

Should Peter Walk on Water?



How to Study Stories in the Bible

1. Focus on the story itself, diving into the words of the story.
Understanding the story based on the literal meaning of the story.
("Pashat")

Mark 5:1-5

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him **out of the tombs** a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And **no one could bind him** anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he **wrenched the chains apart**, and he **broke the shackles** in pieces. **No one had the strength** to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was **always crying out and cutting himself** with stones.

Mark 5:6-13

And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”

For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.”

And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.”

So, he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

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The Two Promises

- **Mark 6:22[b]-23:** And the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.”
- **Esther 5:3:** And the king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.”
- **Esther 7:2:** the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”

	Similar Roles	
Book of Esther		Story of John the Baptist Beheaded
Haman	Villain	Herodias
Mordechai	Hero	John the Baptist
King of Persia	Authority to kill Hero	King Herod
Queen Esther	Can save Hero	The daughter? No one?

	Similar Events/ Circumstances	
Book of Esther	Banquets	Story of John the Baptist Beheaded
Three banquets (Queen Vashti (1), Queen Esther (2))		Herod's birthday
Queen Vashti	Suggestive Dance	Daughter of Herodias
Haman is "filled with fury" against Mordechai (Es. 3:5)	Evil thoughts against the Hero	Herodias has a "grudge" against John
King of Persia cannot undo his order to kill the Jews	Unbreakable Vow	Herod will not break his oath

Lessons for the Roman Christians

- Like Esther, do not be afraid to identify yourself and take risks.
- Like Mordechai, be cunning and wise to try to prevent as much harm as possible.
- The example of John's disciples in Mark 6:29: "When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb."

Esther: A Lesson for People in Exile

- Jews remaining in Persia after the exile from Babylon and the order permitting them to return to Israel
- The main characters are engaged in Persian culture (drinking, murder, sex, palace intrigue)
- The main characters violate Torah (Esther marries the King of Persia)
- God (even though never mentioned in Esther) is present in mess of human behavior
- God uses the faithfulness of even morally compromised people to accomplish His purpose

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2. Focus on the “remez,” the hint in the story that points to another passage in the bible. Incorporate the lessons from that second passage into the story being studied.
3. Compare the story to how the same story is told in other parts of the Bible. But it is not necessary to lump the stories together and teach them as a single story.

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

Matthew 14:22-33 (cont'd)

And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Talmid

1. The “definition” is student, scholar, disciple.
2. In practice, it is more like an apprentice than a student. The talmid works with the rabbi (“teacher”) to learn and imitate what the rabbi does.
3. A talmid is totally devoted to becoming like the rabbi and would spend his entire time listening, learning, and observing how to understand scripture and put it into practice.
4. A talmid will imitate whatever the rabbi is doing.
5. A talmid will follow without knowing where the rabbi is going but trusting that the rabbi will bring them to the place where the teaching makes the most sense.
6. After learning and observing for a while, the rabbi will send out a talmid to practice being like the rabbi.

Lessons of the Talmid

1. We should always seek to imitate Jesus even if the circumstances seem impossible.
2. When Jesus commands us to come we need to “step out of the boat” without hesitation.
3. We need to trust (“not doubt”) that Jesus has empowered us to do what he has commanded us to do even if the circumstances cause us to think differently.
4. These lessons speak to Matthew’s audience:
 - a. Outsiders who were not seen as the most able or likely to succeed.
 - b. People who likely could have doubts about their ability to follow Jesus.

Mark 6:45-52

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

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To Pass By (“parechomai”)

Ex. 33:18-19: Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

Ex. 34:5-6a: The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him . . .

1 Ki. 19:11-12: And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.

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Lessons of “passing by”

1. As with Moses, the Lord will be present and lead His people in His glory and mercy.
2. As with Elijah, continue to serve even when you feel abandoned and alone.
3. In connection with the “lesson of the loaves,” the Lord will provide and empower you to serve even in impossible situations.
4. These lessons seem to speak to Mark’s audience:
 - a. Christians in Rome who were suffering ostracism and persecution.
 - b. People who likely could have trouble seeing God in their difficulties.
 - c. People who likely could have doubts (“hardened hearts”) about trusting God to lead them out of their difficulties.

John 6:15-21

Perceiving then that they were about to take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

The Problem of Capernaum or Bethsaida?



- Archeology has uncovered only one city known as Bethsaida. It is in the wrong direction.
- There were many smaller cities around Capernaum (like suburbs). We do not know the names of these cities.
- “Bethsaida” means “place of fishing,” which could easily have been the name of one of these cities.

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Jesus is King . . .

Job 9:8: [God] alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea.

Job 38:16: [God asks Job] “Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?”

[Jewish Wisdom literature] **Sirach 24:5:** “Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss.”

Greek mythology attributed the ability to pass over water (like the wind or riding in a chariot) to certain kings: Poseidon, Orion, Euphemus, and Pythagorus.

... But not the king you seek

John 6:24-27: So, when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”