

Deeper Study: Mark 4:35-41 and the Fear of the Lord

1. Context of Mark 4:35-41

Narrative Setting

- This episode comes after Jesus' parables of the kingdom (Mark 4:1–34). The parables emphasized the hidden yet powerful nature of the kingdom. Now the story *shows* the power of the kingdom breaking in, ie, Jesus' authority over chaos.
- Crossing "to the other side" (v. 35) signals movement into Gentile territory (the Decapolis). This journey foreshadows the gospel's expansion beyond Israel.

Historical/Geographical Notes

- The Sea of Galilee is ~700 ft below sea level, surrounded by high hills, including Mt. Hermon (~9,000 ft). Sudden, violent storms are common.
- The boat described in v. 36 resembles a first-century Galilean fishing vessel discovered near Ginosar in 1986 ("the Jesus boat"). It was 26' long, 7' wide, and held 4-5 crew with passengers: hardly ideal in a "hurricane" (Greek: *lailaps megale*, v. 37).

Linguistic Observations

- *Lailaps* (λαιλαψ) – often used for "whirlwind" or "hurricane," emphasizing destructive power.
- *Siopá!* (*Quiet!*) and *pephímōso* (*Be still!*) both imperative commands (v. 39). *Pephimōso* literally means "be muzzled" (cf. Jesus' rebuke of demons, Mark 1:25). This implies that Jesus' authority over the storm parallels His authority over spiritual forces of chaos.
- *Phobos megas* (φόβος μέγας) "great fear" (v. 41). Mark plays with irony: the disciples' fear of the storm (*deiloi* – cowardly) is replaced with a reverent, overwhelming awe of Jesus.

Theological Emphasis

- The question, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (v. 41), is a central Christological inquiry of Mark's Gospel. Mark builds his narrative around answering this question (cf. 8:27-30; 15:39).
- The calming of the storm echoes OT depictions of Yahweh's sovereignty over chaotic waters (Ps. 89:9; Ps. 107:23-30; Job 38:8-11).

2. Intertextual Connections: Storm and Fear of the Lord

Old Testament Parallels

- **Psalm 107:23-30**: Sailors in a storm cry out, and God stills the storm — strikingly similar to Mark’s narrative.
- **Job 38:8-11**: God declares His authority to set boundaries for the sea: “This far you may come and no farther.”
- **Jonah 1**: Jonah sleeps during a storm; sailors panic. The disciples’ cry, “Don’t you care...?” echoes the sailors’ desperate prayers. Jesus is a greater Jonah — but unlike Jonah, He is not fleeing God but revealing God’s presence.

The Fear of the Lord in Scripture

- **Deuteronomy 10:12**: Fear → obedience, love, and service.
- **Proverbs 9:10**: Fear → wisdom.
- **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**: Fear → the “whole duty of man.”
- **Psalm 33:8**: Fear → reverence of all nations.
- The disciples’ progression in Mark 4 illustrates both *negative fear* (paralyzing dread in v. 38) and *positive fear* (astonished reverence in v. 41).

3. Theological and Scholarly Reflections

N.T. Wright

- Wright argues that Jesus’ miracles are not “random displays of power” but enactments of Israel’s God returning to His people as King (*Mark for Everyone*). This story reveals that the authority of Israel’s God over creation is present in Jesus Himself.
- “The real Jesus is someone who is so fully at one with the Creator that the forces of chaos and destruction recognize and obey him” (*Simply Jesus*, p. 156).

Michael Gorman

- Gorman highlights that Christian discipleship is about *participation* in Christ. The disciples’ slowness to understand (fear and doubt) reminds us that recognizing Jesus as Lord is a **gradual, cruciform process**. The storm story is a microcosm of their journey toward cruciform faith.

Christopher J.H. Wright

- Wright emphasizes that fearing the Lord involves both awe at His majesty and obedience to His covenant. It is not terror but reverent alignment of our lives to God’s will (*Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, pp. 122-125).

Scot McKnight

- McKnight notes that in the Gospels, “fear of the Lord” is often reframed as *recognizing Jesus’ identity as the one in whom the kingdom of God is breaking in*. For McKnight, this

is not passive awe but active allegiance, ie, living in line with Jesus' lordship (*Kingdom Conspiracy*, pp. 89-90).

G.K. Beale

- Beale connects Jesus' calming of the sea to the temple motif. Just as God subdued chaos at creation and in the temple (a microcosm of creation), Jesus shows Himself as the true temple presence where God dwells and rules (*The Temple and the Church's Mission*, p. 181).

Nijay Gupta

- Gupta points out that "fear of the Lord" in the NT is often linked with *hope* rather than dread (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:17-21). Reverence deepens intimacy: God "confides in those who fear Him" (Ps. 25:14).

4. Summary for Reflection

- Mark 4:35-41 dramatizes the essential question: *Who is Jesus?* He is the Lord of creation, the presence of Yahweh in the boat.
- The disciples' fear is transformed: from dread of circumstances to reverence before Christ.
- The "fear of the Lord" is **essential** because it anchors us in wisdom, holiness, protection, intimacy, and abundant life.
- Ultimately, to fear the Lord is to live in a continual state of astonished reverence, aligning our lives with Jesus' lordship in awe-filled obedience.