

**THE FUNCTION OF MILITARY LANGUAGE IN THE FEEDING
OF THE FIVE THOUSAND NARRATIVE (MARK 6:30–44):
A NARRATIVE-COGNITIVE STUDY**

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Some scholars argue that Jesus was a revolutionary messiah and he was no different than other Jewish revolutionaries who opposed imperial Rome. Others argue that Jesus was a pacifist and he was calling his contemporaries to repent from their nationalistic ambitions and warned them against putting their trust in their own military power. Surprisingly, the majority of proponents of both approaches do not detect military language in the feeding of the five thousand narrative. This study argues that in Mark the feeding of the five thousand narrative (Mark 6:30–44) and its immediate context contain military language and present Jesus as a “warrior” leader but with a radical new twist. Jesus appears to be a “warrior” leader who mobilizes an army. But instead of leading his “soldiers” into war, he sends them out into a “battle” that is characterized by compassion. This study utilizes methodologies of narrative criticism and cognitive study, specifically the study of emotions, to determine the function of military language in the narrative. I combine the theories of Lisa Barrett and Martha Nussbaum and operate on the assumption that emotions are constructed evaluative judgments. I assert that the narrative-cognitive approach makes visible what Mark was trying to achieve by his use of military and emotive language in the narrative. This methodology brings to the fore a counter-cultural presentation of Jesus. This study reveals that the text contains *Kulturkampf* that subversively critiques concepts of power and suggests new means of “warfare.” The feeding of the five thousand narrative in Mark is written against the backdrop of the Greco-Roman and Jewish literary contexts. Jewish literature testifies about the anticipation of the warrior-leader, the Messiah, who would restore the glory of Israel and put an end to war by means of military conquest. Most notable voices of Greco-Roman literature, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and particularly the *Aeneid*, are also war-centered and present warrior heroes on their quests. Homer and Virgil present their heroes as shepherds, but they are strong and often hard-hearted. Mark, on the other hand, presents Jesus as a compassionate shepherd-leader. Mark’s presentation of Jesus is countercultural (a social construct) and it leads the reader of the narrative to an emotional response (an evaluative judgment)—compassion for people. The narrative prompts the reader to emulate the compassionate ministry of Jesus.