

Mark 7

Jesus endures another criticism by the Pharisees in this chapter, this time relating to eating without washing one's hands (7:1-20). Jesus' words about foods (7:19) lays down the principle that all *people* - both Jew and Gentile - will be clean in the eyes of God (see Acts 10). In this context, two other miracles take place, apparently within the Gentile community. Jesus casts out a demon from a Gentile woman's daughter (7:21-30) and then heals a deaf and mute man who might also be a Gentile (7:31-37).

TRANSLATION - 7:1-23:

1 And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gather to Him after coming from Jerusalem. **2** And after seeing some of His disciples that with unclean hands, that is unwashed, they are eating bread **3** - for the Pharisees and all the Jews unless by the fist they might wash the hands they do not eat, holding tightly the tradition of the elders, **4** and from the market unless they might immerse themselves they do not eat, but also many it is which they receive to hold tightly, the immersion of cups and pitchers and kettles [and beds] - **5** And the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples do not walk according to the traditions of the elders, but with unwashed hands they are eating bread?"

6 And He said to them, "Well Isaiah prophesied concerning you all hypocrites, as it has been written [that], 'This nation by the lips honors Me, but their heart is far distant from Me; **7** And vainly they worship Me teaching teachings commandments of men.' **8** After leaving the commandment of God, you hold tightly the tradition of men."

9 And He was saying to them, "Splendidly you ignore the commandment of God, that your tradition you may uphold. **10** For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'The one speaking evil against father or mother let him die a death.' **11** But you yourselves say, 'If a man might say to the father or to the mother, 'Corban,' which is 'A gift,' which if from me you might be benefited,' **12** No longer you leave him nor to do to the father or to the mother, **13** voiding the word of God by your tradition which you pass on; and similar such things many you do."

14 And after calling again the crowd, He was saying to them, "Hear Me all and understand. **15** There is nothing out of the man after entering into him which is able to defile him, but that which out of the man coming out it is which defines the man." **16** ? **17** And when He enters into the house from the crowd, the disciples were asking Him about the parable. **18** And He says to them, "Thus also you yourselves are not understanding? Do you not perceive that all that outside after entering into the man is not able to defile him **19** because it does not enter into him, into the heart but into the stomach, and into the toilet it comes out?" [He said this,] Cleaning all foods.

20 And He was saying that "That out of the man after coming out, this defiles the man. **21** For within out of the heart of the man [are] the evil reasonings are coming out: sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, **22** adulteries, covetousnesses, wickednesses, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. **23** All things the evil within comes out and defies the man."

GREEK WORDS:

"To come together" (ver. 1) is used earlier at 2:2. "Pharisees" were found earlier at 2:16. "Scribes," who probably belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, were used earlier at 1:22. "Jerusalem" was used earlier at 3:8. "Disciples" (ver. 2) was used earlier at 2:15. "Unclean" is used fourteen times in the NT; in Mark only at 7:2, 5. "Unwashed" is used only twice in the NT, only in this event: Matthew 15:20; Mark 7:2. "To eat" is found earlier at 1:6. "Bread" is used earlier at 2:26. "Fist" (ver. 3) is used only here in the NT. "To wash" is used 17 times in the NT, only here in Mark. "To hold tightly" is used 47 times, first in Mark 1:31. "Tradition" is used 13

times in the NT, only in this context in Mark: 7:3, 5, 8-9, 13. "Elders" is used seven times in Mark: 7:3, 5; 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; 15:1. It is used 66 times in the NT.

"Market" (ver. 4) was used earlier at 6:56. "To immerse" was used earlier at 1:4; this word is generally translated "baptize." "To receive" was used earlier at 4:36. "Immersion," the noun form related to the verb used earlier, is used only here in Mark, out of four uses: Col. 2:12; Heb. 6:2; 9:10. "Cups" is used 31 times, six in Mark: 7:4; 9:41; 10:38-39; 14:23, 36. "Pitchers" is used only here in the NT, one of the Latin words Mark uses. "Kettle" or "bronze vessel" is used only here in the NT. "Beds" are used earlier at 4:21. "To ask" (ver. 5) is used first at 5:9. "To walk" is used earlier at 2:9.

"To prophesy" (ver. 6) is used twice by Mark; here and 14:65. It is used 28 times in the NT. "Isaiah" was used earlier at 1:2. This is the only other mention of Isaiah in Mark.

"Hypocrite" is used only here in Mark, out of 17 uses. "To write" is used 191 times in the NT; it was used earlier at 1:2. Mark uses "it has been written" five times: 1:2; 7:6; 9:13; 14:21, 27.

"Nation" is used 142 times, twice in Mark: 7:6; 14:2. "Lips" are used only here in Mark, out of seven uses. "To honor" is used 21 times, three in Mark: 7:6, 10; 10:19. "Heart" was used earlier at 2:6. "To be distant" is used 19 times, twice in Mark: 7:6; 14:41.

"Vainly" (ver. 7) is used only in this event: Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7. "To worship" is used ten times, only here in Mark. It is used also at: Matthew 15:9; Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13; 19:27. "To teach" is used earlier at 1:21. Its related noun "teaching" (or "doctrine") is used 21 times, only here in Mark. "Commandments" is used only at Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:22. "To leave" (ver. 8) was used earlier at 1:18; this word is translated "to forgive" in appropriate contexts. "Commandment" in this verse is a different word than that used in verse 7. The word is used 67 times in the NT, six times in Mark: 7:8-9; 10:5, 19; 12:28, 31. "To ignore" or "invalidate" (ver. 9) is used sixteen times, twice in Mark: 6:26; 7:9. "To uphold" or "validate" is used 155 times, ten times in Mark, first at 3:24.

"Moses" (ver. 10) is found 80 times in the NT, eight times in Mark, first at 1:44. "To curse" or "to speak evil against" is used four times: Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10; 9:39; Acts 19:9. "Death" is used 120 times, six times in Mark: 7:10; 9:1; 10:33; 13:12; 14:34, 64. "To die" is used 11 times, twice in Mark: 7:10; 9:48. "Corban" (ver. 11) is used only here in the NT. "Gift" is used 19 times, only here in Mark. "To help, aid, benefit" is used 15 times in the NT, three times in Mark: 5:26; 7:11; 8:36.

"To void" or "to revoke" (ver. 13) is used three times: Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13; Galatians 3:17. "Word" is used 330 times; it was used earlier at 1:45. "To pass on" is the verb form of the noun "tradition." This verb is used 119 times, 10 times in Mark, first at 1:14. "To summon, call, or encourage" (ver. 14) was used earlier at 3:13. "Hear" or "listen" was used earlier at 2:1. "To understand" was used earlier at 4:12. "To defile" (ver. 15) is used fourteen times, four times in Mark, all in this context: 7:15, 18, 20, 23.

"Parable" (ver. 17) was used earlier at 3:23. "Not understanding" (ver. 18) is used five times, only here in Mark. "To perceive" is used 14 times, three times in Mark: 7:18; 8:17; 13:14. "Stomach" (ver. 19) is used 22 times, only here in Mark. "Toilet" or "latrine" is used only here and Matthew 15:17. "To cleanse" is used 31 times, four times in Mark: 1:40-41, 42; 7:19. "Food" is used only here in Mark, out of 17 times. "Reasoning" (ver. 21) is used 14 times, only here in Mark. "Evil" is used twice in Mark: 7:21; 15:14. The word is used 50 times in the NT. "Sexual immoralities" are used 25 times in the NT, only here in Mark. It refers to all sexual behavior which is not authorized by God: before marriage (fornication), outside marriage (adultery), prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality. "Thefts" is used in Matthew 15:19 and Mark 7:21. "Murders" is used 9 times, twice in Mark: 7:21; 15:7. "Adulteries" (ver. 22) are used in Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:22; John 8:3. "Covetousness" is used 10 times, only here in Mark. "Wickednesses" are used only here in Mark, out of seven uses. "Deceit" or "cunning" is used 11 times, only here and 14:1 in Mark. "Licentiousness" is used 10 times, only here in Mark. See also Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:2, 7, 18; Jude 4. "Evil" is different than the word "evil" in the prior verse. This word is used 78 times, only twice in Mark: 7:22-23. "Eye" is used 100 times, seven times in Mark. "Blasphemy" was used earlier

at 3:28. “Arrogance” or “pride” is used only here in the NT. “Foolishness” is used four times: Mark 7:22; 2 Cor. 11:1, 17, 21.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

“Immerse themselves” (ver. 4) is a verb in the middle voice, which means they perform the act on themselves.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Priests were required under the Law of Moses to wash in the laver before entering the tabernacle (Exo. 30:18-21; 40:30-32; Lev. 22:1-6). If one touched a bodily discharge, he would also have to wash (Lev. 15:11). Sometime after the exile into Babylon, certain Jewish leaders - who evolved into the Pharisees - started applying these ritual washings to all the Jews. Their intentions were honorable because they believed the whole nation needed to be pure (see Lev. 20:26). But an inquisitive Jew could have easily gone back to the Law of Moses and said, “But that’s not what *God commanded*.”

The Pharisees went far beyond the Law of Moses in prescribing cleansing rituals for matters that were unclean. It is interesting that Jesus had contact with many people whom the Law or the Pharisees considered unclean: the lepers in 1:40; the tax collectors (2:13), Gentiles (5:1), a woman with menstrual bleeding (5:25), and dead bodies (5:35). Later, Jesus will have contact with a Gentile (7:24-30).

In verses 6-7, Jesus will quote Isaiah 29:13, where Isaiah talked about Israel being religious on the outside, but not being spiritually-minded on the inside. Therefore, they were hypocrites. The accusation is not dissimilar from what he had said back in 6:9-10, which Jesus also quoted in 4:12. Israel in Isaiah’s day were so focused on their own habits that they could not see how and when they were violating the commandment of God.

In verses 10-12, Jesus quotes two verses from the Law: Exodus 20:12 (or Deuteronomy 5:16) and Exodus 21:17. “Corban” comes from the verb “to offer a gift” and means a “gift.”

“Clean” and “unclean” foods were listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

There are multiple references to the Ten Commandments in this text: Honoring father and mother (ver. 10; fifth commandment); do not commit adultery (ver. 21; seventh commandment); do not steal (ver. 21; eighth commandment); do not murder (ver. 21; sixth commandment); do not covet (ver. 22; ten commandment).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Jerusalem was 90 miles south of Capernaum, but at a higher elevation; thus these men “came down” as they traveled north.

We have commented before that the Pharisees believed in an “oral” tradition which was handed down by Moses along with the written law. That oral tradition was finally written down about 170 years after Jesus was resurrected; this oral tradition is known as the Mishnah. Commentary on the Mishnah is known as the Talmud. One Talmud comes from a Jewish community in Babylon (500-600 AD) and another Talmud originated in Palestine (400-450 AD). It is estimated that 25% of the Mishnah dealt with questions of purity. Its relevance for NT studies is difficult to know because oral traditions could change during a 170 year period, especially because the destruction of Jerusalem happened in AD 70.

Verse 16 is present in the majority of the Greek manuscripts, but it is not found in one of the oldest, most complete, and therefore most reliable witnesses known as the Alexandrian manuscript. Scholars suggest it was added under the influence of 4:9 or 4:23.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See Matthew 15:1-20 for his account of this discussion.

COMMENTS:

This is the second time scribes have come down from Jerusalem to challenge Jesus (3:22). We do not know if the Pharisees also came down, or if these were Pharisees from nearby. These religious leaders were watching Jesus' disciples to see if they would eat without washing their hands. The text describes the hands as "unclean" but then Mark defines that by saying "unwashed." "Unclean" occurs in verses 2 and 5 while the verbal form, "to defile" or "to make unclean" is used in verses 15, 18, 20, 23.

In verse 3, for his Gentile readership, Mark describes the Pharisees' traditions. "All the Jews" is likely hyperbole, but it emphasizes how widespread the practice was. These Jews do not eat unless they "wash with the fist" (literally). To wash "with the fist" is not understood by modern scholars. Some suggest it means to rub the fist into the palm of the opposite hand. Or, it might mean to wash up to the wrist or elbow. Still others suggest it means to wash with a cupped-hand. The truth might actually be a fourth option. In doing so, then Jews observe the "traditions of the elders." The word "traditions" is used in verses 3, 5, 8-9, 13.

When the Jews, under the influence of the Pharisees and their traditions, return from the marketplace, they "wash / immerse themselves" (ver. 4). They could have accidentally come into contact with any number of unclean things (like carcasses) in the marketplace and needed to become ritually clean. Mark further explains there are many other similar behaviors which the Jews have "received" (from Pharisaical tradition) and observe. This would include washing cups, pitchers, and pots. Some manuscripts have "and beds." It is obvious that the Pharisees are not interested in one's good health as much as they were interested in maintaining their traditions.

As they had done before (2:18, 23-24), the Pharisees attack Jesus' disciples and thereby attack Jesus. Why don't His disciples keep the traditions of the elders? Why do they eat with unclean hands?

Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and scribes for three matters:

- 1) Hypocrisy.
- 2) Worshipping God in vain
- 3) Invalidating the commandments of God.

Relative to hypocrisy, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13 (ver. 6). Isaiah did not prophesy *specifically* about these particular Jews, but His words were appropriate for the *attitude* of these Jews. Secondly, Jesus accused them of vain worship. They honor God verbally, with their lips, but their hearts were a long way from being humble and submissive to God. Consequently, their worship was in vain, pointless, inconsequential because they were teaching "teachings" which were simply commandments of men (ver. 7). Because they were so intent and focused on their traditions, they were neglecting the commandment of God.

Third, Jesus accuses them of invalidating the commandments of Jehovah God (ver. 9). With irony and sarcasm, Jesus says they are "experts" at invalidating the commandment of God simply to keep their tradition. Now, Jesus quotes from God, from the Law of Moses. First, Moses commanded in Exodus 20:12 (see also Deuteronomy 5:16) that a Jew should honor his father and his mother. Secondly, Jesus quotes from Exodus 21:17 (see also Leviticus 20:9), where Moses commanded that if someone spoke evil or cursed his father or mother, he was to be put to death, literally "to die the death" which translates the Hebrew infinitive absolute, a grammatical form used for emphasis.

The way in which they were invalidating the commandment of God is given in verses 11-12. The Jews would allow a man to dedicate some offering to God (referred to as "corban"; notice again that Mark defines the word for his Gentile audience), and subsequently the man would not have to give anything further to his father or mother for their support. He would simply say, "I'm sorry parents; what I could have given to you, I have already given to God." In that way, he could keep more of his possessions for himself.

It was in this way, they were basically saying that the Law of God was, itself, unlawful! They invalidated it by their tradition (ver. 13) which had been handed down, not given by the

angels of God as the Law of Moses was (Gal. 3.19). Further, Jesus accuses them of doing “many things such as that.”

The scene shifts in verse 14. Jesus decided to elaborate on His teaching about cleanness. Here, He addresses the broader crowd, not just His disciples. First, He calls on them to listen to Him, as He did earlier at 4:3, 9. Jesus states that spiritual uncleanness does not originate outside of the man; it does not have physical properties (ver. 15). Rather, uncleanness has its origin inside a man, in his heart. This is the reason we know that Jesus’ statement that one should cut off his hand or pluck out his eye if they cause him to sin (Matt. 5:29-30) is hyperbole. Sin has its origin in the heart. Some manuscripts add verse 16: If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. While the statement is accurate, it might not be original in this context.

The scene shifts once again in verse 17. He entered the house where He was staying and His disciples came to Him privately and asked Him, again, about the parable, as they had done in 4:10-12. In verse 18, Jesus once more questions their ability to understand. Things (foods or dirt) which have their origin outside of man cannot make him unclean because these things pass through the digestive system and do not enter the heart (ver. 19). The last part of verse 19 is commonly believed to be a comment by Mark that Jesus was declaring all foods clean, thus fulfilling the laws from the Law of Moses which distinguished between clean foods and unclean foods.

Sin originates in the heart; thus man must stop the sin, put it to death, while it is still in its germinal phase in the heart: Colossians 3:5; James 1:13-15. What comes out of the man (ver. 20) has its origin in the heart; clearly here Jesus shifts the discussion from the physical to the spiritual. From within, out of the heart, come evil thoughts (ver. 21). Then, Jesus gives one of many lists of various sins found in the NT.

The first six sins are in the plural form while the last six are in the singular. This suggests that the first six related to behaviors and the last six related to attitudes. These sins have their origin in the heart: sexual immorality (*porneia*, which is the broad general category of all sexual behavior which is not authorized by God: adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution), thefts, murders, adulteries (sexual immorality on the part of married persons), coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander (“blasphemy” in the original language, which is used generally for slandering God), pride, and foolishness.

Jesus summarizes the discussion in verse 20: “All these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man.”

APPLICATION:

Because “clean and unclean” foods were such an integral part of the Law of Moses and Jewish life, they became a source of contention when the kingdom was opened to the Gentiles. Paul will write in 1 Timothy 3:4 that “all foods” are acceptable, if they are received with thanksgiving. For the discussion as it moves its way through NT theology, see: Acts 10:9-16 (in fact, chapters 10-11); 15:1-29; 1 Corinthians 8; Romans 14-15; Galatians 2:11-14.

Notice how the Pharisees were reacting toward the word of God:

- 1) They were teaching their teachings as if they were the word of God (ver. 7).
- 2) They were neglecting the word of God (ver. 8).
- 3) They were ignoring the word of God (ver. 9).
- 4) They were invalidating the word of God (ver. 13).

Traditions are sinful if they set aside the Word of God, impinging into areas where Christ has already spoken or if they are performing actions which are without Christ’s authority. Traditions are good, if they are inspired traditions, that is if they are handed down through the apostles of Christ (2 Thess. 2:15). The commandments and teachings of men cannot make one pure and holy in the eyes of God (Col. 2:22-23), regardless of how elaborate and sincere the ritual might be.

There are a number of lists of sins in the NT: Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 2:20-21; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-8; 1 Timothy 1:9-12; 2 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 4:3.

Reasonings are “thoughts.” The word is used fourteen times in the NT: Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; Luke 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46-47; 24:38; Romans 1:21; 14:1; 1 Corinthians 3:20; Philippians 2:14; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 2:4.

“Sexual immoralities” is used 25 times: Matthew 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21; John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Revelation 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2.

“Thefts” are used twice: Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21.

“Murders” are used nine times: Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; 15:7; Luke 23:19, 25; Acts 9:1; Romans 1:29; Hebrews 11:37; Revelation 9:21.

“Adulteries” are used three times: Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; John 8:3.

“Covetousnesses” are used ten times: Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15; Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 9:5; Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:5; 2 Peter 2:3, 14.

“Wickednesses” is also translated as “malice;” the word is used seven times: Matthew 22:18; Mark 7:22; Luke 11:39; Acts 3:26; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:8; Ephesians 6:12.

“Deceit” is used eleven times: Matthew 26:4; Mark 7:22; 14:1; John 1:47; Acts 13:10; Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 12:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Peter 2:1, 22; 3:10.

“Licentiousness” is used ten times, often translated “sensuality” or lack of self-restraint, especially in sexual contexts: Mark 7:22; Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:2, 7, 18; Jude 4.

The “evil eye” probably refers to “stinginess.” It is also translated as “envy.” See Deuteronomy 15:9. The idea is used in: Matthew 27:18; Mark 7:22; 15:10; Romans 1:29; Galatians 5:21, 26; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:1.

“Blasphemy” means to “speak evil against.” Relative to people, it is usually translated “slander.” Relative to God, it is translated “blasphemy.” The word is used eighteen times: Matthew 12:31; 15:19; 26:65; Mark 3:28; 7:22; 14:64; Luke 5:21; John 10:33; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; 1 Timothy 6:4; Jude 9; Revelation 2:9; 13:1, 5-6; 17:3.

“Arrogance” is only used here in the NT. It is an inappropriate sense of one’s own importance.

“Foolishness” does not refer to someone who is ignorant, but rather to someone who lives as if there is no God, someone who does not make good moral decisions (see Psalm 14:1; 53:1). The word is used four times: Mark 7:22; 2 Corinthians 11:1, 17, 21.

TRANSLATION - 7:24-30:

24 And from there after rising, He passed on into the region of Tyre. And after entering into the house no one He desired to know, and He was not able to be hidden. **25** But immediately after hearing a woman concerning Him, whose daughter had an unclean spirit, after coming she knelt at His feet. **26** And the woman was a Greek, a Syro-phoenician by race; and she was asking Him that the demon He may cast out from her daughter. **27** And He was saying to her, “Allow first to be fed the children, for it is not good to take the bread of the children and to the puppies to cast.” **29** But she answered and says, “Lord; even the puppies from under the table eat from the crumbs of the youngsters.” **29** And He said to her, “On account of this word, go, there has gone out of your daughter the demon.” **30** And after departing into her house she found the youngster having been laid on the bed and the demon had gone out.

GREEK WORDS:

“Tyre” (ver. 14) was found earlier at 3:8. “To know” was used earlier at 4:13. “To escape notice” is used six times, only here in Mark. “Daughter” (ver. 25) was used at 5:23 and here, in the NT. “Spirit” was used earlier at 1:8. “Unclean” was used earlier at 1:23, 26-27. “To kneel” or

“to bow before” was used earlier at 3:11. “Greek” (ver. 26) is used here and Acts 17:12. “Race” is used 20 times, in Mark at 7:26; 9:29. “Demon” was used earlier at 1:34. “To cast out” was used earlier at 1:12. “To fill” (ver. 28) is used earlier at 6:42. “Children” was used earlier at 2:5. “Puppies” is used at Matthew 15:26-27; Mark 7:27-28. The word means “little dogs.” “Crumbs” is used only here and Matthew 15:27. “Youngsters” is a synonym for children. This word is used 52 times, first in Mark at 5:39.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verb “had gone out” (ver. 30) is a perfect tense verb, showing that the demon had gone out without returning again.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

God had prophesied in the OT that His new kingdom, through His new covenant, would include the Gentiles: Isaiah 2:2-3; 19:25; 25:6-8; Micah 4:1-2; Daniel 7:14; Amos 9:11-12; Zechariah 9:10.

Dogs were associated with uncleanness in the OT: Exodus 22:31; 1 Kings 21:23; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:36. See also 1 Samuel 24:15; 2 Samuel 16:9; Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 56:10. For a NT example, see Philippians 3:2.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

This is the only place where “Syrophenician” (ver. 26) is used in the NT. This distinguishes her from a “Libo-phenician” who were from North Africa, from Carthage.

Tyre and Sidon were located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and its inhabitants were largely Gentile. Tyre was north and west of Galilee (formerly known as Phoenicia) and made its money through commerce and trade but it was criticized by the prophets for their idolatry and godlessness: Isaiah 23; Jeremiah 47:4; Ezekiel 26-28; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9; Zechariah 9:2-3. The area was about 20 miles from Capernaum. Sidon was another 20 miles north of Tyre.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This event is also found in Matthew 15:21-28.

COMMENTS:

There are 35 miracles recorded in the life of Jesus. Four directly involve women: Peter’s mother-in-law (1:30-31); the widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17), Mary and Martha’s brother (John 11), and this woman. This miracle is remarkable from the perspective of the woman. She was a Gentile, and a woman. Her daughter was possessed by a demon. The disciples did not want Jesus to have anything to do with her (Matt. 15:23) and Jesus Himself kept delaying her request (Mark 7:27).

In verse 24, Jesus went as far outside of the area of His people as He would travel. Tyre had a long history of antagonism with the nation of Israel and would be denounced by the OT prophets. He entered a house, planning to be alone and get some rest. But, His reputation preceded Him and He was discovered.

A woman (ver. 25) had a daughter with an “unclean spirit,” and so Mom came to the house and fell at the feet of Jesus. This text illustrates the fact that “unclean spirits” (ver. 25) are equivalent to “demons” (ver. 26, 29-30). She addresses Jesus as “Son of David” (Matt. 15:22), which shows that she had some knowledge of the OT prophecy of the Messiah and she recognized Jesus as that Messiah. She expected Jesus to have the power to cast the demon out of her daughter. Her faith led her to Jesus.

She was a “Greek” (literally), of the Syrophenician race (ver. 26). “Greek” became a synonym for “Gentile” in the NT times: Romans 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor. 1:24; 10:32; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11. Verse 26 notes that Mom “kept asking” Jesus to cast out the demon. At the beginning, Jesus “kept saying ‘no’” because, as Matthew records: Jesus was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24).

Eventually, Jesus will respond with a general principle, one does not take food from the children and throw it to the dogs (ver. 27). Many scholars have tried to exonerate Jesus in one way or another from making such a harsh statement to the woman. It would hardly be within the nature of Jesus to criticize the narrow views of the Pharisees (7:1-13) and then almost immediately express a racist sentiment to this hurting mother. Rather, we believe Jesus is simply stating a general principle. If I were to state to a fellow adult, from whom I received something: "It's like taking candy from a baby," that person would not likely believe I was inferring he or she was a baby! It's a general statement. Likely, that is the case here as well. Also, notice that Jesus said, "Allow the children to be fed first..." The adverb "first" implies that Jesus intended to serve the Gentiles as well, at some point in the future.

But then the woman expressed a strong faith in Jesus, even as she expressed a profound sense of humility (see Matthew 15:28). In verse 28, the woman "accepted" the position of being a puppy, compared to the Jews who were God's children. Yet, even within the general statement Jesus made, the puppies under the table would eat the crumbs! A tender-hearted homeowner would not deny puppies to eat the crumbs under the table. This is the only time in Mark's gospel that someone refers to Jesus as "Lord" (ver. 28).

Jesus was amazed at the woman's faith (ver. 29). He wondered at the lack of faith of His Jewish friends and family (6:3), but He also marveled at the faith of another Gentile, in Matthew 8:10. Because of her faithful response, Jesus sent her back home, stating that the demon has already gone from her daughter.

When she returned home, she found her daughter having been laid on the bed, and the demon had gone (ver. 30).

APPLICATION:

Jesus has taught, at least in short sayings, fifteen times among the Jews. There are no references to teachings among the Gentiles, despite the fact that He casts out demons (5:1-20; 7:24-30) and heals (7:31-37) and feeds the hungry (8:1-10) among the Gentiles.

Jesus once again tries to get away from the crowd; see also 1:35; 3:13; 4:10; 6:31-32.

This woman illustrates an important attitude which God calls on all His children to have: perseverance and persistence: Luke 18:1-8; 2 Corinthians 4:1, 16; Galatians 2:10; 6:9; Ephesians 3:13; 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12; Hebrews 4:11; 2 Peter 1:10, 15; 3:14.

TRANSLATION - 7:31-37:

31 And again after going out from the region of Tyre, He went through Sidon unto the sea of Galilee in the midst of the region of Decapolis; **32** And they bring to Him a deaf and [with a] speech impediment and they encourage Him that He might place on him the hand. **33** And after taking aside him from the crowd alone He put His fingers into his ears and after spitting He touched his tongue. **34** And after looking up into heaven He sighed and says to him, "Ephphatha!" Which is "Be opened!" **35** And [immediately] his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosened and he was speaking clearly. **36** And He ordered them that nothing they might say; but as much as He ordered them, these rather even more preached. **37** And beyond all measure, they were amazed, saying, "He has done all things well, and the deaf He makes to hear and [the] non-speaking to speak!"

GREEK WORDS:

"Sidon" (ver. 31) was used earlier at 3:8. "Galilee" is found earlier at 1:9. "Decapolis" is used earlier at 5:20. "Deaf" is used 14 times, three times in Mark: 7:32, 37; 9:25. The word could refer to an inability to hear or to talk. Here, it refers to an inability to hear. "Speech impediment" is used only here in the NT. "To encourage" was used earlier at 1:40. "To take aside" (ver. 33) is used only here in Mark, out of 10 uses. "Finger" is used only here in Mark, out of eight times. "Ear" is was used earlier at 4:9. "To spit" is used here, Mark 8:23, and John 9:6. "Tongue" is used here, 7:35; 16:17 in Mark, out of 50 uses. It is also the word for "language."

“To sigh” (ver. 34) is used only here in Mark, out of six uses. Mark is the only writer who uses the Aramaic word “Ephphatha.” “To be opened” is used only here in Mark, out of eight uses. “To loosen” is used 42 times, first at Mark 1:7. “Bond” is used only here in Mark, out of 18 uses. “Clearly” or “correctly” is used four times, mostly in Luke: Mark 7:35; Mark 7:43; 10:28; 20:21. “To order” or “to command” is used earlier at 5:43. “To preach” is used earlier at 1:4. “Beyond all measure” (ver. 37) is used only here in the NT. Its form suggests “over-the-top amazement!” “To be amazed” is used 13 times, first at 1:22. “Non-speaking” means someone who is mute. The word is the verb “to speak” with the negative particle “a” in front of the word. It is used only by Mark, in 7:37; 9:17, 25.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Because “speech impediment” (ver. 32) is found only one other time in the Bible, Isaiah 35:6, this verse finds its fulfillment in this miracle, specifically, and in all His miracles in general. It proves, among other reasons, that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. Jesus cites Isaiah 35:5-6 in His response to John in Matthew 11:4-6 to show that He was the Messiah predicted by Isaiah.

The confession of the people in verse 34 that Jesus “did all things well” is an echo of Genesis 1:31. This is yet another way that Mark sets Jesus in the context of His deity (Mark 1:1-3).

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This miracle is not found in any other gospel account. However, see the general account in Matthew 15:29-31.

COMMENTS:

The final miracle Jesus will perform, in this chapter, is healing a deaf and mute man. This is the first occurrence of one deaf healed by Jesus. The word has been found in Matthew 9:32-33; 11:5; 12:22; 15:30-31. In Mark’s account, He will heal another deaf in 9:25.

In verse 31, Mark informs us that Jesus was moving around in this largely-Gentile region. Some scholars accuse Mark of being ignorant of the geography, but there is no reason to believe Mark is trying to portray some kind of “straight line.” Jesus goes from village to village and if He visits the same village twice in the same week, then He does just that. Jesus is now in the neighborhood of Tyre (ver. 31) and He passes through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, near Decapolis, where He was in Mark 5:20.

A man was brought to him, probably by friends (ver. 32), but this man was deaf and spoke with difficulty. We do not know what type of speech impediment He had. The people encouraged Jesus to lay His hands on the man. We do not know why, but Jesus took the man aside, privately (ver. 33). We do not know why, but Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears; perhaps this was to physically indicate to the man that Jesus would heal his ears. We do not know why, but Jesus then spit (whether on the ground, on His hand, or on the man’s tongue) and touched the man’s tongue. Perhaps this was also to show the man that He would heal his tongue.

In an act of prayer, Jesus looked up to heaven (ver. 34) and sighed deeply. We do not know why He sighed, unless it was a sigh of sadness at the destructive nature of Satan, who causes (directly or indirectly) all of man’s sufferings (see Luke 13:16). Then, Mark records, Jesus spoke (in Aramaic): “Ephphatha!” As he did earlier (7:3, 4, 11), Mark translates the phrase into Greek: “Be opened!” The power of the word of God then opened the man’s ears and loosed the impediment of his tongue (ver. 35). The man began speaking, even though he had never learned before how to speak. That’s a miracle!

As He had done before, Jesus ordered the audience not to tell anyone (ver. 36). He was already having trouble finding rest (ver. 24). But, the more He commanded people not to tell, the more they felt compelled to tell! The people of Decapolis were completely astonished. Mark uses a word to emphasize just how much the people were flabbergasted (ver. 37)! They

confessed that Jesus had “done all things well!” Among His powers, Jesus is able to make the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. Is there anything Jesus cannot do?

APPLICATION:

This is the first deaf man Jesus heals in Mark’s account. He serves as a representative of the Pharisees, who are deaf but refuse to hear, but also as a representative of Jesus’ own disciples who are deaf, but learning how to hear.