syria²⁷

A Centurion was stationed in all levels of the Army. In a legion there was a senior or Legion Centurion, usually with 20 plus years of service; an auxiliary Centurion (2nd to the Legion Centurion); a cohort Centurion; and unit Centurions. They are the leaders of each respective level, answering only to the General of the Roman Army, or the Governor of the Province, or the Emperor himself.²⁸ The Centurion from my chosen text was considered a Legion Centurion only because Rome had faced many resistances in Palestine. Moreover, the legion in Syria overlooked the operations in Judah, which Pilate was the Governor.

1.4.1 General role of the Centurion

A Centurion plays a vital role in the Roman Army. Since, he was with the most years in service and the most experience. In the growth of the Roman Empire, the Centurion's daily functions consist of training, disciplining, ensure the welfare of the soldiers at his command were at/or above standards. A leader in the battlefield, an expert in any given weapon, a tactician in the art of war, a technician in maneuvering elements in order to be victorious in battle and consequently war, and an observer with keen insight to know when to act and when to hold back. Because of his long tenure of service before becoming a Centurion, he most likely assumed many if not all the different assignments throughout the Empire, and could have filled the various missions such as supervision of building projects, posting duties in mine and quarries, functioning as a tax collector, or as a mediator in boundary dispute.²⁹

²⁶ Raymond K Bluhm, *U.S. Army: A Complete History* (Knoxville, Kentucky: Army Historical Foundation, 2004), 210-20.

²⁷ T.R.S. Broughton, "Military," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Joel B. Green; Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, Illinois/ Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 549-50.

²⁸ T. R.S Broughton, "The Roman Army: The Beginning of Christianity," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary (O-Sh)*, ed. David Noel-Freedman (New York City, New York: DoubleDay, 1992), 787-97.

²⁹ Sakanfield, *The New Interpreter Dictionary of the Bible*, 596.

A Centurion in essence, was a well – rounded, educated/experienced leader in every aspects of the Empire establishment. He had to possess extraordinary and special qualities needed by the Empire for expansion, maintaining law and order, and fulfilling the wishes of the local Governors, State Leaders/Emperors, and Caesar.

1.4.2 Role of Centurion in Jesus' Crucifixion

In the New Testament world, a Centurion played a vital role in *Pax Romana* in Judea. He served as a lead officer in security patrols, enforcing law and order in the streets and any domestic dispute within the province. He was also the leader of the execution squads, like crucifixions.³⁰ His responsibility was to serve as the supervisor for the Crucifixion, ensuring that prisoners were executed according to Roman law. The life of the persecuted was his responsibility. In other words, the persecuted will die according to his sentence, no more and no less. For instance, in a crucifixion, his responsibility was to keep the persecuted alive until the cross. He was always present from the beginning during the trial, judgement, and persecution. He followed the whole proceeding from the beginning until its finale, a prisoner's death. He would then report the event's aftermath to his leaders, the Governor or the Emperor himself.

1.4.3 Soldier's Analysis and Reading Lens

The soldier's analysis and reading lens will entail re-reading this narrative passage from the eyes of a modern day soldier who knows the roles and responsibilities that are similar to those of a Centurion. As detailed earlier, the main responsibilities of a Centurion was the discipline of the legion under his command. Leadership, guidance, preparedness, and carrying out one's orders ensured the stability of the Roman Army. Furthermore, he exemplified great knowledge and awareness, such as keen insight and vision, based on many years of service and experience. He was the mediator between the field and the aristocratic leader/Emperor to whom he reported too. Thus he carried with him the will of his aristocratic leader, the Emperor and the Empire on his shoulders every time he stepped onto the field, in this case, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

In a Soldier's analysis of the roles and functions of a Centurion, it is a major and conflicting role. One can define this role as a servant's role. He is in charge of escorting the persecuted, who was most likely a menace to society, disturbing and disrupting peace, being prosecuted for many different charges which spanned from thievery to murder, or

³⁰Ibid., 602.

may be murdering a Roman citizen or one of his own. Furthermore, he is in charge with the safekeeping of the welfare of the persecuted as much as his troops; with an understanding that the prisoner will be executed as commanded in a given time, and given method of persecution.

In addition, being loyal to his role as Centurion, to his leader, or the Emperor himself and the Empire. His function was to analyse and report to the governor or the Emperor. A Centurion must have an ample amount of professionalism to adhere and proceed with his responsibilities, being a bodyguard to such person. In my experience, no Soldier want this detail, due to the fact that you are protecting someone that could have killed your fellow soldier, and you are the only person he/she is permitted to speak to until you reach the final destination. Conversing with someone who is facing death, sometimes is their last boasting of his/her glory days, but most of the times is their final confession before death. Did the Centurion converse with Jesus enroute to Golgotha? Was that the reason behind the proclamation?

Jesus faced an abundant of abuse prior to the Cross. For example, the verbal abuse before the council by the chief priest, and the elders. When facing Pilate, he was whipped violently, and the long death march carrying His Cross on His shoulders. From a Soldier standpoint, these are soldier-like qualities and discipline, and yet never wavered or bowed to the allegations by the priests. Jesus stayed true to His conviction, never stumbled or gave up his loyalty to his mission and especially to His Commander, the Living God of Israel. As an experience soldier like the Centurion, one can be amazed and feel a sense of respect for what unfolded before his eyes. With the knowledge, experience and keen insight and awareness possessed by the Centurion, all that was part of his thinking process before making the grand proclamation, "Truly, this man was God's Son!"

Chapter 2

Methodology: Narrative Criticism

Introduction

This chapter offers a brief synopsis of narrative criticism and the literary elements to interpret the narrative unit, Mark 15:1-39. Although my focus will be the Centurion as mentioned before and the events leading up to his proclamation (Mark 15:33-39), this chapter will establish the reach and range of narrative criticism. By doing so, I will attempt to unpack and reveal what occurred between the events of Jesus' trial before Pilate, his crucifixion, and the proclamation of the Centurion (15:1-39).

2.1 Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism, attempts to critically analyse series of stories. A concise description by Elizabeth Malbon, equivalent to Mark Powell, is that narrative criticism is a new biblical approach derived from literary criticism. The widely held assertion is that it is the most prominent method to study the Gospels and the Book of Acts.³¹ To understand this criticism is to know the difference between 'the story' and 'the discourse.' The story asks the 'what' and the discourse asks the 'how' question. Together, they are integrated to give the content of a narrative wherein the story becomes the discourse or 'story as discourse.'

According to Malbon most scholars of the New Testament studies ask the 'what' question when reading a text. For example, 'what does the text mean?' The 'what' deals with the historical-source, form and redaction-criticism.³² These criticisms are mainly of historical reconstructions of stories and by-products of the historical aspects with 'referential meaning'.³³ Narrative criticism provides a new approach that side-lines the 'what' question and creates a 'paradigm shift in biblical studies' by promoting the internal meanings of texts over its referential meaning.

³¹Mark Allen Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Paternoster Press, 1995), 239.

³²Elizabeth Struthers Malborn, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean. In Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Andersen; Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

The paradigm shift is a new way of asking ‘how does the story mean’. The final form of the text is the key to interpretation with fidelity to the text as the core of this criticism.³⁴ It deals with the text itself and the way it communicates to us. This is what Malbon calls a narrative discourse or story-as-discourse.³⁵

Malbon asserts that discourse is *how the story is told*; focusing on the beginning and ending of the narrative called the rhetoric. Discourse contains the literary nature of the story useful for critique. It is the interaction of the implied author and the implied reader that makes it distinctive from its content. Similarly, Seymour Chatman describes the discourse as the ‘expression’ of the narrative.³⁶ Chatman adds that discourse also refers to narrative statement that expresses questions, commands or intentional declaration.

2.2 Elements of Narrative Criticism:

Narrative criticism contains specific elements such as implied author/reader, character, setting, plot and rhetoric which will be further discussed below.³⁷ Before I look at the different elements or aspects of *story as discourse* I would like to offer three questions that will guide my critical exegesis. What meaning is being relayed by the pericope/story in its final form? Does this story serve a purpose within the narrative with the preceding and proceeding stories? What lesson is taught?

2.2.1 Character

Characters are those with names, nicknames, portrayals and are known within the narratives by their words and actions. They are also recipients of what others speak to or about them. They help to unfold the plot of a narrative. In characterization by Malbon, there is ‘telling’ and ‘showing’. Clearly emphasised, ‘telling’ is by the author and ‘showing’ is a product of a reader. Characters are also described as ‘flat’ and ‘round’, ‘minor’ or ‘major’ and ‘negative’ or ‘positive’.³⁸ Flatness is described by simplicity, consistency, mild appearance and predictable actions and words.³⁹ Roundness refers to

³⁴ Malborn, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean*. In *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 25. I do not intend to disqualify the historicity of literature but to seek possibilities to alternative readings.

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (New York, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19,151.

³⁷ Malborn, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean*. In *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 33.

³⁸ Ibid., 29.

³⁹ Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 132.

complexity and the dynamics of a character often changes over time. Major and minor characters can be clearly shown by the implied author. The negativity and positivity of a character are portrayed through the interaction of major and minor characters. Although these structures are set in place to help read and identify characters, they are limiting in that some characters cannot easily be identified as major or minor and round or flat.

2.2.2 Setting

As Malbon indicates, setting refers to time and space. It is the question of when and where the event takes place. It determines the reaction of characters involved in the story. Some settings give a specific location, others are connotationally symbolic.⁴⁰ Setting constitutes worlds like social, cultural and political. Worlds like these can be identified by the reader who reads the narrative or an episode. In the same vein, Rhoads and Powell are identical in spatial and temporal settings of a story.⁴¹ Spatial setting denotes the physical background of a story. The temporal setting designates the chronological order of events. The setting and the characters work together to give the plot.

2.2.3 Plot

The plot, as Malbon suggests, is a derivative of the interaction between the characters and setting. In relation to these two elements, things change in time and space as we normally know in the reality of things in the modern world. Consequently, the sequence of events, the order of incidents, its duration and frequency change as well. Since there is a play between characters there is also conflict in suspense. Conflict in Malbon's mind, is the key to the plot unfolding. It can be noted that the episode between the Centurion, the soldiers, and Jesus appears to be a natural conflict between the Empire and the condemned, yet the Centurion's proclamation provides an unusual ending to this conflict and moves the plot from a local to a global issue regarding Jesus' identification that Mark has tried to suppress from the beginning of his narrative..

To reiterate, characters, setting and plot are all elements of a particular story. From the integration of these three principles, evolves the fourth and most important constituent, emphasising *story-as-discourse*, called the rhetoric

⁴⁰ Malbon, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean. In Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

2.2.4 Rhetoric

Rhetoric in Mark is narrative based.⁴² The integration of characters, settings and the plot offer persuasive ways to read this Marcan account. The idea, by Malbon, is for the author to persuade the reader, in order for the reader to ‘understand’, ‘share’ and ‘extend’ what the author implies. Rhoads, Dewey and Michie advance their meaning by changing the ‘what’ to ‘how’, as a way not only to persuade but to ‘transform the reader or the audience’. The audience is labelled as the *ideal audience* that reads a story in any respective way. Thus for Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, this could be possible since the actions of the real audience cannot be produced or ‘predicted’ in the same way that I, as a reader, reads Biblical stories.

In addition, there are 7 rhetorical devices, intensively employed, by Malbon to analyse story-as-discourse. These are ‘repetition, intercalation, framing, foreshadowing and echoing, symbolism and irony’.⁴³ These devices provide clues as to how the author will try to influence the audience to adhere to the ideas and values that he is promoting with his story of Jesus and the Centurion.

⁴² Malbon, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean. In Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 35.

Chapter 3

Biblical Exegesis: Soldier's Reading of Mark 15:1-39

Introduction

This chapter will provide a Biblical exegesis of Mark 15:1-39 from the lens of a soldier re-reading the Jesus and the Centurion pericope to see what can be said anew about this narrative. The chapter will deal with the two narrative units that Mark 15 can be split into: Unit 1: Mark 15:1-32 and Unit 2: Mark 15:33-39. Afterwards, the various elements will be discussed from the reading perspective of a soldier.

3.1 The Narrative Units:

Mark 15 can be split into two units in order to focus on the proclamation by the Centurion in unit 2, verses 33-39. The first unit, Mark 15:1-32, sets up the story and provides the chaotic scene that leads up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, while the second unit 15: 33-39 concludes the passion narratives with the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and the proclamation by the Centurion. For purposes of this paper, the entire chapter will be used to establish the characters, settings, plot, and rhetoric; however, the focus of this study is the proclamation by the Centurion of Jesus' identity.

To further understand the narrative unit of interest (Mark 15:33-39), the whole narrative unit (15:1-39) will be divided into four sub-units to further highlight the progression of the story. The first sub-unit, Mark 15:1-5 is "Jesus in Front of Pilate." The second sub-unit is "Jesus in Front of the Crowd," 15:6-16. The third sub-unit is the "Pre-crucifixion" activities (15:17-32) While the fourth and final sub-unit will be the "Crucifixion" 15:33-39 in which the Centurion's proclamation resides.

3.2 Character

The characters will be analysed to illustrate their role and purposes in the narrative of Jesus and the Centurion. In order to demonstrate how they not only help to move the story along, but what their contributions are to our understanding of this pericope of Mark's in his overall purposes of demonstrating that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah.

3.2.1 Jesus in front of Pilate (Mark 15:1-5)

In this unit, there are three groups of characters being highlighted by Mark; the chief priest and the elders, Pilate and Jesus. Mark's emphasis seems to be on the interaction between these three characters. Pilate served as the governor of the Syrian

province for the Roman Empire, representing the Empire's law and order. On the other hand, were the representation of the Jewish community in Jerusalem and its communal laws, the chief priests and the elders of its synagogue. Finally there's Jesus, presumably the one who broke the Jewish laws by proclaiming He was the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One (Mark 14: 61-62), which could also be seen as treason in the eyes of the Roman Empire.

One important note of this sub-unit is the place of the story which is the living quarter of Pilate, a Roman or a gentile, not a Jew. It highlighted the character of the chief priest and the elders. Here we have expert of the Jewish laws and custom, yet they would breach it in order to bring death upon Jesus. Pilate's home is where the vile actions such as spilling of blood, and Roman business is being handle; in Jewish law that's considered an unclean place, entering it is was considered a blasphemy and sin. Yet, the leaders of the church overlooked it just so that Jesus can be executed by the Romans.

It seems that the chief priests and his entourage would stop at nothing in order to kill Jesus, not even their own laws and customs. Mark highlighted the crookedness and the wickedness of the chief priests and the elders of the church. They forgot the dignity of their place and office, when they turned informers, and did in person accuse Christ of many things, and witness against Him. "The destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldean is said to be for the iniquity of the priests that shed the blood of the just (Lam.4:13)."⁴⁴

The other key character of this sub-unit is Pilate. He was the representation of the Empire which is one of the key components of the research. Pilate belonged to a special group of imperial administrator, beneath the rank of senator. Their official title in the period prior to Claudius was procurator or prefect. As far as criminal and political jurisdiction was concerned, they possessed powers similar to those held by senatorial proconsuls and imperial legates.⁴⁵ He had the power to free Jesus of all the charges, as he firmly knew they were out of jealousy. Pilate's question of whether Jesus' was the King of the Jews entailed the fact that he was aware of who Jesus was. Mark's emphasis on Pilate's character, that he had the power to do the right thing, but did not, highlights the fact that Jesus had to get to the cross; not even the Empire could stop His mission.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Henry, *Commentary of the Whole Bible* Volume V (Matthew to John), 560.

⁴⁵ William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 548.

⁴⁶ James A. Brooks, *The American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of the Holy Scripture Niv Text (Mark)*, ed. David S. Dockery, vol. 23, Mark (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1991), 640-43.

Furthermore, this could also be an acquittal of Rome as the enemy, instead it was the Jewish leaders who provoked and eventually forced Jesus to the cross as seen in the next section.

In this sub-unit, Jesus was given the chance to defend Himself, yet he did not say a single sentence; but became passive and stayed silent throughout, until His crucifixion. It seems Jesus was caught in the middle of a power struggle for Jerusalem. In the end, both sides lost and the world was redeemed.

3.2.2 Jesus in front of the Crowd (Mark 15: 6-15)

In this particular sub-unit, aside from Jesus, Pilate and the chief priests; Mark introduces two other characters, Barabbas and the crowd. The chief priests continued with their relentless efforts to persecute Jesus. Their stirring of the crowd features the impiety of the priests.

Adhering to his traditions of winning the hearts and minds of the local population, Pilate offered Jesus to be freed, understanding He was with no faults according to Roman Laws, yet the cry for Barabbas who was notorious criminal. It appears Pilates have not changed his mind about freeing Jesus, but could not. It seems Pilate had political ambitions for his future; which bring us to the next character Barabbas.

Barabbas, theologically is a representation of sinful world. Here we have Jesus on one hand with no fault, and Barabbas on the other who can be called a career criminal. Yet, he lived and Jesus died. Mark brought Barabbas into light in order to highlight the purpose of Jesus' life; He was to die in order for the world to be freed from sins. Barabbas was also a passive characters, said nothing, except receiving of his freedom; his character seems to be entitled because of Jesus.

The last characters of this sub-unit are the crowd (ὄχλος⁴⁷), which were the key factor of this particular narrative. Mark's insertion of the crowd highlighted the fate of Jesus was the cross. They were easily stirred by the chief priests because they didn't know, or confused. Their confusion further enhanced the denial of Jesus by His own people, because of their certain ideas of who the Messiah was supposed to be. . Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, did not fit that expectation. He was not a King of warfare, liberator of their oppression state, but King of peace who bring forgiveness of sin. The

⁴⁷ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 346. "a crowd, a confused multitude of people".

crowd also highlighted the iniquity of the chief priests; they were dedicated and driven to bring death upon Jesus.

Pilate's plead for Jesus solidified his stance with Jesus, which was opposite from the chief priests. The using of the crowd by Mark further showed that Jesus needed to die. Pilate and many other Roman officials use the multitude of people to gain power within the Empire. In other words, in order to gain power, he need to win the hearts and minds of the people; hence his tradition of releasing of a prison favoured by the crowd during the Passover. On this define moment, Mark inserted, it was a decision rather Jesus or Barabbas. The chief priests understood the Roman customs where the crowd have the power over officials.

When it came to Jesus, Pilate knew that He was innocent, but rather than pronouncing for acquittal, he decided it would be politically expedient to deal with in term of paschal amnesty, which he had done often to gain popularity. He's political visions and aspirations relied heavily on this define moment. On the ground of political convenience Pilate decided that he had no choice but to yield to the determined will of the crowd. In essence in order to satisfy the crowd, he released Barabbas and scourged Jesus.⁴⁸

3.2.3 Pre-Crucifixion (Mark 15:16-32)

The trial has been completed and Jesus was found guilty, His sentence was death by crucifixion. In this sub-unit Jesus is handed over to the soldiers with the assumption that Centurion has been observing the entire story unfolding. The characters here are the soldiers and their interaction with the main character Jesus.

Mark insert of the soldiers as a continuation of the mockery of Jesus. He was mocked by the Jewish leaders, now he's mocked by the simplest people of the Roman Empire. Differ from the Centurions, these are the soldiers are the ground pounder, who were the regulators in rough places, the muscle of the legion. These were not members of the regular army, but provincial auxiliaries recruited from non-Jews in Palestine and elsewhere in the eastern part of the Empire.⁴⁹ In other words, their loyalty was not to anyone, including Caesar, but to their mission on hand. They were undisciplined when comes to handling a crowd, which is why they're picked to be in rough place like

⁴⁸ Lane, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark*, 556.

⁴⁹ Brooks, *The American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of the Holy Scripture Niv Text (Mark)*, 23.

Jerusalem. Mark highlighted these soldiers because of their awful and atrocious character, which is parallel to the chief priest.

All these are happening to the main character, yet no cry for help, no pleading for mercy, just silence. One of the direct characters not mentioned is the leader of the cohort, the Centurion. Why was he silence throughout the process? What was the significant of his muteness?

So far there's no attempt to create sympathy for Jesus or hatred for His enemy. There are few key characters in this sub-unit that is worth noting. One of them is Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Who is Simon of Cyrene? And what's his significant? For intensive purpose, Simon must be a God-fearing man he is there for the feast. But his action of carrying Jesus' cross tells a bigger story. He was not a disciple, nor a follower of Jesus, and yet he carried the cross for the Lord. Mark highlighted the acceptance of the task by a total stranger. It shows what Jesus had to offer can be accepted by anyone, if they're willing.

On Golgotha, a soldier none the less offered Him wine mixed with Myrrh. These actions by the soldier show a different type soldier from the courtyard of Pilate's home. It was the act of compassion and caring for Jesus. Wine with Myrrh is sedative which can numb the pain of the crucifixion, but Jesus refused it. Mark continued to highlight the character of Jesus as passive and innocent.

The two bandits were now introduced into the story. The harden criminals who deserved their fate. They were crucified next to Jesus, as if Jesus was on the same low level as them. Mark is starting to identify to the Jews that the Messiahship of Jesus was not a hero with a sword and spear, but with love and compassion for the sinners.

In the end of this sub-unit, Mark re-iterated all the characters that were there from the beginning of the narrative unit; the chief priests, representative of Rome, Jesus, the crowd, and the sinners who Jesus came for.

3.2.4 Crucifixion/Proclamation of the Centurion (Mark 15: 33-39)

Undoubtedly the Centurion mentioned in this narrative unit is the focus of this study. What is worth noting also, it was this narrative unit where Jesus finally spoke, but not what we expected. He didn't cry for mercy, or proclaim His innocence; He cried to His Father.

Everything that has been done to Jesus to this point, it is absolutely certain that the Centurion seen it all. One important character that Mark introduced in this narrative is the Narrator himself. Mark “break frame” in this particular part of the story in order to highlight Jesus’ character and further stance that was the Son of God. The insertion of the Narrator in verse 34 by explaining Jesus cried with a loud voice “Eloi, Eloi lamach sabachtani”. The Narrator has been in the background the entire story, yet Mark revealed his character in order to bring Jesus center stage.

As mentioned before, in every aspect of the cohort daily routine, whether it’s combat or peacekeeping, or crowd control, the Centurion is never absent. Along with his professional leadership traits, the Centurion has one of the unique characters that made him stand out, his aggression.⁵⁰ This unique character further solidified the presence of the Centurion throughout the chosen narrative. Wherever the cohort was, there too was the Centurion. This, was further coagulated when a bystander offered Jesus sour wine. This wine was a cheap wine drank by soldiers themselves. As per Hendrickson

“Immediately someone-no doubt a soldier, acting under orders of the Centurion-took a sponge, filled it with sour wine or vinegar, the kind of cheap wine which soldiers drank and brought it to the mouth of Jesus.”⁵¹

The Centurion has seen what was unfolded before his eyes. And now the cry, surely the Centurion saw the cry of confidence instead of pain. Mark introduced the Centurion in this particular point of the story, but never mentioned him before. As stated in the beginning, what the Centurion does, and stood for; he finally uttered his confession. But it’s a confession that was done from careful observation of what was unfolded before his eyes. It was a proclamation of a believer, not from word of mouth but by first account.

⁵⁰ Ward, "Centurions: The Practice of Roman Officership," 84-85. "... aggression is compared with that of their contemporaries, the trait of ferocia seems actually to have been embraced and idealized for characterizing the Centurion in combat... Cicero contrasts the era of the Centurion with the emotionally detached reason (ratio) of the wise man. Such aggression went above and beyond merely fighting beside their subordinates in the front line – ancient authors depict it primarily as near-suicidal, individual assaults."

⁵¹ William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Bakers Books, 2004), 457-59.

3.3 Setting

The setting will look at how location and the movements in and out of Jerusalem assists to promote Mark's intentional use of the Centurion as a demonstration of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ has now become a universal and/or inclusive message for all.

3.3.1 Jesus in Front of Pilate (Mark 15:1-5)

From the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Mark emphasized that the main goal of Jesus' ministry was his entry into Jerusalem.⁵² For Jerusalem represents the city in which God resides, the city upon which his son too would reside and reign. However, it is interesting to note, that although the setting for this narrative unit is Jerusalem, it is in foreign space, for all the action takes place in Pilate's home. So in keeping track of the setting thus far, Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly, only to exit Jerusalem solemnly as he stands before Pilate and the Jewish leaders in Pilate's home.

3.3.2 Jesus in Front of the Crowd (15:6-16)

As Jesus is brought outside of Pilate's home, he re-enters Jewish space before the crowd. It is noteworthy to point out that the word crowd (*ὄχλος*) has been discussed heavily in New Testament studies due to its connotations to those who were against Jesus' ministry as mentioned in the character analysis above.⁵³ But due to constraints of this paper, the focus will be on the use of the crowd within Jerusalem. The crowd is brought to the fore to represent the defiant Jewish leaders now back in their territory rejecting Jesus. In this narrative unit, Jesus has been fully rejected not only in foreign space (Pilate's home), but now also within Jewish space.

3.3.3 Pre-crucifixion (15:16-32)

As the analysis of the setting continues, Jesus is returned into foreign space, in the Roman prisons to be tortured and prepared for the pending crucifixion. Jesus the once proud Jew who entered triumphantly into Jerusalem has now been rejected not only in Jerusalem but also within foreign space, is now initially humiliated, tortured, and ridiculed by foreigners, the Roman soldiers, in foreign space.

⁵² C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Mark. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27 (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/ Auckland: Doubleday, 1986), 596.

⁵³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), 586-90.

After the ridicule and the mockery of Jesus in the hands of the soldiers, He was again presented to the Jews in Jewish space on the road to Golgotha. However, while in back into Jewish space, he did not receive any help from any Jews, but from a non-Jew, Simon of Cyrene. He was a passer-by meaning he was on the road coming in to Jerusalem, as Jesus was on the same road in Jewish space heading into foreign space which was outside of the city walls in place call Golgotha.

3.3.4 Crucifixion (15:33-39)

The final sub-unit takes place in Golgotha, a place outside of Jerusalem and back into foreign space to demonstrate the total rejection and ridicule of this once proud Jewish rabbi/teacher. Not only has he been totally rejected by the Jews, his rejection is further amplified by the ultimate suffering and death outside of his home and amongst the foreigners in foreign space.

The significance of Golgotha is not its purpose which is the place of execution, but rather its location, which is close to Jerusalem yet stand outside of it. Having Jesus crucified in Golgotha, emphasized the rejection of Him by the Jewish leaders and the nation of God, and the Gospel He brings is accordingly believed to belong to the world outside of the walls of Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus brought the Gospel into Jerusalem, yet it was rejected by the Jewish leaders and the ὄχλος, yet it was proclaimed by the Centurion outside of Jerusalem, a gentile to demonstrate that the Gospel has come out of Jerusalem and is now a universal message for universe.

3.4 Plot

The definitive plot of this narrative unit (Mk 15: 1-39) is Jesus' crucifixion. It was highlighted by the stillness and silence of Jesus during His trial in front of Pilate and the crowd, until He was crucified on the cross. Pilate was sure of the innocence of Jesus and saw through their envy (Mk 15:10), but he was hoping that Jesus would answer these charges to relieve Him of His burden. He marvelled at the self – control of Jesus.⁵⁴ For Mark, this was a chance to highlight the Roman's Governor's amazement at Jesus extraordinary presence and possibly absolving Pilate of Jesus' death and pinning it on the Jewish leaders and the crowd.

⁵⁴ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *World Picture in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Matthew; the Gospel According to Mark* (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1930), 392.

The condemnation (vv. 6-15) is entwined into a sub-plot about Barabbas, a prisoner who had been detained for charges against the Roman law during a recent civil disruption. Mark institutes that Pilate thought Jesus was innocent (vv.9-10, 14-15a) and that he however condemns Jesus to death (v. 15b). The interaction of personalities also serves many other purposes as well; as seen with the motives of the religious leaders and the crowd.⁵⁵

One noteworthy significance is the conflict of interest between characters due to their professional ambitions as accentuated by Mark. This was shown through Pilate's character when he knew Jesus was innocent, yet his decision making process was finalized in order to gain the favour of the crowd. His political aspirations overshadowed his personal honourable state. This political aspiration was also seen in the chief priest as he entered Pilate's home, considered an act of defilement according to Jewish laws, yet their personal ambitions of killing Jesus would not be hindered by it. Mark stressed this significant interaction in order for the plot to be fulfilled on Golgotha. The hero that was accused by the Jewish leaders and the crowd, but sentenced to an outsider's death on the cross and on foreign land.

Golgotha is where the finality of the plot for this narrative takes place. Every interaction has led to this particular place, a place of execution and death. Basic Marcan themes come to head here. The hostility of the religious leaders introduced at Mk 2:6-7 and building ever since, climaxes when the chief priest's death sentence is carried out, as they mocked him, while he hung on the cross. The failure of His disciples through misunderstanding, betrayal, denial, and flight reaches its lowest point at the cross, not a single disciple was present according to Mark.

Tried and mocked as the King of the Jews, Jesus is crucified as the King of the Jews, ridiculed as the Messiah by the same people that should have known who he was. He was crucified along with robbers, not disciples, at His right and left hand. He was furthered scorn because of the need to hide his Messianic status so that the people would approach him through faith and belief, and not because of the power and authority he possesses as the Messiah, the Son of God, and saviour of the world. What is remarkable about the death of Jesus on the cross is that the Jewish leaders, the Jewish crowd, and his Jewish disciples continued in their disbelief, yet a Roman Centurion confesses and

⁵⁵ Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, 270-71.

revealed in the end that He was truly the Son of God, a powerful proclamation and a royal title.⁵⁶ It was at this pivotal point where the plot reverses the theme and the Messianic secret that Jesus upheld was no longer a secret for now it was available to the whole world, through the voice of a foreign Centurion, a non-Jew, yet a believer of Jesus royal status as the Son of God, the Savior and Messiah of the world. We can also claim that this was Jesus' coronation; and the Centurion was the witness who proclaimed it to the world.

3.5 Rhetorical Analysis

The rhetorical aspect of this narrative revolves around the idea of how does Mark demonstrate through the use of his characters, setting, and plot to tell the story to "persuade the reader, in order for the reader to 'understand', 'share' and 'extend' what the author implies."⁵⁷ In this chosen narrative (vv.1-39), Mark wants his readers to walk away knowing and understanding that Jesus is the Son of God.⁵⁸ So, that they too could share and extend this belief to others as a way to evangelize the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From the beginning, Mark framed Jesus to be innocent of the charges against Him. This was punctuated by Pilate's claim during his interaction with the priest and the crowd. Mark also continues this idea through the repetition of Pilate's claim with the questioning of the crowd as mentioned in verse 13. Mark emphasized the framing of Jesus by the chief priest out of jealousy, yet, Jesus would stay silent while being tormented and ridiculed. The outcome of these interactions was Jesus' unfair sentence to death by way of crucifixion. This echoed Jesus foretelling of His death and resurrection; to all who believe (Mk 8:31-9:1; 9:31-32). It also highlighted how the characters did not understand the full effect of who Jesus was, as mentioned before by Mark.

Mark highlighted Jesus being reserved and inaudible, like a helpless lamb being lead to slaughter, foreshadowing Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah (Isaiah 53). The mockery of Jesus by the soldiers as He sat there and absorbed it, while they also spat on him as well as the disdain of the people as he made his way to way Golgotha. Nevertheless, according to Mark, Jesus the Son of God went through it all. But there were also other characters that highlighted the true nature of Jesus. Mark began with Pilate through his hesitance/pushback against wrongful authority to convict and sentence to

⁵⁶ Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, 277.

⁵⁷ Malborn, *Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean. In Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 41.

⁵⁸ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, Nicnt* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1.

death, then he introduced Simon the Cyrene in order to highlight one of Jesus' nature, lending a helping hand to those in need despite the consequence.

The interactions between Jesus and soldiers on Golgotha re-emphasized Mark's claim of Jesus being the Son of God. Jesus' rejection of the wine mixed with myrrh further stressed the misunderstanding of the people who Jesus was as weak and fallible, giving in to fleshly desires for the suffering to end. As mentioned before, this wine was a sedative to ease the pain of the one suffering. We can also project from another standpoint, that this act by the misinformed soldiers was an innocuous attempt at continual mockery of Jesus, in order to highlight the King of the Jews as a weak King, or less than the Romans. However, Mark highlighted the rejection of the drink by Jesus, in order to emphasize the strong Will of the Son of God. Yet the offering of and the acceptance of the sour wine later, becomes a trigger mechanism used by Mark to stress how Jesus accepted the state of the Jews as a once sweet and fruitful wine to be enjoyed and celebrated, but have now soured and become a bitter after taste in the presence of God through his Son Jesus Christ. This becomes an important prelude to the proclamation that comes later by the Centurion as a demonstration that the Gospel message that was once for the insiders (Jewish community) has now come outside and is now available to all who believe and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the Messiah.

Another important interaction that Mark highlighted was the interaction between Jesus and His Father. Throughout the narrative unit, Jesus and God were silent, but in Jesus' final moment, He cried out to His Father. This act is significant because it fulfils a prophetic oracle by the psalmists of someone who suffers alone. Was this the intent of Mark, to ensure that Jesus' suffering was completely his and his alone to endure? Was this also the affirmation that the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin was now complete through the blood of the innocent Son that was shed on the cross at the hands of the unbelieving? Also, significant in this last interaction was the Centurion, who was also silent throughout the narrative until the very end, like Jesus towards his father who cried out before it was completed. Now the Centurion professes openly, "Truly this man is God's son!" This ends the narrative unit and becomes the last words from the scene of Jesus' death. Is this conclusion the hope of the message of the Gospel? That if the Centurion is correct, that Jesus is the Son of God, then death is not the final word, but that the final word resides with God and what is to follow? A hope that has been taken away from the Jews because they have soured like the wine that Jesus accepted, but now resides

with the world who truly believes and accepts Jesus as their Lord and Saviour? This is the message that the Centurion conveys and reaffirms with his proclamation. Our hope is with God, for his Son has shown us the way and the Centurion accepted the path taken, because he knows very well that death is a daily reality faced by him as a soldier. But this was not the only reality. The Centurion witnessed all that happened to Jesus, from within Pilate's house all the way to the cross at Golgotha. He saw first-hand Jesus' loyalty to his Father and the courage to stay the course and persevere in order to carry out the plans for salvation. In the end when Jesus cried out, it was the fulfilment of the prophetic words of the psalmists, "*...To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were no put to shame.*" (Psalm 22:5). Because of the Centurion's keen vision and capabilities, to fully understand the things that are transpiring around him as an assessment of counter measures to take. He was able to arrive at a conclusion that not only comes with awareness, but also a faith that transcends national and religious boundaries. His proclamation opens the door to the world and becomes the gateway by which Mark demonstrates the direction that the Gospel message is or will be taking in the future.

Chapter 4

Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will discuss the importance of the narrative through the eyes of a modern day soldier. The meaning of the interactions by the characters, the shifting of setting used by Mark, and the significant acts that help to move the plot along, eventually climaxing with the Centurion's proclamation on Golgotha for the world to hear.

For any seasoned modern day soldier who dug their foxhole on the field of battle, their primary mission is to eliminate the enemy by any means necessary. Their primary purpose is to defend those who can't defend themselves from any formidable force. But their indirect goal is to observe and react to any injustice not only on his/her side of the fight, but the other side as well. In other words; a leader on the battlefield not only monitor the welfare of his soldier, but the enemy as well. It means, when the enemy no longer have the will to fight, a good leader will halt any pursue to eliminate, instead, he will offer aid and food and look out for the welfare of the enemy as well.

One significance of Mark's narrative was the shifting of scenes from one to the other. Mark utilized time to show his readers the beginning of a different scene. In the soldiers reading, time is one of the essence in his daily life. It symbolizes the moving of the day and its events, also the progression of any mission. Mark highlighted the time which entails the progression of Jesus mission of getting to the cross.

As Mark's narrative unfolded, the Centurion was without any doubt present from the beginning. As mentioned before, the Centurion was the eyes and the ears of the emperor in the frontline. In this story, he was the regulator for the governor. He observed every interaction between characters from the morning when the Jewish leaders presented Jesus to Pilate, until Jesus was crucified on the cross. Like Jesus, he was silent, but he was observing and calculating rather if justice is needed or not. He understood Pilate's claim of Jesus innocence, but was following his orders to get Jesus to the cross, despite his innocence. Through the mockery of Jesus by his own soldiers, followed by the death march of Jesus to Golgotha where He was further ridiculed by the crowd and abused by his soldiers, yet no defence or retaliation was offered up by Jesus.

Golgotha was the place where both Jesus and the Centurion came face to face on centre stage. For the Centurion, the offering of drinks to Jesus was two-fold as mentioned

earlier. Yet, the choice of the sour wine versus the wine mixed with myrrh is very telling. Jesus chose the bitter sour wine and declined the sedative wine with myrrh. If the Centurion is the keen observer looking to ensure the well-being of his soldiers as well as the enemy. I can say that as he witnessed Jesus' rejection by His own people and leaders, the undeserving treatment by his legion soldiers, He suffered through it all in order to get to the cross. The offer of the sour wine was his salute to Jesus for a job well done. It was also a symbol of the Centurion finally understanding Jesus' mission. But why did Mark emphasize the Centurion's confession/proclamation? As said before, a leader on the battlefield is also an agent of truth and justice. He witnessed the injustice upon Jesus, his duty was to report it to his superior. But what he saw in Jesus was not for his superior alone, rather it was for the entire world to know. He realized that there was someone mightier than his own God-Governor, Emperor, and Caesar. He saw an innocent man quietly accepting his fate, nailed and hung on a cross without a word until the end. In the Centurion's mind, "just how powerful is that God for someone to give up their life without fighting back?" His proclamation of who Jesus was followed Jesus' own proclamation to his Father. Connecting the two, the Centurion knew that his proclamation needed to be strong enough and powerful enough to be heard beyond the land of Jerusalem.

Secondly, Mark unfolded the narrative from Jesus coming in to Jerusalem bringing His Ministry into its walls. It was scorned and rejected by the Jews; however, it appeared acceptable by Pilate, whom proclaimed his innocence, but did not want to powerfully proclaim someone else as the Son of God, besides the Emperor, for fear of rejection by his own followers and soldiers who did not understand like the crowd. Therefore, it was carried out onto the streets of Jerusalem and outside of its walls. The significance of all this movement in and outside of Jerusalem was a demonstration of how Jesus' Ministry was not accepted by the Jews, even after the plethora of miracles done within the walls of Jerusalem and for all of Israel. Golgotha was significant because it was supposed to be the burial place of Jesus' Ministry, yet, it was the birth place of His Gospel. The proclamation by the Centurion was the first step and the milestone in administering the Gospel.

The act by the Centurion signifies truth, justice, selfless service, honor, and integrity. His proclamation entails the telling of the truth, even though it is an unpopular statement; this is the true sign of discipleship. It is the discipline and the courage to proclaim the truth about God through Jesus Christ. Although, Jesus mission was to die in

order to bring salvation to the sinful world. We as believers need to proclaim the truth of it to the world like the Centurion did on Mount Golgotha.

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