

Women in Mark's Gospel

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 T & T CLARK INTERNATIONAL
A *Continuum* imprint
LONDON • NEW YORK

THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN AND HER DAUGHTER (7.24–30)

1. Introduction

The account of the exorcism of the Syrophenician woman's daughter is the third narrative depicting a woman and young girl. We have seen the positive portrayal of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and of the raising of Jairus' daughter (5.21–43), followed by a negative description of women in the account of the plot of Herodias and her daughter to execute John the Baptist (6.14–29). The third story, which is of a woman who seeks healing for her daughter, is a positive account portraying the faith of a Gentile woman. The earlier two accounts present women in a Jewish context, but now Jesus moves into the Gentile area surrounding Tyre, and the woman who requests help for her daughter is a Syrophenician. Her child is possessed by an unclean spirit, indicating that the power of disease and evil extends over Gentile land as well as over Israel.

Initially, Jesus appears reluctant to heal the woman's daughter, but the Syrophenician woman refuses to give up her request. The account of the Syrophenician woman is striking in its portrayal of the courage and determination of the woman. Her refusal to give up hope recalls portraits of other persistent women who successfully debate with powerful men as in 2 Sam. 14.1–20, Lk. 18.1–8 and b. *Erub.* 53. Feminist interpreters, such as Fander, argue that the Syrophenician woman changes Jesus' mind.¹ Range, moreover, suggests that the faith of the woman allows Jesus to come to a new understanding of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.² Kinukawa proposes that the woman is the one who challenges Jesus to ignore the barriers between Jews and Gentiles.³ As Rhoads points out, the persistence of the Syrophenician woman reveals the power of faith to overcome obstacles.⁴ Her courage and determination thus portray this woman as a prototype of the faith of the Gentiles.

The portrayal of the Syrophenician woman is similar to that of the woman with the flow of blood (5.24–34), since each account depicts the courage of women and their ability to act independently. Both women appear alone and risk condemnation

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in their approach to Jesus. The woman with the flow of blood seeks healing by reaching out to touch Jesus' clothes, and her action points to the abandonment of the purity regulations. In our passage the Syrophenician woman appears as a prophetic figure, who ignores the religious and social barriers between Jews and Gentiles in order to seek help from an itinerant Jewish teacher, and her story indicates that the mission of Jesus is for both Jews and Gentiles.

2. *The Portrayal of the Syrophenician Woman*

The Syrophenician woman and her daughter are both anonymous, and the mother is introduced simply as a woman (γυνή, 7.25) in a manner similar to that of other women in Mark (5.25; 14.3). She is defined by her daughter's illness (ἵς ἐκεῖν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, 7.25), which suggests that her life is dominated by her child's suffering. Matthew portrays the woman as a Canaanite (15.22), but Mark describes her in greater detail as Ἐλθνής, Συροφοινίκισσα τῶ γέυει (Greek, a Syrophenician by race, 7.26). As Rhoads observes, this phrase is a typically Markan two-step progression in which a general description is followed by a more specific term (1.32; 6.53; 14.3).⁵ In our passage Mark emphasizes that the woman is not only Greek-speaking, but also a Gentile by race. Taylor argues that the description Syrophenician is intended to distinguish the woman from Libyphenicians who are from the area around Carthage.⁶ As Marcus points out, however, Mark may use this term to indicate that the woman is from the Phoenician area of Syria instead of the Coele-Syrian area, or the description may suggest that the woman is a descendant of the intermarriage of Phoenicians with Syrians.⁷

The narrative takes place in the region around the city of Tyre, and some manuscripts include a reference to Sidon, but the latter may have been inserted, since these cities are frequently linked together, and Jesus later visits Sidon (7.31). Tyre and Sidon are portrayed negatively in the Old Testament (Isa. 23.1–12; Jer. 47.4; Ezek. 26–28; Joel 3.4–8; Amos 1.9–10; Zech. 9.2–4). The description of the woman's background, therefore, not only defines her as a Gentile, but also links her with the people of Tyre who were traditionally regarded as the enemies of the Jewish people (cf. Josephus, *Apion* 1.70). This conflict, moreover, continues in the first century as Josephus refers to hostilities between the Jewish people and the inhabitants of Tyre at the time of the Jewish War (*War* 2.478).

The Old Testament references to Tyre and Sidon often condemn the wealth and materialism of these cities (Isa. 23.8–9; Ezek. 27–28; Joel 3.4–6; Zech. 9.2–4). Theissen highlights the socio-economic features in the account in his examination of the social and historical context which lies behind the relationship between the Galileans and the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon.⁸ Tyre was a wealthy trading city which lacked land suitable for agriculture, and Tyre therefore bought food supplies

1. Fander, *Stealing*, 74.

2. S. H. Range, 'A Gentile Woman's Story', in A. Loades (eds.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 56.

3. Kinukawa, *Women*, 60.

4. D. Rhoads, 'Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study', *JABR* 62 (1994), 348–52.

5. Rhoads, 'Syrophenician', 353.

6. Taylor, *St. Mark*, 349.

7. Marcus, *Mark*, 462–63.

8. G. Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social History and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 72–75.

from Galilee. Theissen argues that there were considerable tensions between the two areas, since the Galileans went hungry in times of food shortage in order to supply the people of Tyre.

In our passage the social status of the woman may be indicated by the description of her as a Greek (7.26). Theissen notes that the term Ἑλληνίς suggests that the woman is immersed in Hellenistic culture, which may imply that she is a member of the upper classes.⁹ As he observes, the woman may be wealthy, since her child lies on a bed (καλὴν, 7.30), rather than on the mats that were used by poor people (κρίβαντος, 2.4, 9, 12; 6.55).¹⁰ The apparent wealth of the woman is reminiscent of the portrayal of the woman with the flow of blood (5.24–34) who initially had sufficient means to enable her to pay doctors in her search for a cure for her illness. The social status of the Syrophoenician woman, however, is not as high as that of Herodias and her daughter, who are members of the aristocracy of Galilee, but her position contrasts with that of the majority of the poorer people of Galilee. The inhabitants of Tyre are traditionally associated with sufficient wealth to buy whatever grain they need from their poorer Jewish neighbours. In our passage these roles are reversed as a representative from the wealthy area of Tyre is portrayed as seeking 'bread' from Jesus, a Galilean.

Not all associations of Tyre and Sidon in the Old Testament, however, are negative. Gnlika points out that there is a promise of salvation for Tyre and the neighbouring peoples in Ps. 87.4.¹¹ In addition Derrett notes the similarities between our passage and the story of the widow of Zarephath who encounters the prophet, Elijah, in the vicinity of Sidon (1 Kgs 17).¹² In 1 Kings Elijah requests that the woman serves him first before sharing her last meal with her son, which is similar to the way Jesus in our account wants his people to be fed before the Gentiles. Both passages feature the healing of Gentile children, since Elijah raises the widow's son from death and Jesus casts out a demon from the Syrophoenician woman's daughter. The widow of Zarephath, moreover, acts as a prototype of faithful Gentiles elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Lk. 4.16–30). The positive response of the Syrophoenician woman to Jesus may thus foreshadow the future success of the Gentile mission.

The Syrophoenician woman and Jesus each represent separate worlds, since they differ in race, social status and gender. She is portrayed as a member of the Hellenistic world, cultured and wealthy, whereas Jesus is a Jewish man who lives as an itinerant teacher. The woman's need for help for her daughter prompts her to seek out someone outside her world to find healing for her child. Just as Jairus, the president of the synagogue, had to move out from the synagogue to find healing for his daughter (5.21–43), so the Syrophoenician woman seeks help from someone outside the Gentile world. In both passages there is an implication that the present

world of the suppliant is unable to heal, and this lack of power prompts individuals to approach someone beyond their familiar experience.

The Syrophoenician woman acts independently, without anyone to help on her behalf, and there is no reference to her husband or to any male relatives. Rhoads argues that the gender of the Syrophoenician woman is not essential to the story, since the account of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles could have featured a Gentile man.¹³ The gender of the woman, however, is highlighted by her willingness to ignore social conventions in order to speak to Jesus.¹⁴ Respectable women were not expected to go out unaccompanied or to approach strangers, particularly men. A woman on her own was also vulnerable to attack, and therefore the Syrophoenician woman risks her security for the sake of her child, since she enters the house alone to speak to Jesus. The Syrophoenician woman's trust in Jesus, however, enables her to disregard the social boundaries between Jews and Gentiles to seek help from a Jewish man. In this way she is similar to the woman with the flow of blood (5.24–34) and the woman who anoints Jesus (14.3–9), as they also appear to be alone.

The issue of gender plays a role in both our passage and in the account of the woman with the flow of blood (5.24–34). Although the woman with the flow of blood is ritually impure, she still touches Jesus' clothes (5.27). In our account the Syrophoenician woman disregards the religious and social barriers between Jews and Gentiles in her search for healing for her daughter, and Jesus casts the unclean spirit from the Gentile child. The abandonment of the purity regulations, therefore, is prompted in both accounts by the actions of women, and is justified by the healing of women.

On one level the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman is an account of a mother's request for healing for her sick daughter; but on another, this meeting has deeper implications for the relations between Jews and Gentiles. Sugirtharajah¹⁵ notes that Jesus does not ask the Syrophoenician woman to give up her status as a Gentile or to follow him, and Perkinson¹⁶ raises the question of

9. Theissen, *Gospels*, 70.
10. Theissen, *Gospels*, 71.
11. Gnlika, *Evangelium*, 1.291.
12. J.D.M. Derrett, 'Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum', *NovT* 15 (1973), 16.

13. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician', 367.
14. Pomeroy (*Goddesses*, 149–89) notes that upper-class Roman women had more freedom to travel outside their homes in order to attend public dinners, games and political gatherings than their counterparts in classical Athens. She also observes (*Goddesses*, 190–204) that the lives of poorer women were not as secluded as those of the upper classes, since women worked at trades and in taverns. Clark (*Women in the Ancient World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 17–21) takes a similar view in her analysis of the lives of women. She points out that Roman women attended dinner parties with men (Cornelius Nepos, *Privat* 6). See also E. Cantarella, *Pamphila's Daughters: the Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (trans. M.B. Fant, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987). Cantarella (134) accepts the increasing freedom of Roman women, but argues that it was intended to educate upper-class women in male values and to prepare women for the role of wife and mother. The Syrophoenician woman, however, not only travels on her own to visit Jesus, but meets him in a private place. Her unexpected appearance and Jesus' reluctance to heal her daughter imply that she has not been invited to the house, and there is also no indication of the presence of any other people.

15. R.S. Sugirtharajah, 'The Syrophoenician Woman', *ExpTim* 98 (1986), 13–15.
16. J. Perkinson, 'A Canaanite Word in the Logos of Christ, or The Difference the Syrophoenician Woman Makes to Jesus', *Semeia* 75 (1996), 61–85.

whether or not the Syrophoenician woman retains her religious differences after her encounter with Jesus. Our passage, however, is not a call narrative. In the context of the gospel the Gentiles are not subsumed within the Jewish mission, since Jesus abandons the food laws (7.19). The exorcism of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter is a sign of the kingdom of God breaking into the world. Mark characteristically portrays the healing of an individual as representative of the action of God in redeeming the world. As we have seen, the account of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and of the raising of Jairus' daughter (5.21–43) foreshadows the restoration of Israel. Our passage describes the exorcism of a Gentile woman's daughter in a way that points forward to the extension of the salvation of Israel to the Gentiles.

3. *The Portrayal of the Syrophoenician Woman's Daughter*

The daughter of the Syrophoenician woman is anonymous like her mother, and we are given little information about her apart from her illness. The girl is first described as being possessed by an unclean spirit (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, 7.25), and later there are two references to the demon which possesses her (7.26, 29). She is subject to an outside evil force which renders her unclean. As we have seen, the descriptions of human beings possessed by evil spirits (ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτου, 1.23; 5.2) are ambiguous. Individuals may have the unclean spirit within them, or they may be regarded as submerged within the evil age of Satan.¹⁷ In one sense an outside evil force has taken control over the girl. On the other hand this description suggests that illness comes about as a result of the inability of an individual to adapt to an evil environment. The child is possessed by an unclean spirit because she is vulnerable to the power of the evil age in which she lives. Jesus, therefore, seeks both to heal the individual and to redeem creation.

Although the girl's condition is not portrayed in detail, the Markan audience is aware of the severity of demon possession, since we have already heard the description of the torments of the Gerasene demoniac who lived among tombs, tearing himself with stones (5.1–20). The Gerasene demoniac has been abandoned by his community, who seek only to restrain him. The Syrophoenician woman, however, refuses to abandon her child. In the Greco-Roman world girls were less highly valued than boys, and they were more likely to be exposed as infants (*P. Oxy.* 744; Apuleius, *Metam.* 10.23).¹⁸ Ringe, moreover, notes that they were costly to their

17. Marcus, *Mark*, 192.

18. For a discussion on the exposure of female infants, see Pomeroy, *Goddesses*, 164–65 and Cantarella, *Pontora's Daughters*, 115–16. D. Engels ('The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World', *CP* 75 [1980], 112–20) argues that the stable population figures indicated that there was not a high rate of the exposure of female infants in the Greco-Roman world. M. Golden ('Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens', *Phoenix* 35 [1981], 316–31), however, counters Engels' argument and shows that female infanticide was a factor in the low rate of population growth. G. Clark (*Women in the Ancient World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 25) notes that there is evidence for a shortage of upper-class women since Augustus allowed well-born men not of the senatorial class to marry the daughters of freedmen (Dio 54.16.2).

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families and required a dowry in order to marry.¹⁹ The desire of the Syrophoenician woman to seek healing for her daughter, however, indicates the value she places on her child. This portrayal is similar to that of Jairus' daughter. The concern of both parents to find healing for their daughters at personal cost to themselves challenges negative views of the status of women and particularly of daughters in the first century.²⁰

Children are the most vulnerable members of the community and suffer the onslaught of disease associated with the increasing evil of the end-time (cf. 13.19). They are members of the last generation in whose lifetime the kingdom of God will come (9.1; 13.30). The healing of Jairus' daughter and the Syrophoenician woman's daughter thus point forward to the new age when no disease or evil will remain. Mark, however, gives different presentations of the healing of these children. As Taylor points out, the girl in our passage is healed at a distance and there is no reference to healing either by the touch (1.31; 5.41) or by the word of Jesus (1.25; 5.8; 9.25).²¹ This account contrasts with the healing of Jairus' daughter, as in that passage Jesus seizes the girl by the hand and addresses her directly (ταλὶθρα κοῦμ, 5.41). The present exorcism is depicted as a battle between Jesus and the power of evil. Jesus is asked to cast the demon from the girl (ἵνα τὸ δαίμονιον ἐκβάλῃ, 7.26). The verb ἐκβάλλω (to cast out) is a violent verb expressing the force necessary to free the girl from evil. After her healing the girl is thrown onto her bed (βεβλήμενον ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην, 7.30), and Rhoads notes that this description implies that a violent struggle has taken place.²² The narrative depicts the after-effects of the exorcism, and the final picture of the girl is one of the peace attained after a battle.

As in the earlier accounts of exorcisms (1.21–28; 5.1–20), however, there is still a lack of resolution to the conflict since we are not told where the demon has gone. The healing of the girl is poignant because she appears to be alone in the climactic moments of her struggle against evil. This situation contrasts with the healing of Jairus' daughter in which Jesus, his four disciples, and the girl's mother and father are present (5.40). Jairus' daughter rises from death to the presence of her family, and she is given food by them (5.43). As Hooker observes, the healing of the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman is reminiscent of the healing of another Gentile, the centurion's servant who is also healed at a distance (Mt. 8.5–13; Lk. 7.1–10).²³ These healings, therefore, are indications of the power of Jesus to move beyond

J. Boswell (*The Kindness of Strangers. The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* [London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1989], 74) argues that the practice of the exposure of children in the Greco-Roman world should not be confused with infanticide because children were often left in places where they could be collected and brought up by strangers. Some were adopted as foster children (*Dig.* 34.1.15; 34.1.14.1; 36.3.26). Boswell (111–13), however, also notes that a large number became slaves or prostitutes (Terence, *Haut.* 640; Justin, *1 Apol.* 27).

19. Ringe, 'Gentile Woman's Story', 55.

20. Iian, *Jewish Women*, 44–48.

21. Taylor, *St. Mark*, 348.

22. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician', 352.

23. Hooker, *St. Mark*, 184.

Israel to the Gentiles. As the Gentile mission is particularly associated with the period between the resurrection and the parousia (13.10), these healings without the physical presence of Jesus are proleptic of a power to heal that will continue after his death.

4. *The Meeting of Jesus with the Syrophenician Woman*

At the beginning of our passage Jesus travels north into the Gentile area of Tyre and enters a house with the desire of remaining hidden. Immediately the Syrophenician woman hears of him and she approaches him within the house with a request that he release her daughter from the power of an unclean spirit. Mark, however, begins with Jesus' reply rather than the request of the woman. Jesus' words are shocking in their severity since he appears unwilling to heal the sick child ('Let the children be fed first for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs', 7.27). In the opening chapters of the Gospel, by contrast, we have seen Jesus responding immediately to the needs of those who seek healing (1.29-31; 1.40-45; 2.1-12). When Jairus, the president of the synagogue, requests help for his daughter, Jesus sets off immediately to his house (5.24). In our account, then, expectations are overturned, since Jesus seems reluctant to help the Syrophenician woman's daughter.

Various interpretations have been suggested to explain the harshness of Jesus' reply. Some give a psychological explanation; Taylor, for example, cites the beginning of our passage in which Jesus enters a house and wishes to remain concealed (7.24). He suggests that Jesus seeks privacy in order to reflect on the scope of his mission, and he is speaking to himself as well as to the woman.²⁴ Lane, moreover, proposes that Jesus tests the woman to ensure that she does not regard his miracles as magic or superstitions.²⁵ These interpretations are unconvincing, however, since Mark does not describe Jesus' motives and there is no indication that the woman has a false understanding of Jesus.

Other commentators, such as Myers, focus on the action of the woman, proposing that Jesus' rejection of the woman is to be expected, because the behaviour of the Syrophenician woman in approaching an unknown man in a private house was unconventional and insulting to Jesus.²⁶ Similarly, Kinukawa argues that the

24. Taylor, *St. Mark*, 349-50.

25. Lane, *Mark*, 262.

26. Myers, *Binding*, 203. Tolbert ('Mark', 269) suggests that Mark's audience may have compared the woman's unconventional behaviour to that of the Cynics who were called 'dogs' because of their disregard of social conventions. F. G. Downing ('The Woman from Syrophenicia, and her Dogeness: Mark 7.24-31 (Matthew 15.21-28)', in G. J. Brooke (ed.), *Women in the Biblical Tradition* [Studies in Women and Religion, 31]; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 134) also argues that the use of the term 'dog' implies that the woman is portrayed as a Cynic. Downing, moreover, compares the skill of the Syrophenician woman in argument to that of the Cynic Hipparchia (Diogenes Laertius, 6.97-98). The Syrophenician woman, however, does not anticulate any of the teaching of the Cynics, and she is portrayed as a mother who is anxious to return home to her daughter rather than as an itinerant philosopher who has rejected social norms.

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woman's approach to Jesus brings disgrace to him, because the act of bowing was only accepted among men.²⁷ Her argument is influenced by her experience of the social conventions of Japanese society, which are not reflected in our passage. Both Myers' and Kinukawa's interpretations fail to consider the praise and acceptance Jesus gives to the woman with the flow of blood, who also kneels before him (5.33).

In our passage, rather, the reason behind Jesus' refusal is indicated by the clause *ὅτι* (but) in 7.26: the woman is *Ἐλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα* *τῷ* *γέλει*, implying that Jesus is reluctant to heal the child because of her race. The woman and her daughter are Gentiles and are thus outside the Jewish nation. Jesus contrasts the Syrophenician's daughter with the term for children, *τέκνα* (7.27), which may also be translated as descendants, and thereby portrays the Jewish people as the children of God (cf. Deut. 14.1; Isa. 1.2; Hos. 11.1; *m. 'Abot* 3.15). Jesus, moreover, insults the Gentile child and portrays her as an outsider, since he compares her to a dog. The reference to dogs (*κύνες*, 7.27) occurs in other biblical texts as a term of abuse for Gentiles (1 Sam. 17.43; 2 Kgs 8.13).

There are only a few positive references to dogs in the Old Testament (Job. 6.2; 11.4). Dogs were regarded as scavenger animals who roamed on the outskirts of towns. In the Old Testament Elijah prophesies that Jezebel will be eaten by dogs (1 Kgs 21.23), and in Greco-Roman literature Herodotus writes of Masiastes' wife whose mutilated body is thrown to the dogs (*Hist.* 9.112). Jesus' reference to dogs, therefore, depicts the Gentile world as a threatening environment. As Thiessen notes, in other New Testament texts Jesus teaches that his disciples should not throw that which is holy to dogs (Mt. 7.6) and opponents and heretics are described as 'dogs' in 2 Pet. 2.22; Phil. 3.2 and Rev. 22.15.²⁸ The term 'dogs' is used in association with meals by the author of the *Didache* when he prohibits anyone who is not baptized from sharing the community meal; in so doing he cites the teaching of Jesus 'Do not give what is holy to dogs' (9.5).

The comparison between the children and dogs portrays the woman and her daughter as outsiders. Rhoads, however, attempts to soften the severity of Jesus' response by suggesting that the portrayal of the woman as a scavenger dog is playful.²⁹ He argues that the term *κύνες* (dog, 7.27) is a diminutive, which may be regarded as a term of 'endearment' referring to a puppy rather than a dog. As Guelich observes, *κύνες* is only one of a series of diminutives in this passage (*θυγάτριον*, 7.25; *ψυχίδιον*, 7.28; *παιδίον*, 7.30).³⁰ It is therefore more likely that the use of the diminutive is intended to strengthen the correspondence between the dogs and the Syrophenician woman's daughter, since she is described with another diminutive, *θυγάτριον* in 7.25.

Jesus' harsh answer implies that the woman requests that 'food' be taken from the Jewish children in order to 'feed' her own Gentile daughter. The use of *τρεφόντων* (first, 7.27), however, indicates that Jesus does not deny food to the Gentile girl,

27. Kinukawa, *Women*, 54.

28. Thiessen, *Gospels*, 62.

29. Rhoads, 'Syrophenician', 356-57.

30. Guelich, *Mark*, 386.

but argues that she must wait until the Jewish children are fully fed. The concept of priority in eating recalls texts such as Exod. 23.11, in which the surplus produce of the land is intended for the poor of the people and anything left over is for the wild animals. The prospect of throwing food to dogs, therefore, has connotations of wastefulness.

The Syrophoenician woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter, but Jesus replies with a saying about food. Rhoads thus notes that Jesus' words in our passage may be interpreted as a 'carefully crafted allegory'.³¹ Throughout Mark Jesus' parables may be interpreted allegorically (4.1–20; 7.14–15; 12.1–11). Similarly, Jesus' reply may be read as an allegory which relates to the timing of the Gentile mission. His words may also be compared to a parable. Parables act as a means of revelation in apocalyptic literature (cf. *1 En.* 37–71; *4 Ezra*). Marcus observes that Jesus' parables characteristically act as a means of revelation which divide those who hear them into insiders and outsiders (4.10–12).³² In chapter 4 Jesus teaches the parable of the sower to the crowd, and insiders are those who approach him for further instruction. They are the ones who receive the secret of the kingdom of God.

The Syrophoenician woman is a Gentile who may be considered an outsider, but she shows herself to be an insider, since she responds to Jesus' parable with one of her own. Jesus proposes that the children must be fully satisfied before the dogs are fed. The woman contradicts Jesus' saying with an observation from everyday life, arguing that the dogs under the table eat at the same time as the children from the abundance of the children's crumbs. Her response emphasizes that she does not want to deprive anyone else of food; she merely wants to benefit from others' surplus.

Whereas Jesus speaks of throwing the children's bread to dogs, the woman introduces a reference to a table (τράπεζα, 7.28). As Dutton notes, Jesus refers to scavenger dogs which are outside the house, while the woman is speaking of household dogs under the table.³³ In addition, the Syrophoenician woman replaces the Jewish term for children, τὰ τέκνα (7.27), with τὰ παῖδια (7.28). As Pokorny points out, the Syrophoenician woman's daughter is described as τὸ παῖδιον (7.30) at the end of the passage.³⁴ The term τὸ παῖδιον is a general word for child and is used for the synagogue president's daughter (5.40) and of the Syrophoenician woman's child (7.30) as well as in the teaching of Jesus (9.36–37; 10.13–15). In our passage Jesus speaks of giving bread to the children first, and the Syrophoenician woman reminds him that her daughter is also a child.

Behind the account of the request of the Syrophoenician woman is the issue of salvation history. Jesus argues that his mission is directed first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. This chronological order occurs in Rom. 1.16 (τοὺς αἰσχροὺς καὶ τοὺς κατὰ ἔθνη) in which the term ἔθνη recalls the initial description of the woman as ἑλληνίς (7.26). A similar priority of mission may be seen in other New Testament texts such as Rom. 2.10; Acts 13.46 and Acts 18.6. In our passage the

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order of Jews and Gentiles has an eschatological focus. There are several Old Testament texts which refer to the positive response of the Gentiles after the restoration of Israel (cf. Isa. 2.2–4; 19.19–25; 60.3; 66.18–24; Mic. 4.1–2; Zech. 9.10).³⁵ In Matthew, Jesus describes his mission to the lost sheep of Israel (10.6; 15.24), and the mission to the whole world is commanded only by the risen Jesus (Mt. 28.19). In John, the positive response of Gentiles occurs at the close of Jesus' mission, and is interpreted by Jesus as a sign of the end-time (Jn 12.20–23). In our passage the advent of the Syrophoenician woman is also a foreshadowing of the faithful response of the Gentiles in the end-time, since Jesus particularly associates the mission to the Gentiles with the period between the resurrection and the parousia (13.10). The Syrophoenician woman's response indicates that the time has drawn near for the Gentile mission.

Jesus' reply suggests that the initial focus of his mission is Israel. Burkhill proposes that our passage has developed over a period of time from a saying of Jesus (Mk 7.27b) expressing the priority of his mission to Israel to a narrative supporting the future mission to the Gentiles.³⁶ Although the Gentile mission appears to have been supported by the early Christians, Sanders points out, that there was considerable debate over the terms of the Gentile mission among Christian groups.³⁷ The sharing of meals between Jews and Gentiles was a contentious issue in the early church (Gal. 2.1–14; Acts 10). It is significant, therefore, that our passage focuses on the sharing of food between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus' speech, moreover, contains verbal similarities to the accounts of the feeding of the five thousand (6.30–44) and of the four thousand (8.1–10). The phrase λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον (to take bread, 7.27) is similar to the description of Jesus' action of taking bread to feed the crowds in the feeding narratives (λαβεῖν... ἄρτους, 6.41; 8.6). In our passage Jesus wants the children to be fully fed (χορτάσθηναι, 7.27), and this verb recalls the account of the feeding of the five thousand in which the crowd eats and is fully satisfied (ἐχορτάσθησαν, 6.42). The feeding of the five thousand (6.30–44) has several features which suggest a Jewish setting. The number twelve is prominent in the account; the twelve disciples help to distribute the food, and there are twelve baskets of leftovers (6.43). The number twelve is associated with the gathering of the twelve tribes and the restoration of Israel (Isa. 27.12–13; Hos. 11.11; 2 Macc. 1.27; 4 Ezra 13.32–50; 2 Bar. 78.1–7). The feeding of the five thousand, therefore, shows that the Jewish people have already been fully fed (6.42) and points to the restoration of Israel.

Jesus' encounter with the Syrophoenician woman acts as a turning point in the Gospel. After the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter Jesus moves to the area of the Decapolis, where many Gentiles lived (7.31), and he feeds a crowd of four thousand (8.1–10). The crowd with Jesus have travelled a great distance (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἦκαντι, 8.3), and Danker observes that this phrase is associated with Gentiles (Josh. 9.6, 9) and is used of the inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation

31. Rhoads, 'Syrophoenician', 355.

32. Marcus, *Mark*, 305.

33. F. Dutton, 'The Syro-Phoenician Woman and her Dogs', *ExpTim* 100 (1989), 417.

34. P. Pokorny, 'From a Puppy to a Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis Demonstrated from Mark 7.24–30/Matt 15.21–28', *NTS* 41 (1995), 337.

35. See J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), 55–73.

36. T. A. Burkhill, 'The Historical Development of the Story of the Syrophoenician Woman (Mark vii. 24–31)', *NovT* 9 (1967), 161–78.

37. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 220.

of Israel (Isa. 60.4).³⁸ The reference to four thousand people may allude to Gentiles, since there were eschatological expectations that people would travel from the four corners of the earth to Israel at the end-time (Ps. 107.3; Isa. 43.5–6). On this occasion there are seven baskets of leftovers (6.43). The number seven is associated with completion, since the world was created in seven days, and the Sabbath is regarded as the fulfilment of creation (Gen. 2.2–3).

The significance of the feeding narratives and hence of our feeding parable, moreover, can only be understood in the context of the Last Supper. As Taylor points out, there are verbal similarities between the blessing and distribution of bread in the feeding narratives and the action of Jesus at the Last Supper (ἀφβῶν ἄπτον... ἐὺλόγησας ἐκλάσεν... ἔδοκεν, 14.22).³⁹ Jesus blesses bread (ἐὺλόγησεν, 6.41) as he blesses bread at the Last Supper (14.22). In the feeding of the four thousand he breaks the bread after having given thanks (εὐχαριστήσας, 8.6), a sequence that is also repeated at the Last Supper (14.23). At the Last Supper Jesus identifies his body with the bread which is broken and shared among his followers (14.22). Jesus also identifies the wine as his blood of the covenant which is poured out for many (14.24). His action alludes to his death on the cross, which brings salvation to humanity. The broken bread foreshadows the death of Jesus which redeems all human beings, both Jews and Gentiles.

The feeding narratives (6.30–44; 8.1–10) and the Last Supper (14.22–25), look forward to the messianic feast. As Schweitzer notes, the Last Supper has an eschatological focus, since Jesus tells his disciples that he will not drink the fruit of the vine until he drinks it in the kingdom of God (14.25).⁴⁰ In the feeding narratives everyone eats and is fully satisfied (6.42; 8.8), and the messianic feast is characterized by abundance (Isa. 25.6; 1 En. 62.14; 2 Bar. 29.5–6; 4 Ezra 6.51; *Pirque Aboth* 3.20; Mt. 8.11; Rev. 19.9). In the parallel passage in Matthew, the woman refers to the table of the Lord (κύριος, 15.27). The woman's reference to the table in our passage may also allude to the Lord's table (cf. 1 Cor. 10.21; Isa. 65.11; Mal. 1.7–12). Furthermore, in the reference to our passage in Ps.-Clem. *Hom.* 2.19 there is a direct allusion to the 'table of the kingdom'.

Allusions to the presence of Gentiles at the messianic feast are also to be found in Jewish writings. Marcus points out that righteous Gentiles are depicted as domestic dogs at the eschatological banquet (*Midr.* Ps. 4.11), and he suggests that the description of the presence of dogs at a banquet may be a known term for the inclusion of Gentiles at the end-time.⁴¹ In our passage the woman places herself in the last

position content with the crumbs which fall from the table. The Syrophenician woman's desperation to find a cure for her daughter enables her to recognize the power of Jesus to heal. In Jesus' exorcisms and healings the kingdom of God breaks into the world and his miracles are prophetic of the new age. The Syrophenician woman appears as a prophetic figure whose word indicates that the time has drawn near for the Gentile mission.

Jesus is the Messiah who overcomes the power of disease and evil through his death on the cross, and his victory is celebrated by the messianic feast. Jesus, therefore, 'feeds' both Jews and Gentiles through the giving of his life. In our passage the Syrophenician woman asks Jesus to heal her sick child and he replies with a saying about food. In earlier passages too healing is associated with eating. In response to her healing Simon's mother-in-law serves a meal to those present (1.31), and after Jairus' daughter is raised from death, Jesus asks that she be given something to eat (5.43). Simon's mother-in-law and Jairus' daughter, therefore, both eat after their struggle against disease. In these accounts food is both a confirmation of their healing and a foreshadowing of the messianic feast which celebrates the victory over evil. In our passage the Syrophenician woman's determination to find healing for her daughter is a prophetic sign of the faith of the Gentiles which will be realized in the future mission of the Markan community (13.10).

5. The Gentile Mission

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel Jesus begins his mission in Galilee, and he calls twelve disciples who may be regarded as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel (3.13–19). He later heals the woman with the flow of blood who has been ill for twelve years and raises a twelve-year-old girl to life (5.21–43). In the feeding of the five thousand there are twelve baskets of leftovers (6.43). The use of the number twelve in these accounts points forward to the restoration of Israel. At the same time, however, the news of the gospel moves on ahead of Jesus, attracting crowds from the Gentile area around Tyre and Sidon (3.8). As Burkitt notes, the places named in this summary statement are later visited by Jesus during his mission.⁴² The power of the word breaks the boundary between Jews and Gentiles, and Gentiles respond positively to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus, moreover, has already healed the Gentile Gerasene demoniac (5.1–20). Farrer suggests that this man is a representative of the Jews from the Diaspora.⁴³ This interpretation is unlikely, since the Decapolis is a Gentile area, and the reference to the herd of pigs implies a Gentile setting. In this account the Gerasenes are afraid of Jesus and ask him to leave their district. Rhoads, therefore, argues that the negative response of the Gerasenes leads Jesus to believe that it is not the right time for the Gentile mission.⁴⁴ Jesus, however, does not abandon Gentiles; he sends

38. F. W. Danker, 'Mark 8.3', *JBL* 82 (1963), 215–16.

39. Taylor, *St. Mark*, 324; G. H. Boobyer ('The Eucharistic Interpretation of the Miracle of the Loaves in St. Mark's Gospel', *JTS* 3 [1952], 161–71) argues that the language used in the feeding narratives is not intended to foreshadow the eucharist. He notes that the references to the blessing and the distribution of the bread may be seen in meals which are not eucharistic (cf. Acts 27.35). In the literary context of Mark's Gospel, however, there are verbal correspondences between the feeding narratives and the account of the Last Supper which suggest that these accounts all allude to the eucharist.

40. A. Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (London: A. & C. Black, 1925), 172–73.

41. Marcus, *Mark*, 464.

42. T. A. Burkitt, 'The Syrophenician Woman: The Congruence of Mark 7.24–31', *ZNW* 57 (1966), 32–33.

43. A. Farrer, 'Loaves and Thousands', *JTS* 4 (1953), 2.

44. Rhoads, 'Syrophenician', 361–62.

the healed man to his own house and his own people to bear witness to what the Lord has done for him (5.19). The sending out of this man is unusual, since Jesus characteristically commands silence when he has healed someone (1.44; 5.43). Jesus' action, however, foreshadows his sending out of the Twelve (6.6b–13). Jesus does not reject the Gentile mission, for this Gentile man has the role of continuing Jesus' mission.

In this section there is a positive portrayal of the Jewish mission, but at the same time there are instances of opposition to Jesus. Jesus' family (3.20–35) and his hometown (6.1–6a) fail to understand him. The religious authorities oppose him (2.1–3; 6.3.22–30; 7.1–23), and the Pharisees and the Herodians desire to put him to death (3.6). In our passage Jesus moves into the same area and wishes to remain concealed (κοιμένα ἡθελεν γινώσκειν, 7.24), following the account of the execution of John the Baptist at the instigation of the Herodian women (6.14–29). The introduction to our passage is reminiscent of the account of the flight of Elijah, who goes into hiding after he is threatened by Jezebel (1 Kgs 19.1–3). In 1 Kings Elijah is driven north into Gentile territory, and similarly, there is an implication that opposition to Jesus leads him to move to Gentile areas.

Opposition to Jesus' mission is suggested by the storm which arises during the second boat journey. After the feeding of the five thousand Jesus sends his disciples on ahead to Bethsaida (6.45). A strong wind appears to blow the boat off course and they land at Gennesaret (6.53). At the beginning of our passage Jesus enters Gentile territory and enters a house with the desire of remaining hidden (7.24). As Marcus notes, the appearance of the Syrophenician woman indicates that Jesus is unable to remain hidden and suggests that the power of the gospel cannot be concealed (7.24).⁴⁵ He and the disciples do not reach Bethsaida until 8.22, and the intervening section relates Jesus' teaching, healing (7.31–37) and miraculous feeding of Gentiles (8.1–10). After Jesus and the disciples reach Bethsaida they begin to make their way to Jerusalem. This structure is reminiscent of Paul's argument that the opposition of Israel leads to the Gentile mission but that ultimately Israel will come to faith through the Gentiles (Rom. 9–11).

The course of Jesus' mission thus shows an initial priority of Israel. At the same time the word of God transcends the boundaries of Israel and attracts Gentiles. Jesus encounters opposition from the Jewish authorities, which drives him into Gentile territory (7.24). The progression of events implies that the arrival of the Syrophenician woman is intended to indicate that the time has drawn near for the Gentile mission. In Mark, Jesus teaches that the disciples are to carry out the Gentile mission in the period between the resurrection and the parousia (13.10). The Jewish mission is not rejected, since the first disciples are Jewish. In chapter 13, moreover, Jesus addresses his teaching about the events of the end-time to four of the Twelve, who act as representatives of the community who are to carry out the Gentile mission.

Several features of the Gentile cycle in Mark allude to the period between the resurrection and parousia. On the second boat journey Jesus sends his disciples on

ahead of him while he prays on a mountain (6.45–46). The absence of Jesus in this narrative may point forward to the period following the death of Jesus. When the disciples experience difficulties, Jesus approaches them and intends to go past them (6.48), and this description is similar to the references to the resurrection in which Jesus goes ahead of his disciples to Galilee (14.28; 16.7). The numinous quality of Jesus' appearance is indicated by the fear of the disciples that he is a ghost (φάντασμα, 6.49). The time of Jesus' appearance at the fourth watch of the night (πρὶ τριτοῦ τῆς φυλακῆς τῆς νυκτός, 6.48) is associated with the resurrection, since Jesus is raised from death before the women arrive in the early morning (16.2).

The account of the exorcism of the Syrophenician woman's daughter continues these allusions to the period between the resurrection and the parousia. At the beginning of the narrative Jesus rises (ἀναστὰς, 7.24) and moves on to Gentile territory. The verb ἀνίστημι is used of Jesus' resurrection in the passion predictions (ἀναστήναι, 8.31; ἀναστήσεται, 9.31; 10.34). Jesus, moreover, desires to remain hidden in the house, a description that might remind readers of the period after his death when he is physically absent from his followers. Jesus heals the Gentile child at a distance, and this description emphasizes that the power of Jesus is effective even when he is not physically present. Our passage, then, may allude to the way in which Jesus is able to become present to his followers during the time between the resurrection and the parousia.

The feeding of the four thousand which follows shortly (8.1–10) also has associations with the period between the resurrection and the parousia. The phrase ἐκείνας τὰς ἡμέρας (in those days, 8.1) has eschatological connotations (cf. Joel 3.1 and Zech. 8.23), and it is used later in Mark to signify the end-time (13.17, 19, 24). On the present occasion the people have been with Jesus for three days in the desert (8.2), and this reference also has eschatological associations, since it corresponds to the period between the death and the resurrection of Jesus (8.31; 9.31; 10.34). Jesus does not want to send the people away hungry (ὑπορεῖς, 8.3), a description that recalls the passage in which Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast (οὐ νηστεύουσιν, 2.18). Jesus replies that they do not fast because the bridegroom is with them, which suggests that the presence of Jesus is associated with a feast. Jesus, however, prophesies that he will be taken from them, and this time is linked with mourning (2.20). Mark locates both the feeding of the five thousand and that of the four thousand within the earthly life-time of Jesus, but as we have seen, the Gentile cycle contains literary allusions to the period after the death and resurrection. This literary technique corresponds to the section we have identified between the two references to Bethsaida (6.45; 8.22). The Gentile mission does not replace the Jewish mission, but is placed within the context of the Jewish mission.

6. The Markan Community

The account of the exorcism of the Syrophenician woman's daughter is preceded by a series of debates on purity issues (7.1–23). The Pharisees and some scribes

45. Marcus, *Mark*, 467.

criticize some of Jesus' disciples, who eat without first washing their hands. The Pharisees were noted for their aim to develop personal holiness by extending law observance to the everyday life of the people.⁴⁶ In response Jesus propounds a parable that says that nothing from outside can enter a person and make that person unclean. Instead impurity originates from within a human being (7.14-15). The narrator concludes this passage with the statement that Jesus has declared all foods to be clean (7.19). These debates are followed by the account of the exorcism of the Syrophenician woman's daughter.

The girl is initially described as possessed by an unclean spirit (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, 7.25), whereas Mark refers to her condition as demon possession later in the passage (7.29-30). As Focant observes, the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον may be intended to allude to the earlier debates about impurity (7.1-23).⁴⁷ The Syrophenician woman enters the house where Jesus is present, but she does not make power to cast the demon out of her. Jesus, moreover, interprets the woman's request for healing in terms of sharing a meal between Jews and Gentiles.

The conflict over the sharing of meals between Jews and Gentiles has led scholars, such as Sanders, moreover, to argue that Jesus did not carry out a Gentile mission during his lifetime, and that this mission was the initiative of the early church.⁴⁸ Loader proposes that Jesus may have had a conservative attitude towards the Law, and there are traces of his view in our passage in Jesus' initial rejection of the woman.⁴⁹ Räisänen believes that the parable about the nature of defilement (7.15) is not authentic, since it would have been used to support those who wished to abandon the food laws.⁵⁰ Riches, however, shows that Jesus' redefinition of purity in this parable is compatible with his other teaching such as the love of enemies and his meals with tax collectors and sinners.⁵¹

It is significant, nevertheless, that the declaration that Jesus has made all food clean is an editorial comment from Mark (7.19). As Marcus observes, the passage begins with a debate about hand washing and develops into teaching concerning the abandonment of the food laws.⁵² He points out that the account may start with a dispute in the lifetime of the historical Jesus and end with an issue in the current disputes between the Pharisees and the Markan community.

On the level of the Markan community, some members may wish to retain the food laws. The compassion of Mark's audience, however, is engaged by the

account of the suffering of the woman and her child; the barriers between Jews and Gentiles are swept away in order to heal a sick child. Mark portrays the abandonment of the food laws in the lifetime of Jesus, but this is proleptic of the post-Easter situation, and the healing of the Gentile child functions as a prototype for the Gentile mission. In Jesus the power of God breaks into the world and foreshadows the new creation, which comes about through his death and resurrection, since the period between the resurrection and the parousia will be the real time of the Gentile mission (13.10).

7. Discipleship

The Syrophenician woman acts like a disciple: she has heard about Jesus, and this news prompts her to approach Jesus (ἀκούσασα... ἐπὶ αὐτοῦ, 7.25). She may be compared to the woman with the flow of blood who also seeks Jesus after hearing about him (ἀκούσασα ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 5.27). The Syrophenician woman enters a house to speak to Jesus, and this location is frequently depicted as a discipleship setting (3.31-35; 9.28, 33; 10.10). She falls at Jesus' feet in an attitude of worship (προσκύνησεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, 7.25), and this description recalls the portrayal of the woman with the flow of blood, who also kneels before Jesus (προσκύνησεν αὐτῷ, 5.33). The woman in the present story may be regarded as a model of discipleship, since she places herself and her child last, content with the crumbs which fall from the table. As Rhoads points out, she makes herself 'least' in order to help her daughter.⁵³

Ringge wishes to avoid interpretations of the passage which concentrate on the relations between Jews and Gentiles, and she focuses on the social and economic background of the account.⁵⁴ She proposes that Jesus is reluctant to heal the child because the Syrophenician woman is a representative of the wealthy inhabitants of Tyre who exploit the poor people of the region. Ringge, however, does not take into account the tensions between Jews and Gentiles which are reflected in the economic situation. Theissen, moreover, observes, that the Syrophenician woman may be portrayed as a representative of the wealthy inhabitants of Tyre who have taken food from the Galileans.⁵⁵

In this case an apparently rich Hellenistic woman is willing to give up her privileges and place herself last. Her response foreshadows Jesus' teaching that those who wish to be first should make themselves last of all and servants of all (9.35). Her willingness to come last illustrates Jesus' teaching about the eschatological reversal in the kingdom of God, in which many who come first will be last and the last first (10.31).

The speech of the Syrophenician woman also has deeper implications than she may realize. She addresses Jesus as κύριε (7.28), which may be understood as a

46. D. R. de Lacey, 'In Search of a Pharisee', *TynBul* 43 (1992), 353-72.
47. C. Focant, 'Mc 7.24-31 par. Mt 15.21-29. Critique des Sources et/ou Étude Narrative', in C. Focant (ed.), *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (BETL, 110; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 48.
48. Sanders, *Jews and Judaism*, 212-21.
49. W. Loader, 'Challenged at the Boundaries: A Conservative Jesus in Mark's Tradition', *JSNT* 63 (1996), 45-61.
50. H. Räisänen, 'Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15', *JSNT* 16 (1982), 79-100.
51. J. K. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980), 136-44.
52. J. Marcus, 'Scripture and Tradition in Mark 7', in C. M. Tuckett (ed.), *The Scriptures in the Gospel* (BETL 131; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 145-63.

53. Rhoads, 'Syrophenician', 366.

54. S. H. Ringge, 'A Gentile Woman's Story Revisited: Rereading Mark 7.24-31', in A.-J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 79-100.
55. Theissen, *Gospels*, 75.

term of respect, but which is also a Christological title in the phrase κύριος Ἰησοῦς (Rom. 10.9 and 1 Cor. 12.3). Fander, moreover, argues that the woman's address of κύριε foreshadows the confession of the Roman centurion that Jesus is the Son of God (15.39). As Fander points out, elsewhere in Mark this title occurs only in scripture citations (1.3; 11.9; 12.11, 29, 30, 36) and in the words of Jesus (5.19; 12.37; 13.20, 35).⁵⁶ While the other three Gospels include examples of human beings addressing Jesus as Lord, this passage is the only occasion in Mark in which this happens.⁵⁷ Gnika, moreover, argues that it is significant that this title is used by a woman who becomes a prototype for the faithful Gentiles.⁵⁸ The title κύριος also occurs in the account of the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, who is a Gentile. Jesus instructs the man to proclaim what the Lord has done for him (ὁ κύριος, 5.19), although the man speaks of Jesus' action in healing him (5.19–20).

In Fander's view, the confession of the woman indicates that she has been given the secret of the rule of God.⁵⁹ Rhoads, however, argues that while the woman shows faith in Jesus' ability to heal her daughter, her faith does not imply that she is aware of Jesus' identity as the Messiah.⁶⁰ Rhoads' argument is convincing, since the woman responds to Jesus in everyday language. Her desperation for healing for her daughter gives her insight into Jesus' parable. She acts as a prophetic figure, and her word foreshadows the future sharing of food between Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus heals the girl on account of the word the woman speaks (ὁ ἄκουον τὸν λόγον, 7.29) which may be translated 'because of this word'. Fander argues that the woman's reply leads Jesus to change his mind.⁶¹ She even compares the conversation between the woman and Jesus to the controversy debates with the religious authorities (2.1–3.6). In these debates Jesus characteristically concludes with an authoritative saying (2.17; 2.27–28; 3.3–4). Fander stresses that this account is the only passage in which someone other than Jesus has the last word. This narrative, however, differs from the controversies, since the woman is not hostile towards Jesus. Her faith in the power of Jesus to heal her daughter leads her to challenge him.

The Syrophenician woman is persistent in her request for healing for her daughter despite Jesus' initial refusal. She acts as a model of discipleship on account of her courage and her refusal to give up hope. The woman has faith in Jesus' power to heal, just as disciples have to place their trust in Jesus. She continues to hope for a cure for her daughter, and her action brings a message of perseverance. In the prophecies of the end-time Jesus teaches his disciples that the one who endures to the end will be saved (13.13). The account of the Syrophenician woman conveys a sense of hope in the midst of despair, which points forward to the power of God to bring life out of death. Her story may encourage members of Mark's community who face persecution and fear that Jesus will not respond to them (cf. 4.38). This

- 56. Fander, *Stellung*, 80.
- 57. Fander, *Stellung*, 80.
- 58. Gnika, *Evangelium*, 1.293.
- 59. Fander, *Stellung*, 81.
- 60. Rhoads, 'Syrophenician', 346.
- 61. Fander, *Stellung*, 74.

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message continues to appeal to the members of Mark's audience, who also wait for the return of Jesus and the dawn of the new age.

8. *The Relation between the Syrophenician Woman and the Twelve*

The Syrophenician woman responds in faith to Jesus, and her speech reveals that the time has drawn near for the Gentile mission. The positive portrayal of this woman leads Fander to compare her favourably with the twelve male disciples.⁶² Fander suggests that the Syrophenician makes a Christological confession whereas the Twelve lack understanding of the nature of Jesus' identity. As we have seen, the Syrophenician woman acts as a prophet, since her word looks forward to the messianic feast which has abundant food for both Jews and Gentiles. In contrast, the Twelve have difficulty in understanding the Gentile mission. After the feeding of the five thousand the failure of the disciples to recognize Jesus is linked to their inability to understand the significance of the feeding of the five thousand (ὁὐ γὰρ οὐνίκαν ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἢν αὐτὸν ἡ καρδία περὶ αὐτοῦ, 6.52). On the third boat journey Jesus expects the disciples to be able to understand the significance of the two feeding narratives (8.14–21).

The disciples have been present throughout Jesus' mission and they have witnessed the two feeding miracles, but they do not understand the significance of the events they have witnessed. Farrer interprets Jesus' references to the number of loaves in the feeding narratives by examining the account of the description of the disciples who pluck grain on the Sabbath (2.23–28).⁶³ In his debates with the Pharisees Jesus defends the disciples by referring to the action of David who took five loaves from the bread of the presence in order to feed his soldiers (1 Sam. 21). Farrer argues that the five loaves in the feeding of the five thousand correspond to five of the twelve loaves of the bread of the presence (Lev. 24.5–8). There are thus seven presentation-loaves left to feed the Gentiles in the feeding of the four thousand (8.1–10). In the feeding of the five thousand the twelve baskets allude to the restoration of Israel, and in the feeding of the four thousand the Gentiles are added to indicate the redemption of the whole of humanity.

The disciples have forgotten to bring bread and they have only one loaf. Gibson suggests that the disciples have deliberately 'forgotten' to bring additional loaves because they wish to deny bread to the Gentiles.⁶⁴ The disciples, however, fail to understand the significance of the bread which they do have in the boat. As Manek points out, the symbolic significance of the numbers in the feeding narratives suggests that the reference to one loaf is also to be taken symbolically.⁶⁵ In the feeding of the five thousand and that of the four thousand the crowds are fed through the breaking of bread, which foreshadows the Last Supper, where Jesus will identify the bread with his body (14.22). In the period between the resurrection

- 62. Fander, *Stellung*, 83.
- 63. A. Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 303.
- 64. J.B. Gibson, 'The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mark 8:14–21', *JSNW* 27 (1986), 35–36.
- 65. J. Manek, *Mark viii 14–21*, *NovT* 7 (1964), 12–13.

and the parousia Jesus takes the place of the bread of the presence. The disciples will continue Jesus' mission, and the breaking of the bread points to the presence of Jesus in their midst.

The disciples are accused of having hardened hearts (6.52; 8.17), which recalls the description of the Pharisees and Herodians (3.5). In the Old Testament God is frequently described as the one who hardens the human heart. In Exodus, God hardens the heart of Pharaoh (Exod. 7.3; 8.15; 9.35; 11.10), and there are references to the hardening of Israel in other texts (Deut. 29.18; Isa. 63.17). Matera explores the New Testament background of the description of the hardened hearts.⁶⁶ He compares the hardening of the hearts of the disciples to the hardening of Israel, so that Israel does not recognize the Messiah (Jn 12.40; Rom. 11.7, 25; 2 Cor. 3.14). As Matera points out, God is the agent of hardening the heart, and human beings are able to understand only through the revelation of God. Matera rightly emphasizes that the hardening of the heart is not a moral failure, but it may be an indication of moral failure. In Mark the hardening of the disciples' hearts reflects their inability to understand the mystery of Jesus' identity, and they fail to recognize Jesus as the Messianic shepherd. He notes that the disciples are not as culpable as the religious and political authorities, since they wish to understand and follow Jesus, whereas the authorities plot to put him to death (3.6).

The disciples, moreover, differ from Jesus' enemies, since Jesus asks if they do not yet understand (ὁὐκ οἶδα, 8.17, 21). As Marcus observes, the use of ὁὐκ suggests that they will understand in the future.⁶⁷ At the end of this section the disciples arrive in Bethsaida, and after the healing of the blind man Peter recognizes Jesus as the Messiah (8.29). Peter thus gains understanding of Jesus' identity, but at this stage he is unable to comprehend that the Messiah is to suffer and die. The significance of the feeding narratives can only be understood in relation to the Last Supper, when Jesus identifies the bread with his body (14.22). Jesus' identity is revealed as he gives his life for others. In the same way, no human being is able to understand Jesus' identity until the Roman centurion recognizes him as Son of God at his death on the cross (15.39).

Mark characteristically portrays individuals in the healing narratives who show faith and courage beyond that of the Twelve. The woman with the flow of blood risks criticism for breaking the purity regulations, and she overcomes her fear to tell Jesus the truth (5.33). Similarly, Bartimaeus does not allow the crowd to forbid him from calling out to Jesus (10.48). Those who suffer from debilitating diseases recognize their need for healing, whereas the religious and political authorities who have power and status are unable to put their trust in Jesus. Individuals in the healing narratives are often at the extremities of life, at the boundary between life and death. They respond to Jesus because the power of God is revealed at the point of human hopelessness. Jesus overcomes evil through his death on the cross, and his identity as Son of God is revealed as he gives his life to redeem humanity.

66. F.J. Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession (Mark 6.14-8.30)", *Bib 70* (1989), 157-58.

67. Marcus, *Mark*, 508.

In our passage the Gentile woman acts as a model of discipleship, but she does not become a disciple herself. The Twelve do continually follow Jesus, and they are portrayed positively in that they leave everything to follow him (1.18; 1.20; 10.28). Nevertheless, they learn the implications of Jesus' teaching only as they follow him. Disciples are called to follow Jesus on the way of the cross, and discipleship involves struggles between faith and fear, lack of understanding and understanding.

The Gentile woman contrasts with the twelve male disciples who act as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel. Her faith points forward to the Gentile century who recognizes Jesus as the Son of God (15.39) and also to the future faith of the Gentiles (13.10). The disciples, however, are the ones who question Jesus inside the house about the meaning of the parable about purity (7.15). They are insiders who receive the private teaching of Jesus which dispenses with the food laws (7.19). In the feeding of the five thousand they have the role of distributing the food (6.41), which foreshadows their service of the eucharist. The disciples, moreover, are instructed to undertake the Gentile mission in the period between the resurrection and the parousia (13.10).

The Syrophenician woman contrasts with the Twelve according to gender and race. She is an outsider who responds in faith to Jesus and who does not render him unclean. She illustrates the teaching that there is nothing from outside a person that can enter and defile the person. Instead impurity originates in the human heart (7.14-15). The power to pollute the community, moreover, comes from within the community itself, as is shown in the example of Judas, one of the Twelve, who betrays Jesus (14.45). In chapter 13 Jesus warns his disciples of betrayal within families, which may allude to betrayal within the discipleship community, since family terminology is associated with discipleship (3.31-35; 10.29-30).

Mark's audience has greater understanding than the characters within the narrative, and they are shown the struggles of the disciples to understand. The difficulties with the Gentile mission are current debates for Mark's community, and the faithful response of the Gentile woman highlights these issues. As we have seen, the woman with the flow of blood overcomes her fear to confess her faith (5.33), and her story acts as an encouragement to those who risk persecution on account of the gospel. In our passage the Syrophenician woman reveals the courage and persistence of the Gentiles, and thus acts as a model of discipleship for Mark's community.

9. New Creation

In Mark, creation is under the rule of Satan, and Jesus, the Son of God, has come to liberate human beings and inaugurate the new creation. As we have seen, Jesus heals the woman with the flow of blood and raises Jairus' daughter to life in a Jewish setting that points forward to the time in which there will be no disease or evil. In our passage the Syrophenician woman's request for the healing of her daughter indicates that Gentiles are also plagued by unclean spirits, and that Gentile land as well as Israel is under the rule of Satan. Jesus first heals two Jewish

women, and now he casts out an unclean spirit from a Gentile child. Just as the account of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and the raising of Jairus' daughter foreshadows the restoration of Israel (5.21–43), our passage reveals that the Gentiles are to be incorporated into the salvation of Israel.

Jesus' initial response to the Syrophoenician woman refers to the priority of his mission to Israel (7.27). We have already seen the issue of priority in association with the account of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and of the raising of Jairus' daughter (5.21–43). Jesus stops to speak to the woman with the flow of blood who has been an outcast, and while he is speaking to her the daughter of the president of the synagogue reaches the point of death. Jesus assigns priority to the woman, who would be regarded as among the least in her community, and the young girl dies. The earthly realm is characterized by limited time and resources. Jesus, however, has the power of the Spirit and is able to overcome the force of death and raise the girl to life. His healing of the two women foreshadows the abundance of the new creation. In our passage the priority of the Jewish mission is aligned to the old age. In the new creation the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles are overcome.

The new creation is inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In his death on the cross Jesus dies as one who is cursed (Deut. 21.23; cf. Gal. 3.13); he becomes aligned with impurity in order that humanity may be redeemed. In the new creation the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles no longer exist (cf. Gal. 3.28). In the account of the woman with the flow of blood and of the raising of Jairus' daughter, the purity regulations are disregarded. In his debates with the Pharisees Jesus has declared all food clean (7.19), overcoming one of the main boundaries between Jew and Gentile. The two accounts are thus signs of the new creation breaking into the world, in which purity regulations and the food laws are no longer required.

The Syrophoenician woman's desire for the healing of her daughter leads her to ignore the division between Jews and Gentiles and to ask Jesus for help. She replies to Jesus' parable with a saying which indicates that the time for the Gentile mission has drawn near. The Syrophoenician woman speaks a prophetic message (*λογος*, 7.29). The term *λογος* (word) is associated with the proclamation of the gospel (1.45; 4.1–20; 8.32), and the word Jesus speaks has the power to teach, heal and cast out demons. In the parable of the sower the proclamation of the gospel (*λογος*, 4.14–18) leads to the abundance of the kingdom of God (4.20). The focus on the creative power of speech, moreover, recalls the account of creation in Genesis. At the beginning of Genesis, God speaks and his word separates creation from chaos. The word of God separates land from sea, and the purpose of creation is that the land may bear abundant fruit (Gen. 1.11–12).⁶⁸ In Mark the proclamation of the gospel itself is a sign of the power of God breaking into the world. In our passage the word of the woman is aligned to the proclamation of the gospel.

In his analysis of the creation accounts in the Old Testament Levenson points out that God combats evil in order to bring creation into being, and creation is

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celebrated with a victory banquet.⁶⁹ On the first day of Jesus' mission in Capernaum, similarly, he casts out demons and heals, and Simon's mother-in-law serves a meal (1.21–31). Jesus then carries out his mission by teaching, healing and miraculously feeding a crowd in a Jewish setting (5.21–43; 6.30–44). After the meeting with the Syrophoenician woman Jesus follows a similar pattern as he teaches, heals and feeds a crowd of Gentiles (7.24–30; 7.31–37; 8.1–10). Both sections culminate with a miraculous feeding of the crowds, and these feedings are associated with the Last Supper. At the Last Supper Jesus identifies the bread as his body given to redeem humanity. His action points forward to the messianic feast in which his victory over evil will be celebrated.

Just as evil is overcome only through the death of Jesus on the cross, so Jesus' own identity is realized through his death on the cross (15.39). Jesus is revealed as Messiah and Son of God at the point when he wins the battle against evil through his death on the cross. In Mark, Jesus does not struggle against evil alone. In the prologue he is served by angels who sustain him during his testing by Satan (1.13). In our passage the Syrophoenician woman serves Jesus in the midst of his testing by human enemies by bringing him the word of God (7.29). It is only in the Passion Narrative, when Jesus is handed over into the power of evil, that he will be abandoned by his disciples (14.50) and will have to face his enemies alone.

10. Conclusion

The Syrophoenician woman is portrayed as a woman who is alone and in great need of help for her sick child. Her desperation leads her to ignore religious and social conventions and to approach an itinerant Jewish teacher. She refuses to be dissuaded by Jesus' initial parabolic rejection of her request, and she acts as an insider by responding to his parable with one of her own. The woman skillfully transforms the imagery of Jesus' parable into a saying that leaves room for the healing of her daughter. Her response reveals her faith in the power of Jesus to heal her daughter. The woman acts like a prophet, since she looks beyond a situation of disease and division to catch a glimpse of the messianic feast, where there will be abundant food for everyone. In the apocalyptic context of the Gospel, her word points to the new creation, in which the division between Jews and Gentiles will be overcome and no disease or evil will remain.

68. Levenson, *Creation*, 47.

69. Levenson, *Creation*, 29–32.