

# BNTC 2005 ~ Fourfold Repetitions in the Gospel of Mark

[T]he literary structure of the Pentateuch moves beyond genetic strata to purposeful strategy and beyond atomistic structures to comprehensive structure. It therefore shifts the interpretive focus from questions of origin and formation to the evidence for and effect of the resultant configuration and from independent genres to their participation in and contribution to the larger compositional fabric into which they are meaningfully woven. (V. J. Steiner)

## 1 The Basic Phenomenon

Very frequently in the canonical form of Mark's Gospel, we find important *Leitworte* repeated in four times within a pericope. Mark's use of repetition "is one of the most noticeable literary features" of the Gospel (Donahue and Harrington, 18).

A 'fourfold repetition' in its clearest and most basic form is the fourfold repetition of a lexical unit within a pericope. Depending on the delineation of pericopae, this phenomenon occurs between 50 and 60 times in Mark. Both the frequency of the occurrences and the frequent absence of this "benign feature" (Burkett, 13) in Matthew and Luke indicate it to be a compositional feature of Mark *in its canonical shape*.

### Some Examples of the Basic Phenomenon

Mark	Pericope	Term	Matthew	Luke
2:1–12	<i>Healing of the Paralytic</i>	κράβαττος 2:4, 9, 11, 12	9:1–8 (κλίνη) 9:2 [not]], 6	5:17–26 5:18 κλίνη [n]] 5:24 κλινίδιον
3:1–6	<i>Man with the Withered Hand</i>	χεῖρ 3:1, 3, 5, 5	12:9–14 12:10, 12	6:6–11 6:6, 8, 10, 10
3:22–30	<i>Beelzebul Controversy</i>	οἰκία 3:25, 25, 27, 27	12:22–30 12:25, 29, 29	11:14–23 11:17 οἶκος
4:35–41	<i>Stilling of the Storm</i>	πλοῖον 4:36, 36, 37, 37	8:23–27 8:23, 24	8:22–25 8:22 only
		ἄνεμος 4:37, 39, 39, 41	(ἄνεμοι) 8:26, 27	8:23, 24(-μος) 8:25 ἄνεμοι
5:1–20	<i>Gerasene Demoniac</i>	χοῖρος 5:11, 12, 13, 16	8:28–34 8:30, 31, 32	8: 26–39 8: 32,33
15:1–20:	<i>Roman Trial</i>	βασιλεὺς τῶν λουδαίων 15:2, 9, 12, 18	27:1–2, 11–31 2X β. τ. Ιουδ. 2X χριστός	23:2–5, 17–25 23:3 β. τ. Ιουδ 23:20 Ἰησοῦς
16:1–8	<i>Tomb Scene</i>	μνημεῖον 16:2, 3 5, 8	28:1–8 28:1 τάφος 28:8 μνημεῖον	24:1–12 1X μνήμα 3X μνημεῖον

### Observations:

- In only 20-25% of parallels do the fourfold repetitions occur in either Matthew or Luke or in both Matthew and Luke: e.g., in Mk 12:18–27 ἀδελφός; 14:66–72 Πέτρος.
- The *frequency* of the phenomenon, but not its origin, is due to redaction of canonical Mark.
- Identifying the basic phenomenon leads the reader seek out and identify variants of the phenomenon: e.g., the fourfold use of term and its cognate within a pericope as in the double occurrences of δίδασκω and διδαχή in Mk 1:21–28. This variant occurs about 15 times across the Gospel. It also leads the reader to recognize other repetition phenomena in the Gospel: e.g., *fivefold* repetitions of other *Leitworte*, a phenomenon which occurs about 10 times across the Gospel (e.g., γεωργός in Mk 12:1–12)

## 2 Reader Formation by the Redactor of Canonical Mark (“Leserlenkungssignale”)

The canonical form of Mark, like many of the biblical texts that it receives, is a text that was written for ‘close reading.’ The redactor must not only give his readers a new perspective but he must also ‘form’ the reader(s) to read well. Mark’s creative use of geography is a clear example of reader formation. Topographical markers become what Kowalski has termed *Leserlenkungssignale*—signals which lead the reader in a specific direction.

However, not only does the evangelist use topographical markers for his literary and theological ends, he uses verbal repetition patterns in an analogous way.

## 3 The Significance Four and Five within Mark

“Mark’s penchant for duplicate narratives and expressions suggests a deliberate parallelism, where actions that Jesus performs mainly in Jewish territory are paralleled among the Gentiles.” (Donahue and Harrington, 209)

In Mark, the Feeding of the FIVE Thousand (6:30–44) is mirrored in the subsequent the Feeding of the FOUR Thousand (8:1–9). The clearly deliberate repetition of the story has important narrative functions. In the poetics of repetition, variation—be it deliberate or non-deliberate—is of great significance (Sternberg). Commentators such as Hooker and Marcus, are quick to point out that the FOUR thousand have been too rapidly identified with the Gentiles. The fact that we have difficulty interpreting the significance of the numbers may not detract from the overall significance of these numbers.

Bar-Ilan maintains that the use of four in Genesis (four rivers, four corners of the earth, four seasons) represents cosmic perfection. Collins (78) sees the use of four in Dan 2 and Dan 7 and “perhaps even its selection in the first place may owe something to the cosmic significance of the number (as in four winds, for example).” These emphases, along with the emphasis in the Tabernacle Accounts of Exodus on the four sides of the altar may not have been lost on *some* of the readers of canonical Mark.

The FOUR thousand in the second feeding narrative is just as significant as the FIVE thousand in the first feeding. In a sense one might say that the 5000 represent where Jesus has come from and the 4000 represent where he is going to or maybe it is better to express this in terms of the community: that the 5000 represent where Mark’s community has come from and the 4000 represent where that community is going, its aim or goal.

By the use of numbers (5, 12, 4 and 7) and by his ‘transformation’ (*metamorphosis* see Mk 9: 2) of the narratives within his Gospel, Mark opens the eyes of his readers to see the world in a new way—‘clearly’—and no longer “like trees walking.” (Mk 8:24).

## 4 Conclusion

Intensified fourfold repetitions within canonical Mark are a compositional characteristic of the Second Gospel which shape the implied readers of the Gospel and give contemporary critics an insight into Mark’s theology and a lens to view the development of the Synoptic Gospels.

## 5 Bibliography

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