

**PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN:
NOT THE *INNER CIRCLE***

David McAuley PhD

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When a jury is taken to view the scene of a crime it is to provide relevant data to assist them in arriving at their verdict – they are not the judge’s favoured group, yet he needs them fully equipped.

Introduction

The perennial view that Peter, James, and John were the “inner circle” of apostles has held sway for centuries. Origen (185–254) claimed that only Peter, James, and John were deemed worthy of beholding Jesus’s transfiguration.¹ Along similar lines, Chrysostom (349–407) claims that Jesus chose Peter, James, and John because they were superior to the rest.² According to Jerome (347–420), Peter, James, and John were an “inner circle” that prefigured the apostolate, martyrdom, and purity of heart.³ Origen, Chrysostom and Jerome held a high view of Peter, James, and John which might have sown the seed for the universal acceptance of an “inner circle” of apostles.⁴ There can be no doubt that most commentators posit Peter, James, and John as the inner circle through a holistic analysis of the gospel narratives. For example, Cullmann asserts the Synoptic authors claimed that Peter occupied a special position in the group around Jesus:

With the sons of Zebedee and his brother Andrew he [Peter] belonged to the innermost and most intimate circle of those associated with Jesus. Even in this inner circle (Mk. 9:2 and par.), however, he had an important position of precedence, so that the Synoptic Gospels always portray him as standing in the forefront, Mk. 9:5. Thus Jesus allows only Peter and the Sons of Zebedee to go

¹ Origen, *Comm. Matt.*, Book 12, 36.

² Quoted by Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, 45, 3 ad. 4.

³ ACC II, 76. In Homily 77 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament II, Mark*. (ed. T. C. Oden and C. A. Hall; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).

⁴ See Hendriksen, *Matthew* (NTC; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 664.

with Him into the house of the ruler of the synagogue, Mk. 5:37.⁵

In like manner, Bockmuehl assigns significance to Peter as one of the inner circle because of his presence at the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration, the eschatological discourse, and the agony in the garden of Gethsemane.⁶ Similarly, Wiarda claims Peter as one of the inner circle based on attendance at the transfiguration, Gethsemane, the resurrection of Jairus'; daughter, and the discourse with James, John, and Andrew (Mark 13:3).⁷ Not only is the view widespread in New Testament scholarship,⁸ it has also exerted an influence in broader aspects of exegesis. For example, some scholars consider the giving of nicknames as another factor which lends weight to inner circle status.⁹ France explains the presence of only Peter, James, and John at the resurrection of Jairus' daughter:

The limitation to three disciples may have been necessitated (as in 1:29–30?) by the size of the room in which the girl's body lay, but is in any case consistent with

⁵ Cullmann. "Πέτρος," *TDNT* 6.101

⁶ M. Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 25, 79, 132.

⁷ T. Wiarda, *Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship* (WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 77, 83, 89, 103, 127.

⁸ For example, E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 106; W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 318; M. J. Wilkins, "Disciples." *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J. B. Green, S. McKnight, I. H. Marshall, Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 178; M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1991), 150; M. L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 183; J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Pillar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 262; BDAG 'Πέτρος,' 810–11.

⁹ J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (EKKNT II/1; Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1978), 140.

Jesus's tendency to allow only the three 'nicknamed' disciples (see on 3:17) to be with him at moments of special revelatory significance; cf. 9:2 (the transfiguration); 13:3 (the final discourse; with Andrew); 14:33 (Gethsemane).¹⁰

In similar fashion, Casey claims that Jesus gave Aramaic epithets to the inner circle of three disciples, Peter (כפא), and Jacob and John (בני רעם),¹¹ and Culpepper notes that 'only the inner three, Peter, James, and John, are given new names.'¹² However, despite universal acceptance there is no mention of an inner circle of apostles in the New Testament. The idea has been inferred from certain biblical passages (mentioned above) and has become an established fact of New Testament exegesis. Consequently, this paper seeks to answer two questions: Does the presence of only Peter, James and John at three important events establish them as the inner circle?¹³ Does the giving of nicknames to only Peter, James and John establish, or lend weight to, them as the inner circle?

Is "inner circle" an inference to the best explanation?

In the absence of any explicit reference, it is obvious that the notion of Peter, James and John as the "inner circle" is an inference drawn from the textual data. But is this a correct inference? Or rather, is it an inference to the best explanation? To answer these questions, an appeal can be made to a method used in the Philosophy of Science – "inference to the best explanation." Gilbert Harman defines the term and says it corresponds approximately to what others have called *the method of elimination*, *eliminative induction*, and *theoretical inference*:

¹⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 6, 239.

¹¹ M. Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*, (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 84.

¹² R. A. Culpepper, *John: The Son of Zebedee The Life of a Legend* (SPNT; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 40.

¹³ Andrew's presence at *only* the eschatological discourse mitigates his inclusion in the circle.

In making this inference one infers, from the fact that a certain hypothesis would explain the evidence, to the truth of that hypothesis. In general, there will be several hypotheses which might explain the evidence, so one must be able to reject all such alternative hypotheses before one is warranted in making the inference. Thus one infers, from the premise that a given hypothesis would provide a 'better' explanation for the evidence than would any other hypothesis, to the conclusion that the given hypothesis is true.¹⁴

Peter Lipton suggests that inference should be 'inference to the best of the available competing explanations, when the best one is sufficiently good.'¹⁵ He encourages the examination of the features of the explanation to determine in what way it is better or sufficiently good. The problem is that the inner circle explanation is the *only* one proffered. Its acceptance therefore rests on it being sufficiently good as opposed to being better than others. Yet, the idea that Jesus had chosen an inner circle is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, it exposes him to the charge of showing favouritism and creating a kind of two-tiered apostolic status among his closest followers. Such an approach to leadership and group dynamics is not congruent with Jesus's character and the content of his teaching (see below). Moreover, the term "inner circle" is inappropriate because it has been imbued with a meaning of "more secret or exclusive."¹⁶ It is hard to escape the sense of elitism that the term conveys and the hint of snobbery that may ensue from its abuse. The former notion is certainly reflected in Heil's exegesis of Mark 9:2a: 'The audience recalls that Jesus did not allow anyone to accompany him to witness the revelation of his power to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead except this same *elite* three...' ¹⁷ Consider also Austin Cline's comments on the

¹⁴ G. H. Harman, 'Inference to the Best Explanation,' *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 88–9.

¹⁵ P. Lipton, "Inference to the Best Explanation," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (ed. W. H. Newton-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 5.

¹⁶ OED. 'An exclusive group close to the centre of power of an organisation or movement, regarded as elitist and secretive.'

¹⁷ J. P. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2–8*,

transfiguration:

Jesus shows something special to the apostles, but not all of them — just Peter, James, and John. Why were they singled out for special, insider information that they couldn't even reveal to the other nine apostles until after Jesus had risen from the dead? This story would have given a boost in prestige to whoever was associated with those three in the early Christian church.¹⁸

Certainly, a boost in prestige might not have been a bad thing for the early Christian communities, yet a particularly pernicious inner circle mentality can result from having *more prestige* than another. Such an attitude probably contributed to the division in Corinth where some had declared allegiance to Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ.¹⁹ Thus, the seeds of faction and division are sown with attainment of greater prestige the very antithesis of the Christ paradigm. Based on these observations alone, the inner circle explanation is not sufficiently good. Secondly, there are two incidents recorded by Mark that counter the notion that Jesus would have approved of an “inner circle” (Mark 9:14–50 and 10:32–41).

Jesus's disapproval of inner circle mentality: Mark 9:14–50

In the aftermath of the transfiguration, Jesus had cause to rebuke John (Zebedee) following his demonstration of a divisive inner circle mentality. The passage that links the two incidents (Mark 9:30–37) concerns the disciples' response to Jesus's announcement of his impending death and resurrection, and the revelation of their discussion of who was the greatest amongst them – the first hint that status within the group was an issue. The significance of Jesus's reaction to the disciples' attitude is emphasised by the repeated refrain “in my name.” The

Matt 17:1–8 and Luke 9:28–36 (AnBib 144; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 153. Italics mine.

¹⁸ A. Cline, “Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:1–8),”

<http://atheism.about.com/od/biblegospelofmark/a/mark09a.htm>.

¹⁹ 1 Cor 1:10–12. See G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Raids: Eerdmans, 1987), 59, who describes the problem as “spiritual elitism.”

phrase, and variations of it, appears four times in verses 37–41. In verse 37 it qualifies how a child is to be welcomed (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι μου); in verse 38, how a demon had been exorcised (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι σου); in verse 39, how a miracle is to be performed (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι μου); in verse 41, how a drink of water is given to a follower of Jesus (ἐν ὀνόματι ὅτι Χριστοῦ ἐστε). In verses 37–39 the phrase is used to present John and the other apostles as a foil to a successful, yet anonymous, exorcist: ‘we saw someone casting out demons *in your name*, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.’ The phrase can have several meanings depending on context, such as “with proclamation of the name,” “in obedience,” “in the sphere of power” or “in the power.”²⁰ The latter would seem to be the sense in which Mark uses it in 9:38–39 – Jesus’s followers are commissioned to act in his power by performing miracles such as exorcising demons. However, ‘the name of Jesus shows its power only where a man joins Jesus in faith and obedience, and does the will of God. Use of the name of Jesus for independent ends is a misuse and condemns to failure.’²¹ Clearly this was the case in the event recorded by Mark immediately after the Transfiguration (9:14–29). The failure of Jesus’s disciples to cast out the demon was due to their lack of faith and dependency upon him (9:19; cf. vv. 23–24): in other words, they were not casting out demons *in Jesus’s name*. That this failure was significant for Mark can be noted in what he records in 9:38–41. John, as spokesperson for “the twelve,” admits their attempt to prevent the anonymous exorcist from ministering “in Jesus’s name” because he did not belong as one of their group (more narrowly, the apostolic band of twelve described in Mark 9:35).²² For John, and the other apostles, the

²⁰ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” *TDNT* 5.271.

²¹ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα,” *TDNT* 5.277–8.

²² The bracketing of 9:35 (καθίζω – sitting down *with the twelve*) and 10:1 (ἀνίστημι – getting up), suggests that Jesus’s instructions described in 9:35–50 are directed to the twelve apostles only.

issue was the exorcist's lack of apostolic status and group membership – something which drew an emphatic rebuke from Jesus – Μὴ κωλύετε αὐτόν.²³ The anonymous exorcist was obviously commissioned to perform the miracle although he was not following the apostles. The incident provoked Jesus into issuing a dire warning against the attitude of John and the other apostles: ‘Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea’ (Mark 9:42). The “little ones” (τῶν μικρῶν τούτων) of verse 42 is commonly understood to refer to the humble Christian community or equated with the “child” (παιδίων) of verse 37.²⁴ However, taking account of the immediate literary context, it is better to view the “little ones” as referring to those like the anonymous exorcist in verse 38.²⁵ What makes him μικρῶν is having a lesser status than an apostle: diminutive in status, not age, the anonymous exorcist was a stranger, not even a member of Jesus's company. It may well be that Jesus intended to group all non-apostolic disciples, of any age, as τῶν μικρῶν τούτων in response to John's opinion that they are insignificant. Thus “little ones” is antithetical to “the greatest” (9:34) of the apostles. Furthermore, in Mark 9:42, the verb σκανδαλίζω is used of someone who “trips” or “disables” another's discipleship.²⁶ What seems to be in view is the seriousness of the apostles' jealousy in seeking to disable or stifle another believer's expression of faith in

²³ κωλύετε is a 2nd person plural imperative and thus a command directed to all twelve apostles.

²⁴ See R. A. Cole, *Mark* (TNTC; Leicester: IVP, 1989), 222.

²⁵ Lane, *Mark*, 345; contra Cole who prefers “children” to “lowly disciples.” But Jesus uses παιδίων to refer to children; see also France, *Mark*, 381, who views “little ones” as denoting disciples of any age but does not link the phrase specifically to the successful exorcist of 9:38.

²⁶ France, *Mark*, 380. Not “to rob of eternal salvation,” as in Stählin, “σκανδαλίζω,” *TDNT* 7.351.

Jesus²⁷ – by preventing the anonymous exorcist from casting out the demon they were hindering his service to Jesus. Causing someone to cease to be an effective disciple was a serious crime in Jesus’s eyes, as evidenced by his instruction in 9:43–50. John wanted Jesus to chastise those “non-apostles” who were casting out demons in his name – but Jesus rebuked John for his “inner circle” mentality, namely, that only the “official Jesus party” (the twelve) should be doing this. Yet, some of them had failed in this very task (v. 28). Indeed, Jesus’s teaching in Mark 9:39–50 is a direct response to John’s clannishness, and it is noteworthy that he ends by commanding John and the others to ‘be at peace with one another’ (Mark 9:50). This command refers back to the factionalism of the apostles recorded in 9:34, 38 and prefigures the internal conflict of 10:35–45, especially verse 41 (see below). Not only is Mark 9:42 ‘a sober warning against inhibiting, injuring, or destroying the faith of simple and ordinary disciples,’²⁸ it is a rebuke for any harbouring the notion of inner circle elitism.

Jesus’s disapproval of inner circle mentality: Mark 10:35–40

In Mark’s gospel, *glory* is associated with Jesus’s *Parousia* or his future kingdom (Mark 8:38; 13:26) and is the context through which James and John view *sitting in Jesus’s glory* (Mark 10:37).²⁹ In this episode the two brothers ask Jesus for favoured status within the group – specifically, for positions of honour at the messianic banquet or in the eschatological kingdom. They had expectations that Jesus would restore the throne of David, imminently in Jerusalem (Mark 9:1, John 6:15 and the suggestion in Mark 6:45), and they had their eyes on

²⁷ The verb is to prevent/hinder, not “tell to stop” as in NIV. The apostles’ actions were stronger, perhaps physical. A similar incident is described in Num. 11:26–30.

²⁸ Edwards, *Mark*, 292–3.

²⁹ The word “glory” occurs these three times in Mark’s Gospel, and only in 10:37 is it the possession of Jesus.

the benefits he could provide for them as royal Messiah.³⁰ However, on hearing their request, Jesus immediately turns the issue to his own death in a reorientation of glory: ‘But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”’ (Mark 10:38). The cup is clearly a reference to Jesus’s suffering and death,³¹ the metaphor also used in the OT to signify judgment and retribution.³² In Mark 10:38, *βάπτισμα* connotes the ‘overwhelming tragedy which would engulf like flood-water,’³³ and after Jesus’s death the term recalled his crucifixion and resurrection.³⁴ Jesus’s understanding of his glory does not chime with that of James and John. Furthermore, several scholars have suggested that Mark 10:35–40 is a possible source for the Johannine doxa-theme in the fourth gospel where John uses the verb *ὑψόω* to mean elevate/lift up (on the cross) as well as exaltation (to the throne room of heaven).³⁵ According to Morris, ‘The glorification of Christ is connected with what appears to human understanding as the very opposite of glory. Jesus is looking to the cross as he speaks

³⁰ Cf. Casey, *Aramaic*, 205, who suggests that James and John were ready to die with Jesus.

Yet, this seems to ignore Jesus’s comment: ‘you do not know what you ask’?

³¹ Mark 14:23–24, 36. S. Légasse, “Approche de l’episode préévangélique des Fils de Zébédée,” *NTS* 20 (1974): 167–77.

³² Ps 75:7–8; Isa 51:17–22; Jer 25:15; Ezek 23:31–35.

³³ E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: the Markan soteriology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 155.

³⁴ Rom 6:4; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21.

³⁵ D. Hill. “The Request of Zebedee’s Sons and the Johannine Doxa-Theme,” *NTS* 13 (1967): 281–5; P. Ensor, “The Glorification of the Son of Man: An Analysis of John 13:31–32,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58.2 (2007): 229–252, esp. pp. 250–51.

of glory.’³⁶ Ensor also states that the glorification of Jesus in John’s gospel refers to his death and exaltation as a single event.³⁷ Although Jesus affirms that James and John will drink the cup of suffering and be overwhelmed with tragedy, this will not happen during his earthly ministry: ‘But to sit on my right or on my left, this is not mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared’ (Mark 10:40). John Muddiman, noting that seats are allocated but persons are prepared, proposes that God has pre-ordained the Roman execution party (first mentioned in 10:34) to prepare the seats on the right and left of the crucified Christ³⁸ – Mark records that two robbers were crucified with Jesus, one on his right and one on his left (Mark 15:27). Accordingly, Jesus is not admitting to having no influence in the assigning of seats in his kingdom, but that his Father has already decided who will prepare the crucifixion seating arrangement (see below). The virtue of Muddiman’s analysis is that it makes sense of Jesus’s comments in the context of reoriented glory – James’ and John’s view of Jesus’s glory is deficient because they are asking to sit in the wrong place! The Roman style of death by crucifixion required the victim to “sit” on a *sedile*, a wooden peg positioned on the vertical beam of the cross.³⁹ The provision of a “seat” on the cross was not a concession made to the victim, but a practical matter that prolonged the torture by providing support for the body. The Roman philosopher Seneca, who lived at the same time as Jesus, offers an early witness to the details of crucifixion in his criticism of Maecenas who wanted to prolong his life through the unbearable suffering of crucifixion:

³⁶ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 560.

³⁷ Ensor, “Glorification,” 250–51.

³⁸ J. Muddiman, “The Glory of Jesus, Mark 10:37,” in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 57.

³⁹ M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the ancient world, and the folly of the message of the cross* (London: SCM, 1977), 25.

Fashion me with a palsied hand, Weak of foot, and a cripple; Build upon me a crook-backed hump Shake my teeth till they rattle All is well, if my life remains. Save, oh, save it, I pray you, ***Though I sit on the piercing cross!***... I should deem him most despicable had he wished to live up to the very time of crucifixion: "Nay," he cries, "you may weaken my body if you will only leave the breath of life in my battered and ineffective carcass! Maim me if you will, but allow me, misshapen and deformed as I may be, just a little more time in the world! ***You may nail me up and set my seat upon the piercing cross!***" Is it worth while to weigh down upon one's own wound, and hang impaled upon a gibbet, that one may but postpone something which is the balm of troubles, the end of punishment?⁴⁰

In terms of *glory*, Jesus, James and John were talking at cross-purposes. The brothers are essentially asking to be the "inner circle," which necessitates a lesser role for the other apostles because there are only two "seats" available! Their self-centred petition inevitably evoked anger in the other ten apostles: 'Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John' (Mark 10:41). The outrage of the ten revealed their opinion of the importance of their own dignity – selfish ambition and rivalry had permeated the apostolic band. Jesus clearly denounces the idea of privileged status among his apostles. Moreover, their showcasing of inner circle status would serve as an inimical paradigm for present and future generations of Christian communities.

Does the giving of nicknames establish (lend weight to) an inner circle?

Gundry claims that Jesus's renaming of Peter, James and John indicates his special liking of them. They make up an inner circle among the Twelve because of their presence at the events described in Mark 5:37, 9:2, 14:33, and 13:3 (with Andrew).⁴¹ It must be noted that giving of a nickname, in and of itself, does not necessarily support the notion of special liking. In

⁴⁰ Seneca, *Moral Epistles 101*. Italics mine. See also Irenaeus (*Against Heresies II, 24*): 'The very form of the cross, too, has five extremities, two in length, two in breadth, and one in the middle, on which [last] the person rests who is fixed by the nails.'

⁴¹ R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 169.

Mark's gospel, Jesus never directly addresses Peter, James or John using these nicknames. Only in Luke 22:34 does he use the vocative, Πέτρε. The context is Peter's denial of Jesus, ironically when he is at his least imperturbable ("rock-like"). Just before this, Jesus warned Peter that Satan had requested "to sift" them like wheat (Luke 22:31), calling him Simon (Σίμων Σίμων) – the one and only use of Πέτρος, in the vocative, expresses a negative irony. Jesus is being satirical since Peter never demonstrated rock-like traits or characteristics during Jesus's earthly ministry.⁴² Lane suggests that the giving of the surname sets Simon (Peter) apart as spokesman and representative of the twelve during Jesus's ministry.⁴³ In contrast, Cullmann ascribes a representative role to Peter via "rock" such that the name is more than a reflection of Peter's character – he is given the "role" of rock by Jesus. Yet Cullman concedes that this special role does not mean he leads the other disciples during the lifetime of Jesus.⁴⁴ Cullman paves the way for Simon *becoming* the rock at Pentecost.⁴⁵ Another perspective on Simon's surname is advanced by Quast: 'In the final analysis, it is best to state that the naming of Peter in the Gospel of John has primarily a Christological function and it serves a secondary purpose of *highlighting the 'rock-like' character or the role that Jesus intended Peter to assume in the Christian community.*'⁴⁶ Certainly, the giving of a name in antiquity had more profound meaning than assigning inner circle membership. There may be more merit in viewing a name given by God as signalling the beginning of a new character,

⁴² M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SCM, 1965), 51, notes that Peter is the embodiment of the disciples' lack of understanding and their failure.

⁴³ Lane, *Mark*, 134.

⁴⁴ Cullmann, "Πέτρος," *TDNT* 6.103.

⁴⁵ See also Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 101.

⁴⁶ K. Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple: Figures for a Community in Crisis* (JSNTSup 32; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 41. Italics mine.

relationship or career – for example, Abraham (Gen 17:5), Jacob (Gen 32:28), John the Baptist (Luke 1:11–17) and Jesus (Matt 1:21).⁴⁷ The idea that Peter was a member of an inner circle because Jesus gave him a new name is suggestive.

Both ancient and modern interpreters have tended to spiritualise the nickname, Ἰοὶ Βροντῆς (sons of thunder). For example, the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (263–340) wrote, ‘Thunder here refers to the preaching of the gospel.’⁴⁸ Likewise, Basil the Great (330–379) claims: ‘That the gospel is like thunder is made evident by the disciples who were given a new name by the Lord: sons of thunder.’⁴⁹ But there is little evidence that James and John were particularly accomplished evangelists during Jesus’s lifetime. Others appeal to their zeal and potential as thundering witnesses.⁵⁰ With few exceptions commentators have puzzled over the relationship between the nickname βoανηργές and Mark’s interpretation of it – Ἰοὶ Βροντῆς. The issue spirals around whether the source of Mark’s βoανηργές is Greek or Semitic. If βoανηργές has a Semitic origin how does Mark transliterate so that it corresponds to Ἰοὶ Βροντῆς? If the name is divided as Βoανη–ργες then a transliteration of בְּנֵי רֶגֶשׁ is possible. This takes Βoανη– as equivalent to בְּנֵי (*b^ene–* meaning “sons of”) and ργες to רֶגֶשׁ (*regesh*). However, רֶגֶשׁ can mean “unrest/commotion” and “conspire,” but not “thunder.” Furthermore, the transliteration ignores the odd vowel combination (oα) in βoανηργές – a transliteration of βανε– or βονε– would have been closer. This option necessitates “thunder” as a free translation otherwise James and John are sons of commotion or sons who conspire. John Root proposes Βoανη– as a transliteration of בְּנֵי and –ργης as a transliteration of רֶעֶר

⁴⁷ See also Morris, *John*, 140–1.

⁴⁸ Commentary on Psalms (Ps 77:18).

⁴⁹ Homily 13 (on Ps 29:3).

⁵⁰ J. Roloff, *Apostolat–Verkündigung–Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965), 148.

(*ra'ash* meaning “quake/shake”) rather than רגז. He draws on a translation technique that replaced the Hebrew ayin with the Greek gamma. Root concludes that James and John are ‘Sons of (the) quaking (heavens)’ which is parallel to “Sons of Thunder.” Again, “thunder” is a free translation of “quake/shake.” Randall Buth suggests that Mark originally wrote Βονερέγεμ, Βονε– being a transliteration of the Hebrew בני (“sons of”). Mark then transliterated רעם (*ra'am*) meaning “storm/thunder” by replacing ע (Hebrew ayin) with γ (Greek gamma) – to render ρεγεμ.⁵¹ A copyist then Grecized the first part from Βον– to Βοαν– (βοάω meaning “to shout/cry out”) and in the second part deleted a vowel (ε) and changed a final consonant (ς to μ) to produce ργεσ from ρεγεμ.⁵² The latter portion (ργεσ) now takes on a meaning of “workers” (ἐργατάι). Buth then proposes that *shout* “corresponds nicely with the loudness associated with ‘thunder’” giving a meaning of “shout workers.” Yet another option is to view βοανηργές and Υἱοὶ Βροντῆς having Greek or Latin origins, and as paraphrases of each other – that is, not one and the same name in different languages. Uittenbogaard assumes a Greek/Latin source and suggests that βοα– could be derived from the verbs βοάω or Βοή (to shout/cry out) which is reflected in the Latin root *bo-* which means “roaring.” He develops his etymology of βοανηργές by linking the Latin *bos*, which means ox, to the Greek word for ox, βοῦς. The second part of the name relates to ἐνέργεια (activity). He identifies congruence between the compound βοανηργές and the regular compound use of ἐνέργεια and concludes that βοανηργές means “(they) act like oxen” or “busy lowing.”⁵³ The significance of this

⁵¹ See J. T. Rook, “BOANERGES, SONS OF THUNDER” (Mark 3 17),” *JBL* 100 (1981): 94–95, esp. p. 94, for the examples of this transliterating convention.

⁵² R. Buth, “Mark 3:17 BONEREGEM and Popular Etymology,” *JSNT* 10 (1981): 29–33. See also Casey, *Aramaic*, 198.

⁵³ A. Uittenbogaard, “Βοανηργες,” <http://www.abarim->

derivation of βοανηργές (as a paraphrase of Υἱοὶ Βροντῆς) is that James and John make a lot of noise, not necessarily of a positive kind. Such a view coheres with the two brothers as “sons of commotion” who cause unrest, or men who engage in plotting/conspiring (Mark 10:37, 41). Although the etymological studies mentioned above are speculative attempts at determining the derivation of the name βοανηργές, it may be argued that both Semitic and Greek/Latin origins of βοανηργές reflect a satirical significance – James and John are windbags who are all talk and no action (all thunder and no lightening)!

If the origin and derivation of the name βοανηργές is inconclusive, the occasion of its giving may be easier to locate. There is no good reason to doubt that Jesus named James and John “Sons of Thunder” following an episode recorded in Luke 9:51–56. Here, James and John ask a question after Jesus has been denied hospitality by Samaritan villagers: ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ (Luke 9:54). Fire (πῦρ) appears mostly as “heavenly fire” – a means used by God to execute judgment.⁵⁴ In both the OT and NT, fire is an instrument of God’s punishment.⁵⁵ The episode evokes 2 Kgs 1:1–16 (4 Reigns 1:10) where Elijah brought down fire from

publications.com/Meaning/Boanerges.html#.VuaWc0C8Q3g. He also suggests that “thunder” might have referred to Salome who petitioned Jesus on behalf of her sons, James and John (Matt 20:20–21).

⁵⁴ BDAG “πῦρ,” 898. See also Luke 12:49–53 and 17:29.

⁵⁵ Lang, “πῦρ,” *TDNT* 6.936, 942. See O. Betz, “Donnersöhne, Menschenfischer und der davidische Messias,” *Revue de Qumran* 3 (1961) 50, where he comments on Gen 19:24.

heaven as God’s judgment on the representatives of the king of Samaria.⁵⁶ Jesus rebuke⁵⁷ reveals their misunderstanding of the messianic mission and their misappropriation of God’s power: ‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of.’ At this point, “Sons of Fire” would have been a suitable epithet, if only because James and John harboured an overinflated opinion of their own capacity to command fire from heaven as the exercise of judgment on the Samaritans.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Jesus had already instructed them on the correct response to the inhospitable Samaritans – ‘shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them’ (Luke 9:5). Thus, their misappropriation of the divine power is most likely what lies behind the giving of the nickname. Moreover, it is noteworthy that “thunder” also served as a powerful weapon wielded by God against his enemies. In 1 Reigns 2:10, Hannah prays, ‘The Lord ascended to the heavens and thundered (βροντάω for רעם). He will judge earth’s ends and gives strength to our kings and will exalt the horn of his anointed.’ In 1 Reigns 7:10, ‘... the Lord thundered (βροντάω for רעם) with a mighty voice in that day against the Philistines...’ In Ps 77:18 (LXX Ps 76:19), thunder and lightening is a pair of weapons used by God to afflict plague upon Egypt. And in Ps 18:13–14 (LXX 17:14–15), David describes how God routed his enemies using thunder and lightening (cf. 2 Sam 22:14–15 and 2 Reigns 22:14–15).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ For Luke 9:54, some manuscripts (A C D W Δ Θ Ψ) include, *ὡς καὶ Ἡλίας ἐποίησεν.*

⁵⁷ Luke’s language of rebuke is similar to Mark’s in 8:33: *στραφεῖς δὲ ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς: ὁ δὲ ἐπιστραφεῖς καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐπετίμησεν.*

⁵⁸ Contra D. Parker, ‘Sons of Thunder,’ in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, D. E. Orton; New York: Brill: 1994), 146. He claims Jesus is making a witty classical allusion to Castor and Polydeuces, the twin sons of Zeus the Thunderer.

⁵⁹ Note also Diodorus Siculus (8, 11, 2) who describes the fate of Agathocles after he

James' and John's misappropriation of the messianic mission probably lies behind the giving of their nickname. They are two like-minded men who repeatedly misunderstood the divine approval of Jesus's rejection on the road to Jerusalem, and wrongly called on God's (thundering) judgment against the Samaritans. Like Πέτρος, βοανηργές does not imply special liking or inner circle membership, but unlike Πέτρος, it is not complimentary but conveys a pejorative assessment of the two brothers – βοανηργές is a disparaging nickname.⁶⁰

At the Transfiguration: inference to a better explanation?

Beare claims that it is “difficult to point to a single detail (of the transfiguration) that can be taken definitely to indicate historical reminiscence rather than religious symbolism.”⁶¹ Likewise, Chilton asserts that it is inappropriate to reduce the Transfiguration narrative to historical events.⁶² However, the transfiguration has been regarded as a real, historical event and the historical-narrative approach to the text in this article coheres with such a

misappropriated stones intended for the building of Athena's temple – he was struck with lightning, his house was consecrated to the goddess and named “House of Thunder” (Ονομάζεται Ἐμβρονταῖον). See BDAG “Βοανηργές,” 179.

⁶⁰ Although see M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Rhetorical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 145–6, who suggests the origin of Simon's new name is explained by πετρῶδες in Mark 4:5, 16, thus Πέτρος predicts his hard-heartedness – Simon is “rocky-ground.”

⁶¹ F. W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 142. See also E. Lohmeyer, “Die Verklarung Jesu nach dem Markus-Evangelium,” *ZNTW* 21 (1922): 185–215.

⁶² B. Chilton, “The Transfiguration: Dominical Assurance and Apostolic Vision,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 115–24, esp. p. 122.

view.⁶³ The gospel of Mark follows the pattern of a Greco-Roman biographical narrative which proceeds chronologically.⁶⁴ The beginnings of the narrative introduce an exigency, problem or defect that must be overcome; the middle describes constraints used to address the exigency; the end is where resolution is reached. Thus, not only is the ordering of material important, but the narrative progresses in a way such that episodes are located in relation to each other ‘in a nexus of cause-and-effect relations.’⁶⁵ My proposal is that the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–13) should be understood in terms of its cause-and-effect relationship with the apostolic mutiny instigated by Peter in Mark 8:32 – see below. The exigency is the disciples’ refusal to accept the messianic mission summarised by Jesus in Mark 8:31. The narrative progresses with Jesus’s teaching on the necessity of sacrificial suffering and death for his followers with a concluding warning for any disciple ashamed of Jesus because of his predicted fate (Mark 8:34–9:1). In its (historical) narrative context, the transfiguration can therefore be viewed as a constraint used to address the exigency of an attitude that disdains the role of death and resurrection in the messianic mission.

The confrontation between Jesus and Peter, recorded in Mark 8:33, extended to the whole disciple-group – ‘the other disciples shared Peter’s conviction that Jesus was

⁶³ H. Baltensweiler, “Die Verklärung Jesu. Historisches Ereignis und synoptische Berichte” (ATANT 33; Zurich: Zwingli, 1959); M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc* (Paris:, 1947); A. Trites, “The Transfiguration of Jesus: The Gospel in Microcosm,” *EvQ* 51 (1979): 67–79, esp. p. 68.

⁶⁴ France, *Mark*, 4–11; Gundry, *Mark*, 1049–51, includes a more elaborate analysis of literary genre; J. B. Green, *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 43; D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 2-3; E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 10-11.

⁶⁵ Green, *Narrative*, 46.

wrong.⁶⁶ This explains the phrase, ἐπιστραφεῖς καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ⁶⁷ and Jesus's instruction to "anyone," "whoever" (x 3) in Mark 8:34–38. The warnings that culminate in Mark 8:38 are not for Peter alone, but "anyone" who is ashamed of the Son of Man's mission.⁶⁸ Although the majority of commentators accept Peter as spokesman for the group, none consider him culpable as ringleader of a mutinous challenge to Jesus. Yet it is this status that earns *him alone* the stern rebuke, 'Get behind me Satan, for you (φρονεῖς; that is, Peter) are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man.'⁶⁹ Indeed, France suggests that Peter and those who agree with him are acting as spokesmen of Satan⁷⁰ (Garrett goes as far as to claim that Peter is Satan's proxy⁷¹). Jesus quashes this rebellion by admonishing the whole group (Mark 8:34–9:1), with special attention on the

⁶⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 304. See also France, *Mark*, 338; H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Oliphants/Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1976), 217.

⁶⁷ Bertram, "ἐπιστρέφω," *TDNT* 7.722, records an instance of profane Greek usage in Eur. Andr, where the word means "to turn against." Against Origen, *Comm. Matt.*, Book 12, 22, who suggests that "turning" is to confer a favour.

⁶⁸ Cf. Wiarda, *Peter*, 76, who does not see vv. 34–38 as part of Jesus's direct response to Peter's action.

⁶⁹ Jesus could be telling Peter to get back in his proper place with the rest of the other disciples (emphasising ὀπίσω μου, as in Mark 1:17). Thus, ὀπίσω μου means "get in line and follow me." Alternatively, Jesus is commanding Peter to depart (emphasising Ὑπαγε...Σατανᾶ, as in Matt 4.10). See Wiarda, *Peter*, 76; Gundry, *Mark*, 432; Anderson, *Mark*, 217.

⁷⁰ France, *Mark*, 338.

⁷¹ S. R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 76–82.

ringleaders (Mark 9:2–13). Trocmé goes so far as to claim that the three favoured disciples, by questioning Jesus concerning the timing of Elijah’s appearance (Mark 9:11), were allying themselves with the scribes against their Master⁷² – a recalcitrant trio is a better inference than an inner circle.

Mark frequently uses the rhetorical technique of intercalation in which ‘each unit consists of an A¹-B-A² sequence, with the B-component functioning as the theological key to the flanking halves.’⁷³ Although there is the danger of arbitrarily bracketing portions of Mark to fit this schema, there is a tantalising possibility once we note the literary and narrative context of the transfiguration. The transfiguration is sandwiched between two apostolic rebukes – Jesus’s rebuke of Peter and the whole group in Mark 8:33 and 8:34–9:1 respectively, and God’s rebuke of Peter, James and John in Mark 9:7. In both cases the subject matter spirals around the groups’ failure to comprehend the necessity of Jesus’s death, especially in relation to his identity (the metamorphosis of Mark 9:2–3 confirms that the identity of Jesus has not been resolved by Peter’s confession in 8:29 – is Jesus more than Messiah?). The transfiguration may be the theological key intended to address this particular failure in Peter, James and John as we shall see.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain to participate in, or listen to, his conversation with Elijah and Moses (9:4). It is surprising that the narrative purpose of this conversation has been overlooked since, according to Luke 9:31, the discussion was about Jesus’s death at Jerusalem – the very subject the three took issue with in Mark 8:31–33. Peter’s tent-building proposal was clearly an inappropriate response to the “death-talk” of

⁷² So, E. Trocmé, *La formation de l’évangile selon Marc* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 117.

⁷³ Edwards, *Mark*, 11–12. For example, the episode of the woman with a flow of blood is sandwiched inbetween events about Jairus’ daughter. Cf. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 214, who judges intercalation as pre-Markan.

9:4 and seems to have provoked the heavenly rebuke from the cloud (9:7) – that a rebuke was intended can be inferred from the imperative, ἀκούετε.⁷⁴ Peter, James and John were clearly not listening to the proof of Jesus’s mission offered by the presence of the two Old Testament witnesses, Elijah and Moses.⁷⁵ In narrative context, God’s rebuke addresses a persistent failure to listen to Jesus’s teaching concerning his death, and refers back to 8:31 and 8:34–38.⁷⁶ Indeed, Luke records the three disciples being overcome with sleep, awaking to see the transfiguration and Elijah standing with Moses before their departure. If they had slept throughout the Jesus-Elijah-Moses conversation, they would not have heard, let alone understood, what Jesus had contributed.⁷⁷ Perhaps Peter’s response, recorded in Luke 9:33, was because he (Peter) did not know what he (Jesus) was saying because he was asleep: μή εἰδὼς (Peter) ὃ λέγεις (Jesus).⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Contra J. Marcus, *The Way of the Lord* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 81, who speculates that the divine imperative is a virtual citation (of Deut 18:15–18) serving as the climax of the narrative as it identifies Jesus as the “prophet-like-Moses.”

⁷⁵ I suggest that this was the purpose of their presence, not as witnesses to the law and prophets as commonly proposed. Cf. M. Öhler, “Die Verklärung (Mk 9:1–8): Die Ankunft der Herrschaft Gottes auf der Erde,” *NovT* 38 (1996) 207, who thinks they are present simply because they are representatives of heaven.

⁷⁶ Wiarda’s suggestion that the rebuke offers a note of instruction concerning proper discipleship behaviour does not take account of the narrative context. This is due to his focus on the characterization of Peter which omits 8:34–38 (not addressed to Peter only) and disconnecting the two episodes 8:31–38 and 9:2–8.

⁷⁷ B. O. Reid, “Voices and Angels: What were they talking about at the Transfiguration? A Redaction-Critical Study of Luke 9:28–36,” *Biblical Research* 34 (1989): 19–31, esp. p. 23.

⁷⁸ This coheres with Mark who notes that Peter did not know how to answer (οὐ γὰρ ᾔδει τί

The narrative meaning and purpose of the transfiguration can be summarised. Jesus takes the lead-disciples, Peter, James and John, up a mountain and asks his Father to reveal his identity and mission. The Father transfigures Jesus and sends Elijah and Moses to confirm the messianic mission statement. Peter, James and John are overwhelmed and faint/fall asleep. The Father issues a wake-up call commanding their attention to Jesus's input to the conversation. Using "inference to the best explanation," the transfiguration is a divinely orchestrated event designed to prove Jesus's teaching about his death and at the same time correct a bad attitude in three, recalcitrant apostles – they are not the inner circle, but the ones in most need of correction.

At Gethsemane: inference to a better explanation?

In a departure from standard interpretations, Lane offers the following reason for the presence of Peter, James and John at Gethsemane: 'The failure of Peter, James and John to understand what it means to share Jesus's destiny and to be identified with his sufferings, rather than privileged status, appears to be the occasion for the *isolation of the three from the others*.'⁷⁹ Lane (correctly, in my opinion) implies that the other apostles were not in as much need of a witness to the shuddering horror felt by Jesus as he anticipated crucifixion and divine abandonment. Only Peter, James and John are recorded as offering glib responses to the announcement of Jesus's death (Mark 10:38–39; 14:31) before deserting him at his arrest (Mark 14:50). Their actions, more than the other disciples', are exposed by Mark as mere bravado. Now, these three alone are invited to behold a frightened Jesus: '... and (Jesus) began to be very distressed and troubled' (Mark 14:33b); 'And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch"' (Mark 14:34). Nothing in

ἀποκριθῆναι).

⁷⁹ Lane, *Mark*, 515. Italics mine. Cf. R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKN; Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 389.

the narrative supports the notion of an inner circle, especially when considering Mark's portrayal of their abject failure to pray and keep watch while Jesus agonised. Assigning inner circle status to Peter, James and John, may not be the best, or even a sufficiently good explanation for their presence with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

A similar approach (to that of Lane, above) has not been taken when contemplating the presence of Peter, James and John at the other two events – the resurrection of Jairus' daughter and the Transfiguration. Just as Peter, James and John (more than the others) failed to comprehend the extent of the abasement Jesus had to experience (Mark 10:33–34) and what this meant for their association with him, they failed to understand the necessity of his death and (personal and individual) resurrection before the eschaton.

At the resurrection of Jairus' daughter: inference to a better explanation?

Why is the apostolic witness to the resurrection of Jairus' daughter limited to Peter, James and John? What can we infer from the passage? We have suggested that Peter, James and John have a problem which Jesus seeks to correct: they are the ringleaders in the apostolic mutiny recorded in Mark 8:32–38. In addition to denying the mission statement of Jesus concerning his death, Mark also records their confusion about his resurrection: 'They seized upon that statement, discussing what rising from the dead meant' (Mark 9:10). Peter, James and John would have believed in a physical resurrection of the dead on the last day. This is the eschatological, or general, resurrection of *all the dead taking place at the same time* (Dan 12:2–3).⁸⁰ What puzzled them was the timing of the Son of Man's resurrection from the dead.⁸¹ France writes: 'If the disciples understood Jesus to be talking of his own individual restoration to life after death within the normal course of history, they had good reason to be bewildered, as no clear precedent for such an idea can be found in extant literature of the

⁸⁰ J. B. Bernardin, "The Transfiguration," *JBL* 52 (1933): 181–9, esp. p. 182.

⁸¹ See Lane, *Mark*, 322, who notes the alternate reading, *ὅταν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆ*

period.’⁸² Martha believed Lazarus would be raised on the last day – she was not expecting a personal, individual resurrection *ahead of time*: ‘Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” ’ (John 11:24). First-century Jews who believed in resurrection, like Peter, James and John, would have had a problem believing that Jesus would rise from the dead *before the eschaton*. Their problem was not only a disdain for the failure associated with the maltreatment and death of the Messiah, but their astonishment at the possibility of personal, individual resurrection of a dead Messiah. This explains their private discussion recorded by Mark in 9:10 and Mark’s focus on their *seizing* on Jesus’s statement about resurrection.⁸³ Yet, they had already witnessed a personal, individual resurrection. Thus, Tolbert rightly notes that ‘Peter, James, and John had better reason than anyone else to know “what rising from the dead meant”.’⁸⁴ Could this be why Peter, James and John were taken by Jesus into the home of Jairus to witness an individual resurrection *before* the end of time – to prefigure Jesus’s powers over death in his own personal, individual resurrection? Jesus would have been aware of this imperfection in their character.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the presence of Moses at the transfiguration is the second proof of personal, individual resurrection *before* the eschaton. Unlike Elijah, Moses died (Deut 34:5–6; Jude 9; *Assumption of Moses* 9)⁸⁶ and there is no sense that Elijah and Moses are “ghosts” or “hallucinations,” because they appeared in glory (Luke 9:30–31). Even though Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus would die a second time, Moses has surely escaped such a fate – the transfiguration testifies to a

⁸² France, *Mark*, 357.

⁸³ Hooker, *Mark*, 219.

⁸⁴ Tolbert, *Sowing*, 207.

⁸⁵ Cf. Mark 2:8 for an earlier incident that demonstrates Mark’s reporting of Jesus’s prescience.

⁸⁶ Contra Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 87–90.

resurrected Moses.⁸⁷

Jesus took Peter, James and John to witness the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, not because they were the inner circle, but because they (more than the other apostles) needed to understand the possibility of Jesus's imminent resurrection.⁸⁸ They would not fully understand the identity and mission of Jesus until after his personal, individual resurrection from the dead. Their presence at the raising of Jairus' daughter is best viewed as a preparation for future leadership as pillars of the church.

Conclusion

This article is wide-ranging and suggestive at points, and seeks to offer a different perspective to that held by most commentators ancient and modern. I do not preclude the possibility that Jesus recognised leadership abilities and/or personal traits peculiar to individuals that somehow qualified them to receive privileged revelation. Perhaps both personal virtues and character flaws were among his selection criterion. Yet despite their prominence in the Gospel narratives, the biblical portrayal of Peter, James and John may not lend support to the inference that they were an "inner circle" who possessed special leadership or pastoral qualities during Jesus's earthly ministry.⁸⁹ Rather, they are prominent in Mark's gospel for

⁸⁷ Cf. Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 4.8.48 326; K. Haacker and P. Schäfer, "Nachbiblische Traditionen vom Tod des Mose," *Josephus-Studien: Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament: Festschrift O. Michel* (ed. O. Betz, et al.: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 150.

⁸⁸ See W. Grundman, *Das Evangelium nach Markos* (THNT 2: Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 152.

⁸⁹ Papias reported that Mark wrote for Peter and this explains his prominence in the narrative (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15). James and John were fishing partners with Peter (Luke 5:10) so their prominence can be accounted for in like manner (see Wilkins,

epitomising the exigency that Jesus sought to modify – the disinclination to accept God’s approval of a suffering paradigm (cf. Phil 2:5–11, especially 2:9). Peter, James and John must *get it* before the others, in terms of influence and leadership. At worst, they are in most need of the instruction. They were the only ones to witness the paradox of Jesus’s resurrection power and his agony in Gethsemane. They were the only ones who could reflect on the crucifixion having seen a transcendent Jesus. Post-Pentecost, they are well-placed to take the lead. Jesus’s preparation of the “Rock” and “Sons of Thunder” as future pillars of his church does not require them to be the “inner circle.”

“Disciples.” 179). Matthew and Luke subsequently “copied” this stress on Peter found in Mark’s gospel.