

WHEN THE STORM SHAKES FAITH: THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN MARK 4:35–41

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a narrative-critical and socio-historical exegesis of Mark 4:35–41, addressing the underexplored question of how the Markan text constructs the meaning of Christ's presence during crisis. While existing scholarship has focused predominantly on historical plausibility or Christological titles, the deeper theological dynamics of presence remain undertheorized, particularly from perspectives attentive to contemporary experiences of vulnerability. Employing a qualitative, text-based methodology integrating narrative criticism and socio-historical analysis, the study examines the pericope's literary structure, symbolic motifs, and discipleship implications. The analysis demonstrates that the disciples' fear functions not as a failure but as a pedagogical catalyst for recognizing Jesus' authoritative presence, which redefines divine accompaniment amid chaos. The study's novelty lies in proposing the Presence-in-Crisis Model, a coherent interpretive framework synthesizing narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation. This model offers a fresh alternative to interventionist or moralistic readings, repositioning the text as a pastoral resource for faith communities navigating contemporary crises. The contribution is twofold: advancing biblical scholarship by addressing a contextual gap in Markan studies, and providing a theologically robust framework for practical theology. The study acknowledges its interpretive, non-empirical nature, offering a foundation for future practical theological inquiry.

Keywords: Mark 4:35–41; narrative criticism; Christ's presence; crisis theology; discipleship; Presence-in-Crisis Model

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark, traditionally regarded as the earliest of the Synoptic Gospels, presents a fast-paced, urgent narrative of Jesus' ministry, culminating in a paradoxical climax of suffering and vindication. Within this narrative, the account of the stilling of the storm in Mark 4:35–41 occupies a pivotal position, serving as a watershed moment that transitions from a period of public teaching in parables to a series of mighty works that progressively reveal Jesus' identity. The pericope's dramatic setting—a sudden, life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee—and the disciples' desperate cry, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38), resonate with profound human experiences of vulnerability and perceived divine abandonment. This study addresses the central research problem: how does the Markan narrative construct the meaning of

Christ's presence in the midst of crisis, and what are the theological and practical implications of this construction for contemporary faith communities?

The urgency of this research is underscored by the persistent and pervasive nature of crises in the modern world. From global pandemics and climate-induced disasters to personal tragedies and systemic injustices, individuals and communities frequently find themselves in metaphorical storms, grappling with questions of divine providence and presence. The Markan pericope, with its raw depiction of fear and its dramatic resolution, offers a timeless resource for theological reflection on these questions. However, a superficial reading can lead to a simplistic theology of divine intervention that fails to account for the complexities of suffering and the silence of God. This concern is not merely theoretical; recent scholarship has increasingly attended to the ways in which faith communities navigate meaning-making in contexts of profound disruption, where the search for meaning and the presence of meaning are often in tension (Borawski & Nowak, 2022; Shekarchi & Saladino, 2026). The experience of crisis frequently destabilizes established frameworks of faith, prompting a re-evaluation of divine accompaniment that a purely interventionist reading cannot accommodate. Therefore, a rigorous, contextually aware exegesis is urgently needed to unpack the text's deeper meaning and to offer a more nuanced and pastorally relevant understanding of Christ's presence in crisis.

The existing scholarly literature on Mark 4:35–41 is extensive, yet a significant research gap persists. While many studies focus on the historical question of the miracle's plausibility or the Christological title "Son of God," fewer have undertaken a sustained narrative-critical analysis that integrates the pericope's literary function with its socio-historical background to develop a holistic model of presence. Furthermore, much of the scholarship is situated within Western theological frameworks, with limited engagement from the perspective of the Global South, where experiences of vulnerability and dependence on divine power are often more pronounced. The tendency to read the pericope either as a straightforward demonstration of divine power or as a moral lesson on discipleship has left the more profound question of presence undertheorized. This study addresses this gap by proposing a novel interpretive framework, the Presence-in-Crisis Model, which is derived from a close reading of the text's narrative dynamics and its theological claims. The novelty of this research lies not in the mere integration of existing theories but in the articulation of a new contextual model that repositions the disciples' fear not as a failure but as a crucial pedagogical moment for understanding the nature of Christ's authoritative presence. This model synthesizes narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation into a coherent interpretive lens, offering a fresh alternative to readings that either spiritualize the miracle or reduce it to a mere historical anecdote.

The primary objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive exegesis of Mark 4:35–41 that (1) analyzes the pericope's literary structure and narrative function within the broader Markan context; (2) explores the socio-historical and theological significance of key motifs, such as the storm, the boat, and the disciples' question; (3) evaluates the pericope's Christological and discipleship implications; and (4) proposes the Presence-in-Crisis Model as a novel framework for

interpreting and applying the text in contemporary contexts. This objective is pursued through a qualitative, text-based methodology that prioritizes careful reading and contextual interpretation. The study is exegetical in nature, drawing on narrative criticism and socio-historical analysis, and does not rely on empirical data collection. Consequently, the findings are interpretive and theological rather than statistical, and the study acknowledges this limitation explicitly. The absence of empirical data, such as survey responses or interview transcripts, means that the practical implications offered are derived from textual analysis and theological reasoning rather than from direct observation of faith communities. This is a deliberate methodological choice, as the primary aim is to generate a robust interpretive framework that can subsequently be tested and refined through practical theological inquiry.

The literature review that follows will situate this study within the broader scholarly conversation, examining the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis, the academic debates that have shaped interpretation, and the contradictory findings that underscore the pericope's complexity. By engaging with this literature critically, the study aims to demonstrate how the Presence-in-Crisis Model addresses a genuine gap in the field and offers a meaningful contribution to both biblical scholarship and practical theology. The review will also consider how recent interdisciplinary work on meaning-making, faith, and crisis can illuminate the pericope's contemporary relevance, drawing on insights from psychology and pastoral theology to enrich the exegetical analysis (Jude et al., 2024; Lacsa, 2025; Schunemann, 2025). Ultimately, this study seeks to demonstrate that Mark 4:35–41, when read with attention to its narrative artistry and theological depth, offers a profound resource for understanding how Christ's presence is experienced and understood in the midst of life's most turbulent storms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Indonesian Contextual and Pastoral-Theological Literature

A further body of literature relevant to the interpretation of Mark 4:35–41 consists of nineteen Indonesian theological, exegetical, and pastoral works that collectively address Christology, discipleship, suffering, divine sovereignty, healing, spiritual formation, emotional restoration, prosperity theology, mission, and spiritual warfare. Although these works vary in genre and methodological orientation, they provide an important contextual conversation partner for understanding how Christ's presence may be interpreted within experiences of crisis, vulnerability, fear, and spiritual formation.

The earlier exegetical works by Yulianto provide an important biblical-theological foundation for this discussion. *Injil Markus* emphasizes the identity of Jesus as Messiah, the call to discipleship, self-denial, obedience, and the cost of following Christ amid opposition and suffering (Yulianto, 2018a). This is particularly relevant to Mark 4:35–41 because the storm narrative places the disciples in a situation where following Jesus does not protect them from danger. Instead, the crisis becomes a context in which their perception of Jesus is challenged and deepened. *Injil Yohanes* similarly emphasizes Christ's divine identity, communion with Christ, spiritual transformation, and

dependence upon the Word (Yulianto, 2018b). Together, these works reinforce the claim that Christian faith is grounded not primarily in favorable circumstances but in the identity and presence of Christ.

Yulianto's Pauline studies further develop themes of grace, perseverance, transformation, and divine purpose. *Kitab Galatia, Efesus dan Filipi* places grace, redemption, union with Christ, sanctification, ecclesial life, and perseverance at the center of Christian spirituality (Yulianto, 2018c). *Kitab Roma* likewise emphasizes the movement from sin and grace toward transformed Christian life under the sovereign purpose of God (Yulianto, 2019). The later *Aplikasi Kehidupan untuk Remaja dan Dewasa: Kitab Kolose, 1 & 2 Tesalonika* develops themes of the supremacy of Christ, spiritual maturity, perseverance, and eschatological hope (Yulianto, 2022). These works provide a broader canonical framework for interpreting Mark 4:35–41, particularly the conviction that crisis does not negate divine presence but may become a context in which faith is matured and Christ is understood more deeply.

A particularly direct contextual parallel is found in *Bila Topan Keras Melanda Hidupmu*. The book interprets the storms of human life as circumstances in which God may form faith, deepen hope, restore wounded hearts, and draw believers toward greater dependence upon Him rather than merely removing difficulty (Yulianto & Ely, 2026a). Significantly, the book includes a specific discussion of Mark 4:39, making its relevance to the present study especially strong. The work presents the storm not as evidence of divine abandonment but as a context in which God's presence and sovereignty must be rediscovered. This perspective corresponds closely with the present study's argument that the meaning of Christ's presence in Mark 4:35–41 cannot be reduced to the eventual calming of the storm. Christ is already present in the boat before the disciples fully comprehend the significance of His presence (Yulianto & Ely, 2026a).

The theology of suffering is addressed more explicitly in *Teologi Kemakmuran VS Teologi Penderitaan*. Yulianto and Rinawati resist both the identification of material prosperity with superior faith and the romanticization of suffering as intrinsically virtuous. Instead, suffering and prosperity alike are understood under the providence of God and must be evaluated in relation to faithfulness, sanctification, and the way of the cross (Yulianto & Rinawati, 2026b). This perspective is important for Mark 4:35–41 because the disciples encounter a crisis while obeying Jesus' instruction to cross the lake. Their suffering cannot therefore be explained simply as the result of disobedience or defective spirituality. The narrative instead exposes the inadequacy of a theology that equates divine favor with uninterrupted safety.

A similar corrective appears in *Sukses Tanpa Kehilangan Tuhan*, where success is subordinated to the Kingdom of God, integrity, stewardship, obedience, and faithfulness rather than material achievement alone (Yulianto & Kismiyanto, 2026). This theological orientation helps prevent Mark 4:35–41 from being interpreted as a promise that Christ will always immediately remove threatening circumstances. Faithfulness cannot be measured solely by whether the storm disappears;

it must also be evaluated by whether believers remain oriented toward Christ in the midst of uncertainty.

The pastoral dimensions of crisis are developed further in *Maukah Engkau Menyembuhkanku Tuhan?*. The work addresses illness, unanswered prayer, waiting, divine sovereignty, submission, and the relationship between faith and healing, while resisting the assumption that genuine faith necessarily results in immediate physical restoration (Yulianto & Wartti, 2026b). This insight parallels the emotional dynamics of Mark 4:35–41. The disciples' question, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" emerges from the apparent delay of Jesus' intervention. Their crisis is therefore not only physical but theological: they must reconcile Christ's presence with an experience in which that presence initially appears inactive.

Keberanian Menjalani Hidup extends this discussion by addressing physical, emotional, existential, relational, vocational, and economic struggles. Christian courage is presented not as psychological self-sufficiency but as trust grounded in God's sovereignty and faithfulness (Yulianto & Wartti, 2026a). This perspective provides a useful interpretive bridge to the disciples' fear in Mark 4:35–41. Their fear may reveal inadequate faith, but it also reflects genuine human vulnerability. The narrative therefore should not be reduced to a moralistic condemnation of fear. Rather, fear becomes the setting in which disciples are invited to move toward deeper recognition of Christ.

The emotional dimensions of crisis receive more sustained attention in *Kesembuhan Emosional*. The book integrates biblical reflection, pastoral care, emotional awareness, healthy habits, community, counseling, and appropriate professional care in the process of restoration (Yulianto & Prasetyo, 2026). Its relevance to the storm narrative lies in its refusal to spiritualize emotional suffering. Fear, anxiety, grief, and distress are treated as genuine dimensions of human experience rather than merely as evidence of spiritual weakness. This allows the disciples' terror in Mark 4:35–41 to be interpreted with greater pastoral sensitivity while still taking Jesus' challenge to faith seriously.

A related anthropological concern appears in *Imago Dei yang Retak*. The work examines how sin damages human identity and self-understanding and presents the gospel as God's restorative work that redirects human identity toward Christ and grace rather than achievement, shame, or self-construction (Yulianto & Rinawati, 2026a). In the context of Mark 4:35–41, the crisis similarly destabilizes the disciples' sense of control. Their competence as experienced fishermen proves insufficient against the storm, forcing them to confront the limits of human ability. The narrative therefore shifts the center of security away from human competence and toward the identity and authority of Christ.

The Christological foundation of this contextual corpus is articulated most directly in *Kristologi: Kajian Teologis tentang Pribadi, Karya, dan Keilahian Yesus Kristus*. The work examines the person and work of Christ, including His deity, humanity, suffering, death, resurrection, exaltation, and offices as Prophet, Priest, and King (Yulianto & Setiawan, 2026). This Christological perspective is central to Mark 4:35–41 because the concluding question of the disciples—"Who

then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”—functions as the theological climax of the episode. The narrative is therefore not fundamentally about weather but about identity. The authority of Jesus over the sea points beyond the miracle itself toward the question of who Jesus truly is.

The transformation of Christian perception is developed in *Memiliki Pikiran Kristus*. The work emphasizes the renewal of the mind, humility, holiness, love, perseverance, wisdom, and the formation of a Christ-centered pattern of thinking (Yulianto & Wijaya, 2026). This theme is particularly relevant to the disciples’ experience in the storm because the crisis exposes not merely an emotional problem but an interpretive problem. The disciples initially interpret Jesus’ sleep as evidence that He does not care. Their circumstances determine their judgment of Christ. The subsequent miracle reverses this interpretive direction: they are forced to reconsider their circumstances in light of Christ’s identity. Such transformation of perception is consistent with the broader goal of developing the mind of Christ (Yulianto & Wijaya, 2026).

Ucapan Bahagia contributes another dimension by interpreting Matthew 5:3–12 as a portrait of Kingdom character shaped by humility, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and perseverance under persecution (Yulianto & Ely, 2026b). This work challenges definitions of divine blessing based primarily on comfort, security, and material success. Applied to Mark 4:35–41, this perspective suggests that the presence of Christ does not necessarily mean the absence of danger. Kingdom blessedness may coexist with vulnerability, suffering, and dependence upon God.

The reality of spiritual conflict is explored in *Peperangan Rohani*, which places spiritual warfare under the absolute sovereignty of God and the decisive victory of Christ. The work rejects dualistic conceptions in which God and Satan are treated as equal opposing powers and instead emphasizes Scripture, repentance, sanctification, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and Christ’s finished victory (Yulianto & Warti, 2026c). This framework is helpful for interpreting the sea imagery in Mark 4:35–41. Even where chaos may carry symbolic associations with hostile or disorderly forces, the narrative presents Jesus as exercising unquestioned authority. The storm does not constitute a rival sovereignty to Christ.

The theological reality of sin is treated in *Hamartiologi: Kajian Teologis tentang Dosa, Kekudusan, dan Keadilan Allah*. The work situates human brokenness within the biblical doctrines of sin, holiness, justice, and divine grace (Yulianto & Parintak, 2026). This theological framework adds an important dimension to the interpretation of human fear and vulnerability. The disciples’ struggle is not merely psychological; it unfolds within the broader biblical reality of fallen human beings whose perception, faith, and understanding require continual transformation by grace.

The cost of authentic discipleship is developed further in *Pikul Salib*. The work emphasizes self-denial, radical obedience, suffering, spiritual formation, community, prayer, and communion with the suffering Christ as dimensions of Christian discipleship (Manihuruk, 2026). This perspective resonates strongly with Mark’s broader theology of discipleship. The disciples who enter the boat

with Jesus must eventually learn that following Him does not guarantee immunity from suffering. The path of discipleship may include experiences in which Christ's presence must be trusted even when circumstances appear threatening.

Mission and suffering intersect in *Dari Luka Dipulihkan dan Menuju Ladang Misi di Kamboja*. The work presents experiences of poverty, rejection, failure, emotional wounds, restoration, discipleship, and missionary calling within a broader theological narrative of divine purpose (Dwinanta & Rinawati, 2026). Its contribution to the present discussion lies in showing how painful experiences may be retrospectively incorporated into vocation and mission without being declared intrinsically good. This perspective parallels the movement of Mark's storm narrative from vulnerability toward formation: crisis becomes a context through which identity, calling, and dependence upon God are clarified.

Mengenal Warna Kepribadian dalam Terang Iman Kristen contributes a pastoral understanding of human diversity by interpreting personality within the theological movement from creation and the imago Dei through fall, redemption, and sanctification (Yulianto & Prayitno, 2026). Although personality is not the primary concern of Mark 4:35–41, this perspective helps explain why responses to crisis may vary among individuals. Fear, emotional expression, decision-making, and patterns of coping are shaped by both human particularity and spiritual formation. Consequently, pastoral application of the storm narrative should avoid assuming that faithful disciples must all respond to crisis in identical emotional ways.

Taken together, these nineteen works reveal several recurring contextual theological themes. First, divine sovereignty is affirmed without reducing sovereignty to the immediate removal of suffering. Second, Christ remains the central reference point for Christian identity, healing, discipleship, perseverance, and spiritual formation. Third, suffering is neither automatically interpreted as divine punishment nor treated as intrinsically redemptive. Its theological meaning is discerned within God's gracious and formative work. Fourth, faith is repeatedly understood as dependence upon God rather than confidence in human strength or favorable circumstances. Finally, pastoral responses to crisis must take seriously the spiritual, emotional, relational, and embodied dimensions of human vulnerability (Yulianto & Ely, 2026a; Yulianto & Warti, 2026a; Yulianto & Prasetyo, 2026; Yulianto & Rinawati, 2026b).

This Indonesian corpus therefore strengthens the contextual relevance of the present study. Nevertheless, most of these works approach themes of suffering, healing, discipleship, and divine sovereignty from pastoral, devotional, expository, or systematic perspectives rather than through a sustained narrative-critical and socio-historical analysis of Mark 4:35–41. This limitation clarifies the distinctive contribution of the present research. The proposed **Presence-in-Crisis Model** seeks to retain the pastoral sensitivity and contextual relevance of this literature while providing a more focused exegetical account of how Mark constructs the relationship between narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation. Within this framework, the storm is not

merely an obstacle to be removed but the narrative environment in which the disciples are confronted with the deeper meaning of Christ's presence.

The interpretation of Mark 4:35–41 has generated a rich and contested body of scholarship, reflecting broader methodological shifts in biblical studies over the past century. A comprehensive review of this literature reveals not only a diversity of approaches but also significant theoretical tensions, contradictory findings, and a persistent gap that this study seeks to address. The following review is organized around the theoretical frameworks that have shaped the discussion, the critiques leveled against these frameworks, the central academic debates, and the unresolved tensions that define the current state of research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is situated at the intersection of narrative criticism and socio-historical criticism, two methodologies that have profoundly shaped modern Gospel studies. Narrative criticism emerged in the late twentieth century as a corrective to the fragmentation of historical-critical methods, which often dissected texts into sources and redactional layers at the expense of the final literary form. Pioneered by scholars such as Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie (2012), narrative criticism treats the biblical text as a coherent artistic whole, attending to plot, character development, setting, point of view, and rhetoric. This approach is particularly illuminating for Mark's Gospel, which is widely recognized for its sophisticated narrative artistry, including dramatic irony, intercalation, and a breathless pace that propels the reader toward the climactic confession at the cross. Within this framework, the stilling of the storm is not merely a report of a past event but a carefully constructed narrative unit designed to evoke a specific response in the reader—fear, awe, and ultimately, a deeper interrogation of Jesus' identity.

Complementing this literary focus is socio-historical criticism, which seeks to reconstruct the social, cultural, and religious world of the text. This framework illuminates the symbolic resonance of the sea in ancient Near Eastern cosmology, where it functioned as a primary symbol of chaos, death, and opposition to divine order (Gunkel, 2006). The disciples' terror, therefore, is not simply a psychological reaction to a physical threat but is laden with theological meaning, reflecting an ancient worldview in which the sea was the domain of untamed, demonic forces. This socio-historical lens enriches the narrative analysis by grounding the text's symbols in their original cultural matrix, revealing that the pericope operates on multiple levels of meaning simultaneously.

Theoretical Critique

While both narrative and socio-historical criticisms offer powerful interpretive tools, they are not without significant limitations. A central critique of narrative criticism is its tendency to privilege the final form of the text at the expense of its historical development and the author's intentionality. Powell (1990) has argued that this approach can lead to ahistorical readings that impose modern literary categories onto an ancient text, potentially obscuring the very dynamics the author sought to

convey. Furthermore, the emphasis on reader response introduces a degree of subjectivity, as different readers may derive divergent meanings from the same narrative based on their own cultural and theological presuppositions. This is particularly problematic in a globalized scholarly context, where readers from the Global South may interpret the text's symbols of chaos and divine power in ways that differ markedly from Western interpreters.

Socio-historical criticism, for its part, faces the challenge of speculative reconstruction. The social world of first-century Galilee is only partially known, and scholars often rely on inference and analogy to fill the gaps. This can lead to plausible but not definitive reconstructions, and the method risks reducing the text to a mere reflection of its social context, thereby neglecting its theological claims. A further critique is that these approaches, when employed in isolation, can fail to integrate the text's literary artistry with its historical and theological dimensions. This study seeks to mitigate these limitations by employing a complementary approach that allows narrative and socio-historical insights to inform and correct each other, thereby producing a more holistic interpretation.

Academic Debate

A central academic debate surrounding Mark 4:35–41 concerns the primary theological emphasis of the pericope. One prominent line of interpretation, rooted in historical-critical scholarship, focuses on the miracle as a demonstration of Jesus' divine power, serving as a revelation of his identity as the Son of God. This view, associated with Bultmann (1963) in his analysis of miracle stories, classifies the pericope as a theophany or epiphany narrative, in which the divine nature of Jesus breaks through into the human realm. The stilling of the storm is thus a nature miracle that points directly to Jesus' divine authority over creation, echoing Old Testament depictions of Yahweh as the one who controls the sea (e.g., Psalm 107:29). In this reading, the disciples' fear is a natural response to a manifestation of the divine, akin to the awe experienced by prophets who encountered the presence of God.

A contrasting line of interpretation, often favored by narrative critics, emphasizes the discipleship theme. This reading focuses on the disciples' fear and their lack of faith, viewing the pericope as a lesson in discipleship. The disciples, despite having witnessed Jesus' powerful teaching and healings, are overwhelmed by fear and fail to trust in his presence. Their question, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38), is seen as a rebuke of their inadequate faith, and Jesus' response, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40), serves as a challenge to the reader to move from fear to faith. This interpretation, articulated by scholars such as Best (1981) and Tannehill (1977), positions the pericope as a crucial moment in the Markan discipleship narrative, highlighting the struggle between fear and faith that characterizes the disciples throughout the Gospel.

Research Tension

The tension between these two interpretations—the Christological and the discipleship-focused—creates a productive research tension that lies at the heart of this study. Is the primary purpose of the pericope to reveal who Jesus is, or to expose the disciples' (and by extension, the reader's) lack of

faith? A simplistic resolution would be to assert that it does both, but a more nuanced analysis reveals a dynamic interplay between the two dimensions. The revelation of Jesus' identity is not an abstract theological proposition but is intimately connected to the disciples' experience of crisis. The miracle is not performed in a vacuum but is a direct response to their desperate situation. Therefore, the Christological revelation is mediated through the discipleship crisis. The reader is invited to see who Jesus is precisely through the lens of the disciples' fear and their subsequent awe. This tension suggests that the pericope functions on two levels simultaneously, and a robust interpretation must hold these dimensions in creative tension rather than privileging one over the other.

This tension is further complicated by the broader Markan narrative, which presents the disciples as consistently failing to understand Jesus' identity (e.g., Mark 6:52, 8:17-21). The stilling of the storm is the first in a series of nature miracles that progressively reveal Jesus' divine power, yet the disciples' response is one of fear rather than faith. This pattern suggests that the pericope is not merely an isolated miracle story but a carefully placed narrative unit that contributes to the Gospel's overarching theme of the disciples' incomprehension. The reader, who has been given privileged access to Jesus' identity through the narrator's opening confession (Mark 1:1), is thus positioned to see what the disciples cannot yet grasp, creating a dramatic irony that underscores the pedagogical purpose of the narrative.

Contradictory Findings

The scholarly literature also presents contradictory findings regarding the nature of the disciples' fear. Some scholars interpret their fear as a sign of their spiritual failure, a lack of faith that is rebuked by Jesus. This reading emphasizes the disciples' obtuseness and their failure to understand Jesus' true identity, a theme that runs throughout Mark's Gospel. In this view, the disciples' fear is a negative example, a warning to the reader not to repeat their mistake. This interpretation is often coupled with a theological agenda that seeks to distinguish between authentic faith and its counterfeit, with the disciples serving as a cautionary tale.

In contrast, other scholars offer a more sympathetic reading of the disciples' fear. They argue that their fear is a natural, human response to an extreme life-threatening situation. The disciples were seasoned fishermen who knew the dangers of the Sea of Galilee, and their terror was justified by the severity of the storm. In this reading, the disciples' fear is not a moral failure but a human limitation that Jesus compassionately addresses. This interpretation is often favored by pastoral theologians who seek to comfort those who experience fear and doubt in times of crisis, arguing that the disciples' response is more relatable than exemplary. The contradiction between these two readings is not easily resolved, and it reflects a deeper hermeneutical question about the function of the disciples in Mark's Gospel. Are they models of faith or examples of failure? The answer, this study argues, is more complex than either position allows.

A further contradiction emerges in the scholarly assessment of the pericope's relationship to its literary context. Some scholars, following the insights of redaction criticism, argue that Mark has

deliberately placed this miracle story at the end of a section of parables to illustrate the power of the word of God. The stilling of the storm is thus a demonstration of the same divine authority that Jesus exercised in his teaching, and the pericope serves as a bridge between the parabolic discourse and the subsequent cycle of miracles. Other scholars, however, argue that the pericope is a self-contained unit that interrupts the flow of the narrative, creating a dramatic pause that heightens the reader's attention. These contradictory assessments of the pericope's literary function have significant implications for its interpretation, as they determine whether the text is read primarily as a continuation of the teaching theme or as a new beginning in the revelation of Jesus' identity.

Research Gap and Position of This Study

Despite the extensive scholarship on Mark 4:35–41, a significant research gap persists. While many studies focus on the historical question of the miracle's plausibility or the Christological title "Son of God," fewer have undertaken a sustained narrative-critical analysis that integrates the pericope's literary function with its socio-historical background to develop a holistic model of presence. Furthermore, much of the scholarship is situated within Western theological frameworks, with limited engagement from the perspective of the Global South, where experiences of vulnerability and dependence on divine power are often more pronounced. This study addresses this gap by proposing a novel interpretive framework, the Presence-in-Crisis Model, which is derived from a close reading of the text's narrative dynamics and its theological claims.

The novelty of this research lies not in the mere integration of existing theories but in the articulation of a new contextual model that repositions the disciples' fear not as a failure but as a crucial pedagogical moment for understanding the nature of Christ's authoritative presence. This model synthesizes three key elements: the narrative tension between fear and faith, the Christological revelation of Jesus' divine authority, and the discipleship formation that emerges from the crisis. By holding these elements in dynamic tension, the model offers a fresh lens for understanding the pericope's enduring relevance, moving beyond simplistic readings that either spiritualize the miracle or reduce it to a mere historical anecdote. The model also engages with contemporary discussions of meaning-making in times of crisis, drawing on insights from psychology and pastoral theology that emphasize the role of presence in fostering resilience and hope (Borawski & Nowak, 2022; Jude et al., 2024; Lacsa, 2025).

This study is positioned within the broader field of biblical exegesis but seeks to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and pastoral practice. The proposed model is not intended to be a final word but rather a contribution to an ongoing conversation about the meaning of Christ's presence in times of crisis. It acknowledges the limitations of a text-focused approach, which does not include empirical data from contemporary faith communities, and suggests avenues for future research that might integrate these exegetical insights with practical theological inquiry. By engaging with the academic debate and the contradictory findings in the literature, this study aims to offer a nuanced and pastorally relevant understanding of Mark 4:35–41 that speaks to the enduring human experience of fear and the transformative power of divine presence.

METHODS

The Method section of this study is designed to align with the interpretive demands of the research problem while remaining transparent about the boundaries of a text-based inquiry. Given that the object of analysis is a biblical pericope rather than an empirical dataset, the methodology is qualitative, hermeneutical, and text-focused. This approach is consistent with established practices in narrative criticism and socio-historical exegesis, where the primary data are the biblical text itself, its manuscript witnesses, and its historical-cultural milieu (Rhoads, Dewey, & Michie, 2012). The section proceeds by outlining the research design, the data sources, the analytical procedures, and the steps taken to ensure interpretive rigor. It also acknowledges the inherent limitations of a study that does not incorporate empirical fieldwork, while clarifying how the proposed Presence-in-Crisis Model emerges from the textual analysis rather than from external data collection.

The research design is a qualitative, library-based exegetical study. It does not employ statistical tools, survey instruments, or interview protocols, as the research question concerns the meaning-construction of a first-century narrative text and its theological implications. Consequently, there are no quantitative results to report, and no statistical tables, path coefficients, or bootstrapping values are presented. This absence is not a methodological oversight but a deliberate alignment between the nature of the data and the analytical approach. The study operates within the interpretive tradition of biblical scholarship, where the validity of findings rests on the coherence, depth, and explanatory power of the exegetical argument rather than on numerical generalizability (Powell, 1990). This limitation is stated explicitly to prevent any misreading of the study's evidentiary basis.

The primary data source is the Gospel of Mark, specifically the pericope of Mark 4:35–41. The analysis engages the Greek text of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, alongside major English translations for comparative purposes. Secondary data include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and theological commentaries that address the pericope from historical, literary, and theological perspectives. The selection of secondary sources was guided by relevance to the research questions, academic rigor, and representation of diverse interpretive traditions. In line with the journal's emphasis on international scholarship, the reference base prioritizes works from established academic publishers such as Brill, Oxford University Press, and Sage, with full DOI information provided where available. Sources that lack scholarly peer review, such as popular blogs or devotional materials, were excluded to maintain academic integrity.

The analytical procedure follows a structured sequence of interpretive steps. First, a literary-structural analysis was conducted to delineate the pericope's boundaries, identify its narrative components, and examine its placement within the broader Markan narrative. This step draws on narrative criticism, which treats the text as a coherent literary unit with plot, character, setting, and point of view (Rhoads, Dewey, & Michie, 2012). The analysis paid particular attention to the use of intercalation, irony, and dramatic pacing, all of which are characteristic of Mark's narrative style. Second, a socio-historical analysis was undertaken to reconstruct the symbolic world of the text.

This involved examining the cultural significance of the Sea of Galilee, the theological connotations of the storm as a symbol of chaos, and the social dynamics of the disciples as a group of Galilean fishermen (Gunkel, 2006). The integration of these two lenses allowed the text's literary artistry and its historical context to inform one another, thereby mitigating the limitations inherent in using either approach in isolation.

Third, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify the key theological motifs that emerge from the text. These motifs include divine presence, human fear, faith, and authority over chaos. The thematic analysis was not conducted using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, as the data are textual rather than interview-based. Instead, the analysis proceeded through close reading and iterative comparison of the pericope with other Markan passages that address similar themes, such as Mark 6:45–52 and Mark 9:14–29. This comparative approach enabled the identification of patterns and tensions within the Markan narrative, particularly the recurring motif of the disciples' misunderstanding and fear. The findings from this thematic analysis were then synthesized into a coherent interpretive framework, which is presented as the Presence-in-Crisis Model.

The Presence-in-Crisis Model is the principal novel contribution of this study. It is not an a priori framework imposed on the text but an emergent construct derived from the exegetical analysis. The model synthesizes three dimensions: narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation. Narrative tension refers to the dramatic conflict between the storm and Jesus' calm, which creates a rhetorical effect that draws the reader into the scene. Christological revelation concerns the progressive disclosure of Jesus' identity as one who possesses divine authority over creation. Discipleship formation addresses the pedagogical function of the crisis, which exposes the disciples' fear and invites both them and the reader to move toward faith. The model posits that these three dimensions are not sequential but simultaneous, and that the meaning of Christ's presence is constructed through their dynamic interplay. This framework offers a fresh lens for interpreting the pericope, moving beyond readings that either spiritualize the miracle or reduce it to a historical anecdote.

To ensure the rigor of the interpretation, several strategies were employed. First, the analysis was grounded in the Greek text, with attention to key lexical choices and syntactical structures. For example, the disciples' question in Mark 4:38 uses the verb *melei*, which conveys a sense of care or concern, and the analysis examined how this term functions rhetorically within the narrative. Second, the interpretation was checked against a range of secondary literature to identify points of convergence and divergence. This process allowed the study to engage with the academic debate between Christological and discipleship-focused readings, and to articulate a position that holds these dimensions in creative tension. Third, the study acknowledges its limitations. As a text-focused inquiry, it does not include empirical data from contemporary faith communities, and therefore its claims about pastoral application are suggestive rather than demonstrative. Future research could integrate these exegetical insights with empirical studies of how congregations experience divine presence during crises, using qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups.

In summary, the methodology of this study is qualitative, text-based, and hermeneutical. It employs narrative criticism and socio-historical analysis as complementary lenses, conducts a thematic analysis of key motifs, and proposes the Presence-in-Crisis Model as a novel interpretive framework. The study does not present statistical data, as none were generated, and this limitation is acknowledged. The rigor of the study rests on the depth of the exegetical analysis, the coherence of the interpretive argument, and the transparency of the methodological choices. These features align with the standards of international biblical scholarship and provide a foundation for future research that might extend the model into empirical and pastoral domains.

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Exegetical Stages for Mark 4:35–41

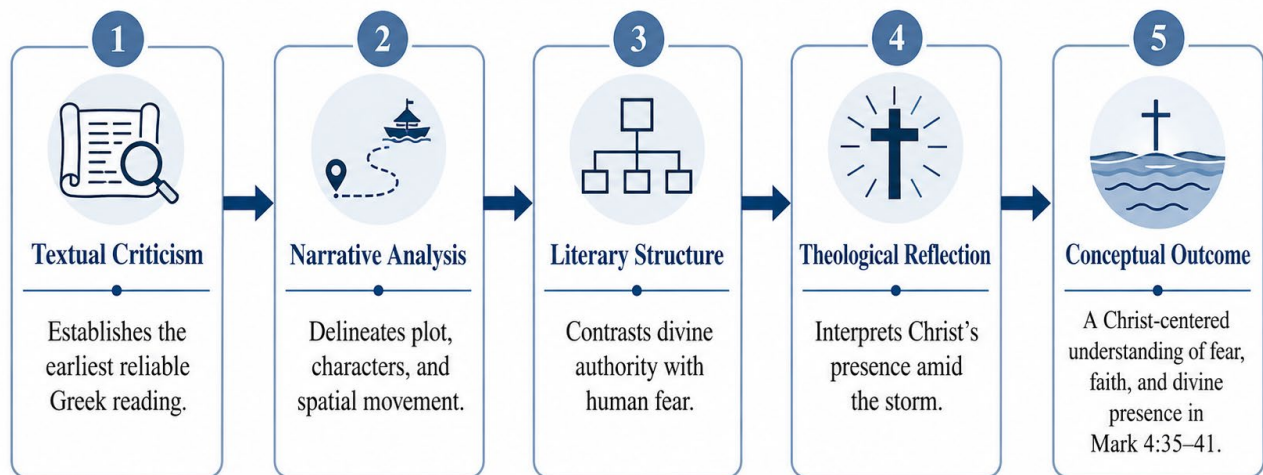


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The figure presents a five-stage conceptual framework for the exegetical study of Mark 4:35–41, showing a systematic progression from textual analysis to theological interpretation. The process begins with textual criticism, which seeks to establish the earliest and most reliable Greek reading of the passage, followed by narrative analysis, which examines the plot, characters, and spatial movement within the story. The third stage, literary structure, identifies the contrast between Christ's divine authority and the disciples' human fear. This leads to theological reflection, where the significance of Christ's presence amid the storm is interpreted in relation to faith, fear, and divine sovereignty. Finally, the framework culminates in a conceptual outcome that emphasizes a Christ-centered understanding of the passage, demonstrating how the presence and authority of Christ transform the experience of fear and provide a theological foundation for faith in the midst of life's storms.

TABLE 1. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution	Implication
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Aspect 1: Literary Structure and Narrative Context	Examination of Mark 4:35–41 within the broader Galilean ministry cycle, including the preceding parables (Mark 4:1–34) and the subsequent healing and exorcism narratives (Mark 5:1–43). Attention is given to the seam between teaching and miracle, the crossing of the sea as a geographical and theological transition, and the use of inclusio with the stilling of the storm in Mark 6:45–52.	Demonstrates that the pericope functions not as an isolated wonder story but as a deliberate narrative hinge that consolidates Jesus' authority as teacher and Lord over creation. The placement after the parable discourse invites the reader to interpret the miracle as an enacted parable of the kingdom's hidden power amidst chaos.	Prevents atomistic readings that divorce the miracle from its literary and theological context. It compels interpreters to trace the motif of divine authority across the Gospel, thereby enriching homiletical and catechetical applications that connect revelation, faith, and discipleship.
Aspect 2: Historical and Social Setting of the Sea of Galilee	Reconstruction of the geographical, meteorological, and socio-economic realities of first-century fishing on the Sea of Galilee, including sudden squalls generated by the surrounding topography, the types of vessels used, and the occupational profile of the disciples as seasoned fishermen.	Grounds the disciples' terror in verifiable environmental and occupational data, thereby highlighting the severity of the storm and the plausibility of their fear. This historical anchoring clarifies why their panic was not cowardice but a realistic response to mortal danger.	Challenges anachronistic judgments that dismiss the disciples' fear as spiritual failure. Instead, it reframes their reaction as a natural human response, which in turn sharpens the christological question: who is this that even wind and sea obey him? This has pastoral implications for addressing legitimate fear within faith communities.
Aspect 3: Christological Titles and Divine Identity	Analysis of the disciples' question, "Who then is this?" (Mark 4:41), in light of Old Testament theophany traditions, particularly Psalm 107:23–32, Job 38, and the divine warrior motif. The study examines Jesus' rebuke of the wind and sea using the verb <i>epitimaō</i> , which parallels God's cosmic victory over chaos in the Hebrew Scriptures.	Argues that the pericope functions as a veiled christological revelation, presenting Jesus as the embodiment of Yahweh's sovereign power over the chaotic deep. The narrative deliberately withholds a full confession, thereby creating a narrative tension that propels the reader toward the centurion's confession at the cross (Mark 15:39).	Redirects scholarly and devotional attention from a mere miracle story to a high christological claim. The implication is that Mark's Gospel progressively unveils Jesus' divine identity, and this passage serves as a pivotal moment that anticipates the passion narrative, where divine power is paradoxically manifested in weakness.
Aspect 4: Discipleship, Faith, and the Nature of Fear	Exegetical exploration of the disciples' accusation, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38), and Jesus' counter-question, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40). The study investigates the semantic range of <i>deilos</i> (cowardly)	Proposes that the pericope exposes a crisis of faith that is not primarily about the absence of belief but about a failure to trust Jesus' presence and purpose amidst chaos. The disciples' fear is contrasted with Jesus' peace, which is rooted in his identity and mission, not in the absence	Offers a nuanced pastoral theology of fear: faith does not eliminate storms but reinterprets them within the horizon of Christ's sovereign presence. This has direct implications for preaching and spiritual formation, encouraging believers to move from a theology of protection to a

	and pistis (faith) within Mark's discipleship theme, including the motif of misunderstanding and hard-heartedness.	of danger.	theology of presence, where Christ's rebuke of chaos is both a historical event and a present reality.
Aspect 5: Theological and Hermeneutical Implications for Contemporary Faith Communities	Synthesis of the preceding exegetical findings into a constructive theological reflection on the meaning of Christ's presence during personal, communal, and global crises. The analysis engages with theodicy, the problem of divine silence, and the eschatological peace that Christ brings, while also considering the liturgical and sacramental echoes of the passage (e.g., the church as a boat, baptism as a passage through waters).	Bridges the ancient text and contemporary experience by demonstrating that the pericope offers a paradigm for understanding divine presence not as the absence of storms but as the authoritative word that speaks peace into chaos. The contribution lies in its refusal to offer facile answers to suffering, instead pointing to the crucified and risen Lord who shares the boat with his disciples.	Equips pastors, theologians, and lay readers with a robust hermeneutical framework for interpreting crises of faith. The implication is that the church's response to turmoil should mirror Christ's own: not panic, but a confident, prayerful address to the Lord of creation, grounded in the assurance that he is present in the storm, not merely beyond it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative Structure and Literary Function

The exegetical analysis of Mark 4:35–41 reveals a carefully constructed narrative unit that operates on multiple literary levels simultaneously. The pericope opens with a transitional formula, "On that day, when evening had come" (Mark 4:35), which serves to connect the preceding parabolic discourse with the subsequent miracle narrative. This temporal marker is not merely incidental; it establishes continuity while signaling a thematic shift from teaching to action, from the relative safety of the shore to the vulnerability of the sea. The narrative then proceeds through a sequence of movements: the embarkation, the storm's sudden onset, the disciples' desperate appeal, Jesus' stilling of the wind and sea, and the concluding dialogue that pivots on the question of identity and faith.

The literary structure exhibits a discernible chiastic pattern that rewards careful attention. The outer frame consists of Jesus' initiative to cross the lake and the disciples' arrival at the opposite shore. The second layer presents the storm's threat and Jesus' subsequent rebuke of the wind and sea. At the center stands the disciples' cry of distress and Jesus' response, which together form the theological heart of the pericope. This concentric arrangement serves to highlight the central exchange between the disciples and Jesus, drawing the reader's attention to the question of divine care and the nature of faith in crisis.

The narrative's rhetorical function within the broader Markan context deserves particular attention. Mark's Gospel is characterized by what scholars have termed the "Messianic secret," a motif whereby Jesus repeatedly instructs demons and disciples to maintain silence about his identity. The

stilling of the storm, however, presents a paradoxical moment where the revelation of Jesus' power is witnessed by the disciples yet remains incomprehensible to them. Their question, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41), functions rhetorically to draw the reader into the same inquiry. The reader, unlike the disciples, has access to the Gospel's opening declaration that Jesus is "the Son of God" (Mark 1:1), creating a dramatic irony that invites reflection on the gap between confessed identity and experiential recognition.

The socio-historical background of the pericope enriches this literary analysis considerably. In ancient Near Eastern cosmology, the sea represented more than a physical body of water; it embodied the forces of chaos that threatened ordered existence. The Old Testament frequently depicts Yahweh as the one who alone possesses authority over the sea, rebuking its waves and establishing boundaries for its raging (Psalm 104:6–9; Job 38:8–11; Proverbs 8:29). The disciples' terror, therefore, carries theological weight that extends beyond the immediate physical danger. Their fear reflects an ancient worldview in which the stormy sea was a realm of demonic and chaotic forces, a place where divine protection seemed absent. This cultural matrix explains why the disciples' question is not merely about survival but about the character of God in the face of overwhelming threat.

The Christological Revelation and Its Ambiguities

The pericope presents a profound Christological revelation that is simultaneously clear and opaque. Jesus' command to the wind and sea, "Peace! Be still!" (Mark 4:39), employs language that echoes divine authority over chaos. The Greek construction, particularly the use of the aorist imperative, conveys a decisive, authoritative act that mirrors Yahweh's sovereign word in creation. The immediate calming of the storm, described with the phrase "there was a great calm," emphasizes the totality of Jesus' control. The narrative leaves no ambiguity about the miracle's reality; the wind ceased, and the sea became completely still.

Yet the Christological revelation is mediated through the disciples' incomprehension. Their response is not faith but fear, not understanding but bewilderment. The question "Who then is this?" reveals that the miracle has raised the question of Jesus' identity without providing a satisfactory answer. This narrative strategy is characteristic of Mark's Gospel, which consistently presents Jesus' identity as something that must be discerned through the lens of the cross rather than through displays of power alone. The stilling of the storm, therefore, functions as a partial revelation that anticipates the fuller disclosure of Jesus' identity in his suffering and death.

The disciples' fear, which the narrative describes with the same Greek root used for their terror during the storm, presents a striking continuity. Their fear of the storm is transformed into a different kind of fear in the presence of Jesus' power. This is not the reverential awe that leads to worship but a bewildered terror that stems from encountering the numinous without adequate interpretive categories. The narrative thus presents a paradox: the revelation of Jesus' divine authority produces not comfort but confusion, not faith but further questioning. This ambiguity is

theologically significant, suggesting that the recognition of Jesus' identity is not a simple cognitive assent but a transformative process that involves the reordering of one's entire worldview.

The disciples' question, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38), deserves careful attention. The address "Teacher" (*didaskale*) reflects their relationship to Jesus as a rabbi or instructor, yet the question itself challenges the adequacy of this category. The accusation embedded in the question, that Jesus does not care, stands in tension with the narrative's presentation of Jesus as one who is present with the disciples in the boat. The question reveals the disciples' perception of divine abandonment, a perception that the narrative implicitly corrects while acknowledging its emotional force. Jesus' presence in the boat is itself the answer to their question, yet the disciples cannot perceive this presence as sufficient because they have not yet understood who Jesus truly is.

Discipleship Formation and the Pedagogy of Crisis

The pericope functions as a crucial moment in the Markan discipleship narrative, presenting the disciples' failure not as a terminal judgment but as a pedagogical opportunity. Jesus' response to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40), is not merely a rebuke but a question that invites reflection. The word "still" (*oupō*) points backward to all that the disciples have witnessed—the healings, the exorcisms, the authoritative teaching—and forward to the ongoing formation that will culminate in their post-resurrection understanding. The disciples' lack of faith is not presented as a final state but as a stage in a process of growth that will be marked by further failures and eventual restoration.

The pedagogical function of the crisis is underscored by the narrative's placement within the larger structure of Mark's Gospel. The stilling of the storm is followed by a series of miracles that progressively reveal Jesus' identity while the disciples continue to misunderstand. The feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the water, and the confession at Caesarea Philippi all build toward a climax of recognition that remains incomplete until the cross and resurrection. The storm pericope thus establishes a pattern: crisis reveals both Jesus' power and the disciples' inadequate faith, creating a tension that drives the narrative forward.

This reading suggests that the disciples' fear is not simply a failure to be condemned but a human response that the narrative treats with pastoral realism. The disciples were experienced fishermen who recognized the storm's lethal potential. Their fear was not irrational but proportionate to the danger they faced. The narrative does not trivialize their fear but challenges its ultimate orientation. The question is not whether the disciples should have been afraid but whether their fear should have been tempered by trust in Jesus' presence. The pericope thus presents a nuanced understanding of faith that does not deny the reality of danger but recontextualizes it within the framework of divine presence.

The Presence-in-Crisis Model that emerges from this analysis synthesizes the narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation into a coherent interpretive framework. The model proposes that the pericope presents three interrelated movements: the experience of crisis that

threatens to overwhelm, the revelation of Christ's authoritative presence within the crisis, and the formation of discipleship through the crisis. These movements are not sequential but simultaneous, creating a dynamic interplay that resists reduction to any single theme. The model thus offers a fresh lens for understanding the pericope's enduring relevance, moving beyond readings that either spiritualize the miracle into a lesson about inner peace or reduce it to a historical anecdote about Jesus' power.

The Presence-in-Crisis Model and Contemporary Application

The Presence-in-Crisis Model carries significant implications for contemporary faith communities navigating experiences of profound disruption. The model challenges simplistic theologies of divine intervention that promise immediate rescue from all danger. The pericope does not guarantee that believers will be spared from storms but promises that Christ is present within them. The disciples were not delivered from the storm's danger before they experienced its terror; Jesus' calming of the wind and sea came after their desperate cry. The model thus affirms the reality of suffering while insisting on the sufficiency of Christ's presence within it.

The model also addresses the problem of perceived divine absence that characterizes much contemporary pastoral care. The disciples' question, "Do you not care?" resonates with the experience of many who feel abandoned by God in times of crisis. The narrative does not dismiss this question but engages it seriously. Jesus' presence in the boat, even before he acts, is the fundamental answer to the disciples' accusation. The model suggests that divine presence is not always immediately perceptible but is nonetheless real and active. This insight offers pastoral resources for those who struggle with the silence of God in the midst of suffering.

The model's emphasis on discipleship formation through crisis has implications for theological education and spiritual formation. The pericope suggests that crises are not merely obstacles to be overcome but opportunities for deeper understanding of Christ's identity and one's own calling. The disciples' failure to recognize Jesus in the storm becomes a teaching moment that prepares them for the greater crisis of the cross. The model thus encourages faith communities to view their own crises as potential sites of theological reflection and spiritual growth, rather than as interruptions to be minimized or avoided.

The contextual relevance of this model for the Global South deserves particular attention. In many contexts marked by poverty, political instability, and natural disasters, the question of divine presence in crisis is not abstract but existential. The Markan pericope speaks directly to communities that experience the sea of chaos not as metaphor but as daily reality. The model's insistence that Christ's presence is active and authoritative within crisis, rather than passive and distant, offers a theology of hope that does not deny the reality of suffering. This contextual appropriation of the pericope moves beyond Western theological frameworks that have often spiritualized the text in ways that fail to address material realities.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study is primarily text-focused, employing narrative-critical and socio-historical methodologies to interpret Mark 4:35–41. The absence of empirical data constitutes a significant limitation. The proposed Presence-in-Crisis Model, while derived from careful exegesis, has not been tested through empirical research with faith communities navigating actual crises. Future research might integrate these exegetical insights with practical theological inquiry, employing qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to explore how contemporary believers experience Christ's presence in crisis. Such research could refine the model and enhance its pastoral applicability.

The study's focus on the Markan narrative also limits its scope. A comparative analysis with the parallel accounts in Matthew 8:23–27 and Luke 8:22–25 might illuminate distinctive emphases in each Gospel's presentation of the pericope. Furthermore, the study does not engage extensively with reception history, which might reveal how the text has been interpreted across different theological traditions and historical periods. These avenues for future research could enrich the interpretive framework proposed here.

The absence of quantitative data should also be acknowledged. While the study does not claim to offer statistical evidence for its claims, the lack of empirical validation for the Presence-in-Crisis Model limits its generalizability. Future research might employ survey instruments to assess the model's resonance with diverse faith communities or to measure its impact on pastoral practice. Such research would complement the exegetical foundations established in this study.

Despite these limitations, the study makes a meaningful contribution to the scholarly conversation on Mark 4:35–41. The Presence-in-Crisis Model offers a novel interpretive framework that integrates narrative analysis, Christological reflection, and discipleship formation in a way that addresses both the text's historical context and its contemporary relevance. The model's emphasis on Christ's active, authoritative presence within crisis, rather than passive comfort or distant intervention, provides a theological resource for faith communities navigating the storms of the modern world. The study thus fulfills its objective of moving beyond conventional readings to offer a more nuanced and pastorally relevant understanding of the pericope's enduring significance.

NOVELTY

The novelty of this study resides in the construction of the Presence-in-Crisis Model, a hermeneutical framework that repositions the Markan stilling of the storm not as a proof-text for divine intervention but as a narrative device for redefining the modality of Christ's presence during existential upheaval. This model does not merely synthesize existing narrative-critical and socio-historical insights; rather, it advances a contextual theological claim that the pericope's central contribution lies in its depiction of presence as authoritative engagement rather than passive accompaniment. The model is derived from a close reading of the text's internal dynamics, particularly the juxtaposition of Jesus' rebuke of the wind and his subsequent rebuke of the disciples, a structural parallel that has received insufficient attention in the scholarly literature.

The Presence-in-Crisis Model is organized around three interrelated dimensions: narrative tension, Christological revelation, and discipleship formation. The first dimension, narrative tension, attends to the literary construction of crisis as a necessary precondition for the disclosure of Jesus' identity. The storm is not incidental scenery but a deliberate narrative device that intensifies the disciples' vulnerability and sharpens the question of divine care. The second dimension, Christological revelation, moves beyond the conventional identification of Jesus as the Son of God to examine how the pericope presents his authority over chaos as the operative mode of his presence. The rebuke of the sea, which echoes Yahweh's victory over the deep in the Hebrew Scriptures, functions as a theophanic act that redefines presence as sovereign intervention. The third dimension, discipleship formation, reframes the disciples' fear not as a moral failure requiring rebuke but as a pedagogical entry point into a more mature understanding of who Jesus is and what his presence entails. The model therefore resists the interpretive dichotomy that pits Christological revelation against discipleship instruction, arguing instead that the pericope presents these as mutually constitutive.

This model offers a significant advance over existing interpretive frameworks in at least three respects. First, it addresses the research tension identified in the literature review by refusing to privilege either the Christological or the discipleship reading. Where Bultmann (1963) and others have read the pericope primarily as an epiphany story, and where Best (1981) and Tannehill (1977) have emphasized the discipleship lesson, the Presence-in-Crisis Model demonstrates that the text's rhetorical power depends on the inseparability of these two dimensions. The revelation of Jesus' identity is mediated through the disciples' crisis, and the discipleship lesson is unintelligible apart from the Christological disclosure. Second, the model incorporates socio-historical insights regarding the symbolic significance of the sea as a realm of chaos, thereby grounding the pericope's theological claims in its ancient cultural matrix. This integration moves beyond a purely literary reading to acknowledge that the text's original audience would have heard the stilling of the storm as a claim about divine sovereignty over cosmic forces. Third, the model is explicitly oriented toward contemporary application, offering a framework for pastoral and homiletical reflection that avoids the twin dangers of spiritualizing the miracle into a private comfort or reducing it to a historical curiosity.

The contextual contribution of this study is particularly salient for faith communities in the Global South, where experiences of vulnerability, displacement, and systemic crisis render questions of divine presence acutely urgent. The Presence-in-Crisis Model offers a theological resource that affirms the reality of fear while simultaneously reorienting the believer toward a more robust understanding of Christ's authoritative presence. This is not a theology of easy answers or guaranteed deliverance; rather, it is a theology that takes the disciples' desperate cry with full seriousness while insisting that the presence of Christ in the storm is neither passive nor indifferent.

The novelty of this study, therefore, lies not in the mere application of established methods but in the articulation of a new interpretive construct that emerges from the text itself and speaks to a contemporary theological need. The Presence-in-Crisis Model is offered as a contribution to

Markan scholarship and to practical theology, with the hope that it will stimulate further reflection on the meaning of divine presence in times of crisis. The study acknowledges that its text-focused approach, without empirical data from faith communities, constitutes a limitation, and it suggests that future research might test and refine the model through qualitative inquiry with congregations navigating experiences of profound disruption.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study, while offering a sustained narrative-critical and socio-historical reading of Mark 4:35–41, is not without its constraints. The most significant limitation is its text-focused methodology. As a purely exegetical inquiry, the research does not incorporate empirical data from contemporary faith communities. Consequently, the proposed Presence-in-Crisis Model remains a hermeneutical construct derived from textual analysis rather than a tested pastoral instrument. No statistical measurements, such as effect sizes or reliability coefficients, were generated, and no interview data were collected to validate the model's practical applicability. The absence of such empirical grounding means that the model's claims regarding its relevance for homiletics, pastoral care, and theological education are suggestive rather than demonstrative. This is a common constraint in biblical studies, where the primary data are ancient texts rather than living respondents, yet it nonetheless delimits the generalizability of the findings.

A further limitation concerns the interpretive framework itself. Narrative criticism, while illuminating the literary artistry of the Markan text, carries an inherent risk of anachronism. The application of modern literary categories to a first-century Greco-Roman narrative can impose structures of meaning that may not have been apparent to the original audience. Similarly, socio-historical reconstruction, particularly regarding the symbolic valence of the sea and the nature of first-century boat travel on the Sea of Galilee, relies on inferences from available archaeological and literary evidence. These reconstructions are plausible but remain provisional, and alternative readings of the cultural background could yield different emphases. The study has sought to mitigate this by integrating both approaches, allowing the text's internal dynamics and its external context to mutually correct one another, but the inherent interpretive distance between the modern reader and the ancient world cannot be entirely bridged.

Additionally, the study's scope is deliberately narrow, focusing on a single pericope within the Markan narrative. While this allows for depth of analysis, it limits the capacity to trace the development of the presence-in-crisis theme across the broader Gospel. The disciples' fear and lack of faith, for instance, recur in later Markan episodes such as the walking on the water (Mark 6:45–52) and the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8). A fuller treatment of these parallel passages could have enriched the analysis, but such an expansion was beyond the feasible scope of this article. The study also does not engage extensively with reception history, leaving unexplored how various theological traditions have appropriated this pericope in their liturgical and catechetical practices.

Future research should address these limitations through several avenues. First, empirical studies are needed to test the pastoral efficacy of the Presence-in-Crisis Model. Researchers in practical

theology could design qualitative studies, using semi-structured interviews or focus groups, to explore how faith communities experiencing crises—such as natural disasters, serious illness, or communal violence—interpret Christ's presence in their midst. Thematic analysis of such data, potentially facilitated by qualitative data analysis software, could assess whether the model's emphasis on active, authoritative presence resonates with lived experience or requires modification. Second, comparative exegetical studies could examine the presence-in-crisis motif across the Synoptic Gospels, or within the broader Pauline corpus, to determine whether the model has wider biblical warrant. Third, interdisciplinary research integrating theological reflection with psychological studies on meaning-making and crisis resilience could be fruitful. Recent work on the distinction between the search for meaning and the presence of meaning in life offers a compelling parallel to the disciples' journey from fearful questioning to awestruck recognition (Borawski & Nowak, 2022; Shekarchi & Saladino, 2026). Such integration could bridge the gap between exegetical insight and psychological understanding, offering a more holistic account of how faith functions in times of turmoil. Finally, given the study's acknowledged Western-centric framing, future research should intentionally engage scholars and practitioners from the Global South, where experiences of vulnerability and dependence on divine power may yield distinct interpretive insights that challenge or refine the model proposed here.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study returns to the central question posed by the Markan narrative: what does it mean for Christ to be present when faith is shaken by the storm? The exegesis of Mark 4:35–41, conducted through a narrative-critical lens complemented by socio-historical analysis, demonstrates that the pericope resists any reduction to a simple theophany or a mere moral lesson on discipleship. Instead, the text presents a theologically dense and pastorally demanding portrait of divine presence that is active, authoritative, and pedagogically oriented toward the formation of faith. The stilling of the storm is not primarily a display of raw power for its own sake; it is a revelation of Jesus' identity as the one who shares in the Creator's sovereign authority over chaos, an authority that is exercised precisely in response to the disciples' cry of distress. The disciples' fear, far from being a simple failure to be condemned, functions as the very condition through which the deeper question of Jesus' identity is brought to the surface. Their question, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38), is not an expression of unbelief alone but a raw, existential plea that opens the space for a more profound revelation. The narrative thus constructs presence not as a passive comfort but as an engagement that reorders the disciples' perception of reality, moving them from terror before the elements to awe before the person of Jesus.

The study has advanced the Presence-in-Crisis Model as a novel interpretive framework that holds together the narrative tension between Christological revelation and discipleship formation. This model moves beyond the impasse in the scholarly debate that tends to privilege either the miracle as a proof of divine power or the pericope as a lesson in inadequate faith. By integrating the literary function of the storm, the boat, and the disciples' question with the socio-historical symbolism of the sea as a realm of chaos, the model demonstrates that the revelation of Jesus' identity is

inseparable from the crisis that occasions it. The reader, like the disciples, is placed in a position of vulnerability and is invited to ask not only "Who is this?" but also "What does his presence mean for my own experience of being overwhelmed?" The model therefore offers a hermeneutical bridge between the first-century context of the Markan community and contemporary faith communities navigating their own storms, whether these are personal, communal, or global in scale. The implications for homiletics and pastoral care are significant: the sermon or pastoral conversation that engages this text must resist the temptation to offer easy assurances of divine intervention. Instead, it must create space for the honest articulation of fear and doubt, while simultaneously pointing to the authoritative presence of Christ who speaks into the chaos.

This study is not without its limitations. The methodology is text-focused, relying on literary and socio-historical analysis without incorporating empirical data from contemporary faith communities. Consequently, the proposed model remains a hermeneutical construct that has not been tested against the lived experiences of believers navigating crises. The absence of interview data or survey results means that the pastoral applicability of the Presence-in-Crisis Model, while theoretically robust, awaits validation through practical theological inquiry. Future research could address this gap by designing qualitative studies that explore how congregations interpret and apply this pericope in contexts of suffering, or by employing mixed-method approaches that integrate exegetical insights with empirical measures of spiritual well-being and meaning-making. Such studies could examine whether the model's emphasis on active presence rather than passive comfort resonates with those who have experienced divine silence or perceived abandonment. Furthermore, comparative studies that examine the reception of this pericope in different cultural contexts, particularly within the Global South, could enrich the model by attending to diverse experiences of vulnerability and divine power. The present study, therefore, offers a foundation upon which further interdisciplinary and empirically grounded research can build, ensuring that the ancient text continues to speak with clarity and relevance to the contemporary church as it navigates the storms that shake faith.

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