

Jairus' Daughter and the Woman with an Issue of Blood in Mark 5:21-43

Part 1



I hope that this article will be the first part of an extended study of the two intercalated healings by Jesus described in Mark 5:21-43. The approach taken in this study will emphasise the role of structure in these verses with the aim of seeing whether the structure can help us in the task of exegesis.

I have found this passage of Scripture very complicated, and my efforts here are both tentative and speculative in the extreme, and I'm sure there is much, much more "going on" than I have noticed!!

I originally looked briefly at this passage in the chapter entitled *Peace Be Still!* (chapter 5) in my book *Chiastic Structures in the Interpretation of Scripture*. This chapter can be freely accessed on the www.famousfox.org website (in the "Articles" section). In that chapter, I attempted to show that there was an inter-textual chiastic link between the two healings described in Mark 5:21-43 and two of Jesus' parables involving sowing—those found in Mark 4:26-32. I still think this (somewhat unlikely!) link is valid, and I hope to return to this topic towards the end of the present article.

Before we start, I should mention that there are a number of textual matters in these verses which are helpfully discussed in the commentaries, but which we will not be looking at here. As always, we will be using the Textus Receptus version of the Greek text: the interlinear Greek-English text,

together with the KJV translation of the first few verses of our passage is given below. The two intercalated healings in Mark 5:21-43 are also found in the parallel passages Matthew 9:18-26 and Luke 8:41-56. In this article however, our primary interest will be Mark's account.

	21 Καὶ διαπεράσαντος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ ἔπαλιν εἰς τὸ πέραν, ἠσυνήχθη ὄχλος πολὺς ἐπ' αὐτόν, καὶ ἦν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν. 22 Καὶ ἰδοῦ, ἔρχεται εἰς τῶν ἀρχισυναγῶγων, ὀνόματι Ἰάειρος, καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτόν, πίπτει πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. 23 καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτόν πολλά, λέγων, Ὅτι τὸ θυγάτριόν μου ἐσχάτως ἔχει. ἵνα ἐλθὼν ἐπιθῆς αὐτῇ τὰς χεῖρας, ἵπως σωθῆ καὶ ζήσεται. 24 Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν μετ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ὄχλος πολὺς, καὶ συνέθλιβον αὐτόν. 25 Καὶ γυνή τις
21 And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. 22 And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. 24 And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him.	And ² having ³ passed ⁴ over ¹ Jesus in the ship again to the other side; ⁴ was ² gathered ^{1a} a ² crowd ² great to him, and he was by the sea. And behold, comes one of the rulers of the synagogue, by name Jairus, and seeing him, falls at his feet; and he besought him much, saying "My little daughter is at the last extremity, [I pray] that having come thou wouldest lay on her [thy] hands, so that she may be cured, and she shall live. And he departed with him, and ² followed ² him a ² crowd ² great, and pressed on him. And a ² woman ¹ certain

It is well known that the healing of the woman with the issue of blood is “nested” within the narrative of the healing/raising of Jairus’ daughter. There is thus an A—B—A’ chiastic structure. However, it seems to me that, beyond this basic pattern, the passage is very highly structured even in small details. As already indicated, I feel that this study will only provide a most inadequate attempt to recognise some of these, and I would greatly welcome help, correction and insight from anyone reading this!

In this first part of the study, I would like to offer 1) a brief introduction to these verses, and then 2) to give the “flavour” of our chiastic analyses by considering the structure, not of the whole passage, but just the first part (the A section in the A-B-A’ scheme above) i.e. the verses in which Jairus comes to Jesus and makes his request regarding his daughter. I hope that, together, these two rather different approaches, will help to set the scene for the remaining articles.

Setting the Scene - Introductory Comments

It is well recognised in the commentaries that there are a number of significant contrasts between the two healings and between the protagonists in each case. As with Nicodemus (who comes to Jesus by night) and the Woman of Samaria (who meets Jesus at mid-day) in John chs. 3 and 4, we have, in Mark Ch. 5, Jairus, a named male leader of the Jewish community, and an unnamed female “outsider”. In both cases, the woman

not only outshines her male counterpart, but, at least as I read the texts, in her persistence and insight, she “gets the better” of Jesus— being blessed with healing in one case and with an intimate revelation of Jesus’ true identity in the other. And in both cases, there are typological marital overtones. (Future husbands and wives meet at wells in the bible, and the fringes or wings of garments are associated with betrothal and marriage - for example, Ruth 3:9, Ezek. 16:8).

Furthermore, in our passage, there is an additional contrast between Jairus’ daughter—significantly protected within the “house” and surrounded by her family - and the woman - alone and unprotected who must “shift for herself” out in the public arena. Nevertheless, Jairus’ daughter was ultimately no more safe from possible harm despite these advantages than the woman. Both are linked by a sort of shared “history” of 12 years—one having had 12 years of life, the other 12 years of the “symbolic death” of ritual uncleanness according to the Mosaic law. For contrasting reasons, neither has had a womb which is able to bear fruit for 12 years, but at the end of the narratives, the woman’s fertility has been restored, and the girl, (despite her being referred to as a little daughter or a little girl), is at the culturally recognised symbolic age of the menarche, (i.e. aged 12 or in the 13th year) and, being on the cusp of womanhood, able in the relatively near future (given the culture and customs of those times) to be married and become herself a “mother in Israel”.

However, there are other significant similarities and contrasts. Both of the healings are private. In the case of the woman, no-one apart from the woman herself and Jesus, who knew that “power” had gone forth from him, were involved—even though they were surrounded by a large crowd plus the disciples - thus there were two witnesses. In the case of Jairus’ daughter, first the entire crowd and all the disciples apart from the “inner three” are left behind. Then the mourners are “cast or thrown out” (the Greek is *ek-ballo*—the same word used for casting out demons.) The primary “protagonists” in this second healing are of course Jesus and the girl. However, in this second “transaction”, Jesus has his three disciples with him, and the girl has her two parents with her—seven people (witnesses) in all.

In the first healing, the two witnesses—Jesus and the woman—both bear witness to the crowd, but, by contrast, Jesus is emphatic (Mark 5:43) that no-one should know about the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the second miracle. It is not at all clear to me why there is this marked difference. I’m sort of assuming it has something to do with the positive attitude to Jesus of the surrounding crowds in the first healing contrasted with the

disgraceful attitude of the mourners in the second. If this is so, then this would be in line with the earlier words of Jesus to the disciples (Mark 4:25): “*For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not will be taken away even that which he has*”.

An interesting similarity in the two healing narratives is that in both, Jesus asks a question and receives a dismissive and unbelieving answer. In the case of the woman with the issue of blood, Jesus asks “Who touched me?” and the Disciples’ reply indicates that they think Jesus is asking (at best) an unreasonable question. In the raising of Jairus’ daughter, Jesus asks, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping?” Their reply indicates insincerity since, immediately after weeping, they start to laugh. This insulting response to Jesus is countered by Jesus throwing them out! In both instances, the exchange is followed by the healing miracle.

Coming back to the Disciples’ reply again, in the context of an honour and shame culture, this reply shows the Disciples in a rather bad light, but it is also a public challenge to Jesus’ honour—though as we know, the subsequent events fully exonerate Jesus. The Disciples would have suffered some shame by the subsequent healing since it shows that their implied criticism of Jesus was wrong. Nevertheless, Jesus is accompanied by the “inner three” Disciples (who together with Jesus perhaps symbolically form the four corners of a “portable altar” upon which Jairus’ sacrificed daughter will subsequently arise (*egeiro*) as an “ascension offering” into new life.)

We note that the messengers from Jairus’ house are all excluded. Their words to Jairus, said in Jesus’ presence and hearing, were also a challenge to Jesus’ honour (the use of words like “teacher” and “don’t trouble *further*” are a challenge since Jesus is more than a teacher—as the crowd knows: Jairus came to Jesus because Jesus had healing power and Jesus gave no indication that he had been troubled at all. Indeed, only a charlatan would be troubled by a request for healing and therein lies part of the challenge. Jesus responds to the challenge, and also encourages Jairus (who would have been shamed by the insinuation of the messengers that his request had been ineffective or was given to someone unworthy of that request) by his encouraging words to Jairus, and Jesus accepts the challenge by continuing on the journey to Jairus’ house. Subsequent events exonerate Jesus, but He subverts the honour challenge itself by excluding these messengers and by insisting on secrecy regarding the successful raising of Jairus’ daughter: He therefore does not make a public show of this “defeating” of the messengers. (Nevertheless, we learn from Matthew’s account that the event becomes widely known.) Similar considerations to

the above apply to the exclusion of the mourners—as already discussed.

Honour and shame, as well as patron and client, considerations also apply to the woman and to Jairus and Jesus' interactions with both them. Jairus is of course an honourable man, but he fully embraces the role of client when addressing Jesus. He thus honours Jesus by implicitly asking to become a client—a request which Jesus implicitly accepts, by (apparently silently) going with Jairus. The woman does not overtly come to Jesus as a client, and nor does she really challenge Jesus' honour—at least not in the normal way—because she thinks her action is hidden. However, Jesus *makes* her acknowledge her clientage to Him, and her touch *becomes* a challenge to Jesus' honour “in retrospect” since Jesus chooses to interpret her touch in this way by making the fact public and requiring a response. Her shame because of her condition (i.e. “bad” shame as opposed to her “good” (womanly) shame which balks at drawing attention to herself in public and in particular in the presence of men) becomes known to the crowd (who act as “adjudicators” in honour-shame challenges), but most importantly, it becomes publicly known only when there is, in fact, no longer cause for this shame, and Jesus' complimentary remarks to her, and regarding her, at the end of the exchange (including calling her “daughter”) load her with great public honour. In fact, Jesus sort of allows himself to lose the “challenge” by acknowledging that she was justified in touching Him—an action which He originally publicly questioned. Jesus frequently “subverts the challenge-riposte “genre” by losing: there is thus what is technically called a “trans-valuation” of the honour-shame system: Jesus would rather “lose” to the woman than shame her publicly: He did not come to “quench a smoking flame or break a bruised reed”.

But we can still ask, and indeed we should ask, why Jesus held up the journey to Jairus' house by this extended discourse with the woman—after all, time was of the essence, and whatever the cause of the flow of “power” from Jesus, that moment was now past. In answer, we know that Jesus never rushes - in any of the Gospel accounts. Also, Jesus clearly wished to make the cause for this private awareness of loss of power a public matter. Also, within the intercalated narrative of Mark's Gospel it seems clear to me—for a number of reasons which will be discussed—that Jesus' delay was also a deliberate “move” on His part in order to allow time for the girl to actually die. (Jesus' delay in the case of Lazarus in the Gospel of John is analogous). If this is so, then Jesus links the woman's healing and the death and resurrection of the girl—just as Mark does through the intercalation of the two narratives: they are not just “side-by-side”, they are interdependent.

The family plays an important role in honour and shame. Jesus calls the woman daughter showing, *inter alia*, she has become part of Jesus' spiritual family. At the end of the raising of Jairus' daughter, Jesus, the disciples and the immediate family of Jairus are together, symbolically "in the house" whilst the messengers and the mourners are now, equally symbolically, outside. There is thus a transfer of the locus of honour and shame towards Jesus spiritual family—just as Jesus declared earlier in Mark's Gospel (Mark 3:34-35). Jesus' spiritual family is often referred to as "fictive kin" in some articles and commentaries that take a social science or cultural anthropology perspective. I think this is awful terminology!!

As a final point in this section of the article, I would like to mention another little link—emphasised in Mark's account—between the woman and Jairus' daughter. It concerns the particular terminology use by Jairus in Mark's account to describe the girl's condition. He says that she "has an end" (*eschatos echei*). This is a somewhat unusual expression. However, it points to a clear similarity with the description of the woman. Mark tells us that the woman has "*spent everything by her*" (i.e. everything that she had), and that she had gained nothing but rather had "*come to the worse*": both the girl and the woman have reached the "end of the line".

Setting the Scene —Jairus Comes to Jesus and Beseeches Him Regarding His Daughter

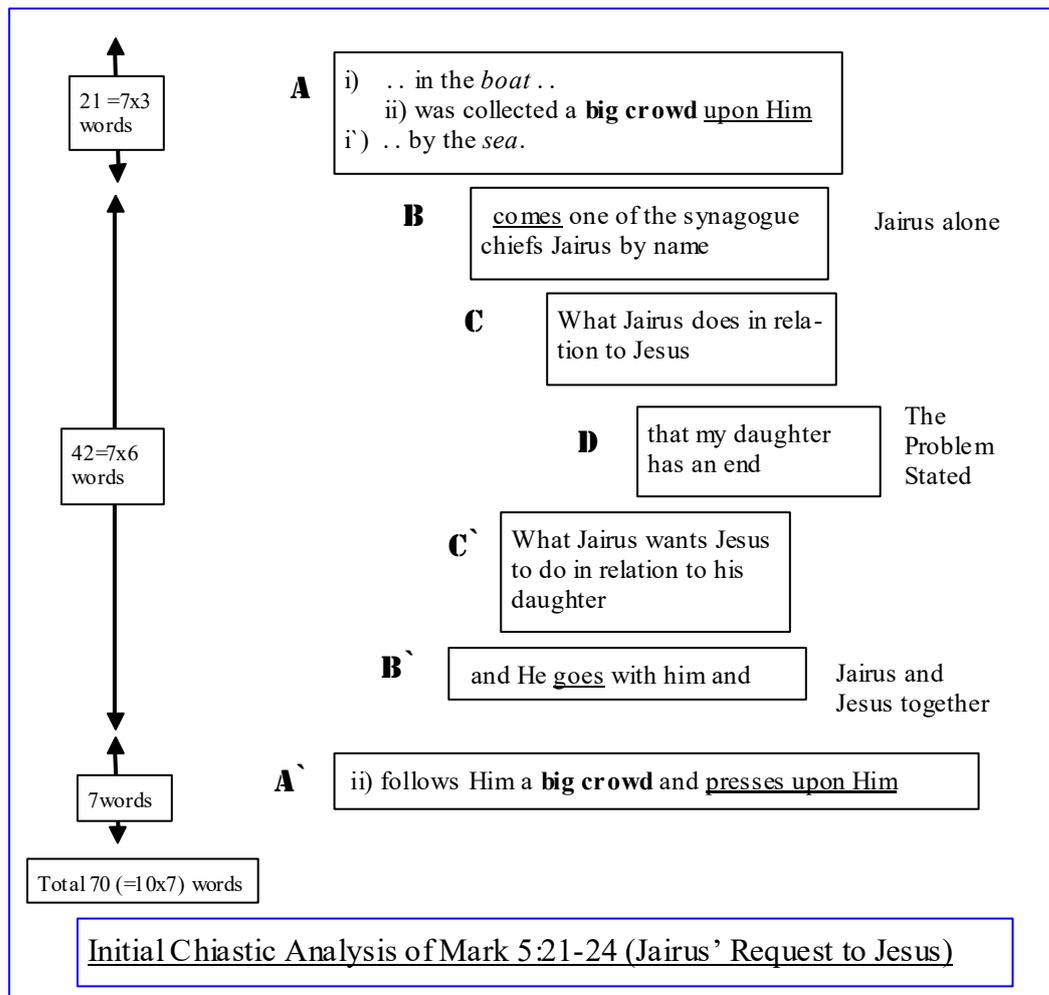
Well, with those few, rather disorganised, introductory comments, I would now like to attempt a sort of structural analysis of verses 21-24. These verses cover the events from Jesus' disembarkation from the boat up until Jesus departs with Jairus followed by the pressing crowd.

This passage has its own little chiastic structure , and we will work our way towards this in stages.

An initial analysis is presented in the diagram on the next page.

Notes:

1) The passage is framed, in A and A', by references to the big crowd which is "collected upon Jesus" (*ep auton*) in A and which "presses upon Him" in A'. Inside this, in B and B', we have the coming of Jairus, (together with a mention of his role as synagogue chief) in B and the departure of Jesus and Jairus together in B' following Jairus' successful plea to Jesus. Then, inside this, in C and C' we have Jairus' actual actions in relation to Jesus in C, and the desired actions of Jesus in relation to Jairus'



daughter in C'. Finally, in the middle, in D, we have Jairus' statement of the problem for which he is seeking Jesus' help: the fact that his daughter is on the point of dying. Literally, the words are "The daughter of me an end (*eschatos*) has". This somewhat unusual expression is significant, as mentioned briefly earlier and as I hope to demonstrate further in a later article.

2) In A, but not in A', there are references to boats and the sea. These frame the reference to the big crowd collected upon Jesus in A. Thus, the crowd reference is the centre of a "mini-chiasm" in A, and it is this centre which corresponds to the crowd in A'. These "nautical" references play no further direct part in part out analysis, but they form part of a series of references to the sea, boats and sea crossings (I attempted an analysis of these in the essay *Jesus' Sea Crossings in the Gospel of Mark*).

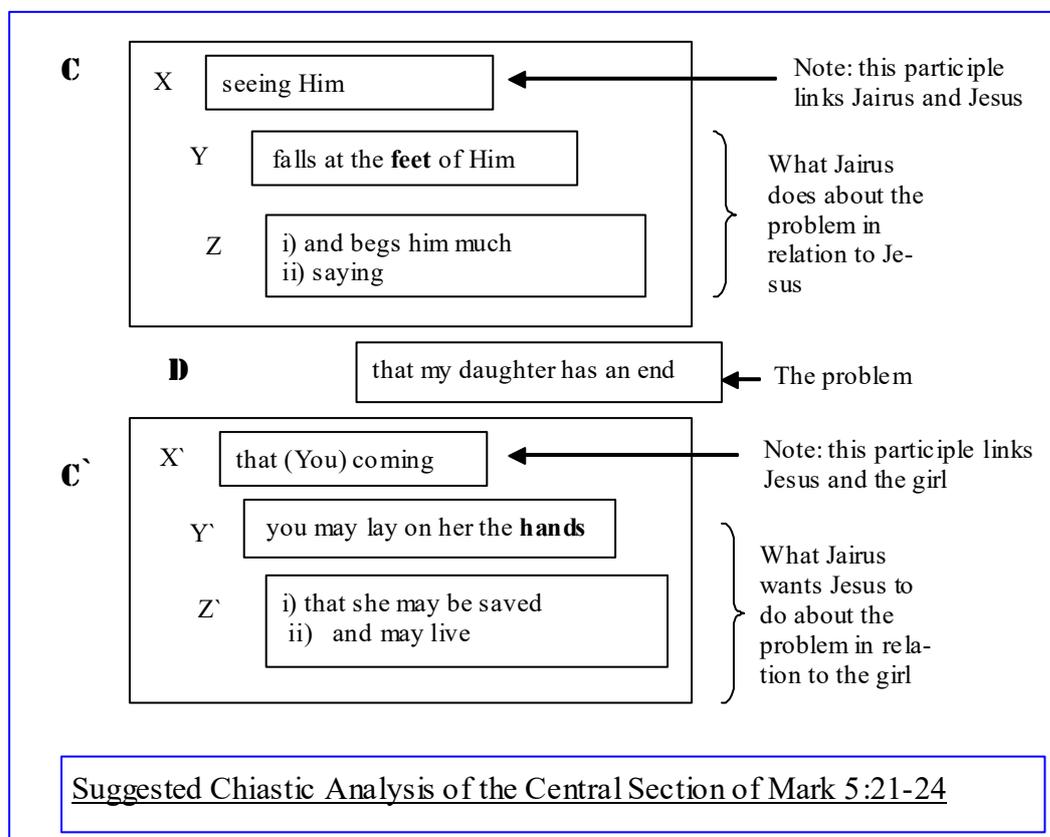
3) One function of the sea references however, is to alert us to the possibility that in this section of Mark, Jesus is about to call more disciples.

Earlier in Mark, Jesus has called Simon, Andrew, James John and Levi by the sea and also healed the Gerasene (Gadarene) Demoniac by the sea making him into a believer and witness to Jesus.

4) There are word count aspects to this passage also. In fact, in the Received Text, Mark 5:21-24 consists of 70 words, divided up in “7’s” as shown in the diagram on the previous page. There are further aspects to this as will be discussed later.

Well, that was an initial look at the passage as a whole. Now I would like to look a little more closely at the central sections—namely, C—D—C`.

Below is an expanded analysis of this middle section.



Notes on Section C-D-C`:

1) The earlier analysis so far was essentially *thematic*. However, I’m proposing an essentially “functional” correspondence for the two inner “C” sections, C and C`. With this approach, we can recognise a functional correspondence between Jairus in relation to Jesus and (Jairus’ request for)

Jesus in relation to the girl.

2) Thus, in X, (please see the diagram on the previous page) Jairus' seeing of Jesus is the necessary step before he can fall at Jesus feet (Y). Likewise, Jesus' coming in X' is the necessary step before Jesus can lay hands on the girl (Y'). We note the correspondence between "feet" in Y and "hands" in Y', and in particular the functional correspondence between the appropriateness of Jairus falling at Jesus' feet as an "outward manifestation" of his beseeching (in Z) and the appropriateness of Jesus laying on of hands as an "outward manifestation" of the healing in Z'.

3) We note that Z and Z' also "match" in the sense that they each have two verbs with closely related meanings (begging and saying in Z and being saved/healed and living in Z').

I now want to present two more slightly different analyses. The first of these looks at the section from B to B' which has 42 words, and the second of these looks more narrowly at the inner section of the central section, which we have up till now labelled C-D-C' and which has 30 words. In both these analyses, we will look at structures which are symmetrical by word count.

First Additional Analysis—from B to B'.

In this analysis, we will regard the central, dividing point of the chiasm as a whole as the transition from Jairus' *actions* to his *words*. The proposed structure is shown on the next page:

Notes:

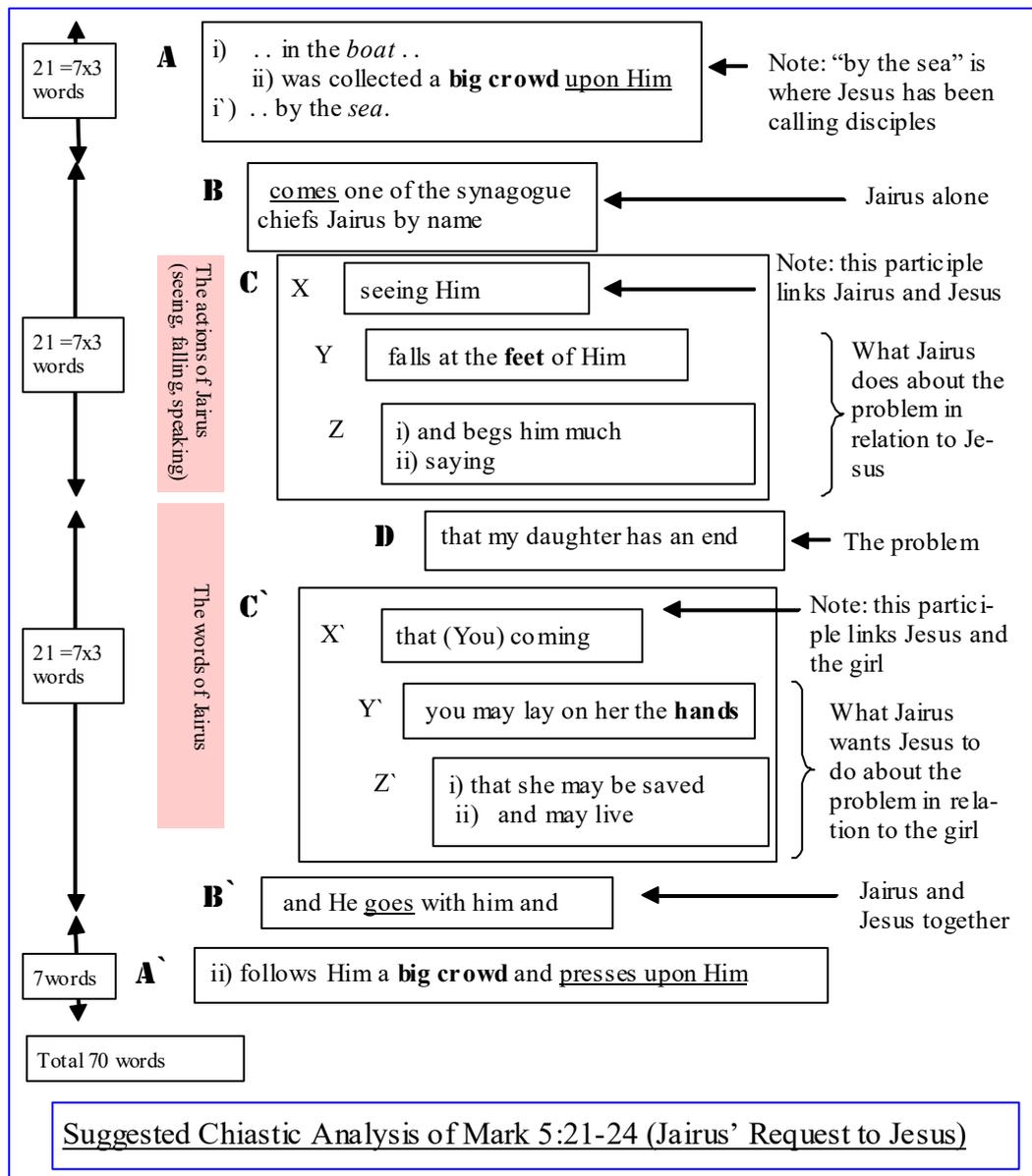
1) The 42 word central section is divided into two subsections of 21 words each. As before, B and B' form the "outer layer". Then, within this, the passage is divided into i) Jairus' actions (C, D, E) and ii) the actual words that Jairus says (F, C', D', E').

Second Additional Analysis—from C to C'

This analysis is presented on the next page but one (with a change of notation!):

Notes:

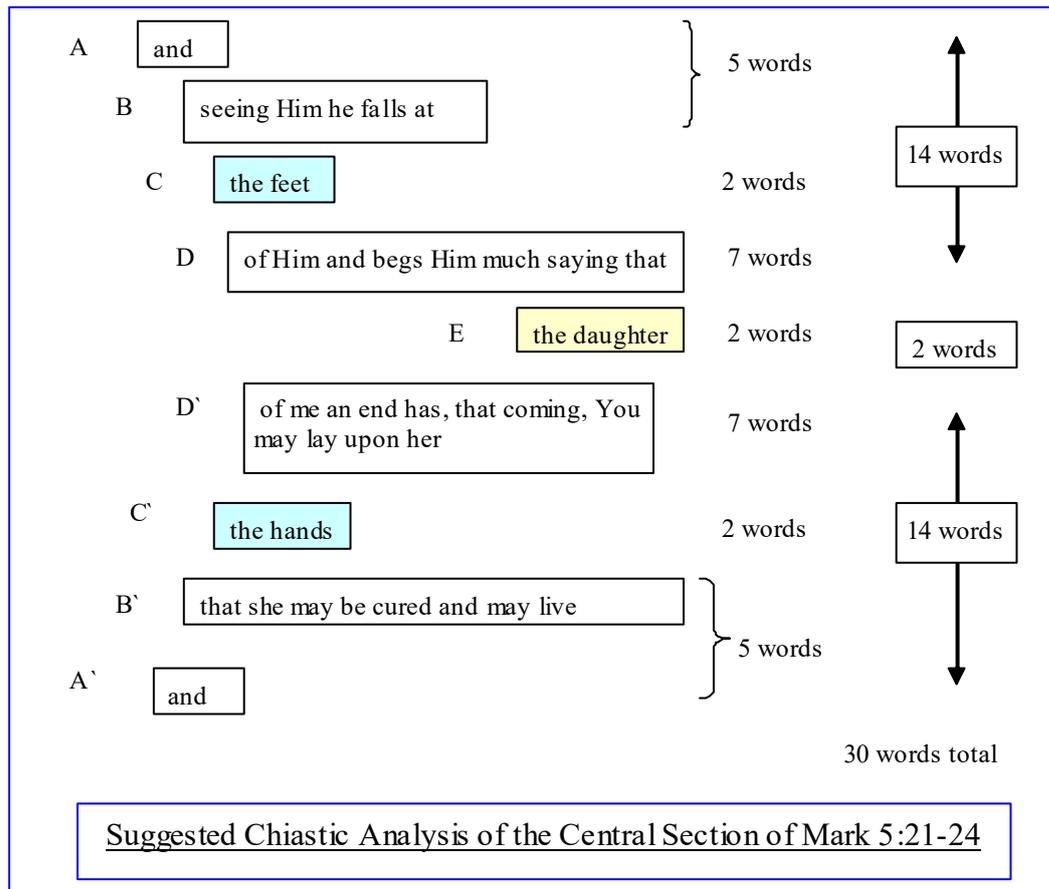
1) The passage is 30 words long. The two words "the daughter" form the



centre of the passage with two sections of 14 words on either side.

2) The passage is structured in such a way that the words “the feet” (referring to Christ’s feet) are words 6 and 7 counting forwards from the start of the passage, and the words “the hands” (referring to Christ’s hands) are words 6 and 7 counting (chiastically) backwards from the end of the passage: His hands and feet are human hands and feet (the number 6) but also holy (the number 7). The daughter is enveloped in double holiness—2 x 7 words on either side.

3) Interestingly, if we consider the whole 70 word passage (Mark 5:21-24) that we have been looking at, the two central words (i.e. word 35 = 7x5 counting forwards and word 35 = 7 x 5 counting backwards) are also “the



feet” - again referring to Jesus’ feet. Thus we have double grace (the number 5) in the context of double holiness (the number 7).

Some Possible Directions for Future Articles in the this Study

Jesus has been calling disciples by the sea. Jairus symbolically goes to the sea (the Gentiles) (c.f. Jonah, the Exile, the Diaspora, the struggle between Paul and the Judaisers in Acts and the Epistles) but Jairus wants Jesus to return with him, thus restricting the blessings to Israel (the house, the synagogue). But the blessings for the outsider (the woman) are a condition for the blessing of Israel in the New Covenant: Israel under the Old Covenant must therefore die (represented by the death of Jairus’ daughter) in order to live and inherit the blessings of Christ in the New Covenant. (Rom. 11:15). This is death to the flesh (i.e. Israel after the flesh) (?Rom 8:12-13) and to sin and the Law (i.e. the impossibility of righteousness and life for Israel through the Law—Gal. 3:21) (See also Romans 6:11 and 7:4). This is Israel’s history (the “death” of Exile, the failure to keep the law which would have given life etc.) (I think this condition for Israel to be blessed is taught by Paul, not only in Romans 10, but also in Galatians—as I’ve attempted describe in my book *The North Galatian*

Hypothesis—in particular in Ch. 17, *Evidence That Galatians Was Written to a Gentile Audience* (freely downloadable from the www.famousfox.org website)).

I believe this is also part of the mystery of the two parables, the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed in Mark 4:26-32: Israel's long history of spiritual growth and development under the Old Covenant (in particular the faithful remnant of the OT) reaches the point (i.e. the "fullness of time", Gal.4:4) where Israel has to die "spiritually" with Christ (e.g. Romans ch. 7) (corresponding to the putting in of the sickle in the parable of the Growing Seed) in order to bring the "harvest" i.e. New Covenant blessings for Israel and the world through faith in Christ (the parable of the Mustard Seed). I hope to try to develop some of these ideas and discuss them elsewhere in this series of essays. The death of John the Baptist, (Mark Ch. 6), the paradigmatic representative of the Old Covenant in the time of Jesus, appears to be significant in this regard also.

