Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman
Mark 7:24-30

A Term Paper
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Course 5231
Gospel of Mark

By
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Introduction

In Mark’s Gospel narrative, he places four women in exemplary roles: the hemorrhaging woman, the Syrophoenician woman, the poor widow and the woman of Bethany.¹ Malbon describes the hemorrhaging woman and the Syrophoenician woman as “bold and faithful women.” The poor widow and the woman of Bethany, Malbon describes as “self-denying serving women.” These women play a strong narrative role in relation to Mark’s central literary purpose: to show what it means to follow Jesus.² Though nameless, Mark places these women carefully in his narrative as poised examples worthy of imitation by the reader. The focus of this paper will be on the Syrophoenician woman.

Jesus’ openness to women should not be exaggerated in contradistinction to first-century patriarchal Mediterranean society. Jesus could not have been a “feminist” by modern standards. On the one hand, Jesus affirmed traditional service roles for women (more radical was his elevation of servanthood as the “greatest” vocation for himself and other men as well as women [see Mk 9:33-37; 10:35-45]). On the other hand, the opportunities Jesus afforded women for active participation in his mission may be compared with women’s rich involvement in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman religious life.³

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Misunderstandings of the Markan pericope containing the dialogue between the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus spring largely from the failure to read it as a whole.\(^4\) The purpose of this research paper is to explore the pericope of Mark 7:24-30, the narrative scene between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. The intention will be to explain the pericope’s likely supported context in the overarching Gospel of Mark while understanding the challenging interaction between Jesus and the woman along with it’s probable connection to Old Testament and New Testament salvation history.

**Overarching Placement in Mark’s Gospel of the Pericope**

From an overarching view, Rhoads\(^5\) has provided a literary road map that is helpful in understanding Mark’s placement and orientation of the pericope in his overall narrative. The Syrophoenician episode is integral to it’s immediate context in the plot.

The episodes before and after are in the following sequence:

A- Jesus feeds 5,000 Jews in a desert in Jewish territory and walks on water
B- Then heals those who come to him
C- After which he has a controversy with Pharisees over eating food with defiles hands
D- And teaches his disciples privately, declaring all foods clean.
C- Then he immediately goes off to the unclean gentile territory of Tyre where he grants the request of an unclean Gentile woman by driving out an unclean spirit
B- after which he goes to other Gentile territory of the Decapolis where he hear is a deaf and tongue-tied man
A- and subsequently feeds 4,000 Gentiles in a desert.

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The central episode here – the declaration that all foods are clean provides the conditions for a transition in the plot from a feeding in Jewish territory to a feeding in Gentile territory. The following episode of the Syrophoenician woman emerges in the Gospel text and echoes salvation history. Gentiles are indeed part of God’s adoptive plan as children enabled to enter His kingdom.

**Pericope Analysis**

The range of forms suggested for this narrative extend in all of the following categories: aphorism (Culpepper)\(^6\), apophthegm (Bultmann)\(^7\), parable (Edwards)\(^8\), riddle (Rhoads)\(^9\) and paradigm (Taylor)\(^10\). The most reoccurring descriptions in the citations are aphorism: a pithy observation that contains a general truth; or apophthegm: pronunciation story as a teaching narrative to a miracle story.\(^{11}\)

In order to understand the intensity of the meaning of this pericope, it seems essential to deconstruct it from the underlying Greek. According to Stein\(^{12}\), the pericope consists of three sections.

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\(^9\) Rhoads, David, *Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark*, 355.


Each section, as defined by Stein, is deconstructed in a table by integrating the ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament\(^{13}\); Danker (based on Bauer’s) Greek-English Lexicon\(^{14}\) along with one more resource dimension of Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.\(^{15}\)

The tables are intended to offer a reference point for words in the text that are most sited by scholars to support or refute the arguments that are made by scholarly articles researched and referenced. Additionally, they will help put in perspective the reasoning and conclusions for the most likely positions chosen to be supported in this research paper.

Stein’s Three Part summary is as follows:\(^{16}\)

1. Mark 7:24-26:
   - Transitional seam (24-25a) consisting of an introductory encounter between Jesus and a Syrophoenician woman
   - A request for healing (25b-26)

2. Mark 7:27-28
   - Dialogue and repartee between Jesus and the woman

3. Mark 7:29-30
   - Story conclusion with a pronouncement concerning faith of the woman (29a)
   - Distant exorcism of the demon from her daughter
   - Proof of the exorcism

\(^{13}\) All biblical references in the tables and throughout the paper are taken from Crossway The English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament English Standard Version, Nestle-Aland, John Scwhandt, ed, 2011


\(^{16}\) Stein, Robert H. *Mark*, 349.
The first section (7:24-26) involves a transitional seam (7:24-25a) consisting of an introductory encounter between Jesus and a Syrophoenician woman, and a request for healing (7:25b-26).

**English Standard Version:**

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know; yet he could not be hidden. 25 But, immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

**Greek:**

24 δε Εκειθεν αναστας απηλθεν εις τα ορια Τυρου και Σιδωνος. Και εισελθων εις οικιαν ουδενα ηθελεν γνωναι, και ηδυνηθη ουκ λαθειν. 25 αλλ ευθυς γυνη ης το θυγατριν αυτης ειχεν ακαθαρτον πνευμα ακουσασα περι αυτου ελουσα προσεπεσεν προς αυ του τους ποδας. 26 δε η γυνη ην Ελληνις Συροφοινικισσα το γενει και ηρωτα αυτον ινα εκβαλη το δαιμονιον εκ αυτης της θυγατρος.

**Table 1 Mark 7:24-26**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English ESV Word/Phrase</th>
<th>Lexicon ESV Greek Word /Phrase</th>
<th>Lexicon ESV Greek Definition</th>
<th>Strong’s Number</th>
<th>Strong’s Greek Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arose</td>
<td>αναστας</td>
<td>rise up</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>to get up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>went away</td>
<td>απηλθεν</td>
<td>to move from</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>to go away, withdraw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyre / Sidon</td>
<td>Τυρου / Σιδωνος</td>
<td>Ancient cities</td>
<td>5184/4605</td>
<td>Tyre “rocky place”/Sidon “fishery”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>house</td>
<td>οικιαν</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>3614</td>
<td>house, home, family household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did not want anyone to know</td>
<td>ουδενα ηθελεν γνωναι</td>
<td>not/want/known</td>
<td>3762/2309/1097</td>
<td>no one/to want/to know, recognize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could not be hidden</td>
<td>ηδυνηθη ουκ λαθειν</td>
<td>no ability to hide</td>
<td>1410/3756/2990</td>
<td>(no) ability/to keep secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woman</td>
<td>γυνη</td>
<td>adult female</td>
<td>1135</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little daughter</td>
<td>θυγατριον</td>
<td>little daughter, endearment</td>
<td>2365</td>
<td>little, younger daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclean</td>
<td>ακαθαρτον</td>
<td>Unclean</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>unclean, evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirit</td>
<td>πνευμα</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>4151</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fell</td>
<td>προσεπεσεν</td>
<td>fell down before</td>
<td>4363</td>
<td>to fall down before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentile</td>
<td>Ελληνις</td>
<td>Greek-oriented woman</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>Greek, Gentile, distinguished Jewish race or nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrophoenician</td>
<td>Συροφοινικισσα</td>
<td>Syrophoenician/Canaanite</td>
<td>4949</td>
<td>Syrophoenician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birth</td>
<td>γενει</td>
<td>ancestry, race, kind</td>
<td>1085</td>
<td>family, offspring; nation, people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beg</td>
<td>ηροτα</td>
<td>make a request</td>
<td>2065</td>
<td>to ask, beg, urge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cast</td>
<td>εκβαιλη</td>
<td>force to leave, drive out</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>to take out, remove, expel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demon</td>
<td>δαιμονιον</td>
<td>evil spirit, demon</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>demon; pagan god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daughter</td>
<td>θυγατρος</td>
<td>Child to parent relationship, female (could be of animals)</td>
<td>2364</td>
<td>younger daughter or woman by extension term of endearment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman were unlikely candidates to have deliberately met, perhaps instead it was in fact a random meeting. On the other hand, as we unravel this story it is possible to become more and more convinced that this was a divine introduction with a larger purpose leveraged by Mark’s placement in the Gospel.

Edwards\(^\text{17}\) and France refer to Jesus’ movement at this point as his “circuitous journey.” The widely held view that there is a deliberate focus on the Gentiles in this section, as presented both by Mark and by Matthew (part of Luke’s omission), depends on the cumulative effect of a number of features of the narrative. Mark documents geographical movements, Jesus ‘gets up and goes from there.’\(^\text{18}\)

Following the controversy with the Pharisees over purity matters and the oral tradition in 7:1-23, Jesus embarks on a long circuitous journey through Tyre (7:24), Sidon (7:31), and the Decapolis (7:31). It is not immediately clear in either Mark or Matthew, both of whom record the venture, why Jesus embarks on this itineration among the Gentiles in what today is modern Lebanon and Syria. Edwards considers several clues to draw at least a tentative conclusion from them.


One clue comes from Jesus’ desire for secrecy in all three stories in this until (7:24, 33, 36; 8:9-10) A second clue is the placement of the Gentile itineration immediately following the controversy with the Pharisees in 7:1-23. A third clue, perhaps, is the reference in 6:16 that Herod Antipas considered Jesus to be John the Baptizer returned to life. Combined, these clues suggest that Jesus and the disciples quit Galilee to escape harassment of the Pharisees and perhaps also Herod, who ruled Galilee and Perea and who had killed John.  

Edward also argues that this is only a hypothesis, but it appears justified from the above evidence. The hypothesis is further supported by the fact that Jesus does not teach in the Gentile itineration. Given the fifteen references thus far in Mark to Jesus’ teaching in Galilee, the omission of his teaching among the Gentiles invites explanation. It is clear that the circuitous itinerary in Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis is governed by a more restricted purpose than Jesus exercised among the Jewish towns and villages. Among the Gentiles he does mighty works of exorcism (5:1-20; 7:24-30), healing (7:31-37) and feeding the hungry (8:1-10), but he does not teach and evangelize.

However, there is instruction and it comes much more indirectly. No mention is made of the disciples, the ones Jesus generally instructs in a house setting. What follows is rather a story than an address. But, the house setting suggests the story to be instructive, at least for Mark’s audience regarding Jesus’ ministry.


Culpepper identifies this story as aphorism or a pithy observations that displays a general truth. The aphorism may have resulted from hostility between Tyreans and the Jews. More specifically, during the Maccabean Revolt in the second century B.C., Tyre along with Ptolemais and Sidon fought, on the side of the Seleuks against the Jews (1 Maac 5:15ff). The prophets decried the wealth and terror of Tyre (Ezek 26:17; Zech 9:3). Israel though guilty as well of paganism, Tyre probably represented the most extreme expression of paganism, both actually and symbolically, that a Jew could expect to encounter. The perception as speculated by Edwards through the understanding of Messiah in Psalms of Solomon 17:23-30, the Messiah would be ordained to expel and subdue the Gentiles, not to visit and embrace them. In the journeying to the vicinity of Tyre, and particularly in receiving a Syrophoenician woman, Jesus expands the scope of his ministry beyond anything conceivable of the Messiah. From a socioreligious perspective, Jesus’ visit to Tyre universalizes the concept of the the Messiah in terms of geography, ethnicity, gender, and in religion in a way entirely unprecedented in Judaism.

Josephus further explains regarding Tyre: Ahab, king of Israel, ruled for 22 years at Samaria, and outdid the previous kings in extraordinary wickedness and lawlessness. He worshiped the heifers that Jerobaom had made, as well as the native gods of his wife Jezebel, who was the daughter of the king of Tyre. The bold woman built a great temple to Baal, the Tyrian god and appointed priests and false prophets to this deity.

22 Culpepper, Alan R. *Mark*, 234.


Realistically the woman’s ethnic-geographic identification was Greco-Syrophoenician (Mk 7:26). The term “Syrophoenican” can be traced to the Latin term “Syrophoenix,” which appears around the second century BC and was used first to distinguish Syrophoenicians from Libyphoenicians, Lucilius, Satires: “That devil of a money-grubber, that Syrophoenician. In other words, she was a Gentile, probably a Greek-speaking woman born in Southern Syria.25

Compared to Mark Matthew’s narrative uses the anachronistic designation of “Canaanite” woman (Mt 15:22) harking back to ancient Israel’s Baal-worshipping foes in the promised land. Remarkably, in the parallel story (not exhaustively being analyzed in this paper), this “Canaanite honors Jesus as “Lord” (three times) and “Son of David,” kneels before him, and beseeches him in “shouting,” challenging yet prayerful mode, as in a lament psalm.26

Therefore, the Syrophoenician woman clearly had an ethnic, cultural, historical and spiritual reputation that preceded her fraught with multiple counts of “impurity” against her -- classifying her ultimately as being an “unclean” Gentile. Even though this woman was set up for potential disdain in this household; she desperately fell at Jesus’ feet with her plea to have him cast out a demon or an “unclean” spirit from her little girl.

The second section is followed by a dialogue and repartee between Jesus and the woman (7:27-28). Culpepper in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark explains the art of Challenge-Riposte. 27


26 Green, Joel B., ed., Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, 1008.

27 Culpepper, Alan R. Mark, 78.
In Culpepper’s commentary, he articulates what it may have felt like in
the First Century to have engaged in a discussion, debate or argument to identify what
position someone may have on a certain subject particularly around controversial subjects of
the day. The context of scriptures he primarily applies this observation to are focused on the
moments when his opponents such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, are challenging Jesus,
Scribes, political leaders and even his family e.g. Mark 3:4; Mark 3:21,33-35;3:22-23).

“Just as concern for money, paying the bills or perhaps affording something is
perpetual and pervasive in American society, so was the concern about honor in the
world of the Gospels. In this competition for honor the game of challenge-riposte is a
central phenomenon and one that must always be played out in public. It consists of a
challenge (almost any word, gesture or action) that seeks to undermine the honor of
another person and a response that answers in equal measure or ups the ante (and
thereby challenges in return. Both positive (gifts, compliments) and negative (insults,
dares) challenges must be answered to avoid serious loss of face. In the Synoptic
Gospels Jesus demonstrates considerable skill at challenge and riposte and thereby
reveals himself to be an honorable man capable of defending God’s honor, his
group’s honor and his own honor.” 28

The tables in this dialogue between the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus seem to
have turned. Jesus begins with the challenge and she is put in a position to answer him.

English Standard Version:
27 And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s
bread and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she answered him, “Yes Lord; yet even the dogs under
the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Greek:
27 καὶ εἶλεγεν αὐτῇ αφες τὰ τεκνὰ χορτασθήναι πρῶτον γαρ ἐστιν οὐ καλὸν
λαβεῖν τὸν τεκνὸν αρτὸν καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις 28 ἐν οπίσθεν η δε απεκρίθη καὶ λέγει
αὐτῷ Ναὶ κύριε καὶ τὰ κυναρὶα ὑποκατῶ τῆς τραπέζης εσθίωσαι απὸ τῶν
παιδίων ψιχιῶν

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28 Culpepper, Alan R. Mark, 78.
### Table II Mark 7:27-28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Lexicon</th>
<th>Lexicon</th>
<th>Strong’s Number</th>
<th>Strong’s Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let αφες</td>
<td>the act of freeing or liberating</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>to allow, permit, tolerate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children τεκνα</td>
<td>Offspring of human parents</td>
<td>5043</td>
<td>daughter, offspring, descendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fed χορτασθηναι</td>
<td>Fill with food, be satisfied</td>
<td>5526</td>
<td>to feed, to be filled to satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first πρωτον</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>4412</td>
<td>first, earlier, above all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for, not right γαρ εστιν ου καλον</td>
<td>For, it is not good</td>
<td>1063/1510</td>
<td>shows inference or continuation/to be/not/good, right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take λαβειν</td>
<td>to take, receive</td>
<td>2983</td>
<td>to take, receive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s τεκνον</td>
<td>offspring of human parents</td>
<td>5043</td>
<td>child, son, daughter, offspring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bread ερτον</td>
<td>baked product cereal grain, loaf of bread</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>Bread, loaves, shewbread</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throw βολειν</td>
<td>to cause to move from one location to another through use of a forceful motion</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>To throw, pour, cast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dogs κυναριοις</td>
<td>house-dog or lap-dog in contrast to a dog off the street or farm, also used with no diminutive at all little dog</td>
<td>2952</td>
<td>little or domesticated dog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But δε</td>
<td>connecting with contrast</td>
<td>1161</td>
<td>But, rather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered απεκριθη</td>
<td>Not preceded by a question expressed or implied, when the sentence is related in content to what precedes and forms a contrast to it reply (as a reaction)</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>answer, reply in discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord κυριε</td>
<td>lord, master</td>
<td>2962</td>
<td>lord, master, sir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dogs κυναρια</td>
<td>house-dog or lap-dog in contrast to a dog off the street or farm</td>
<td>2952</td>
<td>little or domesticated dog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from table της τραπεζηνς</td>
<td>implies partaking of a meal</td>
<td>5132</td>
<td>Table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat εσθιουσιν</td>
<td>take something in from the mouth</td>
<td>2068</td>
<td>to eat, consumer, devour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s παιδιων</td>
<td>diminutive, very young child up to age 7</td>
<td>3813</td>
<td>child, young child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crumbs ψιχιον</td>
<td>Crumbs</td>
<td>5589</td>
<td>Crumb, very small piece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The heart of the story is the “dual wits” in 7:27-28. Jesus responds with a brief parable to the woman’s plea for healing her daughter: First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

The reference to the woman as a dog ranks among the most offensive saying for Jesus. How is it to be understood? It would be an overstatement to say that “dog” was a thoroughly pejorative expression in the ancient world. There are instances of dogs being associated with the positive virtues of humility or service or watchfulness.  

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Nevertheless, almost all OT passages, illustrate the loathing that devout Israelites felt towards dogs.” Dogs were associated with uncleanness because they ate garbage, carrion and corpses (Ex 22:31; 1 Kgs 21:23; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:36). In the NT its contemptuous force is scarcely mitigated. Jesus warns against entrusting what is sacred to dogs (Matt 7:6), he describes human wretchedness in terms of a street mongrel licking the sores of a beggar (Luke 16:21), and Paul refers to his opponents as dogs (Phil 3:2). In the rabbinic tradition “dog” remained a term of reproach, referring to “the most despicable, insolent and miserable creatures.” It was in this opprobrious sense that “dog” was applied to Gentiles.

In Jesus’ place and time “dog” was thus scarcely a compliment. The question is whether Jesus thought of the woman with the above associations, and if he did not, why he referred to her with a term that carried them?

Three points may be offered:

1. Juxtaposition of this story with adjacent Pharisee story to show there are neither defiled objects nor person, then it would clearly defeat his purpose if Jesus regarded this woman as an unclean dog.

2. Greek word for “dog” is not the usual word for unkempt street dog (Gk. κυρον), but a diminutive (Gk. κυναριον), meaning a small dog that could be kept as a house pet. The fact that the woman refers to her daughter and herself with the same term in reply to Jesus shows that she does not take κυναριον in a hostile or

3. “Dog” signifies a traditional distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles that is important to the story. In the thought-world of the day, the Jews considered themselves “children” of God (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; Isa 1:2). They differed from other nations because of their inclusion in the covenant of Abraham (Gen 17) and because they possessed the Torah (Ex 19). The issue at stake between Jesus and the woman is whether Jesus is sent to “the children” or “to the dogs.” The woman maintains the same distinction between the “children” and the “dogs” in her reply to Jesus though with one slight change. Where Jesus refers to Israel as τεκνον (“biological children”), the woman refers to Israel as παιδιον, which is more inclusive, implying both children and servants in a household. The change in terminology suggests that the woman understands the mercies of God to extend beyond ethnic Israel.

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France also comments on Jesus’ response, though nowhere near as brutal as in Matthew, is certainly not diplomatic. It takes the form of a parable, the form of teaching we have been taught to associate with 4:11.\textsuperscript{31} He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables.” The Syrophoenician is an “outsider” therefore he is speaking to her in the language of parables regarding the kingdom of God. The whole tone of the sentence is negative to the point of offensiveness, and suggests that Jesus has no intention of helping the woman. France concurs with Edwards\textsuperscript{32} that the use of κυναρια seems to add gratuitously to the offense. France further notes that the inclusion of προτον softens the blow a little, in that it suggests that there may still be a legitimate place for the dogs after the children have been satisfied, χορταζομαι, indicates to eat ones fill, (not just a taste), but the Gentiles remain at the end of the queue, προτον indicates the same salvation history which Paul declares in Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the examples Gentile.” \textsuperscript{33}

Furthermore, Pokorny explains that Jesus concentrated his activity on Israel, as his saying: “go no where among the Gentiles … go rather to the lost sheep of Israel’ Matt 10:5. This can be confirmed e.g. twelve disciples who were to symbolize the renewed twelve tribes of Israel. This strategy did not in principle exclude the pagans from salvation.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} France, Richard T. \textit{The Gospel of Mark}, ~50.


\textsuperscript{33} France, Richard T. \textit{The Gospel of Mark}, ~52.

The eschatological dimension implied in Jesus’ image of the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom of God most probably included expectation of a procession of pagan nations to Mount Zion at the end of time, also well-known in some prophets: Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10, 19:19-25; 60:3-14; 66:19-21; Micah 4:1-8; Zeph 3:9-10; Zech 8:20-23. The saying of Jesus about people who will ‘come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and will eat in the Kingdom of God’ supports the assumption that he knew this expectation and that his Israel-centered activity was a part of a general centripetal strategy. He intended to prepare his people for the eschatological rally of nations, to make it a ‘priestly kingdom and a holy nation’ (Exo 19:6), i.e. a mediator between God and the other nations. In the context of this second section of the pericope it is important to know that the answer of Jesus reflects his attitude from the time of his Galilean ministry: it is congruent with other direct or indirect evidence about his activity and it explains the origin of this pericope. Jesus did not confirm the woman’s expectation that he would play the role of the exorcist, but confronted her with the comprehensive Israel-centered project of his ministry. 35

Instead of this understanding, some scholars rationalize (Rhoads36 and Culpepper37) that the woman actually changed Jesus’ mind or was even talking to himself and was possibly not serious.

35 P. Pokorny, From a Puppy to the Child Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis, 327.

36 Rhoads, David, Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark, 361.

37 Culpepper, Alan R. Mark, 239.
Some exegetes have attempted to evade a straightforward reading of the text with such rationalizations. Nothing in the texts supports them – then we accept that 7:27 as spoken by the historical Jesus and the suggestion of him talking to himself not the woman, facial expressions or tone of voice tipped the woman off that his refusal was not final and even speculation that he winked offers incorrect conclusions of what actually may have happened. The ending of the passage creates problems for this interpretation; does “because you have said this” (7:29) imply “because you have changed your mind? Possibly, but in the Markan context it seems more likely to mean, “because you have passed the test.” Elsewhere in Mark, Jesus often ascribes healing to people’s persistent faith (2:5; 5:34; 10:52, Math 15:28) Two chapters later, moreover, Jesus will heal a demon-possessed child whose parent has interceded for him (9:14-29). As in our passage, the parent’s request for healing is not immediately fulfilled; Jesus initially makes a response that sounds like a refusal (9:19a), but that turns out to be a ploy designed to evoke a significant expression of faith on the part of the parent (9:24; Matt 8:5-13).38 This is probably the Markan meaning here, whatever their significance for the historical Jesus, Mark’s plot the words in 7:27 are in the nature of a test of faith.

The woman’s reply to Jesus in v 28 shows her understanding and acceptance of Israel’s privilege. Indeed, she appears to understand the purpose of Israel’s Messiah better than Israel does. Her “pluck” (literary punch line) and persistence are a testimony to her trust in the sufficiency and surplus of Jesus: his provision for the disciples and Israel will be abundant enough to provide for one such as herself.

39 P. Pokorny, From a Puppy to the Child, 327.
Several scholars including Edwards, point out that Mark provides a clue to this understanding in the Gk. χορτασθηναι (eat all they want). This word occurs only twice elsewhere in Mark, in the feedings of the five thousand (6:42) and four thousand (8:4,8). In its present location, the word bridges Jesus’ feeding of the Jews (6:31-44) and his subsequent feeding of the Gentiles (8:1-10). When dogs eat crumbs from the table they do not rob children of their food; they simply eat what is theirs from the surplus of the children.

In the final section, the story concludes (7:29-30) with a pronouncement concerning faith of the woman (7:29a), the distant exorcism of the demon from her daughter (7:29b), and the proof of the exorcism (7:30).

29 And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” 30 And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

και ειπεν αυτη δια τουτον τον λογον υπαγε το δαµιον εξεληλυθεν εκ σου της θυγατρος και απελθουσα εις τον οικον αυτης ευρεν το παιδιον βεβληµενον επι την κλινην και το δαµιον εξεληλυθος

Table III Mark 7:29-30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Lexicon</th>
<th>Lexicon</th>
<th>Strong’s</th>
<th>Strong’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word/Phrase</td>
<td>ESV Word/Phrase</td>
<td>ESV Greek Word/Phrase</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>said</td>
<td>ειπεν</td>
<td>To express a thought, opinion or idea</td>
<td>3004</td>
<td>say, said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statement</td>
<td>λογον</td>
<td>word, communication whereby the mind finds expression; utterance chiefly oral</td>
<td>3056</td>
<td>word, spoken or written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>εξεληλυθεν</td>
<td>To move out from or away from an area</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>to go out, leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you may go your way</td>
<td>υπαγε</td>
<td>To leave someone’s presence to go away</td>
<td>5217</td>
<td>to go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demon</td>
<td>δαµιον</td>
<td>Evil spirit, demon</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>demon, pagan god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>θυγατρο</td>
<td>child to parent relationship, female (could be of animals)</td>
<td>2364</td>
<td>daughter by extension term of endearment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went</td>
<td>επελθουσα</td>
<td>to depart</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>to go away, withdraw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>οικον</td>
<td>structure as a dwelling house</td>
<td>3624</td>
<td>house, home physical edifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found</td>
<td>ευρεν</td>
<td>To be discovered/found out; how faith is to be discerned</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>to find, discover, meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>παιδιον</td>
<td>Diminutive, very young child up to age 7</td>
<td>3813</td>
<td>child, children, young child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>βεβληµενον</td>
<td>to cause to move from one location to another through use of a forceful motion</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>to throw, to pour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed</td>
<td>κλινην</td>
<td>Place for those who are resting, suffering or dining; bed</td>
<td>2825</td>
<td>bed, mat, stretcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone</td>
<td>εξεληλυθος</td>
<td>to come out</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>to go out, leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The believing woman submits her cause entirely to Jesus and she is not disappointed. ‘For such a reply, you may go,’ says Jesus, ‘the demon has left your daughter.’ This is a very ironic turning point. Jesus seeks desperately to teach his chosen disciples – yet they are dull and uncomprehending; Jesus is reluctant even to speak to a walk-in pagan woman and after one sentence she understands his mission and receives his unambiguous commendation (loftier yet in Matthew 15:28: “Woman, you have great faith!”). How is this possible? The answer is that the woman is the first person in Mark to hear and understand a parable of Jesus. The brief parable of the children and dogs at the table has disclosed to her the mystery of the kingdom of God.

She is not distant and aloof, attempting to maintain her position and control. She does what Jesus commands of those who would receive the kingdom and experience the word of God those who would receive the kingdom and experience the word of God she enters the parable and allows herself to be claimed by it. 41

Pokorny further explains that in the pericope the pagan woman has ‘entered’ the metaphorical world of Jesus’ apophthegm on feeding and her orientation has been twice intensified in a metaphorical way: from exorcism (‘daily’ level) through ‘feeding’ (lifelong’ level) to discovering the Lord as Saviour (eschatological level). 42

Skinner also offers one more worthy point about the woman’s “faith” although not directly mentioned by Jesus in the Markan pericope as compared to the Matthew parallel pericope. The woman must leave Jesus without visual confirmation of the healing and trusting it has happened and travel from one house to another.

42 P. Pokorny, *From a Puppy to the Child*, 333.
The long-distance miracle therefore alters the woman’s circumstances and allows her faith to manifest itself once again. With the simple words “She departed to her house” Mark depicts her enacting a confident anticipatory faith that allows her to cross the distance from the house of promise (“the demon has gone out of your daughter”) to the house of the realization (“[she] found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone”) Whether the woman makes the trip home with hopeful excitement or nervous trepidation, Mark does not say. What this brief account does say, however, is that she makes the trip without any tangible collateral or Jesus’ presence as a pledge to insure the validity of his promise. In her willingness to take Jesus at his word, to know that it is time to leave off contending and to start traveling home, she displays faith.44

Mark’s concept of faith is certainly not identical with Paul’s. There are some analogies, but there are striking differences, since Mark accepts also the popular concept of faith as miracle faith(5:34). In his version of our story he underands faith as confession and he does not use the expressions πιστις or πιστευειν. He has written his book several years after Paul’s death and tried to gather and interpret a wide stream of Christian tradition. Unlike Paul, who had to defend his teaching against Jewish Christians, Mark tried to interpret the new situation after the situation, which Jesus has foretold, i.e. in the time after the ‘first’ πρωτον period, after the period of feeding the Jewish children. His solution seems to be quite in agreement with the Pauline one: in both cases through the grace of the Lord a non-child becomes the child of God.45


45 P. Pokorny, From a Puppy to the Child, 332.
The pericope ends with the woman finding her daughter free of the demon or “unclean” spirit in her bed at home. The word κλινη implies, though still speculative, that a “bed” rather than a simple “mat” (κραββατος) identifies this woman also with an elevated, opulent status. 46 Similar speculation has been made regarding the first disciples. Zebedee and his sons, James and John, had hired hands to help them which suggests that he operated a small fishing business. While it is unlikely that they were among families of the upper class, neither did they share the desperate lot of hired servants and day laborers. Also, Mark makes it clear that Jesus was in Peter’s home and used it for his ministry. 47 Mark echoes Jesus’ call to discipleship (Mark 8:34-37) by bringing to life in our heart’s and minds what it means to follow Jesus through the eyes, hearts, emotions and circumstances of the characters that demonstrated faith in his gospel.

**Conclusion**

Mark’s readers, even as gentiles, possessed an assured place in salvation history. Jesus taught that the Jews possessed temporal priority. They were indeed first as God’s call to Abraham and his offspring demonstrates, but the divine order of “first to Jews and then to gentile” (Roma 1:16 Acts 13:46) has resulted in salvation coming to the readers of Mark’s Gospel. Edwards further emphasizes that this also assured Mark’s Roman readers that their inclusion in salvation was not an accident, but part of God’s providence, deriving from the ministry of Jesus himself (Romans 11:29-32). 48


47 Culpepper, Alan R. *Mark*, 57.

48 Guelich, Robert A. *Mark 1-8:26*, 389.
Intertextually the pericope of the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus echoes of the Elijah and Elisha narrative cycles. The initial story of the Elijah cycle takes place in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24) a city that belongs to Sidon (1 Kings 17:8 see Mark 7:24) where Jesus “rose up”. Then he alone meets the widow of Zarephath and a miraculous feeding takes place. Later the woman’s son falls ill and dies; after the death of her son the woman verbally confronts the prophet: “Why have you come against me O man of God?” Though the healing of the son is narrated in more detail than in the case of the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter, the words of the prophet take the form of a simple pronouncement: ”See your son lives” (17:33); compare to Mark 7:29: “the demon has already left your daughter.”

Echoes of a similar story in the Elisha cycle, the restoration to life of the son of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kgs 4:18-37), also appear in Mark 7:24-30. The locale Shunem is in the north. After some years this woman’s son dies, and seeks out Elisha. After an initial dialogue the woman grasps the feet of the prophet (4:27; See Mark 7:25). The woman manifests the same initiative and persistent concern as the Syrophoenician woman 4:28-31 Elisha finds the child lying on a bed (4:32; κλινη see Mark 7:30). And the prophetic word announcing the healing is also a simple pronouncement: “Take your son” 2 Kings 4:36. The Elisha story is followed soon after by a narrative of a miraculous feeding. These echoes of the Elijah and Elisha narratives support the motif of the prophet who goes to a person outside Israel (the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite). 49

Mark’s Christology goes a long way toward explaining the kind of people who come to follow Jesus, as well as the kind of people who come to reject him. As for those who follow, that narrative is crowded with unlikely and peripheral characters: an erstwhile demoniac (Mk 5:20); a Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:29); blind Bartimaeus calling out for the “Son of David” (Mk 10:47); an anonymous woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (Mk 14:1-9); and a Roman centurion (Mk 15:39), the embodiment of Gentile oppression and power.\(^\text{50}\)

\(^{50}\) Green, Joel B., ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 536.
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