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PURITY/IMPURITY AND THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
MARK

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A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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By  
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December 2019

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To my parents, to Howard Davis Lewis and Shirley Lou (Carroll) Lewis, who have departed to be with the Lord, and to Patricia Ann (Franklin) Lewis

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## ABSTRACT

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Most modern scholars read purity/impurity to be a major theme in the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23, and the majority further interpret the parenthetical participle clause in Mark 7:19b to indicate that Jesus abrogates the food regulations of Leviticus 11. Many interpreters also detect purity/impurity to be a theme in the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 and in the exorcism accounts. Fewer interpreters, however, read these various accounts together in light of the entire narrative to investigate how Mark presents both Jesus’ relationship to purity and his overall authority, in particular his authority with respect to the Torah. A narrative approach to analyzing the Gospel of Mark would intentionally interpret together the passages where purity is an underlying theme. Such a narrative approach would also consider the OT background, how this was understood in the Second Temple era, and other passages in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus displays unique authority with respect to the Torah. In the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43, Jesus overcomes contact-contagion impurity as defined in the Leviticus 11–15 and Num 19:11–22 by coming into physical contact with unclean persons. In each of these miracles, Jesus brings cleansing/salvation to an unclean person based in his own authority and so *apart from the regulations of the Torah*. Jesus then displays this same authority when he abrogates Leviticus 11 during the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23. When Mark 7:1–23 is compared to other passages in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus teaches about the regulations of the Torah, the narrative indicates that Jesus’ authority is based in his inauguration of the reign of God and the coming of the new age. Therefore, Jesus’ authority encompasses the entire Torah and not just the purity laws. In the exorcism accounts, Jesus displays authority over the unclean spirits whose impurity represents a cosmic and generic class of impurity that is not defined by the Torah. The baptismal ministry of John initiates the fulfillment of the eschatological promises of Ezek 36:26 and Zech 13:1–2 that God would cleanse his people Israel from their sin. As the one who receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus continues this cleansing ministry, and this is accomplished in part through the exorcisms by which he removes the unclean spirits from both Jews and Gentiles. By interpreting together the exorcisms, these three miracle accounts, and the handwashing controversy through this narrative approach, it is shown that Mark’s Gospel depicts Jesus as one who has authority over every type of impurity—both the generic impurity of the spirits as well as Levitical impurity defined by the Torah—and so Jesus is one who is Lord over all things, even Lord over the Torah.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

What is the function of the theme of purity/impurity in the narrative of Mark's Gospel, and how is the matter of purity to be related to the person and work of Jesus? For example, what is Jesus' relationship to the Mosaic regulations regarding Levitical purity/impurity as found in Leviticus 11 (meat), Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy/skin diseases), Leviticus 15 (bodily discharges), and Num 19:11–22 (corpses)? It is almost universally recognized in studies on Mark 7:1–23 (the handwashing controversy) that purity is an important underlying theme in this passage and that in the parenthetical remark of 7:19b the author depicts Jesus as abrogating the food laws of Leviticus 11. Jesus' relationship to purity/impurity is often also recognized as a theme in the miracle accounts of 1:40–45 (the leper) and 5:21–43 (the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus' dead daughter). Less often, however, are the handwashing controversy of 7:1–23 and these three miracle accounts interpreted in light of one another *on the narrative level* to ask if Jesus' relationship to purity/impurity is an important theme in Mark's Gospel and then what this theme says about Jesus himself. What is more, the exorcism accounts in Mark's Gospel (e.g. 1:21–28) also involve the theme of purity/impurity, though in these accounts the impurity of the unclean spirits is not related to Levitical regulations and impurity. If an interpreter were to place these various texts where purity/impurity may be a major concern into *one larger interpretative matrix*, what would this show concerning Jesus' person, both with respect to Levitical impurity and with respect to impurity on a larger, cosmic scale? When we consider both the words and actions of Jesus, it is apparent that Mark uses the theme of purity/impurity to depict Jesus as a man of unique authority with respect both to the Torah and, indeed, to the cosmos itself.

## The Thesis

The theme of purity/impurity is used and developed in the narrative of the Gospel according to Mark to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is Lord in every respect of life. This lordship is exercised over both the Mosaic regulations that define Levitical purity/impurity and, more globally, over the entire cosmos.

## The Current Status of the Question

### The Role of Purity and the Authority of Jesus in Mark 7:1–23

Many studies on Mark 7:1–23 concur that underlying Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes over ritual handwashing are concerns about purity that were an important expression of Jewish religious piety during the Second Temple era. Among these studies there is also a large consensus that the participle clause καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα in 7:19b is a parenthetical comment where Mark adds his own direct commentary on the significance of Jesus' sayings in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a. There is consensus also that the clause is to be understood in a straightforward manner where the referent of πάντα τὰ βρώματα actually is "all food"<sup>1</sup>—even food forbidden in Leviticus 11.<sup>2</sup> Reading with the consensus of

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Greek or Hebrew text are the translations of the dissertation's author.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding all three of the points of this consensus outlined here, see, e.g., Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Marc* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1947), 190; Charles E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Mark*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 241, 243–45; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 344–45; Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, SJLA 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 61; William N. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 255–56; Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 144–45; Heikki Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15," *JSNT* 16 (1982): 82; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 111; Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7*, JSNTSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 50–51; Charles C. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 317; Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," *Semeia* 35 (1986): 107–08; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 219–20; R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 190; Augustine Stock,

scholarly opinion, then, the participle clause in 7:19b demonstrates *at least on the narrative level* that Jesus is depicted as abrogating the food laws of Leviticus 11 in his address to the crowd in 7:14b–15 and in his explanation of this saying to his disciples in 7:18–19a.

There are, however, a minority of authors who disagree with this general consensus regarding either the nature of 7:19b as a parenthetical statement added by Mark or that by means of this statement the author intends to show that Jesus has abrogated the food laws of Leviticus 11. For those who reject 7:19b as originating from the hand of Mark, the more popular explanation is that it is a later scribal addition or gloss.<sup>3</sup> Henry Barclay Swete states simply that this clause is “a note added by a teacher or editor who has realised [*sic*] that in the preceding

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*The Method and Message of Mark* (Wilmington, DE.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 208–09; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 49–51; James A. Brooks, *Mark*, NAC 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 118; Monra D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark*, BNTC 2 (London: A&C Black, 1991), 179; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 355–56; Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux, JSNTSup 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 245; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8 AB 27* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 457–58; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 228–29; James Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 212–13; Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 289–92; Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Purity*, Conant 38 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2002), 61; Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 143–44; M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 202–03; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 356; Alan Culpepper *Mark*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 229; Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 345–46; John P. Meier, *Law and Love*, vol. 4 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 362, 390; Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 99; James W. Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, ConC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 464, 468–70; Daniel L. Atkin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 155; Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 304; and David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 131, 311, 468.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 11th ed., MeyK 2; (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 142; Dennis E. Nineham, *The Gospel of Mark*, PNTC (New York: Penguin, 1963), 196; Ernst Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu: Eine Erklärung des Markus-Evangeliums und der kanonischen Parallelen* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966), 264, n. 3; Eduardo Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark*, trans. by D. H. Madvig; Richmond, VA: Knox, 1970), 150; and John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, SP 2 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2016), 225. Though not always stated explicitly, it appears as if one reason for dismissing the originality of 7:19b is the assumption of the two-source hypothesis and its implications for this verse: *If Matthew copied Mark, why would he omit this parenthetical statement when in other places he does not omit such statements (e.g. Matthew 24:15)? Thus, 7:19b must be a comment or gloss added by a later scribe/copyist.*

words the Lord had really abrogated the distinction between clean and unclean.”<sup>4</sup> Robert W. Guelich argues that the parenthetical remark of 7:19b (as well as that in 7:3–4) does not resemble the same literary style of the author’s other such insertions, and so he concludes that it was introduced later by copyists as a clarifying statement.<sup>5</sup> The importance of this question is that if 7:19b were not considered a part of the original text, then it could be argued that this parenthetical remark expresses only the interpretation of 7:18–19a made by a later reader of Mark’s Gospel rather than the meaning that is intended by the author. Therefore, while Swete reads 7:19b as a faithful interpretation of 7:18–19a, Guelich leaves open the possibility that this is only the view of a later copyist operating in a different historical context than the original author. The choice to read 7:19b as original to the text or as a later addition thus becomes one fundamental decision which must be made while interpreting 7:1–23.<sup>6</sup>

Robert C. H. Lenski represents a minority position in that he rejects both the interpretation that 7:19b is a parenthetical comment inserted by the author (or a later scribe) *and* that this comment depicts Jesus as abrogating the food laws of Leviticus 11. First, Lenski argues that “the participle clause is beyond question a part of the explanation of Jesus” and so should be

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Mark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 152. It is important to note that, although Swete does not believe that this clause is written by the author, he still interprets it as a faithful interpretation of the implications of what Jesus says in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a. What is more, although Swete does not explicitly say this, he implies that the erasure of the distinction between clean and unclean includes more than the matter of foods and that the scribe who inserted this statement recognized that, in fact, Jesus was dismissing the entire Levitical distinction of “clean and unclean.”

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 378–79. Though he does not believe that 7:19b was written by the author, Guelich does admit “this comment clearly pertains to the Levitical food laws and stems from a setting in the early Church that no longer observed them.” Guelich, 378.

<sup>6</sup> On this point it may be noted further that there does not appear to be any textual evidence to support the minority position that 7:19b is not original. Any scholar reading with the minority, therefore, must depend upon an argument based on the internal evidence (similar to that made by Guelich) that emphasizes how the literary features of this parenthetical remark do not resemble the author’s style elsewhere in the Gospel.

considered a part of Jesus' direct discourse to the disciples.<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to Lenski, in 7:19b Jesus himself—and not the author—speaks the words “cleansing all foods.” Yet Lenski also disagrees with the consensus regarding the referent of πάντα τὰ βρώματα: Lenski argues that πάντα τὰ βρώματα only refers to foods that were already permissible under the Levitical code. According to Lenski, Jesus could not abrogate Leviticus 11 when he spoke because “[Jesus] himself fulfilled every requirement of [the Levitical] law as a Jew and retained that law for his disciples until Pentecost.”<sup>8</sup>

In more recent scholarship Clinton Wahlen offers an opinion that concurs with Lenski's conclusion that Mark 7:19b does not speak to the legislation of Leviticus 11. In his larger study on the impurity of spirits, Wahlen devotes one chapter to the function of purity in the Gospel of Mark, and in this chapter he discusses 7:1–23 in the context of other “eating controversies” in Mark's Gospel.<sup>9</sup> In his analysis, Wahlen also vies with the consensus that in 7:19b the author

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<sup>7</sup> Robert C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946), 297. Lenski concludes that the masculine nominative participle καθαρίζων modifies the neuter accusative noun ἁφεδρώνα; he argues further that “the case is not all that important” and “in the Greek the participle lends itself to constructions like the one we have here.” Lenski, 297.

<sup>8</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 294. Lenski's opinion here reflects a common rationale (particularly in Lutheran circles) regarding the relationship of Jesus to the Law during his earthly ministry: *Jesus had to have kept the Law perfectly in our place to be a worthy sacrifice for sin, and so he could not have reinterpreted or abrogated any of the Torah until after his resurrection.* See, e.g., *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1986), 125 and 128–29 for a summary of such a view. With this understanding, Jesus could not possess any unique authority over the Torah before his death and resurrection—and this even though he claims such a unique authority for himself in relationship to the Torah in other places in Mark's Gospel (e.g., “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” in 2:28).

<sup>9</sup> Clinton Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of the Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels*, WUNT 185 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004): 72–83. The majority of this chapter discusses the controversy over handwashing in 7:1–23, but Wahlen first identifies Mark 2:1–3:6 as a unit of five pronouncement stories linked together by the redactor of Mark's Gospel into one literary unit. According to Wahlen, this entire unit (2:1–3:6) is framed at the beginning and end by miracle accounts (the healing of the paralytic and the healing of the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath) with three “eating controversies” in the middle (the dinner at Levi's house, the question about fasting, and Jesus' disciples picking grain on the Sabbath). Then Wahlen argues that the two most extensive controversies in Mark's Gospel that come after this section are 3:22–30, which is prompted by healings (exorcisms), and 7:1–23, which involves eating. Thus, Wahlen sees a thematic link between Jesus' response to the Beelzebul accusation (3:22–30) and Jesus' response to the question/accusation about handwashing (7:1–23). He also notes that the controversy of

says that Jesus abrogates the food laws of Leviticus 11. He argues that since the opponents' question in 7:5 is limited only to whether *foods already permissible according to Leviticus* could be rendered unclean when the hands are not purified, then Jesus' saying to the crowd in 7:14b–15 only addresses the question of whether kosher foods are rendered unclean when eaten with unwashed hands. Wahlen concludes that this passage only presents Jesus as dismissing the scruples of the Pharisees regarding the necessity to wash one's hands before eating because, again, unclean meats are not under consideration in 7:5. Thus, according to Wahlen, Jesus is not depicted as abrogating Leviticus 11 since his remarks in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a are confined to the context of the original question asked in 7:5 and cannot logically move beyond this.<sup>10</sup>

Wahlen does see 7:19b as a parenthetical remark inserted into the middle of Jesus' speech by the author, but, again, he argues that, given the historical situation underlying this text, the author knew that πάντα τὰ βρώματα could only refer to permissible foods.<sup>11</sup> To defend this understanding about the referent of the clause in 7:19b, Wahlen argues further that any use of this passage to argue that the legislation of Leviticus 11 is abrogated by Jesus was not clearly made within the early church until Origen argued this point in the early third century, and this in spite of the Gentile mission that began in the apostolic age and during which this statement could

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7:1–23 logically precedes the Gentile mission that follows in 7:24–8:10.

Though Wahlen notes important thematic links *within the narrative* of Mark's Gospel, he employs a redaction critical approach throughout his analysis of the Synoptic Gospels. What is more, in his discussion of interpretative method he expresses some suspicion regarding a narrative approach toward studying the Gospels, arguing that he is “not converted” by the advocates of narrative criticism and so prefers the “historical” investigation of redaction criticism. Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 20–21.

<sup>10</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 77. Wahlen makes reference to Lenski's commentary in support of his arguments about how Mark 7:19b does not refer to the foods forbidden in Leviticus 11, yet, at the same time, he acknowledges that the majority of scholars do not support this position.

<sup>11</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 78.



have been used to justify such a mission.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, according to Wahlen, the parenthetical statement in 7:19b should properly be understood to read “thus [he] declared ritually pure all (permissible) food.”<sup>13</sup>

In their disagreement with the consensus on how 7:19b functions in Mark’s Gospel, Lenski and Wahlen do draw attention to two important challenges regarding the interpretation of this passage in the wider context of the handwashing controversy. One challenge is that the question and complaint of the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes in 7:5 is about the non-observance of the handwashing tradition and *not* that Jesus’ disciples are eating foods that were forbidden in Leviticus 11. If Jesus in his response then uses the occasion of this question about whether permissible foods are rendered unclean by eating with unwashed hands not only to repudiate the handwashing tradition of the Pharisees and Jerusalem scribes, but also to abrogate the food laws of Leviticus 11 (as the consensus argues), then he raises the stakes considerably in his response to the question in 7:5—which, again, is only concerned with the defilement of permissible foods. Interpreters who follow the consensus, therefore, must explain what Jesus does as he moves beyond the scope of the original question and then abrogates Leviticus 11. Yet most studies that argue with the consensus do not discuss this problem.

A second challenge is that Jesus could appear very inconsistent and even hypocritical if indeed Mark means to show in 7:19b that he abrogates Leviticus 11. Earlier in the passage Jesus accuses the Pharisees and Jerusalem scribes of “having left the command of God” (7:8), “continually setting aside the command of God” (7:9), and “nullifying the word of God” (7:13) by means of their tradition. Yet, if πάντα τὰ βρώματα in 7:19b does refer to foods forbidden in

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<sup>12</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 73–4.

<sup>13</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 79.

Leviticus 11, then Jesus can actually be accused of going beyond what he claims his opponents are doing, for he now declares invalid an important set of regulations found in the very command and word of God and not only in the oral tradition of the scribes. Again, interpreters who follow the consensus must explain this seemingly logical inconsistency between what Jesus says the authorities do and then what he is depicted as doing, yet most studies that argue with the consensus do not address this problem either.<sup>14</sup>

There are thus these two options when reading this passage: One option is that Jesus' entire response throughout this passage is limited to the confines of the question in 7:5. In this case he only speaks about permissible foods in 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19a. In this case also the author is only referring to permissible foods in 7:19b. With this approach there is no question about inconsistency when Jesus moves from accusing the authorities of setting aside the commands of God in 7:7–13 to addressing the crowd in 7:14a–15 and then explaining this statement to the disciples in 7:18–19: Jesus is not setting aside any commands of God, but instead he only dismisses the handwashing tradition. This is how both Lenski and Wahlen read this passage.

The other option is that in his address to the crowd in 7:14a–15 and his explanation to the disciples in 7:18–19a Jesus does intentionally move beyond the bounds of the complaint of 7:5 and, what is more, he does so at the risk of appearing inconsistent with his earlier accusation of the authorities in 7:6–13. This is how the consensus reads, and so the consensus appears to be that when Jesus says in 7:15, “there is nothing going into a man that is able to defile him,” he moves beyond the confines of the question posed in 7:5, he abrogates Leviticus 11, and he risks

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<sup>14</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 467 and 469–70, for one notable exception to this trend. Voelz does draw attention to how Jesus moves from discussion of the oral tradition (in 7:7–13) to discussion of the actual commands of the Torah as found in Leviticus 11 (in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a). He also explains how Jesus makes such a move based in his unique authority as the Son of Man. Voelz' interpretation of Mark 7:1–23 is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

looking inconsistent for abrogating an entire section of Mosaic legislation after just accusing the Pharisees and scribes of doing a similar thing. *Any interpreter who reads this way faces the challenge of explaining by what right Jesus can do this without appearing as if he contradicts himself.* Both Lenski and Wahlen avoid the need for such a discussion by arguing that Jesus is not challenging the legislation of Leviticus 11.

Regarding *the significance* of this passage in what it says about Jesus' person and work,<sup>15</sup> and in particular what the dominical statements of 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19a say about Jesus' relationship to the entire Torah (and not just Leviticus 11), some studies that agree with the consensus say little or nothing at all about this question.<sup>16</sup> Where this is discussed, one common assertion is that Mark presents Jesus as making a distinction between regulations in the Torah that are primarily cultic, ceremonial, external, physical, and/or unique to Jewish self-identity and those that are moral, ethical, and represent an internal and universal standard for righteousness.<sup>17</sup> Both Robert Gundry and Morna D. Hooker argue that by means of his unique authority as the

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<sup>15</sup> See Voelz, *What Does this Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 156–65, for a discussion of interpreting level one and level two signifiers. While level one signifiers are the marks upon the page, level two signifiers are the “things, actions, situations, attitudes, etc.” which then communicate on a “second ‘level,’ i.e., through another complex of signifiers. When reading on level two, the interpreter is seeking the *significance* of these things, actions, situations, attitudes, etc.” Thus, when interpreting Mark 7:18–23, the interpreter might ask what significance there is to Jesus saying these words in this narrative with respect to his authority over Leviticus 11 (and the entire Torah). The interpreter might see the parenthetical remark in 17:19b as the author's/narrator's own interpretation of the significance of Jesus' words in 17:18–19a, a significance that is expressed by level one signifiers, namely, that Jesus has abrogated the food laws of Leviticus 11, and so these laws no longer apply.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Taylor, *Mark*, 344–45 and Collins, *Mark*, 345–46, where in their interpretation of this passage neither author directly addresses the significance of the dominical sayings regarding Jesus' relationship to the Torah.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Moloney, *Mark*, 142, who argues that the Markan Jesus is making a distinction between “moral impurity” and “ritual impurity”; France, *Mark*, 292, who argues that the distinction is between “defilement in moral terms” and “external matters”; Witherington, *Mark*, 230–31, who argues that Jesus is here maintaining “strict moral purity” and argues that “personal sin, not physical impurity now defiles”; and Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity,” 113, who argues that Jesus established “new rules of purity” based in “the core of the Law” (i.e., the Ten Commandments) rather than “the fences of men” (i.e., the rabbinic observances), and so was not “replacing,” but merely “reforming purity.” See also Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60, who argues that the handwashing controversy and the healings of the leper and the woman with the flow of blood indicate that Jesus was more interested in “ethics” than “bodily afflictions” or “unclean hands and food.”

Son of God Jesus does abrogate *one part* of the Torah, yet both argue that Jesus is still maintaining the Torah's moral or righteous demands.<sup>18</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield concurs with this view of Jesus' authority; what is more, he also continues to argue that Mark presents Jesus (in reference to Rom 10:4) as τέλος νόμου ("the end of the Torah").<sup>19</sup> Yet, in spite of this recognition of Jesus' unique authority, Cranfield goes on to claim that Jesus only abrogates "some elements of [the Law]," that is, the ceremonial requirements.<sup>20</sup>

It can be further noted that in most studies where the significance of Mark 7:1–23 in describing Jesus' relationship to the Torah is discussed, even when Jesus' dominical authority is emphasized (as it is, for instance, by Cranfield, Gundry, and Hooker), the conclusion is most often that he abrogates only a part of the Torah while he maintains all of the other parts.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned above, this action is often understood in terms of a distinction between "ceremonial" and "moral" laws (no matter what terminology each individual interpreter may use). Thus, many of these readings of Mark 7:1–23 do not interpret the passage in light of Paul's argumentation about the role of the Torah after Jesus has come as found in Gal 3:19–4:11 or in Rom 10:1–13. Though a number of studies do go as far as to emphasize how Mark's Gospel seems to fit into the Pauline milieu,<sup>22</sup> most do not take their reading of Mark 7:1–23 any further to conclude that

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<sup>18</sup> See Gundry, *Mark*, 356 and Hooker, *Mark*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Cranfield, *Mark*, 244.

<sup>20</sup> Cranfield, *Mark*, 245.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Iersel, *Mark*, 246–47, who says this explicitly in his analysis of Mark 7, stating "the rejection of the dietary laws by Mark and perhaps Jesus himself, or, in other words, the negation of the compulsory character of some literally-taken prescriptions of the Torah does not imply the rejection of the Torah itself." Iersel continues to argue that Jesus in this passage maintains the validity of the fourth commandment (see Mark 7:10), and this indicates that Jesus maintains the moral demands of the Torah while he abrogates only the ceremonial laws. Iersel, 47.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., France, *Mark*, 278–79, where he argues that Paul knew the tradition of Jesus' teaching—including 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a—and that Mark's Gospel represents "the more progressive (Pauline)" wing in the first century church's disagreement over matters of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. See also Taylor, *Mark*, 347, who also makes the case for a connection between Mark and Paul and argues that the list of vices

Jesus is in a unique position of authority in relationship to the *entire* Torah.<sup>23</sup>

One major exception to this general approach about the relationship of Jesus to the Torah as depicted in Mark 7:1–23, however, is presented by James W. Voelz in his commentary on Mark’s Gospel. Contra the opinions of most other interpreters, Voelz does argue that Jesus’ sayings in this passage depict him as one who has authority over *the entirety* of the Torah. According to Voelz, in Mark 7:1–23 Jesus responds to the complaint of 7:5 in two distinct stages, and this two-stage response then parallels Jesus’ response to the complaint about his disciples gleaning grain on the Sabbath in 2:23–28.<sup>24</sup> In stage one (7:6–13) Jesus responds specifically to the complaint of 7:5. In this response, Jesus speaks against the traditions which the Pharisees have added to the Torah and that then go beyond what the Torah requires, overburden people, and could even trump the actual commands of God.<sup>25</sup> In stage two of his response (7:14b–15 and 7:18–23), however, Jesus moves beyond discussing the oral tradition to the regulations of the Torah itself. Thus, Jesus also *intentionally* moves beyond the confines of the question/complaint first posed by the authorities in 7:5. Here the focus is not upon “the improper imposition of human laws,” but “the Mosaic Law itself.”<sup>26</sup> Voelz argues that in

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in 7:21–22 reflects a distinctly Pauline vocabulary. Yet see also Cranfield, *Mark*, 154 and 242, who does not recognize any such connection between Mark and Paul and argues that Mark’s Jesus is not a derivative of Paul.

<sup>23</sup> One question that may be considered, then, is whether such readings about the nature of Jesus’ relationship to the Torah arise based on features of the text itself or whether these readings are influenced more by the beliefs and assumptions that each interpreter brings to the text, namely, beliefs and assumptions about whether there is a clear distinction in the Torah between demands that are moral and “internal” and those that are merely ceremonial and “external.” See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 208–11, for his discussion about readers as “second texts,” that is, how each reader is himself a complex of beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, ideas, experiences, etc. and how, when a reader interprets, this complex also become a part of the interpretative matrix.

<sup>24</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222–24 and 469–71.

<sup>25</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 469.

<sup>26</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 469–70. According to Voelz, in both Mark 2:23–28 and 7:1–23 Jesus moves from focus upon the regulations themselves to focus upon relationships, the relationships of men to one another and of men to God that express God’s foundational will for humanity. A similar pattern is evident later in 10:3–8 when Jesus teaches on marriage and divorce: Jesus moves from discussing what Moses commanded/allowed in the Torah

depicting Jesus as Lord over the Sabbath earlier in the narrative (the conflict arising from the disciples gleaning grain on the Sabbath in 2:23–28) and now as abrogating Leviticus 11 (7:19b), Mark interprets these narrative incidents in a manner that resembles the theology of Paul.<sup>27</sup> According to Voelz, Jesus ultimately abrogates the *entirety* of the Mosaic Law, and not only Leviticus 11, and Jesus does this based in his unique authority as “the Son of Man.”<sup>28</sup> Whether or not the words of Jesus in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a appear to be inconsistent with his earlier remarks in 7:8–13 depends on whether or not the interpreter agrees with the point of view of the author that Jesus as the Son of Man has such authority over the Torah.

Finally, it is important to observe that many studies of Mark 7:1–23 intentionally move beyond the narrative of Mark’s Gospel to attempt via redaction criticism a historical reconstruction of the events and sayings that lie behind the text. Such studies attempt to distinguish the tradition which the author received from the actual redaction of this material. Such studies then also attempt to identify the various stages of development of the earlier Christian tradition underlying 7:1–23 before it was received by the author and then redacted into the text as it now stands.<sup>29</sup> Some studies then attempt to identify also what events and sayings in

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(Deut 24:1, 3) back to God’s intentions for marriage at creation (Gen 1:27 and 2:24). See also Voelz and Christopher W. Mitchell, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2019), 719, where Voelz discusses Jesus’ response to the question on divorce in Mark 10:5–8.

<sup>27</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 471–74.

<sup>28</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 470–71. Note that Voelz provides one answer to Wahlen’s objection about the “logical inconsistency” of Jesus in Mark 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19a moving beyond the question of Mark 7:5 to abrogate Leviticus 11. According to Voelz, Jesus *knowingly* raises the stakes as he moves from stage one (discussing the oral tradition) to stage two (discussing the Torah itself), and Jesus does this based in his own authority as the Son of Man. If the Son of Man has authority over the Torah, then he certainly also is not constrained by the original question of 7:5 even as his response is not constrained by the Pharisees’ complaint earlier in the narrative during the Sabbath controversy of 2:23–28.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Taylor, *Mark*, 342–47, who argues that Mark 7 actually represents various layers of tradition being preserved by the author and then reads this passage accordingly, and Meier, *Law and Love*, 353–56, who offers a similar explanation about the origin of what to him initially appears to be a “shifting, not to say drifting” and even “meandering” series of arguments in 7:1–23 and which, he says, is evidence of the development of this tradition

this passage may be attributed to “the historical Jesus.”<sup>30</sup> Other studies have attempted to determine how the redaction of the material should inform the modern reader about the historical situation of the “Markan community.”<sup>31</sup> Some studies have focused in particular on the question of the historical accuracy of the parenthetical explanation in 7:3–4 regarding the universality of Jewish ritual washing, in particular the author’s claim that πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (“all the Jews”) participated in the ritual washings described.<sup>32</sup> Such historically focused studies ignore or deemphasize questions about how the events and sayings in this passage function *at the narrative level*. Thus, with the exception of Voelz, what is lacking overall in studies on the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23 is a study that focuses upon a decidedly *narrative* approach. Such an approach would consider the wider context of Mark’s story and so other events where Jesus’ relationship to purity and his authority with respect to the Torah are concerns.<sup>33</sup>

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over time before it was finally redacted into its present form.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity*, 55–114, who argues for the historicity of much of the material in Mark 7:1–23, and Meier, *Law and Love*, 342–415, who in his analysis of the entire passage concludes that only the *korban* statement of 7:11 can be attributed to the historical Jesus since this one passage fits into an earlier Palestinian context while at the same time it is dissimilar to any interests of the later church. Meier, 413.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Moloney, *Mark*, 143 who hypothesizes that the debate in Mark 7 could reflect an ongoing debate between Judaism and the Markan community of Christians.

<sup>32</sup> See Adolf Büchler, “The Law of Purification in Mark vii:1–23,” *ET* 21 (1909): 34–40, who argues against the historicity of 7:3–4 by asserting that concern for handwashing was limited only to Pharisees who were also priests. Büchler’s opinion had some influence in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but is rejected by the consensus of scholars today. See the discussions in Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 63–65 and Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 68. See Meier, *Law and Love*, 399–400, however, for a more recent discussion of the historicity of these verses that concurs with Büchler. Meier dismisses the historical veracity of Mark’s claim that such handwashing was universally practiced among the Jews, and with this he dismisses also any attempt to explain the statement 7:19b as merely a “hyperbolic statement.” See also France, *Mark*, 281–82, for a similar discussion. Yet see also, Eyal Regev, “Pure Individualism: The Idea of Non-Priestly Purity in Ancient Judaism,” *JSJ* 31 (2000) 176–202, who argues on the basis of archaeological findings that ritual handwashing was practiced widely among the Jews of the Second Temple era and that this practice was both early (predating even the emergence of the Pharisees) and widespread (practiced also in the Diaspora).

<sup>33</sup> As noted above, see Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 465–71, for an exception to this general trend. Voelz does interpret 7:1–23 in light of the wider narrative of Mark’s Gospel and in particular in light of the Sabbath-controversy of 2:23–28.

## The Role of Purity and the Authority of Jesus in Certain Miracle Accounts

The three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 each involves Jesus coming into physical contact with a person who arguably is considered unclean according to the regulations of the Torah—the leper, the woman with the flow of blood, and Jairus’ dead daughter. In light of the Old Testament background found in Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy/skin diseases), Leviticus 15 (discharges), and Num 19:11–22 (corpses), purity/impurity could be an important concern in these miracle accounts. This possibility is true even if the author does not mention purity explicitly while depicting these events.<sup>34</sup> Since each of these miracles also involves Jesus touching or being touched by (the verb ἅπτομαι with the leper and the woman with the flow of blood and the verb κρατέω with the dead girl) the person with whom he is interacting, it can be asked whether Jesus himself contracts uncleanness by means of physical contact with these unclean persons.<sup>35</sup> Whenever any study does argue that purity is a factor in any of these miracle accounts, however, only very few of these studies explicitly go beyond noting this point to discussing what these miracles say about Jesus’ relationship to purity/impurity in Mark’s account. What is more, few of these studies discuss whether or not these miracle accounts should be then be interpreted in light of each other or how these events speak to Mark’s portrayal of

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<sup>34</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 90, where he argues that in the first century Palestinian context contact with corpses, people with skin diseases, and people with discharges would have been considered obvious means by which impurity was transmitted even if in Mark’s Gospel this is “not explicitly spelled out or exploited by the gospel writer.” Kazen wonders if the lack of explicit mention of purity in the text of Mark’s Gospel is due to the possibility that the purity concern of the historical context of Jesus’ ministry were no longer important to the Markan church so that such explicit descriptions were lost in redaction. Yet see also Meier, *Law and Love*, 409, where he argues that purity is *not* a concern in the account of the woman with the flow of blood. Meier does recognize the possibility that purity is a concern in the healing of the leper (see Meier, 411–12) and the raising of the dead girl (see Meier, 405–9), but he explicitly says that purity is not a concern in the account of the woman with the discharge because, in his interpretation, this woman could not contaminate others through her touch.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69 and Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 90.



Jesus and his relationship to the Torah.

The hermeneutical questions involved in interpreting these miracle accounts should be noted before considering how the various studies treat these accounts: First, there are words on the page that indicate that purity is a theme in the healing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45.<sup>36</sup> The verb καθαρίζω is used three times and the noun καθαρισμός one time in this account. There are, however, no such explicit “level one signifiers” to indicate that purity is a theme in the accounts of the woman with the discharge and the dead girl in 5:21–43. Thus, any reading that purity is a theme in these latter two miracle accounts ultimately would be based on reading the significance of these events in light of the Old Testament legislation and then how this legislation was interpreted and understood within first century Judaism.<sup>37</sup>

Such a reading of the significance of these miracle accounts, then, would consider whether purity (Levitical or otherwise) is a concern in the lack that is overcome by means of Jesus’ power—a leper is cleansed, a woman with a flow of blood is healed/saved,<sup>38</sup> and a dead girl is raised back to life. Such a reading would also consider if there is significance in Jesus’ touching the leper, being touched by the woman, and taking hold of the dead girl’s hand. Such a reading would also ask what role these miracles play overall in how the narrative depicts Jesus as a character, his attitude about purity, his relationship to the purity code specifically, his relationship to the Torah in general, and his overall authority and lordship. What is more, when

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<sup>36</sup> See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156, for his description of level one signifiers. Level one signifiers are signifiers/words as the actual “marks on the page.” Thus there are level one signifiers in the account of the cleansing of the leper that call attention to purity.

<sup>35</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156–58. Here Voelz discusses further what it means not just to interpret on level one (reading the marks on the page), but also on level two (determining the significance of the things, actions, deeds, etc. that are depicted). Note that the account of the cleansing of the leper would also be read at level two, but with this account there are at least some level one signifiers that refer to purity/impurity.

<sup>38</sup> Note that in Mark 5:28, 34 the verb σώζω is used, not θεραπεύω.

considering these questions, one could also ask about the implications of the author including such events in the narrative and whether this indicates that the author and his addressees were concerned about the matters of purity/impurity.<sup>39</sup>

The studies generally indicate that purity is at stake in the cleansing of the leper (Mark 1:40–45).<sup>40</sup> Again, detecting such a connection seems more obvious because Mark uses the verb καθαρίζω three times in place of the verb θεραπεύω (the leper is “cleansed,” not “healed”). Mark also uses the noun καθαρισμός one time, and this is in a direct reference to the instructions about purification from skin disease found in Lev 14:1–32. Ched Myers continues further than other interpreters in addressing the significance of this event when he argues that this entire incident not only relates to purity/impurity concerns, but represents “Jesus’ assault on the purity code.”<sup>41</sup> According to Myers, as Jesus in his earthly ministry initiates God’s reign, those who were left on the margins in the previous order are now included. Myers thus reads that in this particular miracle Jesus acts in a unique position of authority in relationship to the purity regulations of the Torah. Other than Myers, however, most studies do not comment further on the significance of this miracle with respect to Jesus’ authority in relationship to the Torah. What is more, most studies do not discuss whether this miracle should be connected in any way with the miracles of Mark 5:21–43.

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<sup>39</sup> See Voelz *What Does This Mean?*, 165–67, where he discusses reading level 3 signifiers. Any questions concerning the implications for how and what Mark writes about purity/impurity, that is, what this says about the author and his historical situation, involves reading signifiers on level 3.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Lagrange, *Marc*, 29–30; Cranfield, *Mark*, 90; Taylor, *Mark*, 185–86; Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 45; Lane, *Mark*, 85; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelicum nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 68–69; Swete, *Mark*, 29; Mann, *Mark*, 218–20; Guelich, *Mark 1–8*:26, 73; Stock, *Method and Message of Mark*, 87; Brooks, *Mark*, 54–55; Hooker, *Mark*, 78–82; Gundry, *Mark*, 95; Iersel, *Mark*, 143; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 208–9; Witherington, *Mark*, 103–4; Edwards, *Mark*, 68–69; France, *Mark*, 115–21; Moloney, *Mark*, 58; Collins, *Mark*, 179; Culpepper, *Mark*, 61; Stein, *Mark*, 105; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8*:26, 173.

<sup>41</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 152–54. Note that Myers reads Mark’s Gospel in a way that highlights “the political implications” of Jesus’ ministry, and this is evident in his interpretation of Mark 1:40–45.

A number of studies also argue that purity is a theme in the healing of the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5:25–34),<sup>42</sup> though here the consensus is not as large as it is with the cleansing of the leper. Charles C. Mann, Joel Marcus, and Bas M. F. van Iersel go further than other interpreters by arguing that not only is the woman ritually unclean, but also that by touching Jesus she perhaps renders him unclean<sup>43</sup> or at least his clothing unclean.<sup>44</sup> Morna Hooker argues further that the woman's fear when Jesus asks who touched him is perhaps motivated by her awareness of her unclean state and how she has rendered Jesus unclean by touching his garments.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Adela Y. Collins argues against this general consensus by pointing out that purity is not mentioned explicitly by the author to be a factor in this miracle account.<sup>46</sup> Robert Gundry argues similarly that purity is not mentioned by the author, yet he does acknowledge that purity might *implicitly* be an underlying concern.<sup>47</sup> Contra the line of thought later stated by Mann, van Iersel, Marcus, and Hooker about how the woman's touch can be interpreted as defiling Jesus, Vincent Taylor argues that it is speculative to argue that the woman's touch renders Jesus unclean.<sup>48</sup> As with the account of the leper, however, most of the studies that do recognize purity as a theme in this account do not comment further concerning any significance this miracle has about Jesus' relationship to the Torah. Neither do these studies

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<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Cranfield, *Mark*, 184; Lane, *Mark*, 191; Grundmann, *Markus*, 150; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 296; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 201; Stock, *Method and Message of Mark*, 171; Brooks, *Mark*, 93; Witherington, *Mark*, 187; Edwards, *Mark*, 163; France, *Mark*, 236; Moloney, *Mark*, 107; Culpepper, *Mark*, 172–73; Stein, *Mark*, 267; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 371.

<sup>43</sup> Mann, *Mark*, 284, 286 and Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 357–58 and 366.

<sup>44</sup> Iersel, *Mark*, 205.

<sup>45</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 149.

<sup>46</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 283.

<sup>47</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 296.

<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 292.

suggest that this miracle should be connected with the cleansing of the leper in 1:40–45.

Fewer studies state that purity is a theme in the account of the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35–43). This is surprising in light of the fact that Jesus is depicted as taking the dead girl by the hand (κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου), and thus technically he should be viewed as becoming unclean in light of the legislation of Num 19:11–22.<sup>49</sup> What is more, the narrative of the raising of the dead girl in Mark 5 is intercalated with the narrative of the woman with the flow of blood, where (as demonstrated above) purity is more often said to be a concern. The intercalation of these two accounts could indicate that both narratives have purity/impurity as one common theme. There are a few studies, however, which do argue that purity is a concern in this account as well.<sup>50</sup> James A. Brooks says that purity is a theme in this miracle account, and he argues further that Jesus becomes ritually unclean because he touches this girl.<sup>51</sup> Robert A. Stein, however, argues that purity is not a theme in this miracle account because purity is not mentioned explicitly by the author.<sup>52</sup> Yet, again, even where purity/impurity is said to be a theme in these two miracle accounts, few studies comment further about the significance of this miracle regarding Jesus' relationship to the Torah, nor do most studies connect this miracle to the cleansing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45.

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<sup>49</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 197–98, where he argues that impurity by means of contact with corpses is “more clear-cut” than even that with that with lepers or people with discharges. In light of his comments here, the lack of any mention of purity by other commentators/interpreters of this account appears all the more glaring an omission.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 302; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 364–65; Witherington, *Mark*, 190; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377. It may be noted further that only those commentators who see purity/impurity to be a concern in the account of the woman with the flow of blood also see this in the account of Jesus raising the dead girl (though not all commentators who see impurity to be a concern with the former miracle see it in the latter).

<sup>51</sup> Brooks, *Mark*, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 274. Other than the six authors mentioned in footnotes 48–50, the other authors who have been consulted do not mention purity/impurity while commenting on this miracle account, while only Stein argues that it is not a concern.

Concerning these three miracles, then, there appears to be a large consensus among the interpreters that purity/impurity is a theme with the cleansing of the leper, a smaller consensus that it is a theme with the healing of the woman with the flow of blood, and an even smaller consensus that it is a theme in the raising of the dead girl. What is more, any reading that purity is a theme in the two miracles accounts of Mark 5:21–43 appears to be based on interpreting the significance of these events in light of the Old Testament background (Leviticus 15 and Num 19:11–22), where also a few commentators discuss the possibility of Jesus becoming unclean through physical contact with the woman or the dead girl. Those interpreters who say that purity/impurity is not a theme in the two accounts of Mark 5:21–43 argue thus because there are no explicit statements about purity in the text. Nevertheless, most of the studies that do recognize purity/impurity to be a theme in these three miracle accounts do not interpret them together in order to ask what these events say about the person and work of Jesus in the narrative of Mark's Gospel.

The commentaries by Joel Marcus and James W. Voelz, however, vie with this general trend as both of these authors do argue for such an interpretative connection between these three miracle accounts. In his interpretation of the three miracles, Marcus first asserts that all three events do involve Jesus' relationship to the purity laws. He then argues further that these three miracles should be interpreted together because Num 5:1–4 may underlie Mark's narrative of these events.<sup>53</sup> In Num 5:2, three types of unclean individuals are identified as those who must be expelled from the camp: These are כָּל־צָרִיעַ (any leper), כָּל־זֶבַע (anyone with a discharge), and כָּל טָמֵא לְנֶפֶשׁ (anyone who is unclean by means of a dead body). Marcus then notes that the

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<sup>53</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367.

order in which Jesus deals with each of these three classes of unclean individuals in Mark's narrative follows the order in which they are presented in Num 5:2—first a leper (1:40–45), then a woman with a discharge (5:25–34), and finally a dead body (5:35–43).<sup>54</sup> In this way Marcus presents a literary rationale for why these three miracle accounts should be interpreted together. Voelz concurs with Marcus' opinion about reading these three miracles together in this way, but he then argues further that this does address Jesus' relationship to the old order of the Torah. According to Voelz, these three miracles indicate that in Jesus the old aeon with its strictures is passing away and that the new aeon has arrived, an aeon which in its fulfillment “lepers, bleeders, and dead will be no more—as promised by the foretastes that we observe in the mission and ministry of Jesus.”<sup>55</sup>

Another more specific concern that follows from the question of whether or not purity is a theme in these three miracle accounts is what happens when Jesus touches or is touched by the unclean person with whom he is interacting. *Would it have been perceived by others that Jesus contracts ceremonial uncleanness/ritual defilement through physical contact with an unclean person? Would his willingness to touch or be touched by such a person thus further indicate his overall attitude about the purity code?* Again, as mentioned above, Mann, Hooker, Marcus, and

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<sup>54</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367–68. There is one important aspect in his otherwise insightful analysis to which Marcus does not draw any attention. Although in the first two of these miracles Jesus interacts with an individual who can be identified as one of the “unclean individuals” of Num 5:2—a leper and a woman with a bodily discharge—the third miracle account is actually different. It is not the dead person who is the referent of “anyone who is unclean by a dead body,” *but the individual who touches that dead body and so becomes ritually unclean as a result*. Thus, in the third miracle, it is not the dead girl who is the referent of the third kind of unclean person from the list in Num 5:2, *but rather it is Jesus himself who can now be considered “unclean by means of touching a dead body* (see again Brooks, *Mark*, 95 and Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 197–98). Thus, the list of those who would have been considered “unclean” in the old order on the basis of Num 5:1–4, and so who should be excluded from the camp, and yet who are also now “clean” as God's reign is established in Jesus, is not the leper, the woman, and the girl, but rather the leper, the woman, *and Jesus*. Note further that in the narrative it is not clear whether Jairus, his wife, or anyone else touches the girl and so becomes “one unclean by touching a dead body.” Jesus is the only one who “takes/grabs the girl by the hand” after she has died.

<sup>55</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377.

van Iersel argue that Jesus (or at least his clothes) are rendered unclean when the woman with the issue of blood touches him, while Taylor thinks this interpretation is speculative; Brooks argues that by taking the hand of the dead girl Jesus renders himself unclean, while Stein argues that this is not a concern.<sup>56</sup> Note that in each case the commentators are reading level two signifiers, that is, they are interpreting an event depicted in the narrative—the act of Jesus coming into physical contact with someone who is unclean—and then arguing what is or is not the significance of this event.<sup>57</sup> Those who say that purity/impurity is not a concern in these accounts ultimately argue on the basis of the lack of explicit level one statements that mention purity; those who say that purity/impurity is a concern interpret the significance of the actions themselves.

This difference of opinion on whether or not Jesus in Mark's Gospel is perceived as contracting ritual impurity through physical contact with unclean persons (where it is discussed) is illustrated further by the disagreement on this particular question between Hyam Maccoby in *Ritual and Morality* and Thomas Kazen in *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*. As do Marcus and Voelz, each of these two authors *initially* entertains the possibility of interpreting together the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43. While considering this possibility, Maccoby finally expresses a conclusion similar to that expressed by Collins and Taylor when they discuss the woman with the flow of blood and Stein when he discusses the raising of Jairus' daughter: Maccoby argues that because the texts reporting these three miracles do not *explicitly* mention purity/impurity (via level one signifiers), then the question of impurity cannot be considered a concern either in the final form of the texts (at the level of redaction criticism) or in the traditions

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, none of the studies surveyed here discuss the question of whether or not Jesus becomes unclean when he touches the leper.

<sup>57</sup> See again Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156–65, where he discusses how to read level two signifiers.

from which they are based (at the level of form criticism). According to Maccoby, interpreters who argue that Jesus contracts uncleanness by coming into physical contact with an unclean person are imposing such ideas upon the text.<sup>58</sup> Kazen, however, argues that Maccoby's opinion is "too simplistic."<sup>59</sup> According to Kazen, in the cultural context in which the traditions underlying these texts emerged, the concerns for the purity regulations of the Torah were of such great importance that Jesus' attitude about purity would at least be recognized *implicitly* as one factor in each of these "miracle reports" and, in particular, in his touching and being touched by unclean persons.<sup>60</sup> With reference to the arguments of these two authors, note again how Maccoby interprets based on the lack of explicit level one signifiers that connect these miracles to purity, while Kazen reads the significance of the actions on level two to argue that purity/impurity is a concern.<sup>61</sup>

### The Role of Purity and the Authority of Jesus in the Exorcism Accounts

Purity/impurity is arguably also a theme in the exorcism accounts of Mark's Gospel. Such a conclusion can first be considered while reading on level one since the author refers to the spirits eleven times throughout the narrative as πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ("unclean spirits").<sup>62</sup> In Mark's Gospel there are four full narrative accounts of exorcisms as found in Mark 1:21–28 (the

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<sup>58</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 162. It should also be noted that Maccoby seems to ignore the level one signifiers in Mark 1:40–45 that indicate that purity is a theme in the account of the cleansing of the leper.

<sup>59</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 90, n. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 89–90.

<sup>61</sup> It should be further noted that neither Maccoby nor Kazen is primarily concerned with what is happening at the narrative level of Mark's Gospel. The main goal of both authors is a "historical reconstruction" of what lies behind the text and ultimately in determining what were the sayings and actions of the historical Jesus.

<sup>62</sup> Ten of these eleven occurrences appear in descriptions of exorcisms—Mark 1:23, 26, and 27; 3:11; 5:2, 8, and 13; 6:7; 7:25; and 9:25. The other occurrence in 3:30 comes at the conclusion of Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes regarding the means by which he has been performing exorcisms.



man in the synagogue of Capernaum); 5:1–20 (the Gergesene demoniac); 7:24–30 (the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter); and 9:14–29 (the deaf-mute boy after the transfiguration). In each account the demon is (at least once) referred to as πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, three times in 1:21–28, three times in 5:1–20, one time in 7:24–30, and one time in 9:14–29 (thus accounting for eight of the eleven uses of the phrase). References to other exorcisms are also found in 1:34, 1:39, 3:11–12, 6:7 (where the disciples are given authority over unclean spirits), and 9:38 (where an outsider is described as performing exorcisms). In 1:34, 1:39, and 9:38 the signifier δαιμόνιον (“demon”) is used to refer to the spirits; in 3:11 and 6:7 πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean spirit”) is used. The other use of πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is found at the conclusion of Jesus’ confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22–30 where, in 3:30, the narrator explains Jesus’ warning against blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by adding “because they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”<sup>63</sup> The use of the adjective ἀκάθαρτον establishes a connection between these spirits and some concept of impurity.

Some interpreters of Mark 1:23—the first appearance of an unclean spirit in the narrative—do not comment upon the meaning of the adjective ἀκάθαρτον when it is used to modify πνεῦμα.<sup>64</sup> Several other interpreters note only that, in the historical context of Mark’s Gospel, the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is merely a synonym for δαιμόνιον as if there were no fuller meaning of the phrase beyond this.<sup>65</sup> On this point Collins notes further that the phrase is related

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<sup>63</sup> The reference in 3:30 then may suggest that the reader should understand the adjective ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean”) to be the opposite of ἅγιος (“holy”): Jesus has been casting out demons in connection with the Holy Spirit which he received at his baptism (1:10), but the scribes argue that it is by means of Beelzebub (3:22), an unclean spirit (3:30), that Jesus is accomplishing this work. When considering the conflict between Jesus and these spirits, to be unclean is not to be holy, and to be holy is not to be unclean.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 141–43 and Moloney, *Mark*, 54.

<sup>65</sup> See Cranfield, *Mark*, 74; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 56; Witherington, *Mark*, 91, n. 11; and Stein, *Mark*, 87.

to intertestamental Jewish literature where the referent of πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is most likely the spirits of the offspring produced through the intermarriage of fallen angels/“watchers” with human women.<sup>66</sup> Concerning 1:23, some other interpreters note that the author appears to set in contrast the adjectives ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean”) and ἅγιος (“holy”), where the unclean spirit who controls the man in the synagogue acts in opposition to the divine Holy Spirit whom Jesus receives at his baptism; however, not all such interpreters then continue to discuss the significance of this impurity beyond noting this distinction between impurity and holiness.<sup>67</sup>

In their interpretation of the exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28, however, some interpreters do see some greater connection between demon-possession and some concept of impurity. Of this passage Swete argues “ἀκάθαρτος and ἀκάθαρσία are ordinarily used in Leviticus for the ceremonial pollution which banishes from the Divine presence” and concludes that this “idea of estrangement from God” is the probable implication of the man in the synagogue being ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ.<sup>68</sup> Walter Grundmann argues that here Jesus is portrayed as the high priest who by means of the Holy Spirit brings purity/cleanness and freedom by casting out the unclean spirit.<sup>69</sup> Brooks argues “demons make people ceremonially and

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See also Hooker, *Mark*, 63 and Gundry, *Mark*, 75, who also state that the phrase is a synonym for *demon*, but then do not end their discussion there.

<sup>66</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 167–68. While later interpreting the exorcism account in Mark 5:1–20, Collins again argues that the spirits possessing this man are unclean because of their origin in the intermarriage of the watchers and human women and *not* because of the man’s association with the tombs. Collins, 267. See also Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 30–34, where he discusses this intertestamental Jewish understanding of the origin of demons.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 36; Lane, *Mark*, 73–74; Hooker, *Mark*, 64; Gundry, *Mark*, 75; Iersel, *Mark*, 136; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 192; and France, *Mark*, 103 (and 177), who make this point, but do not discuss the nature of the impurity any further. See also Grundmann, *Markus*, 59–60, who also argues that this exorcism account highlights the opposition between impurity and holiness, but then where he continues to discuss the importance of purity/impurity with respect to Jesus’ ministry.

<sup>68</sup> Swete, *Mark*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Grundmann, *Markus*, 59.

morally unclean because they are evil.”<sup>70</sup> Taylor argues that ἀκάθαρτον is the “religious judgment of the Evangelist rather than a special form of ceremonial impurity” and “in his view [demon possession] exposes men to a pollution which unfits them for worship or fellowship with God.”<sup>71</sup> Mann argues in similar fashion that ἀκάθαρτον is a “religious judgment” of the author and “possession leaves people at the mercy of non-ritual uncleanness which makes them unfit for communion with God.”<sup>72</sup> Finally, James R. Edwards argues “‘unclean’ indicates that which is polluted or contaminated, which in Jewish perspective is tantamount to ungodly.”<sup>73</sup> None of these authors, however, discuss in any further detail the function of the exorcism accounts in Mark’s narrative or the relationship of Jesus to the impurity represented by these unclean spirits.

In commenting upon the exorcism account of Mark 5:1–20, several interpreters note a connection between this man being ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ and the narrative setting where this exorcism takes place, in particular the demoniac’s association with the uncleanness of the tombs or the dead.<sup>74</sup> Ben Witherington III sees such a connection between the use of ἀκάθαρτον in this account and the mention of the tombs. He then makes a connection to purity by arguing further that “the phrase ‘unclean spirit’ must mean a spirit which makes a person ritually unclean.”<sup>75</sup> Francis J. Moloney sees a connection between ἀκάθαρτον and the herd of pigs (unclean

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<sup>70</sup> Brooks, *Mark*, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 173–74.

<sup>72</sup> Mann, *Mark*, 212.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 57.

<sup>74</sup> See France, *Mark*, 227; Edwards, *Mark*, 155; and Stein, *Mark*, 251. However, see also Collins, *Mark*, 267, where she argues that there is no connection between the uncleanness of the spirits and the tombs because, according to her, the origin of the spirits’ uncleanness is based in their birth origin from the intermarriage of the watchers/fallen angels with human women.

<sup>75</sup> Witherington, *Mark*, 181. Note that Witherington does not make any remarks about the meaning of ἀκάθαρτον when he comments upon the exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28.

animals) that are nearby.<sup>76</sup> Gundry argues that there is a connection between ἀκάθαρτον and both the tombs and the pigs.<sup>77</sup> Yet, again, while noting and briefly commenting upon the connection between demon-possession and impurity, none of these interpreters discuss the role the exorcism accounts have in Mark's Gospel in any further detail.

In their interpretation of the exorcism accounts, however, there are other authors who do discuss in more detail the role of purity/impurity in these accounts. Some of these authors also attempt to understand these events in ways that take into account the function of the exorcisms in the overall narrative of Mark's Gospel. In his article "The 'unclean spirits' of St. Mark's Gospel," Peter Pimentel argues that the term ἀκάθαρτον represents the author's "essential thought" about the significance of Jesus' entire ministry.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the rigorous demands for extensive purification advocated within first century Judaism, in particular by the Qumran communities, Pimentel sees the exorcisms as evidence that in Jesus Christ "God's mercy [is] extending beyond the community of faithful Israel to include also the unclean."<sup>79</sup> According to Pimentel, then, the exorcism accounts correlate directly with the overall goal of Jesus' ministry: Jesus eliminates the distinction between clean and unclean as an essential concern.<sup>80</sup>

In "An Exorcism of History: Mark 1:21–28," Bruce Chilton conducts a redaction critical analysis of the exorcism accounts of Mark 1:21–28 and 5:1–20 in which he attempts to interpret these two texts at various levels—first the redaction in the final form of Mark's Gospel, then the

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<sup>76</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 101–6.

<sup>77</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 248.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Pimentel, "The 'unclean spirits' in Mark's Gospel," *ET* 99 (1987): 173.

<sup>79</sup> Pimentel, "The 'unclean spirits,'" 175.

<sup>80</sup> Pimentel, "The 'unclean spirits,'" 175.

tradition underlying this redaction, and finally the history underlying the tradition.<sup>81</sup> Chilton argues that the purpose of the exorcism accounts *in the final form* of Mark's Gospel is to demonstrate Jesus' unique eschatological authority. Jesus initiates the reign of God, and so, when he confronts the unclean spirits, it is to show that he also comes to bring an end to Satan's kingdom.<sup>82</sup> The "amazed" reaction of the human characters indicates that they do not understand this eschatological authority of Jesus.<sup>83</sup> The readers of Mark's Gospel, however, enjoy a privileged status of being able both to recognize and to understand Jesus' authority, even if not fully.<sup>84</sup> Chilton also argues that the tradition underlying the final form of Mark's Gospel also has an interest in the conflict between Jesus and the realm of Satan. For instance, he interprets the unclean spirit's efforts to identify Jesus in Mark 1:24 as reflecting the tradition that demons attempted "reverse exorcisms" when encountering Jesus. In identifying Jesus by name, the spirit attempts to cast Jesus out of the synagogue, and the spirit's convulsing of the demon-possessed man is yet a final effort to defy Jesus by destroying its human host.<sup>85</sup> Chilton then concludes that underlying these traditions there is an indication of the historical reality that Jesus actually did perform exorcisms.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Chilton, "An Exorcism of History: Mark 1:21–28," in *Authenticating the Acts of Jesus*, ed. by Bruce D. Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 215–45. Chilton acknowledges the contribution of narrative approaches, but ultimately identifies himself as a redaction critic who is "chastened," but "not converted" by proponents of a more literary approach. Chilton, 215–16.

<sup>82</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 225. Chilton interprets Mark 1:21–28 in light of the sayings of Mark 3:23–27, in particular the parable of the strong man, to argue that Jesus' exorcisms "signify the end of Satan's régime." He argues that in the final redaction of Mark's Gospel the "uncleanness" of the spirits—and so the theme of purity/impurity—is not an important theme, but only their association with Satan and his realm.

<sup>83</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 220–21.

<sup>84</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 221–22.

<sup>85</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 227–28.

<sup>86</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 230–33. Chilton discusses the difficulties many modern interpreters have in accepting the exorcism accounts as evidence of history because the worldview of many critics dismisses the existence of demons. Chilton counters that the evidence gleaned from the tradition underlying Mark's Gospel is that the contemporaries of the historical Jesus did perceive that he performed exorcisms, and this was in a context where

Interestingly, Chilton observes the theme purity/impurity as reflected only in the tradition underlying Mark's Gospel rather than in the final redaction, and in this he assumes a primarily Jewish setting for the emergence of such traditions and a Gentile setting for the final redaction.<sup>87</sup> Of the impurity of the spirits, then, Chilton argues that what is at stake is a "generic" idea of purity (rather than anything explicitly Levitical) that generally distinguished Jews from Gentiles.<sup>88</sup> Jesus' exorcism of the unclean spirits into the herd of pigs in Mark 5:1–20 is not an arbitrary display of power, but rather it is associated with Jesus' "practice of purity." As opposed to the views of purity practiced by the Pharisees and the Essenes which narrowed the boundaries of Israel, Jesus' practice is "inclusive," and it expands the boundaries of Israel to include Gentile areas.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, however, Jesus' purity is also inherently destructive of that which was impure. In Mark 5, this includes ridding the Decapolis of this legion of unclean spirits, the pigs, and so also the economic prosperity that this Roman-dominated region was experiencing until Jesus arrives.<sup>90</sup> According to the tradition, then, Chilton argues that Jesus is a man who possesses a unique purity: "[Jesus'] purity is such that he can indeed encounter what is triply impure, the

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people did believe that demons exist.

<sup>87</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 236–45. Chilton ultimately offers a unique reconstruction of the history behind the tradition: He argues that Jesus' historical interactions with unclean spirits later became problematic for his Jewish followers, in particular for the more observant members of his family. The reason these encounters were problematic was that such interactions might imply that Jesus himself did not maintain the purity code. According to Chilton, James, the brother of Jesus, deliberately interpreted these events in light of the resurrection to demonstrate that Jesus as "the Holy One of God" was a secret Nazarite who possessed a radical purity that could not be affected by uncleanness. Ironically, this would then explain the apparent lack of concern for the purity code displayed by Jesus himself. This "Jacobite" interpretation of the exorcisms that associated these acts with purity later produced the exorcism traditions that underlie Mark's Gospel. Chilton, 244–45.

<sup>88</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 236–37.

<sup>89</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 235–36. Chilton seems to imply that, as a historical event, the exorcism of Mark 5:1–20 would have merely appeared to be an arbitrary display of power; therefore, the tradition associated this event with purity to give it greater meaning. *Thus, while the historical Jesus might destroy the pigs for no apparent reason, the Jesus of the early tradition purifies the Decapolis by ridding it of demons and swine.*

<sup>90</sup> Chilton, "Exorcism of History," 235.

gentile domain of Roman mortuary demons and swine, but the result is a disaster for uncleanness itself. Jesus can abide what is impure, but what is impure cannot survive before him.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, in the exorcism accounts of Mark 1:21–28 and 5:1–20, Jesus is depicted as traveling freely from Jewish lands to Gentile lands and then confronting and vanquishing that which is unclean in either place.

In *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Gospels*, Clinton Wahlen devotes one section of his analysis to the exorcism accounts of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>92</sup> Here Wahlen argues that in the first exorcism of Mark 1:23–28 there is an important contrast drawn between Jesus and the unclean spirits: While Jesus baptizes ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (1:8), the possessed man in the synagogue in Capernaum is described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκάθαρτο (1:23). Thus, he argues that the distinction between “the ‘impure’ spirit and the ‘holy’ Jesus is clearly important” throughout Mark’s Gospel.<sup>93</sup> Regarding the second exorcism account of 5:1–20, Wahlen notes how features of the story such as the Gentile location of the action, the man’s nakedness, the tombs, the spirits identifying themselves as “legion”—a signifier which serves as a reminder of the presence of the “unclean” Roman soldiers in Israel—and the presence of a herd of pigs all indicate that purity/impurity is a concern in this account.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Wahlen argues that the “impurity” of the spirits in these two exorcism accounts is an important feature of Mark’s Gospel; he argues that

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<sup>91</sup> Chilton, “Exorcism of History,” 234.

<sup>92</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 86–105, for his full discussion on the role of purity in the exorcisms in Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>93</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 91. While Wahlen argues that this is a distinction between the unclean spirits and Jesus, an interpreter could argue that that the distinction is really between the unclean spirits and the Holy Spirit whom Jesus received at his baptism, and, indeed, this distinction seems to be the point of the controversy of 3:21–30. On the human level, then, in the exorcism accounts the distinction is between Jesus (who has the Holy Spirit) and the demon-possessed people (who are possessed by unclean spirits).

<sup>94</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 96–97.

one purpose of the spirits being described as “unclean” is to establish a general connection between the impurity of the spirits and general Jewish purity concerns.<sup>95</sup>

Concerning how the exorcisms function within the wider narrative of Mark’s Gospel, Wahlen argues that there is an ABBA chiastic relationship between the four main exorcism accounts. The first (1:21–28) and the fourth (9:14–29) exorcisms tell of Jesus delivering Jews from demon-possession in the land of Israel, while the second (5:1–20) and third (7:24–30) tell of Jesus delivering Gentiles from demon-possession outside of Israel.<sup>96</sup> According to Wahlen, the inclusion of Gentile exorcisms with Jewish exorcisms should then be connected with the two miraculous feedings in Mark’s Gospel, one Jewish (6:32–44) and one Gentile (8:1–9). This reading together of the exorcisms and the miraculous feedings, he argues, then indicates that in the narrative “Jesus is gathering together all who respond to his teaching, both Jew and Gentile.”<sup>97</sup> The overall function of the exorcism narratives, then, according to Wahlen, is Mark’s “expansion of traditional Jewish categories of who (not what!) is clean or unclean” with the inclusion of Gentiles now in the category of “clean.”<sup>98</sup>

In his treatment of the exorcisms in his commentary on Mark’s Gospel, James W. Voelz

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<sup>95</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 97.

<sup>96</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 98–99.

<sup>97</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 99.

<sup>98</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 107. Ironically, Wahlen’s dedication to a redaction critical approach nearly undermines his conclusions regarding the function of the exorcisms in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel. Wahlen argues that the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is a Jewish term that was contained in the tradition that Mark used to compose his Gospel, but that this phrase would not have any clear meaning for the author as he addressed a later (Gentile) Christian context. Wahlen, 88. According to Wahlen, wherever there are signs of redaction (e.g., the summary statements in 1:34 and 1:39), the author uses the term δαίμόνιον (“demon”) to refer to the spirits in place of πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον. Thus, Wahlen concludes that the author’s favorite term for the spirits was “demon” and not “unclean spirit,” but also that his “conservatism” prevented him from changing the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον to δαίμόνιον in the tradition that he used; Mark kept the older phrase intact in the material he copied, and then made this “unfamiliar phrase” (as Wahlen sees it) work toward a new narrative goal, where it now functions to address Gentile inclusion. Wahlen, 89 and 107.



offers a particularly unique interpretation of the role of purity/impurity in these accounts in light of the wider narrative. In commenting upon the exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28, Voelz notes that cleanliness and uncleanness do play an important role in this account, but he argues further that the distinction between these two categories should be understood primarily *in light of the eschatological reign and rule of God* rather than merely in terms of “ritual purity.”<sup>99</sup> According to Voelz, the baptism of John (1:4) indicates that God is washing his people of uncleanness, and so now cleanness becomes a prerequisite for being subject to the reign of God.<sup>100</sup> To be unwashed is to be unclean, and to be unclean is then *not* to be under the reign of God.<sup>101</sup> The uncleanness of the spirits, according to Voelz, thus principally relates to their being outside of God’s reign (rather than merely some ritual idea of impurity).<sup>102</sup> Voelz is consistent with this understanding of the uncleanness of these spirits when later he comments upon the exorcism of Mark 5:1–20. Here Voelz argues “while it may be correct to see ‘unclean spirit’ as associated with tombs and the dead, it is probably best to see it as related to the reign and rule of God—or lack thereof.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, for Voelz, πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον does not relate to ritual or Levitical purity, but to “spiritual lordship” where the demons are unclean because they are outside of God’s reign as it is inaugurated by Jesus.<sup>104</sup> Thus, also as one who is possessed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is

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<sup>99</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 159 and 163.

<sup>100</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 100–04 and 112–14, for his discussion of the nature of John’s baptism as a cleansing from sin in fulfillment of Ezek 36:25. There will be further discussion of this point in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>101</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 163.

<sup>102</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 163.

<sup>103</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 344–45.

<sup>104</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 351. Note how this understanding of clean and unclean being primarily related to the coming of the reign of God in Jesus is consistent also with Voelz’ understanding of the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43. Voelz, 377.

necessarily at war with the unclean spirits as is indicated by all the exorcism accounts throughout Mark's Gospel.<sup>105</sup>

Regarding the accounts of Jesus interacting with and casting out “unclean spirits,” then, the interpreters often, but not universally, recognize purity/impurity to be an important theme. Most interpreters who do say that purity is a concern merely comment upon it briefly and do not discuss in greater detail either the nature of this impurity or the function of the exorcism accounts in the wider narrative of Mark's Gospel. The interpretations offered by Pimentel, Clinton, Wahlen, and Voelz, however, do attempt to interpret the significance of the impurity of the spirits in light of the Mark's portrayal of Jesus' overall ministry, and they view the exorcisms as events that bring “cleanness” to the unclean. Such an understanding of the exorcisms can also provide justification for reading these events together with the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23 and the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 as places in Mark's Gospel that describe Jesus' relationship to purity. It is important to note further that Chilton and Voelz understand the nature of this impurity as distinct from Levitical or ritual impurity: Chilton associates this impurity with the satanic realm, and Voelz defines it in terms of its relationship to the eschatological reign and rule of God, that is, the spirits are unclean because they are *not* under God's reign.

#### The Question of Interpreting Mark 7:1–23 with the Miracle and Exorcism Accounts

There are six scholarly works that have suggested the possibility for placing at least one or more of the three miracle accounts (the leper, the woman with the flow of blood, and the dead girl) together into a wider interpretative matrix with one another *and now also with Mark 7:1–23*

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<sup>105</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 163.

in order to investigate if one major theme of Mark's Gospel is the relationship of Jesus to the beliefs and observances related to purity in Second Temple Judaism. Several of these works also include the exorcism accounts as a part of this wider interpretative matrix. After considering this possibility, however, three authors conclude that this approach is not a valid way of interpreting the three miracle accounts, while three other authors conclude that this approach is valid. Of those who ultimately argue for the validity of this approach, however, no one surveyed concludes that that such a reading suggests that Mark presents Jesus as having any unique authority with respect to the Torah.

### **Opinions that Such an Interpretative Matrix is Ultimately Invalid**

Three interpreters consider the possibility of reading the miracle accounts and Mark 7:1–23 in a single interpretative matrix to demonstrate Jesus' attitude regarding the purity regulations, but then each of these authors finally argues that this approaching to reading Mark's Gospel is invalid. This approach is found in works by Jacob Neusner, Stephen Westerholm, and John P. Meier. Each of these authors recognizes purity/impurity as a theme in the handwashing controversy, but not in the miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43.

In *The Ideas of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, Neusner considers the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage, and the handwashing controversy as places where purity/impurity may be a concern Mark's account; he includes in this discussion also the exorcism accounts where Jesus delivers people from unclean spirits.<sup>106</sup> Neusner concludes that Mark 7:1–23 is clearly about purity.<sup>107</sup> Concerning Jesus' touching the leper and being touched

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<sup>106</sup> Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60–61. It should be noted that Neusner does not comment upon the miracle of Jesus touching and then raising to life Jairus' daughter.

<sup>107</sup> Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 61.

by the woman with the flow of blood, Neusner initially acknowledges the possibility that Jesus becomes ceremonially unclean by means of physical contact with these unclean people. He finally concludes, however, that, even if Jesus does make himself impure by touching the leper, nevertheless, because nothing is stated *explicitly* about purity in this account, then it does not appear to be a concern as it clearly is in Mark 7:1–23.<sup>108</sup> What is more, Neusner argues that Jesus possibly resolves the uncleanliness resulting from his contact with unclean people by following the Levitical rules concerning the washing his clothes and body before going to the Temple (even if Mark’s Gospel does not narrate this). According to Neusner, if Jesus were to purify himself after contact with the unclean, then it is even less likely that purity would be a concern in these two miracle accounts.<sup>109</sup> Thus, in Neusner’s reading, purity/impurity is a concern in the handwashing controversy, but not necessarily in the miracles. This then would relativize the value of reading these various events together in a wider interpretative matrix. Nevertheless, Neusner does at least consider the possibility of reading two of the miracle accounts (along with the exorcism accounts) in an interpretative matrix with Mark 7:1–23.<sup>110</sup>

Neusner’s investigation brings forward three important questions, one or more of which will be considered by other interpreters. First, because Jesus interacts with people who are unclean according to the Levitical code, one can at least consider the possibility of asking whether purity/impurity is a concern in the miracle accounts and so also the possibility of

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<sup>108</sup> Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60.

<sup>109</sup> Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60. Note that Neusner is here “filling in the blanks” with his level two reading of the significance of these two miracle events by assuming events not narrated (i.e., Jesus washes his body and clothes after physical contact with the unclean), but which, in his view, may logically be assumed to have taken place in history. See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 197–99, for his discussion of this concept of “filling in the blanks” when reading on level two.

<sup>110</sup> Note that in this discussion Neusner includes the exorcism accounts as other texts in Mark’s Gospel that may involve purity. Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60–61.

reading these miracles in an interpretative matrix with Mark 7:1–23. Such a reading can be considered even if an interpreter then ultimately concludes, as does Neusner, that such an approach is invalid. Second, as mentioned before, since Mark does not always state explicitly by means of level one signifiers that purity is a concern in the miracle accounts, concluding that purity is a theme will ultimately result from reading *the significance of these events* in light of the Old Testament regulations and the observances of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>111</sup> If one chooses to read the miracles together and with Mark 7:1–23, this will be based in the conclusion that purity is a significant feature of these miracle accounts, even if purity not always being mentioned by means of signifiers on the page; it will be based on a level two reading of these events.

The third question, then, pertains to how interpreters of the miracle accounts might “fill in the blanks” in the narrative regarding the question of whether or not Jesus washes himself and his clothes after coming into physical contact with unclean individuals.<sup>112</sup> One might conclude, as does Neusner, that Jesus simply obeys the Levitical regulations and washes himself and his clothing following such physical contact, and, then, if he does this it relativizes the importance of purity in these miracle accounts. *Yet one might also fill in the blanks by assuming that Jesus does*

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<sup>111</sup> Regarding explicit statements by the author about whether purity is a concern in the miracle accounts, one can question the conclusions of Neusner about whether this is true of the incident where Jesus cleanses the leper (Mark 1:40–45). It is arguable that the use of the verb καθαρίζω three times in 1:40–42 and the noun καθαρισμός in 1:44 (level one signifiers) indicate that purity *is* a concern in this one miracle account: The leper asks to be cleansed, Jesus cleanses him, and then Jesus commands the leper to offer the sacrifice commanded by Moses for his cleansing. See Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60–61, where he argues that purity/impurity is also not an important feature of the exorcism accounts, and he argues thus for the same reason he claims it is not a feature of the miracles accounts, because purity is not said to be a theme in these accounts. Yet it is arguable that Mark’s use of the adjective ἀκάθαρτον eleven times to refer to demons is a level one indicator that purity is a theme in the exorcism accounts as well. Neusner either overlooks or ignores these level one signifiers when he concludes that there is no explicit mention of purity/impurity in either the account of the cleansing of the leper or in the exorcism accounts.

<sup>112</sup> See again Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 197–99.

*not wash after physical contact with the unclean.* Either way, Mark does not discuss what Jesus does with respect to his body or clothes after coming into physical contact with the unclean, and so it falls to the interpreter to fill in the blanks of this narrative.

Another observation can be made concerning this third point: How one chooses to fill in the blanks in the narrative regarding whether or not Jesus washes after physical contact with the unclean may indicate this one interpreter's prior bias regarding Jesus' authority/lordship in general and then, more specifically, his relationship to the purity code and to the Torah. If an interpreter assumes that Jesus is likely to follow the regulations of the Torah—in particular, the demands to wash after becoming unclean—then that interpreter might automatically “fill in the blanks” by assuming that Jesus would wash after physical contact with unclean individuals. If an interpreter, however, assumes that Jesus has a unique position of authority with respect to the Torah, then that interpreter might assume that Jesus does not necessarily have to wash after such contact. How an interpreter is inclined to answer the question posed by this “blank” in the narrative may reveal how that interpreter understands Jesus' relationship to the Torah and his authority/lordship more generally, *but it may not necessarily tell us as much about Mark's portrayal of Jesus until the wider narrative is brought into consideration as well.* Thus, Neusner reveals his bias that Jesus in Mark's Gospel is still bound to the Torah when he assumes that Jesus probably washes himself and his clothing after physical contact with the unclean.<sup>113</sup>

In *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, Westerholm devotes one chapter to the theme of ritual

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<sup>113</sup> To illustrate this point, see, e.g., Jacob Neusner, *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to Professor E. P. Sanders* (New York: The University of South Florida, 1993), 226–30, where he does, in fact, present his belief that Jesus' fundamental teachings about forgiveness and purity generally cohere with the teachings and practices of rabbinic Judaism, so that, in Neusner's opinion, Jesus cannot be “set in opposition to a ‘Palestinian’ Judaism denatured of a concern for purity.” Neusner, 230.

purity in Mark's Gospel.<sup>114</sup> His discussion of Mark 7:1–23 takes up the majority of this chapter, and he concludes that purity is a concern in the handwashing controversy.<sup>115</sup> Before discussing the handwashing controversy, however, Westerholm initially asks whether Jesus' general attitude toward the purity legislation may first be demonstrated by the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 as well as his general association with “sinners” (e.g., Mark 2:13–17).<sup>116</sup> According to Westerholm, each of these three miracles (the leper, the woman with the flow of blood, and the dead girl) concerns someone who is defiled “according to the OT purity laws.”<sup>117</sup> What is more, since Jesus comes into physical contact with each of these three persons, he contracts ritual impurity. When these three incidents are taken together, then, Westerholm argues that in each incident Jesus is portrayed as “unperturbed, if not unaware” or “indifferent” to matters of purity—overall a character who is “unclean and unconcerned.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, Westerholm appears initially to make a very strong case for why the miracle accounts then should be read together with the handwashing controversy as passages that concern purity.

Westerholm, however, finally concludes that purity/impurity is not a concern in these miracle accounts. First, he points out that Mark's Gospel (with the other Synoptic Gospels) contain no explicit mention purity in these miracle accounts. Second, he notes that, because there are steps for purification (the washing of the body and clothing) prescribed in the Torah for such defilement, these miracles ultimately “tell us in any case very little” about Jesus' relationship to

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<sup>114</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 61–91.

<sup>115</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 71–84.

<sup>116</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–71. Westerholm does not include discussion about the exorcisms in his overview of passages in Mark's Gospel where purity may be a concern.

<sup>117</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67.

<sup>118</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69.

the purity code.<sup>119</sup> Thus, just as does Neusner, Westerholm notes the lack of explicit statements regarding purity in the miracle accounts and the possibility that Jesus purified himself after contact with the unclean as two reasons to relativize both the importance of purity in these accounts and so also the value of interpreting them with the handwashing controversy.<sup>120</sup> To these objections, Westerholm also adds a concern for the historical unreliability of the traditions used by Mark as he compiled his Gospel.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of ultimately playing down the role of purity in the three miracle accounts, Westerholm does at least suggest the possibility of placing these miracle accounts into an interpretative matrix with Mark 7:1–23. What is more, he makes a strong case, *at least at the narrative level*, for why this should be done.

In *Love and Law*, the fourth volume of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Meier devotes one chapter to the topic of Jesus and the purity laws.<sup>122</sup> In this chapter Meier

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<sup>119</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 69.

<sup>120</sup> Westerholm's comments regarding the possibility of Jesus purifying himself after contact with the unclean may appear inconsistent with his earlier contention that Jesus in Mark's Gospel appears unconcerned about purity and unperturbed about being touched by the unclean. Jesus' lack of concern for the purity code (again, a lack of concern that Westerholm detects in the miracle accounts and initially finds to be quite significant) might further indicate that he remained "unconcerned" after contact, and so he would not necessarily fulfill the commands to wash and purify himself afterward. With such a portrayal, an interpreter might "fill in the blanks" in the narrative contra what both Neusner and Westerholm argue: "As he was 'unconcerned' about purity when interacting with the leper, for instance, Jesus is just as unconcerned about impurity after contact as he was before contact, and so he does not wash himself afterward."

Such a reading might actually be preferred if the reader understands that Jesus' reception of the Spirit at his baptism in Mark 1:10 already indicates that he is one who cannot be made unclean but is rather the agent of purification. See, e.g., Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 91, where this makes this argument. Thus it may not be that Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is merely unconcerned about purity, but that he himself cannot become unclean even while he cleanses the unclean.

Westerholm, however, does not read this way—and thus his reasoning appears somewhat inconsistent: Why would this Jesus who is depicted as one who is unconcerned about purity when encountering the unclean become suddenly concerned after contact? The problem for Westerholm lies ultimately in the fact that he is using Mark's Gospel to uncover the attitudes of the historical Jesus about purity, and so he is not fully interested in what is happening at the narrative level of Mark's Gospel.

<sup>121</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 69. Westerholm's concern about the reliability of the traditions underlying these miracle accounts indicate that his concerns are primarily historical, uncovering what was true about the "historical Jesus." He is not invested in reading Mark as a narrative.

<sup>122</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 342–477.



discusses (in this order) the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23, corpse impurity (the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the raising of the widow’s son, and the raising of Lazarus), the woman with the flow of blood and menstruating women in general, and skin diseases/leprosy. In this way he at least suggests *the possibility* that the handwashing controversy and the three miracle accounts can be interpreted together in light of their concern for purity. Meier’s goal, however, is not to provide a narrative analysis of the Gospels, but to determine what deeds or sayings in these narratives can likely be traced to the historical Jesus.<sup>123</sup> Meier thus devotes the bulk of this chapter to providing his redaction critical analysis of Mark 7:1–23 in order to determine what sayings or deeds of Jesus in this account are historically authentic.<sup>124</sup> He concludes that, although Mark depicts Jesus as declaring all foods clean in 7:15,<sup>125</sup> the only saying in this pericope that is likely to be credited to the historical Jesus is the *korban* statement of 7:11–13.<sup>126</sup> The remainder of Jesus’ speech, including 7:14b–15 and 7:18–23, is historically inauthentic and so unreliable.<sup>127</sup> Thus, according to Meier, Mark’s account of the handwashing controversy “tells us nothing about the historical Jesus’ views on ritual purity.”<sup>128</sup> Meier, however, does not directly address how Jesus’ speech functions *in the narrative* of Mark’s

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<sup>123</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 5–8. Note that Meier does not include any discussion of the exorcism accounts.

<sup>124</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 352–405.

<sup>125</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 393. Meier argues that although Mark 7:15 does make this point, the Gospels themselves never depict Jesus or his disciples of ever eating forbidden food. This, then, is one reason why Meier calls into question the historical authenticity of this statement.

<sup>126</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 376–84 and 413.

<sup>127</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 390–99. See Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity*, 55–114, for an opposing position on the historical reliability of the material in Mark 7:1–23. Meier (402–04) takes exception with Booth’s analysis in part because of Booth’s argument that Jesus in Mark 7 is only interacting with one particular fellowship/subgroup of Pharisees (the *hābērīm*) who attempted to maintain purity according to the standards demanded for priests. (See also Büchler, “The Law of Purification in Mark,” 39–40.) Since Meier sees Booth’s view as historically unlikely, he then uses this as the basis to dismiss Booth’s overall defense of the historical reliability of the entire account.

<sup>128</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 405.

Gospel, and so his treatment of this passage offers an admission that *on the narrative level* purity apparently is a theme in the handwashing controversy.

Meier then treats the miracle accounts under the title “other possible references to ritual purity in the Gospels.”<sup>129</sup> Concerning Jesus’ touching of Jairus’ daughter, Meier argues that this would have rendered Jesus unclean if Jesus had indeed touched the dead body as related in Mark 5:41. Yet he also argues that it is not historically certain that Jesus ever touched any corpses and that, at any rate, the Gospel accounts do not explicitly discuss whether Jesus is concerned with purity even when he does touch a corpse.<sup>130</sup> Regarding the woman with the flow of blood, Meier argues that impurity is not a concern in this account either historically *or in the narrative* as this woman was not menstruating (*niddâ*) but rather suffering from a chronic flow of blood (*zābâ*); the woman’s condition, he concludes, does not fall under the concerns of Lev 15:25–30, and so it does not raise any question about whether or not Jesus is unclean because of her touch.<sup>131</sup>

Finally, regarding the cleansing of leprosy, Meier acknowledges that such miracles were

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<sup>129</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 405.

<sup>130</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 406. Meier does not outright deny the historicity of this miracle, but he does appear to think it unlikely that anyone other than the parents would touch a child’s dead body. *Meier, however, does make an admission that on the narrative level Jesus would be viewed as having become impure by touching the corpse.* He just does not think that this is historically reliable. This does, however, leave open the possibility that in Mark’s narrative Jesus is viewed as becoming unclean after touching this corpse, and Meier himself admits that this is possible. Interestingly, Meier here also discusses the possibility of Jesus washing after becoming unclean, but he concludes that such regular washing would have been impractical for Jesus while he was living as a traveling teacher.

<sup>131</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 409. Note, then, that in Meier’s opinion the interpreter should not see purity as a concern in the healing of the woman with the flow of blood *even at the narrative level* because he does not believe that such a woman is capable of spreading impurity in the first place. Meier argues that there is a distinction between *zābâh*, the impurity of a woman experiencing her normal menstrual cycle (a condition regulated in Lev 15:19–24), and *niddâ*, the impurity of a woman with an abnormal flow of blood (a condition regulated in Lev 15:25–30), and he assumes that women experiencing the latter condition cannot spread impurity through physical contact. In Leviticus, however, the same term for impurity, נִדָּה, is used to describe both conditions (see Lev 15:19 and 15:25). See also Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 142, who argues against making such a rigid distinction between the impurity regulated in Lev 15:19–24 and the impurity regulated in Lev 15:25–30; the distinction between the two is only the length of time that such impurity continues, not the nature of the purity itself.

likely attributed to the historical Jesus on the basis of multiple attestation (Mark 1:40–45 and Luke 17:11–19). He also states that by touching a leper Jesus becomes unclean. Yet Meier doubts the historicity of Jesus touching the leper as recorded in Mark 1:40–45 because healing a leper by touch is only attested once in the Gospel accounts. Luke 17:11–19 offers a varying account where Jesus heals lepers from a distance and so in such a way that would not raise any concerns about physical contact or violation of the Levitical code. That Jesus was said to have healed lepers, Meier argues, is historically reliable, but the means by which he accomplished these miracles is not clearly known. Meier also mentions again that the Gospel accounts do not mention purity explicitly in the accounts where Jesus does touch the leper, thus indicating that purity is not a concern.<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, although Meier does consider the possibility that two of the three miracle accounts could be read with Mark 7:1–23, he finally concludes that none of these miracle accounts reveals the relationship of the historical Jesus to the purity code. Note also that, just as both Neusner and Westerholm argue, Meier interprets the lack of explicit comments by Mark regarding purity as evidence that purity is *not* a concern in these accounts. Nevertheless, although Meier is not interested in a narrative analysis of the text, he does offer admissions that on the narrative level the interpreter certainly can see purity at stake in Jesus' touching both a corpse and a leper. If the interpreter turns from historical to narrative analysis, then, according to Meier's arguments, purity can be read as a concern in the handwashing controversy, the cleansing of the leper, and the raising of Jairus' daughter.

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<sup>132</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 411–12. Meier assumes the accounts of the cleansing of the leper in Matthew and Luke are both redactions of Mark's version of this story, and so this event is only attested one time in the Gospels. According to Meier, this single attestation of Jesus touching a leper, then, calls into question the historicity of Jesus ever doing this. *Note again, however, that Meier makes another admission that on the narrative level Jesus does become unclean by touching the leper.*

After reviewing the arguments of Neusner, Westerholm, and Meier, it should be noted again that their one common objection to arguing that purity is a feature in these three miracle accounts—and so then also for reading these accounts with the handwashing controversy of Mark 7—is *the lack of explicit references to purity by the author*.<sup>133</sup> This argument about the lack of explicit reference to purity in these accounts, however, is really a matter of *reading the level one signifiers*.<sup>134</sup> In their opinion, since Mark does not directly state anything about purity in this miracle accounts via signifiers on the page, then purity is not a theme. *Yet their objection does not really address what happens when reading the level two signifiers*.<sup>135</sup> This point is evident in the fact that each of these authors *initially* admits that Jesus might become unclean through physical contact with unclean individuals as described in these miracle accounts. This initial conclusion can be defended in light of the legislation in the Torah and the understanding of purity/impurity in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, although each of these authors dismisses his own initial first impression that in Marks' Gospel Jesus contracts impurity through physical contact with unclean persons, this first impression indicates that perhaps there does appear to be something “explicit about purity” in the actions and events themselves, in particular, what happens when Jesus comes into physical contact with an unclean individual. If the interpreter were to focus upon these events, then there is greater justification for reading these miracles together with the handwashing controversy to see how Mark's Gospel uses the theme of purity/impurity to depict the person and work of Jesus.

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<sup>133</sup> Again, since there are level one indicators that purity may be a concern in the accounts of the leper and the exorcisms, it could be that these authors are not paying close attention to the text and/or that they are simply wrong when they say that purity plays no role in these miracle accounts.

<sup>134</sup> See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156.

<sup>135</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 156–58.

<sup>136</sup> See again Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 89–90.

## Opinions that Such an Interpretative Matrix is Ultimately Valid

Contra Neusner, Westerholm, and Meier, there are three authors who argue that there is a strong case for reading together the miracles and the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23 to describe the relationship of Jesus to purity and the purity regulations. The difference between these authors and those discussed above is that these authors detect purity concerns in the miracle events themselves (with or without any “explicit” level one signifiers) through their interpretation of the significance of the deeds and events (depicted at level two). Such an approach is found in works by Jerome H. Neyrey, Thomas Kazen, and Clinton Wahlen. Each of these authors ultimately argues that the purpose of this interpretative matrix is to depict Jesus as a person with *some* authority with respect to the purity laws. None of these three authors, however, concludes that Mark’s Gospel depicts Jesus as someone with authority/lordship over the entirety of the Torah.

In “The Idea of Purity in Mark’s Gospel,” Neyrey argues for placing the three miracles and the handwashing controversy in one larger interpretative matrix on the basis of what he calls “Jewish purity maps” which were recognized and operative in first century Judaism. According to Neyrey, a “purity map” represents the “symbolic systems” whereby “persons, objects, places, etc. are labelled pure or polluted in a given social group.”<sup>137</sup> These maps identify what would be “the right people,” “the right place,” and “the right time”—and thereby also identify the varying degrees removed from what is “right.”<sup>138</sup> The purity maps of first century Judaism, he argues, included maps of persons, places, times, and the body with each map characterized by various

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<sup>137</sup> Neyrey “Idea of Purity,” 92. Neyrey also includes the exorcism accounts as a part of this interpretative matrix.

<sup>138</sup> Neyrey “Idea of Purity,” 94–96 and 106.

degrees from most unclean to most holy.<sup>139</sup> In this system, for example, a map of places would indicate that land outside of Israel was most unclean while Israel was holy, the city of Jerusalem more holy, and the Temple compound most holy.<sup>140</sup> A map of times would indicate that the Sabbath and certain holy days were most holy.<sup>141</sup> And a map of persons would indicate that Gentiles were the most unclean, the chief priests were most holy, and then clean or unclean Israelites would represent various places in the middle of this spectrum.<sup>142</sup>

Neyrey then notes that Jesus in Mark's Gospel is described as a person who on a regular basis does *not* observe these Jewish purity maps. Regarding the map of persons, for instance, Jesus is depicted as regularly interacting with those designated as unclean persons. Neyrey mentions specifically how Jesus comes into physical contact with the leper of Mark 1 and the woman and dead girl of Mark 5 (as well as with "sinners" in general).<sup>143</sup> Regarding the "map of the body" Jesus in Mark 7 defends his disciples for not observing the established handwashing tradition and then declares all foods clean.<sup>144</sup> Neyrey also argues that Jesus' talking with the unclean spirits as described in the exorcism accounts is yet another indicator that he does not observe the purity map of person.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, although the exorcism accounts, the three

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<sup>139</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 94–96. Note that Neyrey argues that this distinction was not merely between "unclean and clean," but rather also between "unclean *and holy*."

<sup>140</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 95.

<sup>141</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 98–99.

<sup>142</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 95–99.

<sup>143</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 107.

<sup>144</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 107–08. Note that in the discussion here Neyrey also notes that the Sabbath controversies of Mark 2:23–3:6 indicate that Jesus does not observe the "map of times" and Jesus' actions in the Temple in Mark 11:15–18 indicates that he does not observe the "map of places." In this way Neyrey links the three miracles of Mark 1 and 5, the exorcisms, and the handwashing controversy of Mark 7 to the Sabbath controversies of Mark 2–3 and the episode in the Temple in Mark 11 thus placing all these passages into one larger interpretative matrix. Neyrey, 109.

<sup>145</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 109. Though Neyrey does not discuss this particular point further, the impression given by Jesus in Mark's narrative whenever he dialogues with unclean spirits may be one reason that the authorities

miracle accounts, and the handwashing controversy indicate that Jesus does not observe the purity maps of the established order, ironically, Jesus himself is depicted in Mark's Gospel as the enemy of uncleanness and the agent of purity and holiness as he repeatedly brings cleansing to the unclean.<sup>146</sup> Thus, in his discussion of these so-called "purity maps," Neyrey provides a rationale for reading the three miracles, the handwashing controversy, and the exorcism accounts together in one larger interpretative matrix to describe Jesus' unique relationship of authority/lordship with respect to purity.<sup>147</sup>

Concerning the function of purity in Mark's Gospel, Neyrey argues that Mark's presentation of Jesus does not represent "a rejection of purity concerns, but a conscious relaxation of purity rules during a missionary phase of the community's formation."<sup>148</sup> Mark uses Jesus' frequent crossing of the lines on the purity map to justify the inclusion of Gentile believers at the time when the Gospel was written.<sup>149</sup> Thus, according to Neyrey, in Mark's Gospel Jesus is not displaying authority over the entire Torah, but rather only over the purity code, and Jesus does not so much abolish the purity code as "relax" it and establish a new application of purity

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in Mark 3 accuse Jesus of having an unclean spirit. To use Neyrey's phraseology, it simply does not seem "right" to onlookers that anyone would talk to unclean spirits as Jesus does (even if he does then cast them out); such interaction with demons might indicate to others that this person is himself unclean or at least that he is unconcerned with the "map of persons."

<sup>146</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 111.

<sup>147</sup> See Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 113, where, as noted earlier in the discussion on the handwashing controversy, Neyrey himself ultimately limits Jesus' authority to the purity code and not the entire Torah. Here he argues that Jesus in 7:18–23 establishes the Ten Commandments as the new standard for an "interior purity" while dismissing the exterior "fences" represented by the established order. Neyrey's appeal to the Ten Commandments appears inconsistent with his own earlier argument that Jesus does not observe the "map of times" through his (healing of a man on the Sabbath in Mark 3:1–6) and his disciples' (picking grain on the Sabbath in Mark 2:23–28) actions on the Sabbath, and so is described as one who stands in a unique position of authority not only to the purity code, but also to the third commandment.

<sup>148</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 121.

<sup>149</sup> Neyrey "Idea of Purity," 121–22 and 123–24. Neyrey assumes that Mark was a Gentile who was writing for a community of Gentile believers.

for his disciples.<sup>150</sup>

In *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, Kazen conducts a comprehensive historical and redaction critical analysis of events in the Gospels where purity may be a concern, and he does this in light of his own reconstruction of what the rules of purity observance were likely to have been in pre-70 AD Palestine.<sup>151</sup> His goal is to determine what is likely to have been the attitude of the historical Jesus regarding such purity observances.<sup>152</sup> Kazen establishes that the Jewish system used three different contexts for impurity: the food laws that distinguished clean and unclean animals, the laws concerning contact-contagion through physical contact with corpses or unclean individuals or objects, and the laws concerning certain grave moral sins. In his overall investigation, then, Kazen focuses only upon the second category of impurity (contact-contagion) because this was the only category of impurity that required purification and so the need for some particular observances of purification.<sup>153</sup> What is more, it was this second category in particular that was subject to an “expansionist trend” in purity observance during the Second Temple period.<sup>154</sup> Then, in his study, Kazen discusses the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–

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<sup>150</sup> Neyrey “Idea of Purity,” 124.

<sup>151</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 5–7 and 44–46. Kazen’s reconstruction of what the rules of purity are likely to have been is done by studying both the passages regarding purity in the Gospel accounts and teachings found in the Mishnah; one challenge in using the Mishnah is that is not always clear what in the Mishnah provides an accurate reflection of the beliefs and practices of first century Judaism, a problem of which Kazen is aware.

<sup>152</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 7–8 and 342–53.

<sup>153</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 5–6. One irony is that while persons who were unclean because of contact-contagion impurity were to be isolated from the community and could not participate in Temple worship, there were no specific provisions barring persons subject to impurity as the result of grave moral sins.

<sup>154</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 5–6 and 72–78.



23<sup>155</sup> and the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43<sup>156</sup> as viable passages in Mark’s Gospel where this contact-contagion impurity would have been a concern. Thus, although he is not primarily interested in a narrative reading of Mark’s Gospel, Kazen does make a case for why the three miracles and the handwashing controversy should be read together in an interpretative matrix to investigate Jesus’ relationship to purity/impurity.<sup>157</sup>

Kazen’s analysis of the miracle accounts also makes a strong case for how these events are to be read in light of purity *on level two*. Of the contact-contagion category of impurity, Kazen notes that there was a discernable hierarchy of uncleanness operative in the Jewish system: Corpses occupied the level of that which is most unclean. After corpses there was a second level of uncleanness that included lepers, persons with discharges, and persons or objects that had touched a corpse. The next level of uncleanness included anyone made unclean by touching a leper, a person with a discharge, or a person or object that touched a corpse.<sup>158</sup> Kazen thus expresses a particular interest in the miracle accounts where Jesus comes into physical contact with unclean individuals or corpses. In his opinion, the question of defilement by means of physical contact is “a neglected issue” in previous scholarship. According to Kazen, what has

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<sup>155</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 60–72. Kazen includes the handwashing controversy under the category of contact-contagion impurity because the concern underlying this observance, in his opinion, was the fear of “bodily transmittable impurities” (67) and not the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Kazen argues that 7:15 is probably historically reliable (65), but that Jesus himself is not addressing Leviticus 11 when he speaks these words (67). Thus the explanation in 7:19b represents the conclusions of the author/redactor (65) and so do not inform the reader about the views of the historical Jesus on Leviticus 11.

<sup>156</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 89–198. In this discussion Kazen includes with the three miracles of the leper, the woman with the discharge, and Jairus’ daughter discussion of other passages that could involve corpse-impurity, including the raising of the widow’s son in Luke and (interestingly) the parable of the Good Samaritan (where the Samaritan touches the beaten man whom the priest and the Levite avoided because they may have considered him to be a corpse).

<sup>157</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 300–38, where he also includes the exorcism accounts as passages where contact-contagion may be a concern.

<sup>158</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 5.

been “neglected” is that in the pre-A.D. 70 context such defilement that comes from touching a leper, a person with a discharge, or a corpse would be recognized *implicitly* by the witnesses of these events.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, if one were to follow Kazen’s suggestions, Mark does not need to say anything “explicit” about purity in these miracle accounts because purity is implicitly recognized in the context. In this way, Kazen provides a rationale for dismissing any opinion that a lack of explicit reference to purity in these miracle accounts necessarily means that purity is not an important theme.

Regarding the function of purity in Mark’s Gospel, Kazen argues that Jesus is presented as maintaining the standards or “inner” or “moral” purity that were a part of the “contemporary Jewish purity paradigm,” that he is breaking with a part of the tradition while maintaining another part.<sup>160</sup> He does not conclude that Mark’s use of purity indicates that Jesus is presented as possessing any unique authority with respect to the entire Torah, nor even the entire purity code, but merely with respect to a part of the purity code.

In *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Gospels*, Clinton Wahlen devotes one chapter to the impurity of spirits in Mark’s Gospel.<sup>161</sup> In this chapter Wahlen first discusses the overall theme of purity/impurity in Mark’s Gospel before he analyzes the exorcism accounts. He begins by discussing the contrast between John’s water-baptism and Jesus’ spirit-baptism (Mark 1:8): The former, according to Wahlen, is preparatory and denotes a washing that is “merely external” and provides “outward purification,” while the latter is a new and more mysterious event that accomplishes cleansing at “a deeper level.” Jesus’ spirit-baptism, he argues, is ultimately

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<sup>159</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 89–90.

<sup>160</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 345–46.

<sup>161</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 69–107. Note that, as do Neyrey and Kazen, Wahlen also places the exorcism accounts in an interpretative matrix with the three miracles and the handwashing controversy.

associated with the “right instruction” as found in Jesus’ teaching. Those people who accept Jesus’ teaching are cleansed.<sup>162</sup> According to Wahlen, the remainder of Mark’s narrative after 1:8 should be read with the understanding that Jesus is the recipient of the Holy Spirit and he brings cleansing to people through his ministry of teaching.<sup>163</sup>

Wahlen then discusses together the “eating controversies” of Mark 2 and 7.<sup>164</sup> The “pronouncement stories” of Mark 2:1–3:6 indicate that the “newness” Jesus brings is associated with both healing and eating, in particular the healing of sinners (the paralytic) and eating with sinners (Levi and others).<sup>165</sup> Yet this section of Mark’s Gospel, according to Wahlen, also introduces the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders: The leaders will reject Jesus and the “newness” that he brings as they instead attempt to hold onto and defend the old ways.<sup>166</sup> Wahlen matrixes 2:1–3:6 with the controversies of 3:22–30 (the Beelzebub accusation) and 7:1–23 (the handwashing controversy), and he argues that the leaders’ rejection of Jesus introduced in chapter 2 continues in another controversy over healing (3:22–30) and then in the climatic controversy over eating (7:1–23). According to Wahlen, that the old way of the leaders is now associated with impurity is then evident in two later passages following the controversy of Mark 7. The first such passage is Jesus’ warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod in 8:13–21, and then the second passage includes all of the events in Mark 11–13 that take place in the

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<sup>162</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 70–72. Note that Wahlen detects purity as a theme at the very beginning of Mark’s Gospel with the account of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: Both the ministries of John and Jesus, as narrated by Mark, are fundamentally concerned with the purification of Israel.

<sup>163</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 72.

<sup>164</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 72–79. It is in this section, as noted above, that Wahlen argues that in Mark 7:19b Jesus is *not* abrogating Leviticus 11 but rather is only declaring permissible foods clean, rejecting the handwashing tradition of the Jewish leaders, but not “the clear teaching” of the Torah itself. Wahlen, 78–79.

<sup>165</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 72.

<sup>166</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 72–73.

Temple.<sup>167</sup> Concerning 8:13–21, Wahlen argues that leaven is a metaphor for impurity, and so the impure leaven of the Pharisees which Jesus opposes in 8:15 is their teachings about fasting, Sabbath observance, and purity—all of which are featured in the earlier controversies of Mark 2 and 7. When they reject Jesus’ teaching authority, the leaders also reject his spirit-baptism and so the purification that he brings with the Messianic new age.<sup>168</sup>

In this discussion, Wahlen includes the handwashing controversy of Mark 7 as just one of several events in Mark’s narrative where purity is a concern. In this way he relativizes the importance of the handwashing controversy in a way that is not done by other interpreters, most of whom are inclined to see Mark 7:1–23 as the clearest passage in Mark’s Gospel that concerns purity. Most of Wahlen’s discussion about Mark 7 is actually devoted more to the question of how to read Jesus’ statements in 7:14b–15 and 18–19a in a way that is logically consistent with the original question in 7:5.<sup>169</sup> According to Wahlen, Mark 7:1–23 should be matrixed with Mark 2:1–3:6, in particular with the other “eating controversies,” and with then 3:21–30, and so not primarily with the miracle accounts. Nevertheless, Wahlen ultimately does place the three miracles and the handwashing controversy into the same interpretative matrix.

It is after discussing these other events in Mark’s narrative that Wahlen then discusses the miracle accounts.<sup>170</sup> Here Wahlen argues that the theme of purity can be detected in a significant

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<sup>167</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 79–83.

<sup>168</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 80. Wahlen also reads the events in the Temple in Mark 11–15 as a part of this same matrix of events that deal with purity. He argues that Jesus actions in Mark 11:15–18 represent a “cleansing” of the Temple from the old order of the religious authorities who reject him, but this action then motivates them to arrange for his arrest, condemnation, and execution. Wahlen, 81–82.

<sup>169</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 75–79. Wahlen concludes on the basis of logical consistency that Jesus could not have abrogated Leviticus 11 in Mark 7:19b as such an act is inconsistent with both the question in 7:5 and his rebuke of their nullifying God’s word in 7:13.

<sup>170</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83–86.

number of the miracle accounts in Mark's Gospel (rather than merely 1:40–45 and 5:21–43). He argues further that purity appears to be a defining theme in how Mark organizes his miracle stories:

A closer look at the healing miracles in chapters 1–7 shows that three of the four clusters begin with the exorcism of an “impure spirit” (1:21–28; 5:1–20; 7:24–30). The remaining cluster (2:1–3:6) has had the story of the cleansing of the leper (1:40–45) placed in front of it. This suggests that Jesus' cleansing of the “unclean” is an important motif, especially in view of the fact that nearly all of the healing miracles involve purity issues in one way or another. Apart from the story of healing Peter's mother-in-law, all of them concern people with physical ailments or other obvious defects which would have disqualified them from taking an active part in Israel as worshipping community, at least in the eyes of some Jews.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, Wahlen argues that Jesus' purifying the unclean is an almost universal motif by which the majority of Mark's miracle stories (including the exorcism accounts) should be read together.

Wahlen then examines in greater detail the cleansing of the leper and the healing of the woman with the flow of blood and concludes that in both of these accounts purity is the important element in the healings. He also argues that there is great significance in Jesus' touching the leper and being touched by the woman.<sup>172</sup> In discussing the cleansing of the leper Wahlen also considers the question of what Jesus' coming into physical contact with unclean persons says of his relationship to the Torah:

Mark especially highlights Jesus' touching sufferers (1:31; 5:41; 7:33; 8:22; 9:27; cf. 10:13) or their touching him (3:10; 5:27–31; 6:56). Did the evangelist want to suggest that, with the arrival of the new age, the Mosaic categories of purity themselves were no longer relevant? His depiction of Jesus in v. 44 as elsewhere (7:10; 10:3; cf. 12:26) showing respect for the Mosaic stipulations makes this unlikely. Rather, Jesus

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<sup>171</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83. In footnote 75 on this page Wahlen then lists the people who, according to him, are afflicted with the ailments that render them unable to participate in Temple-worship—the paralytic, the man with the withered hand, the dead girl, the woman with the flow of blood, the blind men, and the deaf-mute.

<sup>172</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 85–86. Regarding the woman with the flow of blood, Wahlen argues that her “clandestine approach to Jesus” and her subsequent fear are evidence that she knows her touch would bring defilement to Jesus. It should be noted, however, that Wahlen does not discuss in any detail the raising of the dead girl other than to mention it in passing while discussing the woman with the hemorrhage.

seems to be viewed as a source of purity (or healing power), immune from defilement.<sup>173</sup>

Wahlen thus concludes that, on the one hand, Jesus appears immune from impurity, and because of this he is willing to touch or be touched by the unclean. On the other hand, however, Wahlen concludes that this does not necessarily represent any unique authority/lordship that Jesus has with respect to the Torah since in other passages Jesus appears to uphold the Torah. Such a conclusion follows from what Wahlen had concluded earlier regarding 7:19b, that Jesus is not abrogating Leviticus 11, but merely dismissing the handwashing tradition. It is interesting to note, however, that Wahlen views Mark's portrayal of Jesus as one who, at least in his own person, is above the purity regulations because of his unique status as the one who received the Holy Spirit. This, then, would appear to imply that Jesus has some unique authority over the entire Torah as well in as much as his reception of the Spirit puts him above concerns about purity and the purity code.

In his investigation, then, Wahlen identifies compelling reasons for why the miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:25–34 should be read together and also with other healing-miracles and the exorcisms to demonstrate Jesus' unique authority with respect to purity/impurity. Wahlen also includes the handwashing controversy of 7:1–23 in this interpretative matrix. As noted above, however, Wahlen does not see these events as indicating that Jesus has any unique authority over the Torah, but rather he is only interested in dismissing

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<sup>173</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 84–85. Note that Wahlen does not discuss the question of whether or not Jesus washes after contact with the unclean as do Neusner and Westerholm. One might guess that if it is truly impossible for Jesus to be made unclean, as Wahlen asserts, then such washing is unnecessary. On the other hand, given Wahlen's view that overall Jesus is one who upholds the Torah, one might guess that he would have washed as this is commanded in the Torah. How Wahlen might answer the question of whether or not Jesus needed to wash would be very telling, but it is not included in his discussion.

the Pharisaic focus on an “outward, ritual form of purity.”<sup>174</sup>

It should be noted that each of the six authors surveyed in this section is primarily interested in historical questions—primarily how the historical Jesus regarded purity. Each identifies important narrative features of Mark’s Gospel, but they are not concerned with providing a more in depth *narrative* analysis.<sup>175</sup> Thus, what is lacking overall is an attempt to read these various passages from an intentionally narrative critical point of view. It should also be noted that those authors who include a discussion of the exorcism accounts with the three miracle accounts and the handwashing controversy generally do not distinguish the impurity represented by the unclean spirits from the impurity represented by the leper, the woman with the discharge, the corpse, or unclean meats.<sup>176</sup> That such a distinction is not made is important because, while the three miracle accounts and the handwashing controversy involve a class of impurity that can be labeled “Levitical impurity” (that is, impurity defined by the Mosaic regulations in the Torah), the impurity of the spirits is a *non-Levitical* class of impurity. It appears that the next level of investigation would focus more narrowly on these events at the narrative level while making a distinction between Levitical purity/impurity which is at stake in Mark 1:40–45, 5:21–43, and 7:1–23 and a more general, non-Levitical impurity represented by the unclean spirits in the exorcism accounts. Such an investigation would ask how the theme of purity functions in Mark’s Gospel to describe the person and work of Jesus, in particular his

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<sup>174</sup> Wahlen *Impurity of Spirits*, 86.

<sup>175</sup> See again Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 20–21, where he dismisses the value of a narrative approach. Such a dismissal of a narrative reading seems very inconsistent with Wahlen’s later analysis of Mark’s Gospel where he focuses upon features *at the narrative level* to argue his case for the role of purity in Mark’s account.

<sup>176</sup> See, e.g., Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 300–38, where he argues that the impurity represented by the unclean spirits falls into the same category of contact-contagion impurity that he elsewhere identifies with leprosy, bodily discharges, corpses, and unclean meats.

exercise of authority and lordship. Such an approach would not engage the questions posed by those who read through the lens of redaction criticism to uncover how the historical Jesus or the early Christian communities regarded purity, but rather ask how purity/impurity functions as an important theme in the narrative of the Gospel according to Mark. It would ask in particular how Jesus is characterized as one who exercises lordship over both the impurity represented by the unclean spirits and purity/impurity as defined by the Torah.

### **Narrative Criticism of the Gospels**

As this dissertation will attempt a narrative reading of the Gospel according to Mark, it will employ various methodologies and approaches associated with narrative criticism. Narrative criticism as a field of biblical study is described in the works of Jack Dean Kingsbury, Mark Allen Powell, Jeffery A. Gibbs, and others.<sup>177</sup> Powell identifies the narrative critical approach as one that “focuses on stories in biblical literature and attempts to read these stories with insights drawn from the secular field of modern literary criticism” where the goal is to “determine the effects stories are expected to have” on the reader.<sup>178</sup> As such, narrative criticism attempts to read the Gospels as literature rather than focus upon the historical investigation associated with redaction criticism.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, narrative criticism is a text-centered (rather than an author-

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<sup>177</sup> See, e.g., Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. and enl. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 1–40; Mark Allen Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239–55; Jeffery A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and the Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 13–22; and James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 17–40. See also Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 218–23.

<sup>178</sup> Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 239.

<sup>179</sup> See Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 1–4, where he discusses the limitations of the historical-critical methods, in particular how these methods ignore the narrative level of the text.

See also Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1–16, where he describes the breakdown of the pre-critical approach to reading the biblical narrative with the coming of the modern era, a breakdown that includes, but



centered) approach.<sup>180</sup> Rather than treating the text as a lens by which to uncover and reconstruct historical data, the text is treated as offering a coherent narrative in its own right. This narrative, then, is read *as a narrative*, paying close attention to matters that are important for how story functions—matters such as the point of view of the narrator, the flow of the plot and the ordering of events, the settings of events, characters and how they are characterized, conflict and how it is resolved, and so on.<sup>181</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs further says of this task that the “story” emerges from close and repeated readings of the text.<sup>182</sup>

In his description of narrative criticism, Powell emphasizes in particular the concept of reading the narrative as *the implied reader*. According to Powell, the implied reader is the reader “presupposed by and constructed from the text itself.”<sup>183</sup> The implied reader was originally a mental construct of the actual author, the person this author had in mind as he composed the narrative. The implied reader, however, must now be reconstructed by the actual reader.<sup>184</sup> This

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is not limited to, the rise of the historical-methods. Frei also acknowledges the need for a new “narrative” approach. Regarding the “eclipse” of the narrative approach in the modern era, Frei argues “a realistic or history-like (though not necessarily historical) element is a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief. It is a feature that can be highlighted by the appropriate analytical procedure and by no other, even if it may be difficult to describe the procedure—in contrast to the element itself. It is fascinating that the realistic character of the crucial biblical stories was actually acknowledged and agreed upon by most of the significant eighteenth-century commentators. But since the precritical [*sic*] analytical or interpretative procedure for isolating it had irretrievably broken down in the opinion of most commentators, this specifically realistic characteristic, though acknowledged by all hands to be there, finally came to be ignored, or—even more fascinating—its presence or distinctiveness came to be denied for lack of a ‘method’ to isolate it. And this despite the common agreement that the specific feature was there!” Frei, 10.

<sup>180</sup> See Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 14. This is in contrast to the traditional historical-critical approaches where the goal is to uncover what lies “behind the text.” See also Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 165–67, where he discusses level three signifiers, that is, the implications of how an author writes something and the fact that he writes something. Voelz argues that the historical-critical methods of form and redaction criticism, in their efforts to reconstruct the “situation in life” of the earlier forms lying behind the text (form criticism) or of the author and his community (redaction criticism) is primarily an investigation of level three signifiers. Voelz, 166–67.

<sup>181</sup> See Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” 44–48 and Resseguie, 21–25.

<sup>182</sup> See Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 34–35.

<sup>183</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 15. See also Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 34.

<sup>184</sup> See also Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 218–20.

reconstruction of the implied reader is accomplished primarily based upon features of the text itself through a close reading of the text.<sup>185</sup>

Bas M. F. van Iersel also discusses the concepts of the *implied reader* (and the role of the *interpretative community*) in shaping how the “actual reader” approaches the text.<sup>186</sup> Van Iersel defines the implied reader as “the image of the reader that [the real reader] creates in the text” and that then invites “the actual reader to respond to the text in certain ways.”<sup>187</sup> A similar line of thought regarding the implied reader is presented by Voelz in *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*:

**This implied reader is a person, a receptor, with that knowledge, those abilities, that competency, which enables him to “actualize” the text.** He is a conception of the author—it is for him which the author writes (though he in no actual fact corresponds to any actual reader of the text). Who, then, is a valid interpreter of a text? **It is he who conforms to the expectations of the author.** It is he who conforms himself to the given text’s assumptions. It is he who becomes the implied reader—and only such a one—of a given text. Which means that an “objective” reading of a text is not only impossible; it is **not** to be **desired!**<sup>188</sup>

In *Chasing the Eastern Star*, Powell further outlines his understanding of the concept of the implied reader. Powell argues that the implied reader will comply with three important assumptions: First, the implied reader is expected to read the story sequentially from beginning to end. Second, the implied reader will know everything the narrative expects him to know—and

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<sup>185</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 15 and Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 34.

<sup>186</sup> Iersel, *Mark*, 17–19.

<sup>187</sup> Iersel, *Mark*, 17–18. See also Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151.

<sup>188</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 219–220. Note that the emphasis in this quote is original. Voelz then continues to argue that *valid readers*—those who best comply with the expectations of the actual authors and so become the implied reader—are those formed by “the community that produced, received, and preserved a given set of documents” and that such a community is more likely to teach its members to read these texts in a way that is congruent with them. According to Voelz, for the New Testament it is the Christian community that adheres to the creeds and *regula fidei* (the rule of faith) which underlies the creeds that is best fit to instruct its members how to conform to the expectations demanded of the implied reader. Voelz, 220–23.

nothing more than this. Finally, the implied reader will believe everything the narrative expects him to believe—and nothing more than this. For the actual reader to comply with the role of the implied reader, this reader must assume such a reading of the text with such knowledge and beliefs.<sup>189</sup> It will be the actual reader who complies with these assumptions who is more likely to experience an “expected reading,” that is, a reading expected by the text itself. The reader who does not comply, on the other hand, may experience an “unexpected reading” of the text, a reading to which the implied reader should never arrive.<sup>190</sup>

It is in relationship to what the implied reader is expected to know and believe that knowledge of the literary and historical background of the Gospel accounts serves an important function. Of particular importance in this task is familiarity with the Old Testament literature. One assumption of several narrative critics is that the implied reader of the Gospel is so familiar with the Old Testament that he will recognize every citation and allusion to the Old Testament made in the narrative.<sup>191</sup> Knowledge of the historical background underlying the text will also be

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<sup>189</sup> See Mark Allen Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 75–130, where he provides an in depth discussion about the task of reconstructing what the implied reader was likely to know and to believe. Powell here notes one important feature of a narrative critical approach that would speak to the matter of the historicity of Mark 7:3–4: Whether or not historical research can prove the historicity of the author’s claims, the implied reader will nevertheless believe that what the author says is historical, even if only for the purpose of reading this narrative. Thus, the implied reader of Mark’s Gospel will know and believe that there was a near universal Jewish handwashing observance in the first century because this is what is said in Mark 7:3–4. Any modern reader of Mark 7:1–23 must know what the implied reader of Mark’s Gospel knows about Jewish purity observances to properly interpret this text. Any actual reader who refuses to comply with this approach will experience an “unexpected reading” of the text. See also Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 33–34, for a similar discussion.

<sup>190</sup> Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 64–69.

<sup>191</sup> Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 98–101. Here Powell argues that the implied reader of Matthew’s Gospel will know the background for every direct citation and every allusion from the Old Testament, and that such a reader has such a full and complete knowledge of the Old Testament literature that any actual reader who does not know this same literature is likely to misread the narrative of Matthew. Powell 100. See also Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 34 and the excursus “Quotations and Allusions to Old Testament Material” in Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 141–43, for similar discussions. Voelz references C. H. Dodd to argue that “when NT writers used OT material, they assumed that their quotation or allusion would direct a hearer/reader to the larger context of their textual reference.” Voelz, 141. Voelz advocates a broadening of the basic approach presented by C. F. D. Moule where all quotations and allusions provide “hooks” into the larger Old Testament context. Such an approach appears to agree with the

necessary,<sup>192</sup> but even such background knowledge is regulated first by what the text itself assumes to be true, and so what the text itself assumes that the implied reader already knows and believes. Thus, for instance, if the text should assume a historical background that the actual reader believes to be untrue based on his interaction with other sources so that this one reader finds himself doubting the historicity of the target text, then this actual reader “knows too much” to comply with the role of the implied reader.<sup>193</sup>

Another key feature of narrative criticism is focus on the point of view (or perspective) offered by the various voices within the narrative, in particular the point of view of the narrator in relationship to the point of view of characters within the narrative. The narrative of Mark’s Gospel will assume and communicate a certain point of view or perspective about reality, about God and man, about the mission of Jesus, and (for the discussion here) about Jesus’ relationship to purity/impurity. This point of view is primarily expressed in the story by the “narrator,” that

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basic premise of narrative criticism, that the implied reader is a reader with a full knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures.

As to the question of whether or not the implied reader of any Gospel would be informed by other literature in addition to the Old Testament, what Powell refers to as “extratextuality,” see Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 101–06. Here he argues that such literature should be considered *only when the target narrative assumes such knowledge*. He specifically considers the possibility of whether the implied reader of Matthew’s Gospel is expected to be familiar with (1) the Gospel of Mark, (2) the Qumran texts, (3) the tradition of the Jewish elders, and (4) early oral Christian tradition. He concludes that Matthew’s implied reader is not expected to know either Mark’s Gospel (although he assumes that Matthew used it as a source, Powell concludes that the readers of Matthew’s Gospel do not necessarily know this), the Qumran texts, or even early Christian traditions. He concludes that such readers are expected to know the traditions of the elders, *but only in so far as these traditions are mentioned in the narrative of Matthew*; on this point, Powell argues further that since such traditions were not written down in the first century, it is difficult for actual readers of Matthew’s Gospel to reconstruct what the implied reader is expected to know and believe about these traditions. Powell concludes that the readers must ultimately depend upon how these traditions are referenced and interpreted by Matthew in the narrative itself. Powell, 103–04.

<sup>192</sup> See Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 34, where he argues that narrative criticism is not a completely ahistorical task as “the text of Matthew routinely assumes knowledge of something without explaining it: who the Pharisees were, where Nazareth is, the use and purpose of synagogues in first-century Palestine, what teachings were current in Second Temple Judaism, and so forth. The implied reader knows things assumed by the narrative.”

<sup>193</sup> See Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 75–82, for full discussion of this point.

is, that entity within the world of the text who tells the story.<sup>194</sup> According to Meir Sternberg, in the Bible narrative the point of view or perspective of God (as a character in the story) is aligned with that of the narrator, which results in the biblical narrator having an omniscience with respect to reality that may be associated with the point of view of God. Thus, the narrator of the biblical narrative is considered to be a reliable narrator, one whose point of view the reader should trust.<sup>195</sup> In the Old Testament, God as a character has such reliability, and the reader should trust the perspective of God (just as he trusts the perspective of the narrator). By analogy, the character of Jesus in the Gospel narratives also has such reliability, and so the reader should trust the point of view of Jesus. Other characters, however, might offer points of view that vie with those of the narrator, God, and Jesus. The reader of Mark's Gospel would give priority to the voices of the narrator, God, and Jesus, see these points of view as aligned, and then assume that the points of view/perspectives of the narrator, God, and Jesus are reliable; at the same time the reader would be wary of the point of view of any other characters that disagrees with what is the reliable perspective.<sup>196</sup>

The authors of several of the more recent commentaries on the Gospel of Mark have

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<sup>194</sup> See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 130. According to Sternberg, in the Bible the point of view of the narrator should be viewed as identical to the point of view of the author, with the result that these two terms—*author* and *narrator* can be used interchangeably.

<sup>195</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 131. Sternberg discusses the Old Testament, and so he only discusses the Old Testament narrative as being “an omniscient narrative,” yet a Christian reader might argue that by analogy this is true of the New Testament narrative as well.

<sup>196</sup> Thus, for instance, the reader will be suspicious of the point of view of expressed by the scribes in Mark 2:7 that Jesus is blaspheming when he forgives the paralytic. The reader will then later be suspicious of the point of view expressed by the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22 that Jesus has Beelzebul and that he casts out demons by/in the sphere of the prince of demons. The reader already knows from the narrator that Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism (1:10) and that the divine voice from heaven identifies Jesus as the beloved Son of God (1:11); therefore, the reader knows that Jesus is acting with divine authority as he forgives sins and casts out demons.

openly attempted a literary and even “narrative” approach to reading this Gospel.<sup>197</sup> Such an approach assumes that the author intended to present a unified and coherent narrative with its own rhetorical goals rather than merely trying to preserve traditions about Jesus in a loose narrative format.<sup>198</sup> As such, these studies, to varying degrees, attempt to read Mark’s Gospel as a whole with focus on how the story functions as story and so by paying attention to such factors as plot and the sequence of events, characters and their characterization, and conflict and its resolution.

A narrative critical reading of the miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43, the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23, and the exorcism accounts would attempt to reconstruct what the implied reader is likely to know and believe about the purity laws and then Jesus’ authority/lordship with respect to the purity laws in general, with respect to the entire Torah specifically, and then with respect to the entire cosmos. *This reconstruction would be based upon a close and sequential reading of Mark’s Gospel.* The significance of Jesus’ actions would be determined on the basis of such a reading. At the same time, investigation of the literary background of Mark’s Gospel may also inform the reader of what is likely to be known and believed in as much as Mark assumes such knowledge and beliefs on the part of his actual readers. Yet such knowledge is still be meant to serve the actual reader in reconstructing what is known and believed *based upon the text*. It must be admitted at the outset, however, that such a reconstruction of what is known and believed about purity, though based on “objective” features

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<sup>197</sup> See, e.g., France, *Mark*, 11–20, Moloney, *Mark*, 16–22, Iersel, *Mark*, 14–22, and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 40–60. Note that not all of these authors employ the theory of “the implied reader” in their attempt to read Mark’s Gospel as narrative, but they do each claim to attempt to pay attention to other features of the narrative approach.

<sup>198</sup> See, e.g., Taylor, *Mark*, 105–07, for an example of a non-narrative approach that knowingly deemphasizes the literary nature of Mark’s Gospel. Here Taylor argues that Mark’s Gospel is “non-literary” in nature due to the author’s task of preserving various strands of tradition intact, a task that, in Taylor’s opinion, places limitations upon the author’s ability to present a unified narrative.

of the text and what is found in the literary background, can never become a *purely* objective enterprise as actual readers may disagree about what in the text and the background contributes to such knowledge and beliefs.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, any conclusions would be best evaluated (and adjusted if need be) by interaction with other readers of the same text. Yet one must begin somewhere.

Based upon the priority that should be given to the text itself in reconstructing what should be known and believed about purity in Mark's Gospel, in the analysis that follows the first task will be to examine the text to see what clues there are regarding what is known and believed. The second task, then, will be to examine the literary background so that this background too can be analyzed ultimately in light of what is what is known from the target narrative.

### **The Methodological Procedure to Be Employed**

This dissertation will attempt a reading of the Gospel of Mark with a focus on the role that

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<sup>199</sup> That such a reconstruction of what the implied reader knows and believes can never always prove to be "purely objective" or "an exact science," but will to some extent depend upon the knowledge, beliefs, and opinions of the actual readers, is evidenced from a lecture by Mark Allen Powell when he was featured at Concordia Seminary as the New Testament scholar in EN-801 Major Figures in the summer of 2011 (June 20–July 1). On June 24, 2011, in a discussion of Matt 22:15–22 (the question about paying taxes to Caesar), the question arose about whether the author of Matthew would have expected his readers to know what images appeared on a denarius (other than Caesar's image and inscription as mentioned specifically in Matt 22:20–21); in particular, it was asked if the implied reader was expected to know that the reverse side of the coin had an image of Zeus sitting enthroned. Powell contended that the implied reader of Matthew would not be expected to know this fact since the text does not mention this explicitly. And so, he concluded that knowing that there was an image of Zeus on the reverse side of a denarius might be an example of the actual reader "knowing too much" to comply with what is expected of the implied reader. This conclusion was then debated by members of the class.

This discussion does, however, show how Powell attempts to emphasize the text over what is known outside of the text in reconstructing the knowledge and beliefs of the implied reader: According to Powell, since the text does not mention the reverse side of the denarius, then the actual reader should be cautious about assuming that the implied reader would know about this as well, and so it would be best to err on the side of caution. Yet not everyone in the class agreed with this specific conclusion made by Powell regarding what the implied reader of Matthew would know about a denarius.

Regarding his approach to Matt 22:15–22, see also Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 95–97, where he argues how, based on the text of Matthew, the implied reader might not even assume that the image of Caesar on the coin was that of Tiberius, even if Tiberius was the emperor at the time of Jesus' ministry.

purity/impurity plays in the overall narrative and in its presentation of Jesus and his mission of inaugurating the reign of God (Mark 1:14–15). This study will begin by focusing upon passages where Jesus deals with *Levitical* impurity, that is, impurity that is defined by the legislation found in Leviticus 11–15 and Num 19:11–22. First, the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 will be read in light of the Leviticus 13–15, Num 19:11–22, and Num 5:1–4. In each of these three miracles, Jesus comes into physical contact with an unclean person, thus bringing into consideration the matter of contact-contagion impurity based in the Old Testament legislation. With each of these miracles the dissertation will investigate if purity/impurity is a concern in the narrative and then, if so, how purity functions in the narrative. The dissertation will also investigate how these miracle accounts depict Jesus’ relationship of authority/lordship with respect to the purity laws in the Torah.

The dissertation will then examine the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23 as another text where Levitical impurity is a concern. The dissertation will focus its investigation in particular upon the dominical sayings of 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a in light of the scholarly consensus that in the parenthetical statement of 7:19b Jesus is depicted as having abrogated the food laws of Leviticus 11. This incident will be interpreted in light of its narrative context. Then it will also be interpreted in light of other passages in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus demonstrates a unique authority with respect to the Torah, in particular the Sabbath controversy in Mark 2:23–28 and the question about divorce in Mark 10:2–12. The dissertation will consider how the narrative’s depiction of Jesus as one who exercises authority with respect to the purity legislation in both the three miracles and his cleansing of all foods fits in with the overall depiction of Jesus as one who has authority over the entire Torah.

After this discussion of Jesus and Levitical impurity in Mark’s Gospel, the dissertation will



then “widen the lens” on the question of purity/impurity and investigate other passages where purity is a concern. Here it will focus in particular upon how in the exorcisms Jesus overcomes *non-Levitical* impurity, that is, a generic or cosmic impurity which is represented by the unclean spirits and which is not defined or regulated by the Torah. Then, as the first exorcism of Mark 1:21–28 is also the first miracle of Jesus’ ministry, the dissertation will focus especially upon this miracle and the role that the opening events in Mark’s narrative play as they introduce Jesus and his mission. This study will consider in particular the role that purity plays in the baptism of John as a “washing/cleansing” that prepares Israel for the coming of the eschatological reign and rule of God (1:1–8), the baptism of Jesus and his reception of the Holy Spirit (1:9–13)—and so his identification as one who will baptize with the Spirit—and then Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God (1:14–15). At this point the dissertation will also consider the prophecies of Ezekiel 36 and Zechariah 13 as possible background texts with respect to the ministries of both John and Jesus as depicted in Mark’s Gospel. It will consider the narrative that follows as if these opening events are foundational for understanding Jesus’ character and mission in Mark’s narrative.

As the dissertation proceeds, it will attempt to matrix each event within Mark’s Gospel to other events based on the following features: (1) proximity in the overall narrative (e.g., the exorcism of a Gentile in 7:24–30 immediately following the confrontation over purity in 7:1–23), (2) use of particular vocabulary (e.g. texts that use vocabulary related to purity, such as the adjectives ἅγιος, ἀκάθαρτος, or κοινός or the verbs καθαρίζω or κοινόω), and (3) similar features (e.g. miracles involving Jesus touching or being touched by someone who would be considered unclean according to the regulations of Leviticus and Numbers).<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> See Voelz *What Does This Mean?*, 156–65 where he outlines this process for determining the significance of events while reading these level two signifiers.

The dissertation will then offer conclusions about how the theme of purity/impurity functions in the overall narrative of Mark to describe the lordship of Jesus, lordship that is exercised both in relationship to the purity regulations of Leviticus and Numbers and, indeed, to the very cosmos itself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JESUS AND LEVITICAL IMPURITY, PART ONE: THE MIRACLE ACCOUNTS INVOLVING PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH THE UNCLEAN

#### Introduction

This chapter will examine the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 (the cleansing of the leper) and Mark 5:21–43 (the saving/healing of the woman with the flow of blood and raising of the dead girl). Each of these miracle accounts theoretically involves the motif not only of Jesus overcoming disease and death, but also of Jesus dealing decisively with what can be classified as “contact-contagion” impurity.<sup>1</sup> With this class of impurity the uncleanness of one person is theoretically transmitted through physical contact to another person according to both the regulations in the Torah and how these were understood in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>2</sup> In each of these three miracle accounts, Jesus (or his garment in the case of the woman with the flow of blood) comes into physical contact with the body of the person he delivers, and so there is a possibility that Jesus becomes unclean through such physical contact. Yet, at the same time, Jesus’ delivers the three individuals with whom he comes into contact, and this indicates his ability to save people from Levitical uncleanness. That the leper is cleansed, the woman is saved/healed, and the dead girl is raised to life as the result of physical contact with Jesus demonstrates that he possesses a unique authority over purity/impurity. In these three miracles Jesus is confronting a type of impurity that is specifically defined by the regulations of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 89–90. According to Kazen, what makes the contact-contagion class of impurity different than the other types of impurity (impurity of foods and moral impurity) was that the Torah called for the exclusion of persons with contact-contagion impurity from the community while they were in their unclean state and, because of this, this became the class of impurity for which the regulations of observance underwent an expansion in the scribal tradition during the Second Temple era.

<sup>2</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 5–7; 89–108.

Torah, thus an impurity that can be defined as “Levitical” impurity.

One question to consider in these three miracle accounts is whether or not Jesus’ coming into physical contact with the leper, the woman, and the dead girl is significant. *Would Jesus have risked “ritual contamination” through such physical contact? Does the narrative depict Jesus as overcoming this risk by means of his actions in purifying/delivering these three individuals? Does this then depict Jesus as overcoming Levitical impurity apart from the regulations of the Torah and, if so, does this then indicate that Jesus has a unique authority/lordship with respect to the Torah?*

### **Overview of Healings in Mark Involving Physical Contact**

According to the method presented by James W. Voelz in *What Does This Mean?*, when establishing an interpretative matrix to arrive at the significance of things, deeds, situations, etc. within a narrative, the reader can consider items in the same context, items with similar features, items depicted by identical vocables, and then even items which seem to have a relatively independent importance.<sup>3</sup> The reader can then arrive at significance by having a repertoire with the “world of the text.” There might also be definite clues in the text that suggest what the significance of an event might be. Such clues often include interpretations offered by the narrator

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<sup>3</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 159–160. In this section of this text Voelz discusses interpretation on level two which involves determining the significance of the things, events, actions, situations, etc. that are depicted in a narrative text. He discusses particularly the matter of *what texts* can be put together in the same interpretative matrix and so be read together in an effort to determine the significance of such things, events, actions, situations, etc. This method can be very helpful in reconstructing the knowledge and beliefs of the implied reader as it focuses upon what kinds of accounts within the same text the author might likely assume his readers would interpret together based on context, similar features, and similar vocables. This method assumes, as does narrative criticism as a whole, that the implied reader will view the narrative as a single, coherent piece where the parts will interpret one another rather than as pericopes loosely edited together, yet still standing more or less independent of other pericopes.

or reliable characters within the story.<sup>4</sup> Yet sometimes it may be difficult for the reader to find anything in the text by which to arrive at significance.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout Mark's narrative of Jesus' ministry in the north (Galilee and the surrounding regions), Jesus is depicted many times as coming into physical contact with individuals whom he heals. Sometimes Jesus initiates this physical contact, yet at other times the contact is initiated by the people who are healed. According to Clinton Wahlen, this is significant because in Second Temple Judaism there was a perceived connection between impurity and most diseases (not just skin disease and bodily discharges), yet Jesus is depicted as one who is willing to touch and be touched by the sick.<sup>6</sup> According to Stephen Westerholm, these miracle accounts present Jesus as one who is indifferent to impurity, as one who is "unclean, yet unconcerned."<sup>7</sup> An overview of incidents in the narrative of Mark's Gospel where Jesus comes into physical contact with those whom he heals indicates that physical contact with those who are suffering from physical ailments appears to be a significant feature of his healing ministry:

1. In Mark 1:31, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law by taking (the verb is κρατέω) her hand. Here Jesus initiates the physical contact with the sick woman.
2. In Mark 1:41, Jesus cleanses (the verb is καθαρίζω) the leper by extending his hand

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<sup>4</sup> See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 162–63. In this section of the text Voelz discusses *how* one arrives at the significance of the things, events, actions, situations, etc. that are depicted.

<sup>6</sup> Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits*, 83–86. Wahlen ultimately argues that the only miracle in Mark's Gospel where Jesus comes into physical contact with someone that does not involve impurity is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:31. Wahlen, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69. Westerholm uses the words "unclean, yet unconcerned" (67) to describe Jesus himself, not as if Jesus did not become impure/unclean through his interaction with the sick, only that he was not perturbed by such contact. This interpretation that Jesus himself became unclean through such contact will be challenged later in this chapter. Thus, Westerholm also assumes that the historical Jesus may have purified himself through washing after such physical contact. Westerholm, 69.

and touching (the verb is ἅπτομαι) him. Here Jesus initiates the physical contact with the leper. This incident stands out from the other healings in Mark's Gospel because here there are definite level one signifiers (e.g. the verb is καθαρίζω rather than θεραπεύω) to indicate that purity is a concern in this miracle account.

3. In Mark 3:10, people with diseases press upon Jesus in order to touch (the verb is ἅπτομαι) him as the result of Jesus healing (the verb is θεραπεύω) others. The narrative does not say whether or not these people are healed as the result of any possible physical contact with Jesus. Here any possible physical contact is initiated by the sick people, not by Jesus. In response to this situation, Jesus tells his disciples to have a boat ready for him (3:9). It appears as if Jesus' desire for this boat has more to do with his own desire not be pressed upon rather than a desire to avoid physical contact with the unclean.<sup>8</sup>
4. In Mark 5:27–29, the woman with the flow of blood is saved/healed (the verb is σώζω rather than θεραπεύω) after she touches (the verb is ἅπτομαι) Jesus' garment. Here the woman, not Jesus, initiates physical contact, and she attempts only to touch Jesus' cloak, not his body. Jesus is apparently unaware of her attempt to touch him until after it has happened.
5. In Mark 5:41, Jesus takes (the verb is κρατέω) the hand of the dead child and raises her back to life. Here Jesus initiates physical contact with the corpse.
6. In Mark 6:5, Jesus heals (the verb is θεραπεύω) a few sick people in Nazareth by

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<sup>8</sup> See the discussion in Iersel, *Mark*, 163 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 238 and 240–41.

laying (the verb is ἐπιτίθημι) his hands on them. Here Jesus initiates physical contact with the sick.

7. In Mark 6:56, the sick in Genneserat beg to touch (the verb is ἅπτομαι) even the hem of Jesus' garment, and whoever touches him is saved/healed (the verb is σώζω rather than θεραπεύω). In this account, the sick initiate the physical contact, but, unlike the incident with the woman in Mark 5, Jesus appears to be aware of what is happening and allows such contact.
8. In Mark 7:33, Jesus puts (the verb is βάλλω) his fingers into the ears of the deaf-mute and touches (the verb is ἅπτομαι) this man's tongue before healing him. Here Jesus initiates physical contact with this man.
9. In Mark 8:23, Jesus first takes (the verb is ἐπιλαμβάνομαι) the blind man by the hand to lead him away from the crowd and then places (the verb is ἐπιτίθημι) his hands upon him in the first attempt to heal this man. Then, in 8:25, Jesus places (again, the verb is ἐπιτίθημι) his hands upon the man's eyes a second time before the man sees everything clearly. Here Jesus initiates physical contact with the blind man.
10. In Mark 9:27, after the exorcism of the demon from the boy, Jesus takes (the verb is κρατέω) the boy by the hand—as the boy appears dead—and raises him up. Though this action arguably takes place *after* the miracle, it is this act that brings this miracle to its full resolution. Thus, in this incident Jesus comes into contact with a person who both had an unclean spirit and who appears dead. Here Jesus initiates physical contact with the boy.

In attempting to determine the significance of these miracles, the interpreter can place these

various miracles together into an interpretative matrix as they share a similar feature: Jesus comes into physical contact with the people he heals. Several of these narratives also share similar vocabulary. In healing Peter's mother-in-law, raising Jairus' daughter, and delivering the demon-possessed boy, Jesus takes the other person by the hand (κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς). The verb ἅπτομαι is used to describe Jesus touching the leper and then his being touched by the sick in Mark 3:10, by the woman in Mark 5:27, and by the sick in Mark 6:56. The verb θεραπεύω is used to describe Jesus' healing of the sick in various texts, but the verb σῴζω is used to describe his healing of the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5:28, 34 and the sick in Gennesaret in Mark 6:56.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned above, the healing of the leper is unique in that here the verb καθαρίζω is used to describe the healing.

Thus, these various incidents can be read together as they (1) describe Jesus performing miracles of healing, (2) in each miracle Jesus comes into physical contact with the people he heals, and (3) similar vocabulary is used to describe how Jesus comes into physical contact with these people. At the same time, the healing of the leper is unique when compared to these other accounts in that the operative word for the healing there is καθαρίζω. The healing of the woman with the flow of blood is unique when compared to other healings in that there the operative word for healing is σῴζω. It is interesting to note that σῴζω is also used in Jairus' request regarding his daughter (that she "be saved/healed and live") in Mark 5:23. Though σῴζω is not used again in the account of the raising of the dead girl in Mark 5:35–43, the use of this word in

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<sup>9</sup> Note also that in 5:23 Jairus' request is that Jesus would take (the verb is ἐπιτίθημι) his daughter by the hand so that she would be saved (the verb is the aorist passive of σῴζω) and live. Here the father's request is that Jesus "save" his daughter.



5:23 indicates that Jesus' deliverance of both the woman and the girl is associated with this verb.<sup>10</sup>

The miracles of the cleansing of the leper, the healing/saving of the woman with the flow of blood, and the raising of Jairus' daughter, however, stand apart from the other miracles in that here the impurity of the individual whom Jesus touches is more explicit in light of the purity laws of the Torah. Though it is possible that Jesus' contact with any of diseased person could raise the concern about purity/impurity in the context of Second Temple Judaism<sup>11</sup>, with these three miracles the matter of contact-contagion is more explicitly a concern due to the background of Leviticus 13–14 (the leper), Leviticus 15 (the woman with the flow of blood), and Num 19:11–22 (the dead girl).<sup>12</sup> What is more, Joel Marcus and James W. Voelz argue that there is also a connection between these three miracles and Num 5:1–4.<sup>13</sup> In this passage from Numbers, God commands Moses to expel from the camp—and in this order—anyone with a skin disease, anyone with a discharge, and anyone who is unclean by touching a corpse. The ordering of these miracles in Mark's narrative—the cleansing of the leper, the healing/saving of the woman with the flow of blood, and the raising of Jairus' daughter—follows the ordering of the list in Num 5:2. This provides another reason for reading these three miracles together and as distinct from

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<sup>10</sup> See Werner Foerster, “σώζω,” *TDNT* 7:990–91, where he argues that the Synoptic Gospels σώζω occurs sixteen times in stories of healing, but usually in the context where the whole person is restored rather than a single body part is healed. According to Foerster, the choice of this word leaves room for the idea “that the healing power of Jesus and the saving faith go beyond physical life.” Foerster, 991. See also Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 363, where he argues that σώζω in the passive voice can have the sense of to heal or “rescue from sickness,” and 366, where he argues that in 5:34 the perfect active σέσωκεν likely then has a deeper meaning, a meaning that indicates the salvation that has come with the new age and hence is already realized in the case of this woman on the basis of her faith in Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> See again Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83–86.

<sup>12</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 5–6; 89–198.

<sup>13</sup> See Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367–68 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377.

the other miracles in Mark's Gospel where Jesus comes into contact with the people whom he delivers.

### What Can Be Known and Believed about Such Physical Contact

When all of these miracles are considered together, it might *generally* be argued that Jesus often comes into physical contact with those whom he delivers through his healing miracles. He himself will often initiate such physical contact; this happens in seven of the miracles. Yet such contact often results from the initiation of the person who needs healing.<sup>14</sup> This happens specifically in the case of the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5. Yet it also appears to be a common occurrence that the sick try to touch Jesus as described in 3:10 and 6:56. What is more, such physical contact occurs even when the matter of contact-contagion impurity is more explicitly a potential problem, as is the case with the leper, the woman with the flow of blood, and the dead girl. Again, as Westerholm argues, in Mark's Gospel Jesus is depicted as one who is "unperturbed" and "unconcerned" about the chance of being contaminated through such physical contact.<sup>15</sup>

More *specifically*, however, Jesus is characterized as one *who is unafraid* to touch or be touched by the sick. Thus, it is important to read the first such healing miracle, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a fever (Mark 1:29–31), as an incident that occurs near the beginning of the narrative of Mark's Gospel. Before this miracle the narrative tells of the ministry of John

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<sup>14</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83–86. The one example above where Jesus may not have seemed willing to be touched is that described in Mark 3:7–10: Jesus has the disciples prepare a boat for him so that he would not be pressed by the crowd; however, here the concern appears to be Jesus' desire not to be pressed by the crowd and so not necessarily a desire to avoid contact with the unclean. See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 238, where he translates the present subjunctive  $\theta\lambda\acute{\iota}\beta\omega\sigma\iota\nu$  in 3:9 as "actually squeeze."

<sup>15</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69.

the Baptist (1:1–8) and the baptism of Jesus (1:9–11). Francis Maloney, Clinton Wahlen, and James W. Voelz argue that John’s baptism corresponds to a promised eschatological washing/purification of Israel.<sup>16</sup> Jesus is then depicted as one who in 1:10 receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism and thus who will baptize the people of Israel with the Holy Spirit (βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). In fact, Jesus as one who is now operating in the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit is confirmed when the unclean spirit identifies Jesus as “the Holy One of God” in 1:24.<sup>17</sup> The purification that was initiated with John’s baptism is thus continued in the work of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

In Mark 1:14–15 Jesus proclaims the arrival of the eschatological reign and rule of God and calls Israel to repentance and faith. His teaching and actions will thus be characteristic of what God’s reign will entail. The first miracle that Jesus performs is an exorcism of an unclean spirit (1:21–28): While teaching as one who exudes authority in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus is confronted by a man who is “in the sphere/power of an unclean spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ)<sup>19</sup> and who identifies Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ). This identification recalls Jesus’ reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and so this exorcism is

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<sup>16</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 33–34, Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 26–30, and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 104–05 and 112–14. The significance of John’s baptism the fulfillment of God’s promise that he would purify Israel is discussed in more detail in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> See Iersel, *Mark*, 136. See also Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 36; Grundmann, *Markus*, 59–60; Lane, *Mark*, 73–74; Hooker, *Mark*, 64; Gundry, *Mark*, 75; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 192; and France, *Mark*, 103 and 107.

<sup>18</sup> See Moloney, *Mark*, 33–34 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 104–05 and 112–14, for discussion of reading the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus in light of Ezek 36:17, and Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits*, 26–30, for discussion of reading the ministry of John the Baptist in light of Zech 13:1 and the ministry of Jesus in light of Zech 13:2. The role of these Old Testament passages as providing important background for the opening of Mark’s narrative will be discussed further in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>19</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 252 and 261, for his discussion of the meaning of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ.

portrayed as a confrontation between one who is holy (Jesus) and one that is unclean (the spirit).<sup>20</sup> Jesus casts this unclean spirit out of the man, thus indicating that the eschatological reign and rule of God as initiated by Jesus brings purification from uncleanness and that Jesus himself, by virtue of his unique holiness, has the ability and authority to purify what is unclean.<sup>21</sup>

The second miracle then follows immediately upon this first miracle. After leaving the synagogue, Jesus goes with his four disciples to the home of Peter and Andrew. There he heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, and he does this by taking hold of her hand. Jesus thus demonstrates that in addition to his authority as a teacher and exorcist, he is also a healer. *Would it be perceived as problematic that Jesus comes into physical contact with a woman who is sick?*<sup>22</sup> Given Jesus' status as one who has the Holy Spirit, who is the Holy One of God, and who has just cast out an unclean spirit from a man, Jesus' actions of touching a sick person should likely *not* be perceived as problematic. Rather, even if such action might be problematic for some other character in the narrative, it is not so for Jesus.<sup>23</sup> What is more, the woman is healed of her fever.

The next major miracle, and the third full miracle account in Mark's Gospel, follows in 1:40–45 where Jesus cleanses the leper. Interestingly, this miracle follows a summary statement in 1:39 that reminds the reader of Jesus' preaching (see 1:14–15) and exorcisms (see 1:21–28

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<sup>20</sup> See Iersel, *Mark*, 136 and Neyrey, "Idea of Purity," 94–96.

<sup>21</sup> The place and function of the exorcism accounts in the narrative of the Gospel according to Mark will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 of this dissertation, but the general point to be made here is that the exorcisms involve purification.

<sup>22</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83–86 and Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69.

<sup>23</sup> Thus, for instance, if another character were to take this woman by the hand or, later in the narrative, were to touch Jairus' dead daughter, then the reader would have reason to be concerned that such a character risked becoming ritually unclean. Jesus, however, is not just any other character. He is the one who possesses the Holy Spirit, enacts the eschatological reign and rule of God, and demonstrates authority over impurity.

and 1:32–34). That Jesus touches this man is likely more problematic than his taking hold of the hand of Peter’s mother-in-law, because now there is a more explicit connection to impurity as defined by the Torah (Leviticus 13–14). Jesus’ willingness to touch this man thus further demonstrates Westerholm’s dictum that Jesus appears unconcerned about impurity.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus cleanses the leper by means of this touch. This further indicates Jesus’ role as one who brings purification to the unclean.

Again, this question must be considered: *In the narrative is Jesus depicted as one who has become contaminated through physical contact with the unclean?* Some interpreters assume that this is the case, and so to fulfill the Torah Jesus would need to wash himself following such contact.<sup>25</sup> Features in Mark’s narrative, however, suggest that this is not the case. First, Jesus is already characterized as one who received the Holy Spirit, who is even possessed by the Holy Spirit, and so who is the Holy One of God. Thus, it can be suggested that it is impossible for Jesus to become unclean. Bruce Chilton, for instance, argues that Jesus possesses a unique purity that both can encounter the greatest impurity without being affected while at the same time it destroys such impurity.<sup>26</sup> Wahlen argues that Jesus possesses a level of purity that is “immune from defilement.”<sup>27</sup> With such an understanding of Jesus’ unique purity, it is unlikely that he would need to wash after contact with the unclean.

Second, in each of the miracles the impurity is overcome through the cleansing of the leper, the healing/saving of the woman, and the restoration of life to the dead girl. In each case, what

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<sup>24</sup> Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60–61; Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 67–69; and Meier, *Law and Love*, 406.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Chilton, “Exorcism of History,” 234.

<sup>27</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 84–85. Note that while arguing this Wahlen yet still assumes that Jesus is not necessarily operating independently of the Torah.

was unclean is no longer unclean after physical contact with Jesus. Therefore, the question of whether or not Jesus is contaminated through physical contact with these three persons is simply no longer a problem.

Thus, the narrative at the start presents Jesus as one who possesses a unique purity that cannot be defiled and that instead brings purity to the unclean. *Yet is there more going on in the narrative than this? Do Jesus' words and actions also indicate that he has a unique authority with respect to the passages in the Torah that specifically regulate contact-contagion impurity?* To determine this it is necessary to examine the Old Testament texts that regulate such impurity and briefly consider how such texts may have been understood by many Jews in the first century.

## **The Literary and Historical Background**

### **The Old Testament**

In the literary background of the three miracles of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 are the Old Testament texts that contain the regulations regarding the impurity of skin disease (Leviticus 13–14), of bodily emissions (Leviticus 15), and of contact with corpses (Num 19:11–22 ). Marcus and Voelz also argue that Yahweh's instructions in Num 5:1–4 provide important background for how these three miracles function together in the overall narrative of Mark's Gospel.<sup>28</sup> Of particular interest for this dissertation is the question of whether these Old Testament texts create the expectation that the impurity associated with skin diseases, bodily emissions, or corpses is transferred to other people through physical contact. Such an understanding would then highlight the risk of contamination/defilement when Jesus comes into physical contact with these individuals. This underlying risk would then further emphasize Jesus' authority over

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<sup>28</sup> See again Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367–68 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377.

purity/impurity when he removes the impurity from these people without becoming contaminated himself. Such actions then might demonstrate that Jesus has a unique authority not only with respect to impurity, but also with respect to the Torah, when it appears that the regulations regarding purity/impurity do not apply to him.

Regarding the classifications of various terms in the Torah regarding purity, Gordon J. Wenham offers the following useful distinction: The unclean (the term is טָמֵא is used to refer to more general impurity, while the term נִדָּה refers to impurity related to menstruation and contact with corpses) is abnormal for its class; the people in this state must be expelled from the camp. The clean (טָהוֹר) is in a middle state and normal for its class; the people in this state remain in the camp. That which is holy (קֹדֶשׁ) is made so by God's sanctification and is fitted for divine use in the presence of God. Here, the ultimate antithesis is not so much between the clean and the unclean, but between the holy and the unclean: God's holiness in the midst of Israel's camp cannot abide what is unclean.<sup>29</sup> Thus, God demands that what is unclean be excluded from his presence at the Tabernacle and isolated from the community of the people of Israel.<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this investigation, it is especially important to note how this antithesis between unclean and holy found in the Torah is developed in the narrative of Mark's Gospel.

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<sup>29</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 18–75 and Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 109. See also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 12, where he states simply “impurity and holiness are antonyms.” Note that the antithesis between what is holy and what is unclean has already been noted above in the overview of the introduction of Mark's narrative. In the first exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28, the unclean spirit identifies Jesus as “the Holy One of God.” Thus, in this first miracle account the basic confrontation is between God's holiness, represented in the person of his Son, and impurity, represented by the unclean spirit.

<sup>30</sup> See Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 86–88, where he discusses Num 5:1–4 and emphasizes risks of the unclean approaching the holy God, thus necessitating their exclusion from the camp.

That certain people, animals, and things are classified as clean or unclean is based ultimately in the declaration of God that this is so. Each set of regulations is introduced by the formula “and Yahweh said to Moses” (see Lev 12:1 and 14:2) or “and Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron” (see Lev 11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1; and Num 19:11). These regulations are God’s word, and as such it is his word that establishes the boundaries between clean and unclean—and typically without any explanation as to the reasoning behind these distinctions.<sup>31</sup> For the sake of this investigation, it will not be so important why certain conditions are clean and unclean, but that the regulations governing these classifications come from Yahweh, and so Yahweh’s word makes it so.

### **Leviticus 13–15**

Horace Hummel identifies Leviticus 11–16 as a distinct literary unit within the book of Leviticus.<sup>32</sup> In this section one finds regulations regarding clean and unclean meats (Leviticus 11), purification after childbirth (Leviticus 12), impurity of skin diseases and mildew (Leviticus 13), purification of people and objects from sin disease and mildew (Leviticus 14), impurity related to bodily emissions and purification of people from this impurity (Leviticus 15), and

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<sup>31</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 11, where he makes the admission “the texts are silent concerning the motivation behind this priestly reform.” Here he addresses the problem that rarely does the text of Leviticus say why things are the way they are or why things should be done the way it is prescribed. Milgrom, assuming a post-exilic date for Leviticus, argues that one goal in Leviticus is likely to move people away from superstitious ideas about demonic forces at work in nature. He then tries to explain that the reason why certain bodily afflictions are considered unclean is because of their association with death, e.g., “scale disease” resembles the appearance of a dead body (12). Yet he admits that the text does not establish any of these reasons. While many commentators attempt to explain why Leviticus identifies some things as clean or unclean, this is actually never explained in the text. See also Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 150, where, before summarizing five different explanations for the distinction between clean and unclean in Leviticus 11–15, admits that this distinction exists primarily because of God’s word. Tidball admits that no explanation for this distinction between clean and unclean is offered in Leviticus.

<sup>32</sup> Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 82–83.



instructions regarding the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).<sup>33</sup> The theme of this unit, according to Hummel, is purity and atonement.<sup>34</sup> Identifying purity and atonement as the dual theme is arguable, since throughout this section the act of atonement/making expiation often accompanies the act of purification. For instance, at the conclusion of the regulations for the purification of a woman after childbirth, in Lev 12:8b it reads “and the priest will make atonement/expiation (כִּפֹּר) *for her*, and she will be clean (וְטִהַרְתָּ).”<sup>35</sup>

The operative verb in Leviticus 12–15 for dealing with the problem of impurity is טָהַר, which means “to be clean” in the qal (see, for example, Lev 12:8) and “to cleanse/make clean” or “to declare clean” in the piel (see, for example, Lev 14:7). The operative verb in Leviticus 16 for dealing with the problem of individual and national sin is the piel of כִּפֹּר, which means “to atone/expiate.” Yet these two actions are brought together in Lev 12:8 (purification and atonement after childbirth), 14:18–20 and 14:31 (purification and atonement after healing from skin disease), 14:53 (purification and atonement for houses/objects), 15:15 (purification and atonement of men after a bodily emission), and 15:28–31 (purification and atonement for women after menstruation or an abnormally long flow of blood). Thus, Hummel argues that the Day of Atonement also entails the *purification* of Israel from sin as well as the expiation of sin, and he interprets כִּפֹּר to have the sense of both “cleanse” and “expiate.”<sup>36</sup> According to Hummel, there are then three “purifications” that take place on the Day of Atonement as outlined in Leviticus

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<sup>33</sup> Note that there is nothing in this section of Leviticus about corpse-impurity. The regulations regarding this class of impurity comes is found in Numbers 19.

<sup>34</sup> Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 82–83.

<sup>35</sup> Note the emphasis on the words *for her* is based in word order in the Hebrew. In the LXX the Hebrew perfect waw-consecutive וְטִהַרְתָּ is translated as the future passive of καθαρίζω. Throughout these passages the Greek verb καθαρίζω is used in place of the Hebrew verb טָהַר.

<sup>36</sup> Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 83.

16—the sacrifice of the ram for the purification/atonement of the sins of the high priest and his family, the sacrifice of the Yahweh-goat for the purification/atonement of the sins of the people of Israel, and the removal of the people’s sin from the camp through the Azazel-goat (“scapegoat”).<sup>37</sup> In this section of Leviticus, then, the regulations regarding the impurity of foods, human bodies, and objects culminate in the regulations for the Day of Atonement where once every year the sins of the people of Israel will be expiated/purified.

John W. Kleinig, however, sees Leviticus 11–15 as the literary subunit within Leviticus. He refers to this section as the “Manual for Purity.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, rather than read Leviticus 16 (the regulations for the Day of Atonement) with what follows in Leviticus 17, Kleinig sees Leviticus 16 as its own independent literary subunit that stands apart from the rest of Leviticus.<sup>39</sup> Mary Douglas more narrowly argues that Leviticus 12–15 is a literary subunit within Leviticus.<sup>40</sup> She notes the chiasmic structure of these chapters where Leviticus 12 discusses female impurity related to childbirth and Leviticus 15 concludes with discussion of female impurity related to menstruation. These two groups of regulations thus frame the regulations regarding skin disease in Leviticus 13–14.<sup>41</sup> As does Hummel, Jacob Milgrom argues that Leviticus 11–16 is a literary

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<sup>37</sup> Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 240. See also Thomas Hieke, *Leviticus 1–15*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 60.

<sup>39</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 305.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176–78. Douglas argues that the reason childbirth, leprosy, and male and female emissions are considered unclean is because of their relationship to sexuality, fertility, and childbirth. The loss of bodily fluids, for instance, is antithetical to goal of reproduction. So even leprosy shares in this uncleanness related to sexuality because of the unclean person’s inability to reproduce while in the unclean state. Douglas, 178–82. But note again that this is nowhere explained in the text.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas, *Leviticus*, 177. See also Tidball, *Leviticus*, 158–70, who follows the outline advocated by Douglas, but then interprets together Leviticus 12 and Leviticus 15—the two ends of the chiasm—as a thematic unit before he then interprets Leviticus 13–14. Tidball, 171–86.

subunit within Leviticus and that its primary theme is impurity.<sup>42</sup> Yet he also concurs with Douglas that Leviticus 12–15 is a literary subunit within this larger section that regulates impurity of human bodies. He argues that the logical flow from Leviticus 12 through Leviticus 15 is based on the duration of the uncleanness (for instance, the uncleanness related to childbirth is of a longer duration than that related to bodily emissions) and the complexity of the purification process for each situation.<sup>43</sup>

That Leviticus 12–15 (or even Leviticus 11–15) can be read as a subunit, even within the context of Leviticus 11–16, can be argued from the general warning in Lev 15:31 that comes toward the conclusion of the regulations about impurity resulting from bodily emissions: “And you [plural, referring to Moses and Aaron from 15:1] will separate the sons/children of Israel from their uncleanness [מִטְמְאֹתָם] in order that they will not die by defiling/making unclean [the piel of טָמֵא] my tabernacle which is in their midst.” This warning can be understood to speak not only to impurity from bodily emissions, which is the subject of Leviticus 15, but also to any of the bodily impurities discussed in Leviticus 12–15.<sup>44</sup> This warning indicates the seriousness of these regulations regarding impurity: Those who are unclean because of childbirth, skin disease, or bodily emissions can defile the tabernacle, yet there is also the indication that those who come into contact with the unclean (see, for instance, 15:7) also become unclean, and so also risk defiling the tabernacle. Thus, Moses and Aaron are instructed to separate the people of Israel from their uncleanness by keeping the unclean out of contact with those who are clean.<sup>45</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 101–73.

<sup>43</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 140.

<sup>44</sup> See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 316, where he argues that מִטְמְאֹתָם (from their uncleanness) refers to all of the impurities presented in Lev 11–15.

<sup>45</sup> See Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 98, who

phrase “their uncleanness” appears to include the people who are unclean; these are the ones who throughout Leviticus 12–15 are to be separated from the rest of the people.<sup>46</sup> The threat for failing to do this is death for the people of Israel who might defile Yahweh’s tabernacle that is in their midst.<sup>47</sup>

Of particular interest for this dissertation is the question of whether Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy/skin disease) and Leviticus 15 (bodily discharges) present these types of impurity as “contagious” through physical contact, what was to be done to prevent such physical contact, and what was done to resolve and remove such impurity.<sup>48</sup> In this investigation, the texts will be read in light of the general warning from Lev 15:31. There does appear to be a general concern in Yahweh’s instruction for keeping the people and things that are unclean separate from the people and objects that are clean. The general risk of “contamination” from physical contact with the unclean can be argued as one factor for maintaining this separation.<sup>49</sup> For example, this risk of contamination is illustrated by the instructions in Lev 15:7 where it says explicitly that anyone who touches a man who is unclean from a bodily emission becomes unclean.

Leviticus 13:1–46 contains the regulations regarding the impurity of human bodies as the result of *צִרְעָת*, and Lev 14:1–32 contains the regulations for the purification/cleansing for people who are unclean from *צִרְעָת*.<sup>50</sup> It is generally known today that *צִרְעָת* does not refer

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refers to Lev 15:31 as “a major statement of policy.”

<sup>46</sup> See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 316.

<sup>47</sup> See Wenham, *Numbers*, 87, where he refers to the legislation of Leviticus 13–15 in his interpretation of Num 5:1–4.

<sup>48</sup> The problem of impurity after childbirth does not arise in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>49</sup> See Tidball, *Leviticus* 159; Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 319; and Wenham, *Numbers*, 86–88, where these authors argue that the impurity regulated in Leviticus 12–15 is contagious and can spread to other people and objects through physical contact.

<sup>50</sup> The remainder of these two chapters give the regulations for things (houses, clothing, etc.) that are affected

exclusively to “leprosy” (Hanson’s disease), but to any possible skin disease.<sup>51</sup> Note again that the text does not explain specifically why צָרַעַת causes one to be unclean; it only asserts that this is the case. According to Lev 13:1, Yahweh speaks these regulations to Moses and Aaron. That these regulations come from Yahweh show the seriousness of these instructions for the people of Israel.<sup>52</sup>

If one follows the paragraph division in the Masoretic text, there is this general outline of Lev 13:1–46:

1. Leviticus 13:1–8 gives the regulations regarding צָרַעַת (“leprosy”) on people that results from swelling/rising in the skin (שָׁאֵת), scabs/rashes (סַפְּחַת), or bright/discolored skin (בְּהָרַת).
2. Leviticus 13:9–17 regulates the procedure for “leprosy” associated with white hair (שֵׁער לָבָן) and raw flesh (מִחַצֵּת בָּשָׂר).<sup>53</sup>
3. Leviticus 13:18–23 regulates the procedure for dealing with boils (שֹׁחַעַן).
4. Leviticus 13:24–28 regulates the procedure for dealing with burns (מִכּוּה).
5. Leviticus 13:29–37 regulates the procedure for dealing with marks (נִגַּע) on the head or

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by צָרַעַת (Lev 13:47–59) and their purification (Lev 14:33–57).

<sup>51</sup> See E. V. Hulse, “The Nature of Biblical ‘Leprosy’ and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible,” *PEQ* 107: 87–105. While Milgrom chooses the term “scale disease” to translate צָרַעַת (see Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 127), Kleinig opts for the more general term “skin disease” (see Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 274). See also Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 176–77, who argues that צָרַעַת/λέπρα cannot refer to Hansen’s disease because it can also afflict garments (Lev 13:47–59). Voelz notes also that the Mishnah makes a connection between “leprosy” and divine punishment (based on the account of Miriam’s leprosy in Num 12:10 and Uzziah’s leprosy in 2 Kings 15:5), but he argues further that such a connection between leprosy and punishment is not held by Jesus or Mark. Voelz, 107.

<sup>52</sup> See again Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 11 and Tidball, *Leviticus*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 282–83. Kleinig classifies the first section (Lev 13:1–3) as instructions for “suspected skin disease.” He then classifies the second section (Lev 13:9–17) as instructions where it is certain that the person has a skin disease. This distinction, however, is not entirely obvious in the text itself.

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6. Leviticus 13:38–39 regulates the procedure for dealing with “white spots”

(בִּהָרֹת לְבָנֹת) on the skin.

7. Leviticus 13:40–44 regulates the procedure for dealing with white-red marks (נִגְעֵ) on bald spots after hair loss.

This overview indicates that the general term צִרְעָת can cover a number of possible aberrations of the skin (עוֹר). Lev 13:45–46 then contains the final instructions for the exclusion of a person who is determined to be unclean (טִמָּא) because of צִרְעָת.<sup>54</sup>

In each section it is the priest who is to examine these various skin conditions and make/declare/pronounce the person clean (the piel of טָהַר) or unclean (the piel of טִמָּא).<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Lev 13:3, 7, and 8. In the first section of regulations (Lev 13:1–8), at the initial inspection the priest either declares the individual with the skin aberration “unclean” or he shuts him away for seven days. If a person is shut away, the priest is to examine him again on the seventh day, and if the skin aberration has not changed, the priest is to shut him away for another seven days. If the skin condition has still not changed at the end of this second set of seven days,

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<sup>54</sup> See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 282–285, where he provides a chart of this process and the various skin conditions that are mentioned in the regulations.

<sup>55</sup> The piel of טָהַר means “to cleanse/make clean,” but, when as it used throughout Leviticus 13–14, most English translations read “pronounce clean.” Likewise the piel of טִמָּא means “to defile/make unclean,” but, when as it used throughout Leviticus 13–14, most English translations read “pronounce unclean.” See Tidball, *Leviticus*, 172, where he translates the piel of טִמָּא in Lev 13:3 as “pronounce unclean.” See, however, Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 271, where he translates this same verb as “declare unclean” and the piel of טָהַר in Lev 13:6 as “declare clean.” Kleinig argues that the priest’s statement is “a declaratory formula,” and as such it certifies that the person is either clean or unclean. Kleinig, 275. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 129, where he uses “pronounce pure” for the piel of טָהַר in Lev 13:3, yet later he uses “declare pure” in Lev 14:36, and here he argues that it is the priest’s word that makes persons or objects clean. Milgrom, 139. This discussion is important because either it is the priest’s word/speaking that *makes* the person/object clean or unclean or the priest’s word is only recognizing the change of state after the fact. The declaratory language used by Kleinig and Milgrom appears to capture the causative sense of the piel forms of these verbs. Thus this dissertation will prefer this declaratory translation.

then the man is to wash himself, and the priest is to declare him “clean.”

It appears, then, as if the instructions given in the various sections of Lev 13:9–23 operate with the assumption that the rules in 13:1–8 are still applicable (for instance, see 13:11); these various other skin conditions appear to be other examples of skin aberrations that could become **צָרַעַת**. A person with a burn who is not found to be unclean is to be shut away for only one seven day period (13:26). A person with a mark on the head or chin, however, must undergo an examination similar to that established in 13:1–8.

It is the following skin aberrations that result in being declared unclean (**טָמֵא**) by the priest: a mark that is white and deeper than the skin of the flesh (13:3, 20, 25), a mark with white hair and raw flesh (13:10), raw flesh (13:14–15), a mark that has spread on the skin or has worsened after the person has been shut away (13:27), and reddish-white marks on bald spots (13:43–44).

The final instructions regarding those who, in the end, are declared unclean are found in Lev 13:45–46. These people are to wear torn clothes, uncover their heads, cover their lips (or moustache), and cry out, “Unclean, unclean” (**טָמֵא טָמֵא**). They must be alone/isolated and live outside of the camp. Several interpreters note the similarity of this dress, demeanor, and activity to those who mourn the dead and argue that there is a connection between having such a skin disease and death.<sup>56</sup> The final result of being unclean due to such an aberrant skin condition is exclusion from the community and (in light of Lev 15:31) exclusion from the Tabernacle and the presence of Yahweh.

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<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 12, 101, and 128–29. See also Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 281; Tidball, *Leviticus*, 174–75; and David L. Stubbs, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 156–57.

*What is the reason for those who are unclean from skin disease to be alone and separated from the community and to live outside of the camp? And what is the reason for those with skin aberrations who have not yet been declared clean to be shut away for periods of seven or fourteen days?* The text does not explicitly say why this is to be the case. Part of the explanation, however, could be that this is to prevent such unclean people from coming into contact with those who are clean in order to prevent the spread of such ritual impurity to others.<sup>57</sup>

Leviticus 14:1–32 contains the regulations for the purification and atonement of those who are unclean because of *צָרַעַת*/skin disease. According to 14:2, this process begins when the unclean person is brought to the priest. The verb that describes this initial act is the hophal perfect waw-consecutive *וְהוּבָא* (and he will be brought). The unclean person is the subject of this passive verb, but the agent of the verb is not explicitly expressed. Nevertheless, it appears as if the unclean person is acted upon by some other agent who brings him to the priest.<sup>58</sup> In 14:3, the priest then goes outside of the camp and examines the unclean person. If the unclean person has been healed of the skin disease, then the priest initiates the process through which the unclean person becomes clean/is declared clean and is brought back into the community.

The process that follows is complex: According to Lev 4:4–7, a ritual takes place outside of

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<sup>57</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 286–87. Kleinig argues that one reason for the exclusion of these people was that skin disease transmitted impurity by direct and indirect contact. Though this is not explicitly stated in Leviticus 13, Kleinig makes this assumption based on the wider context of Leviticus 11–15 and, in particular, the directive in Lev 15:31. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 128–29 and 131, where he argues that the exclusion of people with scale disease was meant to prevent, not physical, but ritual contamination and so ultimately to prevent a person who has unknowingly become unclean through contact with a person with scale disease from bringing this impurity into contact with the holiness of the Tabernacle. See also Wenham, *Numbers*, 87, where he applies the instructions from Leviticus 13–15 to the instructions in Num 5:1–4.

<sup>58</sup> See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 192, where he translates *וְהוּבָא* as “when it is reported.” He notes the difficulty that would be involved in having some other party bring this unclean person who is outside of the camp to the priest, so surmises that instead that the priest is informed of the healing and then goes outside of the camp to meet the person. See, however, Tidball, *Leviticus*, 172, where he assumes that the agent of this verb would likely be a friend of the unclean person who brings them to the priest.



the camp involving two birds in which one is sacrificed and the other released. After this the healed person is sprinkled seven times with water which contains the blood of the dead bird and is declared/pronounced clean by a priest. According to Lev 14:8–9, the healed person then washes his clothes, shaves, bathes, and reenters the camp. Yet he is not allowed to reenter his own tent for seven more days. At the end of this period, he is once again to wash his clothes, shave his whole body, and bathe, and, it says again, “he will be clean.” Then, according to Lev 14:10–31, on the eighth day the healed person is to be presented before Yahweh at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting with one lamb for a guilt offering, one lamb for a sin offering, and one lamb for a whole burnt offering along with flour and oil. The healed person is to be anointed on his right ear lobe, his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot with blood from the guilt offering and oil. The remainder of the oil is then to be poured over his head to make atonement for him (Lev 14:18). Then follows the sacrifice of the sin and burnt offerings, each again to make atonement for this person (Lev 14:19–20).<sup>59</sup> The end result is that he “will be clean” (וְטָהַר).

An important point in Leviticus 13–14 is the role of the priest in this process: Throughout the process, it is the priest who determines if a person with a skin disease is clean or unclean. The priest is the subject of the piel form of the verb טָהַר that is used nine times in the perfect waw-consecutive in Leviticus 13–14. Five of these uses occur with the masculine singular pronominal suffix (וְטָהַרְתָּ), where the suffix refers to the person with the skin disease. This can be translated as “and he will cleanse him” or “and he will make him clean,” but most English

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<sup>59</sup> See Tidball, *Leviticus*, 182–84, where he discusses the general connection between impurity and the fallen state of creation. Thus, even if a person’s impurity is not the result of individual sin, there is still a connection between impurity and sin because impurity is one effect of the fall. Because of this connection with sin, atonement—with sin, guilt, and whole burnt offerings—is a part of the purification process. See, however, Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 138, where he argues that these sacrifices are offered to expiate actual sins the unclean person knowingly or unknowingly has committed and that “all possible inadvertent misdemeanors have been covered.”

translations render this as a pronouncement—“and he will pronounce him clean.”<sup>60</sup> If the former reading is to be understood (“and he will make him clean”), then the priest offers a declarative statement that makes the person “clean.”<sup>61</sup> For the person whose skin disease is healed, an important turning point in the purification process occurs in Lev 14:7: The priest makes him/declares him clean. After this public declaration, the person can reenter the camp, and he is no longer considered contagious.<sup>62</sup> This statement, then, is likely an example of a performative speech act where the priest’s declaration (particularly in 14:7) is what allows the person to rejoin the community.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, it is not really the healing that renders the person clean, but rather it is the prescribed ritual process conducted in this way and the priest’s formal declaration (a performative speech act) that makes the person clean.

In Leviticus 15, there are the regulations regarding those who are unclean because of bodily emissions. Leviticus 15:1–18 concerns the impurity of men and 15:19–30 concerns the impurity of women. Since the intercalation of Mark 5:21–43 involves Jesus coming into contact with a woman with a flow of blood, this dissertation is concerned with the regulations of Lev 15:19–28 that regulate impurity resulting from female bodily emissions. Leviticus 15:19–24 regulates the impurity related to a woman’s monthly period or “flow of blood” (זָכוּת דָּם). This form of impurity is labelled נִדָּה, which is the same impurity associated with coming into contact

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<sup>60</sup> See footnote 56.

<sup>61</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 139, where he discusses the priest’s speaking as a declaratory act.

<sup>62</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 136–37.

<sup>63</sup> See Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 289–92 where he discusses performative speech act, which is speech which accomplishes something in the very act of doing them. For a speech act to be valid and effective, there are three factors which must be obtained: (1) they must be spoken by the proper person (here the priest); (2) they must be in the proper form with the proper meaning (here the simple pronouncement of “clean”); and (3) they must be spoken within the proper setting (here first outside of the camp and then later at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting).

with a corpse (see Num 19:13). This impurity lasts for seven days. According to the regulations, whatever or whomever a menstruating woman touches is made unclean through such physical contact. The person who touches her (15:19) or who touches anything she lies or sits upon (15:21–23) must wash his clothes, bathe, and be unclean until evening. The man who has sexual intercourse with her will be unclean for seven days, and anything he lies upon in this time will become unclean (15:24).

Leviticus 15:25–30 gives the regulations for a woman whose flow of blood (זֵּוֹב דָּמָה) is either not the result of her period or that lasts longer than her period.<sup>64</sup> This form of impurity is also labelled נִדָּה. This impurity will last for as long as the flow of blood continues (15:26). Anything upon which this woman lies or sits will become unclean; anyone who touches these things will become unclean. The person so defiled must wash his clothes, bathe, and then be unclean until evening. This condition is distinct from the regular monthly period in that, if the unusual blood flow should end, there is a purification and atonement ritual that must be observed.<sup>65</sup> The woman will count off seven days, and on the eighth day she will bring two doves or pigeons to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the priest will sacrifice one bird as a sin offering and the other as a whole burnt offering, and so make atonement before Yahweh for “her impure discharge” (זֵּוֹב טִמְאָתָהּ).

It may be noted that nowhere in the Masoretic text of this section do the regulations state explicitly, as they do for the menstruating woman, that whoever touches this woman or

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<sup>64</sup> Tidball, *Leviticus*, 166.

<sup>65</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 141 and 156. He argues that Israel was unique among the other nations/cultures in that a normal menstruant was allowed to remain at home and participate in her life their during the time of her period, and so the regulations for an abnormal flow of blood—a more severe condition—only became applicable with it lasted longer than seven days. See also Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 309.

whomever she touches will become unclean. Yet, since this form of impurity appears to be more severe than that which is associated with the regular monthly period (which does not require sin and whole burnt offerings at its conclusion), then the fact that such impurity can be spread by physical contact may be implied.<sup>66</sup> Nor does it say anywhere in Lev 15:19–30 that an unclean woman must be kept isolated from other people, but, in light of Lev 15:31 (discussed above), this might also be assumed even without explicit mention of this in the regulations of Lev 15:25–30.<sup>67</sup>

There is one other matter of importance for this discussion: There is a variant reading in Lev 15:27a that is attested in a few Hebrew manuscripts and which is also followed in the LXX. In place of the prepositional phrase **בָּהֶן**, the preposition with a masculine plural pronominal suffix, some Hebrew manuscripts read **בָּהָא**, the preposition with a feminine singular pronominal suffix. So in 15:27a, instead of reading “and all who touch them [referring to objects defiled by the woman] will become unclean” it reads “and all who touch her [referring to the unclean woman] will become unclean.” The LXX reads **πᾶς ὁ ἀπτόμενος αὐτῆς ἀκάθαρτος ἔσται** (“all who touch her will be unclean”). If one chooses to read this variant, then here is an explicit statement that threatens contagion for anyone who touches a woman with an abnormal flow of blood.

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<sup>66</sup> See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 323, where he argues that anyone touched by a woman in this state would be rendered unclean (and he uses as an example Jesus and the woman with the flow of blood). See also Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakah*, 142, where he argues that the regulations of Lev 15:25–30 are an “abbreviated” version of the earlier regulations in 15:19–24. Thus, he argues that it should be assumed that whoever touches a woman in this condition becomes unclean. See also, however, Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 141, where he argues that a menstruant does not render other people unclean through her touch.

<sup>67</sup> See again Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 316.

## Numbers 19:11–22

The regulations regarding the impurity (נִדָּה) that comes from touching a corpse follow after the instructions in Num 19:1–10 which detail the red heifer ceremony that is used to produce ashes that will be used for the water of impurity (מֵי נִדָּה), that is, waters which will be used for purification rituals. The logical connection is that this is the water that will be used to cleanse anyone who becomes unclean (נִדָּה) by touching a dead body.<sup>68</sup> The regulations that follow in Num 19:11–22 regulate the impurity that results from touching a dead body (19:11–13), from someone dying in a tent (19:14–15), and from touching a dead body in an open field, a bone, or a grave (19:16). Num 19:17–21 then contains the instructions for the use of the ashes from the red heifer ceremony to cleanse people who are unclean with respect to such touching a corpse, a bone, or a grave.

Of particular interest here are the first set of regulations in Num 19:11–13 that generally govern the impurity that results from touching a dead body as these would apply to the incident of the raising of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:21–43. The person who touches a dead body will be unclean for seven days. On the third and seventh days he is to cleanse himself (the hithpa'el of הִתְטָא "with/in it" (בוֹ). The referent of "it" (the pronominal suffix on בּוֹ) is the water of impurity/מֵי נִדָּה of Num 19:9.<sup>69</sup> If he does not purify himself in this manner, then he will not become clean. Such a person who fails to cleanse himself defiles Yahweh's Tabernacle and must be cut off from the Israel. These regulations conclude with the statement "because the water of

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<sup>68</sup> See Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 368, where he entitles Num 19:11–22 "Using the Waters of Impurity." See also Wenham, *Numbers*, 162–65; R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 257 and Stubbs, *Numbers*, 156.

<sup>69</sup> Wenham, *Numbers*, 162–63.

impurity was not thrown on him, he is unclean; his uncleanness is still on him” (19:13b). The importance of this regulation and the severity of failing to keep it is demonstrated by its punishment: The person who fails to cleanse himself in this way is cut off from the people of Israel.<sup>70</sup>

#### **Numbers 5:1–4.**

Marcus and Voelz argue that this passage provides important background through which to interpret the three miracles of the cleansing of the leper, the saving/healing of the woman with the flow of blood, and the raising of Jairus’ daughter.<sup>71</sup> In this passage Yahweh tells Moses to command the people of Israel to expel from the camp—and *in this order*—anyone with a skin disease, anyone with a bodily emission, and anyone unclean with respect to a dead body. The reason for this command is so “they would not defile (the piel of נִדָּף) the camp in which I dwell in their midst.” Then in 5:4 it says that the people do as Yahweh instructed Moses. This passage reads more as a short narrative than as detailed regulations, and, in fact, the regulations for why this must happen are found in Leviticus 13, Leviticus 15, and Num 19:11–22.

This passage, then, is a brief narrative account that shows the full implications of the regulations concerning clean and unclean given in Leviticus 13–15 and Numbers 19: Persons experiencing these three classes of impurity are expelled from the camp lest they defile other Israelites and the Tabernacle of Yahweh.<sup>72</sup> One important feature of this passage is that it reveals

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<sup>70</sup> See Wenham, *Numbers*, 164 and Rolf P. Knierm and George W. Coats, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 223, who argue that this is a reference to the death penalty.

<sup>71</sup> See Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367–68 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377. See also Wenham, *Numbers*, 88, where he also briefly mentions the reversal that takes place in the New Testament when Jesus cleanses the leper, heals the woman with the discharge, and raises Jairus’ daughter.

<sup>72</sup> See Wenham, *Numbers*, 86–88 and Knierim, *Numbers*, 71. Note that Wenham briefly comments upon how Num 5:2 is reversed in the Synoptic Gospels when Jesus cleanses the leper, saves/heals the woman with the

the fate of anyone who is unclean because of bodily emissions or by touching a corpse. In Lev 13:45–46, it says that anyone with a skin disease is to live in exclusion from the community; in Leviticus 15 and Num 19:11–22, there are no specific instructions given about how people who are unclean because of bodily emissions or by touching a corpse should be excluded. The instructions in Num 5:1–4, however, are explicit: People experiencing bodily emissions or who have touched a corpse must also to be excluded from the camp.

Theoretically, all of these people can be declared clean and return to the camp if the regulations are followed. For men unclean due to bodily emissions, this could happen by the evening. For women who were menstruating, this could happen after seven days. For people unclean by touching a corpse, this could also happen after seven days, if the purification ritual involving the “water of impurity” is conducted on the third and seventh days. *However, for those who are unclean due to a skin disease that does not heal and for women whose flow of blood persists beyond the normal time, their exclusion continues indefinitely, until either the skin disease heals or the flow of blood stops.* What is more, these two classes of people would also need to undergo the regulated rituals and offer the accompanying sacrifices as part of their purification and atonement. In addition, anyone rendered unclean by touching a corpse and failing to be cleansed with the water of impurity would remain unclean and be cut off from Israel.

Thus, according to the regulations of Leviticus 13 and 15, the impurity of the leper in Mark 1:40–45 and of the woman in 5:25–34 is much more persistent and severe than any impurity that can be removed by washing oneself and waiting for a set period of time. When they appear in the

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discharge, and raises the dead girl to life. Wenham, 88.

narrative of Mark's Gospel, these two individuals are excluded both from the community and from God's presence, and this state will persist for an indefinite period of time, until whenever their impurity should be removed. What is more, the situation facing Jesus after he touches Jairus' daughter is also very severe: If he fails to cleanse himself as instructed in the Torah, he is to be cut off from Israel.

### Issues Concerning Contact-Contagion Impurity in the Second Temple Era

There are two questions concerning the beliefs and practices surrounding purity/impurity in the Second Temple Era that are of particular importance for this dissertation: A first question is what would have been understood if a person comes into physical contact with someone who is unclean. *Would such people be viewed as contaminated by this physical contact?* This discussion is important because, in the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43, Jesus touches or is touched by unclean persons. *In the narrative of Mark, is there a perceived risk that Jesus becomes unclean through such contact?* On this point there is a divided opinion, as demonstrated by the debate between Hyam Maccoby and Thomas Kazen.<sup>73</sup> Regarding all three of these miracles, Maccoby argues that, because the text of Mark's Gospel states nothing explicitly about Jesus being contaminated through such physical contact, it cannot be assumed that Jesus is rendered unclean.<sup>74</sup> Kazen, however, argues that contact-contagion impurity was of such great importance in the Second Temple Era that it should be assumed to be a concern, at least

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<sup>73</sup> See pages 21–22, where the disagreement between Maccoby and Kazen is discussed in more detail. Note also the general pattern presented in chapter one: Interpreters who emphasize the lack of explicit level one signifiers regarding purity in the accounts of these three miracles tend to say that the miracles are not about purity. Interpreters who argue that purity is a concern detect it in the events themselves (reading on level two). Note again also that there are explicit level one signifiers in the account of the cleansing of the leper (Mark 1:40–45) to indicate that purity is a concern in this particular miracle.

<sup>74</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 162.



implicitly, in all three miracle accounts.<sup>75</sup>

A second question is how purity would have been understood conceptually during the Second Temple era. On this point, there is divided opinion as demonstrated by the debate between E. P. Sanders and Jacob Neusner. Sanders argues that purity was understood primarily as a “moral category.” He argues that there was no moral violation simply by being or becoming unclean, *but that such a moral violation would arise whenever any individual failed to do what was commanded in Leviticus*.<sup>76</sup> As Sanders explains, “Wickedness comes not from impurity as such, but from the attitude that the commandments of the Bible need not be heeded.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, according to Sanders, morality should at least be considered as one category when considering the observance of the purity code in the Second Temple era, in particular if the purity commands were ignored or outright disobeyed.<sup>78</sup>

Neusner, on the other hand, argues first that there was no general agreement among the Jews of the Second Temple era on how to understand purity.<sup>79</sup> He admits that some groups within Judaism did understand purity as a “moral” category. This would include the Judaism of

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<sup>75</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 89–90.

<sup>76</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 183.

<sup>77</sup> Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 147.

<sup>78</sup> See also Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 111–15; 170–79, for a perspective on the relationship between purity and morality from the standpoint of the field of moral psychology. Haidt identifies purity (what he refers to more specifically as “sanctity/degradation”) as one of six “moral foundations” that are universal to humanity. Haidt further argues that this one moral foundation (“sanctity/degradation”) is assumed in every non-Western society as part of what defines “moral or immoral” while at the same time it is typically viewed as less important in the West. As the Western view that purity is not a moral category is actually the anomaly, Haidt refers to Western morality as “WEIRD morality.” The Western morality is “weird,” according to Haidt, because violations of purity regulations are generally viewed as *moral* violations in every society on earth *except for the liberal-progressive societies of Western Europe and America*.

<sup>79</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: A Systematic Reply to E. P. Sanders* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 205–09. Neusner argues that in the Second Temple era there was not one, single Judaism, but rather various “Judaisms,” each with its own views on purity and other aspects of the Torah and tradition.

Qumran and, Neusner claims, it was also implied in the “eschatological immersions” of John the Baptist.<sup>80</sup> The mainstream rabbinic tradition that was eventually expressed in the Mishnah, however, understood purity in strictly “ontological” terms.<sup>81</sup> In this view, a person can occupy one of three “ontological categories”—holy, clean, or unclean. The true opposites in this system are “holy” and “unclean,” and so the unclean person is “unholy,” but not “sinful.”<sup>82</sup> There are then certain things that an unclean person could *not* do because of his unclean state—such as approach the Temple.<sup>83</sup> Yet, the unclean person was not regarded as a sinner. What is more, his state could change over time, and so he might become clean or even holy.<sup>84</sup> Neusner’s chief argument against Sanders, however, is that “unclean” does not equal “sinful,” while Sanders sees a connection between impurity and sin, in particular if someone willfully violates any of the commands of God, even those about purity.

This debate has bearing on two questions when reading Mark’s Gospel: First, when cleansing takes place in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, is it be understood as a moral cleansing from the impurity of sin (Sanders and Neusner on John the Baptist), an ontological cleansing from ritual impurity (Neusner on the mainstream rabbinic tradition), or a combination of both activities? Second, how is Jesus regarded by other Jews after coming into

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<sup>80</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 210. Neusner argues here also that the baptism of John the Baptist “thoroughly conforms to Sander’s [moral] view” about purity.

<sup>81</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 211–14.

<sup>82</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 207, 211. It is important to note that in his discussion of impurity, Neusner does *not* comment at all upon the regulations in Leviticus 14 and 15 that, as part of the purification process, required sacrifices of atonement for people who were healed from skin disease or women who were healed from an abnormal flow of blood. That atonement was a necessary part of the purification procedure appears to indicate that the regulations themselves make some connection between sin and impurity, even if in only a general sense. See footnote 60 for further discussion of this matter.

<sup>83</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 211–12.

<sup>84</sup> Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 211.

physical contact with unclean persons, in particular if he does not wash himself afterward? How is he viewed if indeed he behaves just as Westerholm characterizes him in Mark's Gospel—as one who is "*unclean and unconcerned*"? Is this viewed as a moral violation (Sanders) or mere nonobservance involving "ontological impurity" (Neusner)?

### Conclusion

In the examination of the passages from Leviticus and Numbers, several passages can be identified as touchstones for interpreting the purity regulations together. First, Lev 15:31 is a general command that Moses and Aaron "keep Israel from their uncleanness" with the threat of death for defiling Yahweh's Tabernacle. According to Kleinig, the referent of "their uncleanness" is likely all of the impurity discussed in Leviticus 11–15, and not just impurity resulting from bodily discharges that are discussed in Leviticus 15.<sup>85</sup> The threat given for failure to follow these regulations is that the people of Israel would die in their uncleanness. This "separation" which Yahweh commands appears to be the removal of unclean persons from the presence of Yahweh and from the people who are clean.

Second, Lev 13:45–46 calls for the explicit isolation of those who are unclean because of skin disease; moreover, it calls for them to dress and behave in a unique way, and one purpose for this could be to prevent other people from coming into physical contact with them.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, Num 5:1–4 gives a narrative example of the practical implications of the regulations contained in Leviticus 13–15 and Num 19:11–22: The people of Israel do, in fact, expel three categories of unclean people from the camp. This includes not only those with skin

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<sup>85</sup> See again Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 316. See also Levine, *Leviticus*, 98, who refers to Lev 15:31 as "a major statement of policy."

<sup>86</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakah*, 109–12, where he discusses how lepers were excluded from other (clean) people during the Second Temple era.

disease (as commanded in Lev 13:45–46), but also those with discharges or unclean from touching a dead body. Though the primary purpose for this appears to be that such uncleanness is an affront to the holiness of Yahweh, a secondary purpose could be to prevent the unclean from coming into physical contact with the clean (as commanded in Lev 15:31).

Thus, in light of the Old Testament literature, it appears that in Mark's narrative there is a perceived danger of Jesus becoming unclean by coming into physical contact with those who are viewed as unclean. This then raises the stakes in these physical encounters and would further emphasize the unique holiness of and authority possessed by Jesus when he overcomes not only physical ailments and death, but also the impurity represented by these conditions. In doing this Jesus also displays a unique authority with respect (at least) to the purity regulations of the Torah.

Regarding the debate between Maccoby and Kazen, this dissertation will read with Kazen that purity was a major concern during the Second Temple era and so should at least be understood as an implicit factor in each of the three miracle accounts. Such a conclusion is also congruent with the Old Testament literature. Thus, purity does not need to be mentioned explicitly by means of level on signifiers for the reader to understand that purity is a concern in these three miracles. Purity appears to be mentioned explicitly in the cleansing of the leper. It could nevertheless be understood implicitly in the saving/healing of the woman with the flow of blood and the raising of Jairus' daughter. In light of the regulations of Leviticus 13–15 and Numbers 19 *and how these passages were likely interpreted and practiced in the Second Temple era*, it is reasonable to assume that purity is a theme in all three of these miracle accounts and that there is at least a perceived danger of contamination when Jesus touches the leper, when he is touched by the woman, and then when he takes the hand of the dead girl.

Regarding the debate between Sanders and Neusner, this dissertation will read with Sanders that in Mark's Gospel purity is primarily a moral category. Such a conclusion is justified based upon Old Testament passages such as Num 19:13 that threaten to cut off from Israel anyone who will not undergo the purification ritual with the water of impurity—and so disobeys the commands of God. All of these regulations are presented as the word of Yahweh to Moses or to Moses and Aaron. To violate such instruction would be a sin, and, according to Leviticus 15:31, the penalty for such sin is death. What is more, throughout Leviticus 12–15 there is the instruction again and again that the priest make atonement, often by offering sin, guilt, and/or whole burnt offerings as part of the cleansing ritual. This then culminates in the instructions for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, during which the sins of Israel are expiated. This places these regulations into the category not only of ritual or ceremonial law, but of moral law as well. It may seem strange and unfair to some modern eyes that there is a moral problem when people suffer from skin disease or from a bodily discharge that renders them unclean, yet, Hummel says of Leviticus 11–16, “In all of this there is a poignant witness to utter, ‘total depravity.’”<sup>87</sup> The underlying problem is sin and the fallen condition of the world and those in it, including God's people Israel, whose sin needs to be atoned/expiated.

Sanders' approach appears to make better sense in Mark's narrative as well. Thus far in this analysis, John's baptism is presented as an eschatological cleansing of Israel for the uncleanness of their past sins—a moral category of purification;<sup>88</sup> Jesus then continues this purifying work in his own ministry.<sup>89</sup> The primary problem facing Israel is their sin, and the answer to this problem

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<sup>87</sup> Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 83.

<sup>88</sup> See Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 210, where he agrees with this evaluation of John's baptism.

<sup>89</sup> See again Moloney, *Mark*, 33–34 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 104–05 and 112–14 for discussion of reading the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus in light of Ezekiel 36.

comes in the eschatological baptism of John and then in the eschatological reign and rule of God as inaugurated by Jesus. Thus, the presentation of purity/impurity in Mark's Gospel appears to comport better with the moral understanding of impurity than the ontological understanding. It is not said if the leper or the woman with the flow of blood committed individual sins that resulted in their uncleanness (the narrative of Mark's Gospel does not speak to this), but that they are in these states is still the result of sin and a fallen creation.<sup>90</sup>

### **Mark 1:40–45**

#### **Establishing an Interpretative Matrix**

As an interpreter tries to arrive at the significance of the things, deeds, situations, etc. that are depicted in a text, he can establish an interpretative matrix to determine what items are to be interpreted together. He can matrix items in context, items with similar features, items depicted by identical vocables, and items that seem to have relatively independent importance.<sup>91</sup>

It must be established at the outset that the narrative of the cleansing of the leper will be read in an interpretative matrix with the two miracles depicted in Mark 5:21–43. This will be done, first, on the basis that these three miracle accounts have items with similar features: In each account Jesus encounters a person or situation where Levitical impurity is at stake. In each account he comes into physical contact with the individual who is unclean, thus raising the possibility that he himself has become unclean. Yet in each account he heals (or brings back to life) the individual and so removes the cause for impurity. Mark 1:40–45 could well be read with every miracle account in Mark's Gospel, and even more narrowly with every miracle account

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<sup>90</sup> See again Hummel, *Word Becoming Flesh*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> See again Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 158–61 where he discusses how to read level 2 signifiers.

where Jesus touches or is touched by the people he encounters. These three miracles, however, stand apart from the others because of the features outlined above.

A second reason to matrix these three miracle accounts is because Mark 1:40–45 and 5:25–34 share one important word, the verb ἅπτομαι (touch). Jesus touches the leper 1:41 and the woman touches Jesus' garment (5:27) with the result that Jesus asks repeatedly “Who touched my garment?” (5:30). Again, in light of the Old Testament background, the act of touching here has great significance in both miracle accounts.

A third reason to read these three miracles together is that Num 5:1–4 establishes a literary basis and background for such a reading. Again, in Numbers 5 Yahweh commands that three groups of unclean individuals be removed from the camp, and they are presented in this order—anyone with skin disease, anyone with a discharge, and anyone unclean with respect to a dead body. These three miracles then take place in this same order in Mark's narrative—the cleansing of the leper, the saving/healing of the woman with the flow of blood, and the raising of the dead girl. It is as if Mark depicts these three miracles as a reversal of Num 5:1–4.

When considering this miracle in its immediate context, there is an interesting problem that arises that might affect how this miracle is read. Commentators disagree on whether this passage concludes a section of the narrative that precedes it (Mark 1:16–39), or whether it begins a section that follows it, the opposition narratives (Mark 2:1–3:35). In the outline that he establishes for Mark's Gospel, for instance, Richard C. H. Lenski views Mark 1:39 as a summary passage that concludes what he sees as the first section of this Gospel (Mark 1:1–39).<sup>92</sup> According to this outline, the cleansing of the leper is the first narrative in a section that

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<sup>92</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 18.

continues through the summary passage of Mark 3:7–12. Wahlen argues that the cleansing of the leper is the first miracle in what he calls the second “miracle cluster” in Mark’s Gospel. The first “miracle cluster” is found in Mark 1:21–39 and begins with the exorcism in the synagogue. The second such “cluster” is found in Mark 1:40–3:6 and begins with the cleansing of the leper.<sup>93</sup> R. T. France concurs with this reading, arguing that the cleansing of the leper initiates a narrative cycle that continues through 3:6. He entitles this section “Controversial Aspects of Jesus’ Ministry.”<sup>94</sup> If the reader adopts the outline suggested by Lenski, Wahlen, and France, he reads this miracle with the “opposition narratives” that follow, and then perhaps tries to understand how the story of the cleansing of the leper makes sense in light of those other narratives.<sup>95</sup>

One problem with this approach, however, is that Mark 1:40–45 lacks one key feature that is found in the narratives contained in 2:1–3:6 (and then later in 3:20–35). In each of the narratives in this section of Mark’s Gospel Jesus’ authority is questioned, challenged, and opposed, but such opposition to Jesus’ authority is noticeably lacking in 1:40–45. In fact, the other major character in this narrative besides Jesus—the leper himself—demonstrates strong faith in Jesus and does not question Jesus’ authority or actions. This might then suggest that the cleansing of the leper should be read primarily with what comes before in 1:1–39.

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<sup>93</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83. Wahlen argues that each “cluster” of miracles begins with a cleansing miracle. Three of these are the exorcism accounts of Mark 1:21–28 (the first cluster), 5:1–10 (the third cluster), and 7:24–30 (the fourth cluster). The second cluster, according to Wahlen, begins with the cleansing of the leper.

<sup>94</sup> France, *Mark*, 114–15. France argues that this section of Mark shows increasing awareness that not everyone welcomes Jesus. He admits that the cleansing of the leper less obviously fits into this section. But he argues for its inclusion here based on the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς which he interprets as confrontational so that this story anticipates the trouble to come. What is more, France argues that this particular miracle gave Jesus the notoriety that would result in people taking more notice of him and his activity. France, 120.

<sup>95</sup> France, *Mark*, 114 and 120. This is indeed what France attempts to do, make sense of reading Mark 1:40–45 as part of a literary unit that continues in 2:1, a literary unit that focuses upon controversies. See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 173 for an alternate view. Voelz reads the healing of the leper as part of the initial ministry of Jesus and as a subunit with Mark 1:35–38.



The case for such a reading can be demonstrated by focusing upon themes found in this earlier section of this Gospel: At his baptism Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and so is identified to the reader as the man whom John foretold would baptize in/with the Holy Spirit. Jesus proclaims the arrival of the reign of God and calls Israel to repentance and faith. Then, in a series of episodes, Jesus demonstrates his unique authority, and this authority is recognized by others. Jesus calls four disciples, and they follow him. Jesus teaches with authority at the synagogue in Capernaum and casts out an unclean spirit, and his authority is recognized by the witnesses there. Later, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. After the Sabbath they bring the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus, again showing that his authority is recognized by these people. Then, in the "summary passage" of 1:39, Jesus is depicted as doing more of what he has been doing thus far, *viz.*, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Again, one theme in this first section of the narrative of Jesus' ministry is that Jesus has a unique authority to teach, exorcise unclean spirits, and heal the sick, and that this authority has been recognized by many people. The story of the cleansing of the leper thus continues this basic theme. The leper recognizes Jesus' authority to cleanse him of leprosy, and Jesus responds by doing this.

Nevertheless, a new element of Jesus' authority is introduced: it is the authority to cleanse Levitical impurity, and this miracle is accomplished in a way that establishes that Jesus has a unique authority with respect to the Torah. Perhaps this story might anticipate trouble to come in that it concludes (perhaps ironically) with the leper *not* following Jesus' instructions in 1:44 with the result that Jesus' own movements are restricted according to 1:45.

If Mark 1:40–45 is the conclusion of this first section of the narrative of Jesus' ministry, then there is an interesting *inclusio* for this section: In the first miracle Jesus expels the unclean

spirit from a man; in the final miracle in this section, Jesus cleanses Levitical impurity from a man who, because of his condition, has lived on the margins of Israelite society. Jesus has authority over the impurity represented by the unclean spirits; Jesus has authority over Levitical impurity as well. The cleansing of the leper can be read as a fitting conclusion to this narrative of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in which Jesus demonstrates his unique authority and where this authority is recognized by others. Stories about the opposition to his ministry then begin in 2:1.

Yet, even if one insists that Mark 1:40–45 begins a new section of the narrative, it is still not far removed from Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit at this baptism in 1:9–11 and his subsequent initiation of the reign of God in 1:14–15. In fact, the only context for this miracle is what has come before in 1:1–39. In this passage there is a move from purification of general impurity represented in the baptism of John and Jesus' first exorcism to purification of impurity that is regulated by the Torah. As such, just as John's baptism and Jesus exorcisms can be read as programmatic for the ministry of Jesus that follows, the cleansing of the leper can be read as programmatic in relation to other miracles and other incidents which involve the problem of Levitical impurity.

### The Cleansing of the Leper

As noted above, the story of the cleansing of the leper now introduces a new and yet related theme: Jesus will also remove impurity as defined and regulated by the Torah.<sup>96</sup> When this new

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<sup>96</sup> That purity is a theme in this narrative is recognized by many interpreters. See, e.g., Lagrange, *Marc*, 29–30; Cranfield, *Mark*, 90; Taylor, *Mark*, 185–86; Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 45; Lane, *Mark*, 85; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelicum nach Markus*, 68–69; Swete, *Mark*, 29; Mann, *Mark*, 218–20; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 73; Stock, *Method and Message of Mark*, 87; Brooks, *Mark*, 54–55; Hooker, *Mark*, 78–82; Gundry, *Mark*, 95; Iersel, *Mark*, 143; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 208–09; Witherington, *Mark*, 103–04; Edwards, *Mark*, 68–69; France, *Mark*, 115–21; Moloney, *Mark*, 58; Collins, *Mark*, 179; Culpepper, *Mark*, 61; Stein, *Mark*, 105; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 173. See also Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 152–54 where he argues that Jesus' actions in this account represent an assault upon the purity code.

character is introduced as λεπρός (a leper), it may be assumed, in light of the Old Testament background, that this is someone who has צַרְעָרָה/skin disease as defined by Leviticus 13, making this an individual who is unclean according to the regulations of the Torah. The leper's approach to Jesus demonstrates faith on his part: He believes that Jesus can cleanse him (if Jesus is willing). What is more, the fact that he is looking to Jesus specifically for *cleansing* (rather than healing) is significant. *Does he recognize that Jesus has a unique authority to bring about such a cleansing?* This appears to be the case. Yet at the same time the leper's actions also violate the specific instructions given to such unclean individuals in Lev 13:45–46. Instead of staying alone and crying out, “Unclean, unclean,” this man comes to Jesus, thus violating the Torah. Yet his faith is demonstrated by the fact that he comes to Jesus and then by his posture (kneeling before Jesus if καὶ γονυπετῶν is to be read) and request, “If you are willing, you are able to cleanse (καθαρίσαι) me.” Again, the leper asks for Jesus to cleanse him (the verb is καθαρίζω) and not that Jesus heal (the verb is θεραπεύω) him. This indicates that the leper is not only concerned with the healing of a skin disease, but the removal of the impurity that he has based upon the regulations of Leviticus 13 (again, regulations which ironically he has broken by coming to Jesus in this way and not staying back).

Jesus response is not to condemn this man for violating Lev 13:45–46 but to be filled with compassion for this man.<sup>97</sup> Jesus then extends his hand and touches (the verb is ἅπτομαι) this

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<sup>97</sup> A variant for the participle σπλαγχνισθείς is ὀργισθείς as read in D and several old Latin versions. Voelz makes a convincing argument for the reading of σπλαγχνισθείς over the variant ὀργισθείς in 1:41 to make sense of Jesus' treatment of the leper in 1:43. With the variant reading, Jesus' behavior is now not so oddly inconsistent, for he was angry with this man in the first place. See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 178. Both France and Marcus read the variant and say that Jesus' anger was not at the man, but at the condition of this man's exclusion (France) or the power of death (Marcus). See France, *Mark*, 115 and 117–18 and Myer, *Mark 1–8*, 206. I might add one other possible explanation for Jesus' anger if one were to read the variant. Given the regulations of Lev 13:45–46, the leper has just sinned against the commands of Yahweh by coming to Jesus in this way. In doing this he is

unclean man. In light of Lev 15:31, Jesus' touching the leper may also be viewed as a violation of purity regulations, since Yahweh has commanded Israel to be separate from their uncleanness. Or it could be viewed as an act that makes Jesus unclean until evening. Thus, this is not an action one would have expected in light of the regulations of the Torah. What is more, Jesus declares to the leper "I am willing, be clean (the passive imperative καθαρίσθιτι)". In saying this Jesus is arguably treading into the realm of priestly authority, for, according to Leviticus 13–14 it was the role of the priest to declare people with skin diseases clean or unclean. What is more, Jesus is (at this point at least) ignoring the rituals prescribed in Leviticus 14 for the cleansing and restoration of someone unclean because of a skin disease. This could indicate that Jesus is acting as if he has some special authority with respect to the commandments of Leviticus 13–14, authority to circumvent them and cleanse unclean people apart from those regulations. The narrative offers Jesus' pronouncement καθαρίσθιτι as a true performative speech, for the result of Jesus speaking is that the man's טַרְטָר/skin disease is removed and he is cleansed (ἐκαθαρίσθη). This result indicates that Jesus does, in fact, have a special authority with respect to purity/impurity and so also with respect to the regulations of Leviticus 13–14: Jesus has authority to circumvent those regulations and cleanse unclean people apart from those regulations. This, in turn, indicates that Jesus has some unique authority with respect to the Torah itself (or at least to the purity regulations).

Jesus does, however, command the man both not to tell anyone about this and to present himself to the priest and offer what Moses commanded in keeping with the regulations of

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also perhaps unintentionally "forcing Jesus' hand" by causing him to act with authority with respect to the Torah, possibly before Jesus is ready to do this. Thus, Jesus is angry with this man for coming to him in this way—and so his treatment of the man in 1:43 makes sense of the situation. Nevertheless, even with such a reading of the participle, Jesus still touches and cleanses this man.

Leviticus 14. This is to be done as a witness to them (εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς). *Yet exactly to what is this action to be a witness?* Lenski argues that the witness is that Jesus is not only gracious, but also one who keeps and observes the Law of Moses.<sup>98</sup> France suggests that this witness might be confrontational in nature, a warning to the priestly establishment about the activities of Jesus before he eventually comes to Jerusalem.<sup>99</sup> Voelz suggests that this indicates both Jesus' willingness not yet to disregard the Mosaic Law completely, but also that it is a witness to the authorities that the new age has come.<sup>100</sup> Given the nature of Jesus' mission in Mark 1:14–15, it would seem that this witness would entail *more than* simply to convey that Jesus is keeping the Law, that part of this witness would also be to what he is doing now that the eschatological reign and rule of God is here. Whatever the purpose for this, however, the leper fails to carry out Jesus' command and instead proclaims what has happened. As a result, Jesus now finds himself unable (for a time) to enter a city, but he is instead outside in the desolate places (ἔξω ἐπ' ἐρήμοις τόποις). Thus, ironically, after cleansing this leper Jesus finds himself living outside the city in the open spaces that would have been the abode of lepers.

In spite of Jesus' instructions to the leper to obey the regulations of Leviticus 14 (for whatever reason he gave this command), Jesus in this episode nevertheless demonstrates a unique authority with respect to the regulations of Leviticus 13–14, and this especially in light of Lev 15:31: First, Jesus does not reprimand the leper for violating the regulations found in Lev 13:45–46, but instead receives and delivers him. Second, Jesus touches the leper, and thus risks

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<sup>98</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 94. Lenski anticipates the opposition between Jesus and the priests, in fact, he believes it is already there. Nevertheless, this “witness” is to function as both “gospel witness” to the priests by showing Jesus' grace and as a testimony that he keeps and fulfills the law. See also Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 209–10.

<sup>99</sup> France, *Mark*, 120.

<sup>100</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 181.

becoming unclean himself; theoretically Jesus could have cleansed this man by speech without touching him, so in touching him Jesus acts as if he is not bound by Lev 15:31, for he does not separate himself from a fellow Israelite who is unclean but instead touches him. Third, Jesus declares the leper clean by means of his own authority apart for the office of the priest and rituals prescribed in Leviticus 14; indeed, Jesus' authority to do this is validated when, in fact, the leprosy leaves the man and he becomes clean. Thus, even though Jesus instructs the man to follow the regulations of Leviticus 14, this does not change the fact that Jesus has already pronounced this man clean *apart from those regulations*. What is more, even though the man fails to do as Jesus has commanded him, that man is nevertheless still clean because Jesus has made him clean. In the end this leper is cleansed/purified apart from what is commanded in Leviticus 14.

*Where does Jesus get this unique authority with respect to the Torah?* From the narrative thus far any basis for Jesus' authority is established by the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who has received the Holy Spirit. He is the Holy One of God who possesses a unique holiness. As he has expelled the unclean spirits, so Jesus now can remove and cleanse Levitical impurity as well—and he can do this apart from (and in violation of) the Torah. Here as in the exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28 there is opposition between the holiness of Jesus and uncleanness/impurity. As Jesus expelled the unclean spirit, so the leprosy departs from this man and he is clean. Now, however, in the cleansing of the leper Jesus is removing impurity as it is defined by the Torah.

Finally, that purity is a concern in this passage can be established not only by the Old Testament background of Leviticus 13–14, but also by vocables in this passage, *viz.*, the use of the verb καθαρίζω three times and the noun καθαρισμός. Indeed, Jesus' instructions to the

leper recall Leviticus 14 and so the entire context of the regulations regarding skin disease in Leviticus 13–14, and perhaps also the wider context of Leviticus 11–16. Thus, Jesus not only heals this man, but he cleanses him, that is, he removes the Levitical impurity established by the Torah, and he does so apart from the Torah.

### Conclusion

In Mark 1:40–45 Jesus cleanses a man from Levitical impurity and speaks and acts as if he has special authority in relationship to the purity regulations of Leviticus 13–14. As the first such miracle in Mark’s Gospel that involves Levitical impurity, the cleansing of the leper is likely programmatic for other miracles and incidents where Levitical impurity is a concern. As the two miracles in Mark 5:21–43 (and the controversy over handwashing in Mark 7) also involve purity as defined by the Torah, these will be read in light of what is already established in Mark 1:40–45: Jesus has the authority to remove and cleanse Levitical impurity, and he can carry out this authority apart from the Torah. Jesus’ actions thus far demonstrate that as he brings the reign of God, he can remove the Levitical impurity that can affect the people of Israel.

### Mark 5:21–43

#### Establishing an Interpretative Matrix

As argued above, there is already good reason to read the two miracles in Mark 5:21–43 in an interpretative matrix with the cleansing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45. These stories share similar features (Jesus deals with Levitical impurity by coming into physical contact with the unclean), similar vocables (the use of the verb ἅπτομαι), and reading Num 5:1–4 in the literary background. Another point that can be stated at the outset is that these two miracle accounts are

intended to be read together as they are found in an intercalation.<sup>101</sup> These two miracles can also be read generally with other miracle accounts, in particular with those that involve Jesus coming into physical contact with the people whom he heals (though these other miracles will not be the focus here). These two miracles must also be read in their immediate context with what comes before and after.

Wahlen identifies Mark 5:1 as the beginning a “miracle cluster” that begins with the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac; he points out that this is one of three miracle clusters that begins with an exorcism account.<sup>102</sup> In reading this way Wahlen ignores the miracle of the calming of the storm in 4:35–41 that precedes the exorcism. If there is a grouping of various miracles in this section, it actually begins with the calming of the storm (4:35–41), continues with the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20), then continues with the two miracles in the intercalation (5:21–43), and then ends possibly with the lack of many miracles in Nazareth (6:1–6).

Several themes can be found running through these miracles. First, the calming of the storm is an amazing “cosmic” miracle in which Jesus demonstrates his authority over nature. Then follows an exorcism where Jesus casts out not only one, but a legion of unclean spirits. Then in the intercalation Jesus both saves a woman from disease and impurity by her touching him and raises a dead girl, demonstrating authority over death. Yet then, anticlimactically, at Nazareth Jesus is unable to do miracles there.

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<sup>101</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 46–47 for his discussion of what intercalation is, how it functions, and a list of the intercalations that appear in the Gospel of Mark. According to Voelz, in intercalation the second or inner story interrupts and interprets the first or outer story. So in 5:21–43 the story of the woman with the flow of blood interrupts and then interprets the story of Jairus’ sick and then dead daughter.

<sup>102</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 83.



Another theme in these stories is that of faith (πίστις)—who believes in Jesus and how do they demonstrate such faith. After the disciples' behavior during the storm, Jesus asks them if they have faith (4:40). In Mark 4:40 they ask, but do not answer, the question, “Who then is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?”<sup>103</sup> Their question is answered ironically by the unclean spirit in the following story when it identifies him as “Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (5:7). In the intercalation that follows Jesus says to the woman, “Your faith has saved you.” Then, after receiving word that the girl has died, Jesus tells Jairus in 5:36, “Stop being afraid; only believe!” Yet then in Nazareth, Jesus encounters unbelief (6:6) and is unable to do many miracles (6:5).<sup>104</sup> Paralleling the theme of faith may also be fear: The disciples are very afraid after the calming of the storm (4:41), the woman is afraid when Jesus asked who touched him (5:33), and then Jesus tells Jairus to stop being afraid (5:36).

The theme of purity also unites at least three of these stories. In Mark 5:1–20 Jesus casts out a legion of demons from a man. This is the second full exorcism account and also the second time Jesus delivers a man who is described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ. Thus, the exorcism accounts of Mark 1:21–28 and 5:1–20 can be matrixed together.<sup>105</sup> Then immediately follows this intercalation in which Jesus now deals two times with Levitical impurity. There is, thus, in Mark 5 yet another shift where Jesus goes from expelling an unclean spirit from a man to removing the

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<sup>103</sup> The reader of Mark knows the answer to this question based on what has come before in Mark 1:1 and 9: “He is the Son of God.” But the disciples do not make this confession after Jesus calms the storm.

<sup>104</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377–78, where he offers his explanation of the function of the intercalation of Mark 5:21–43. According to Voelz, he is initially inclined to see resurrection as the major theme of this “story sandwich,” a reading that would prioritize the outer story over the inner story. He then, however, reassesses the role that faith plays in the inner story. He concludes that the point of the inner story is that faith in Jesus is key to entering the reign of God and that those who have such faith receive salvation and peace. This then applies to the outer story as such faith characterized Jairus whose daughter Jesus saves from death. Note, then, that Voelz also sees faith as an important theme at least in the intercalation.

<sup>105</sup> The place of the exorcism accounts is discussed further in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

ritual uncleanness of Levitical impurity.

### The Healing/Saving of the Woman with a Discharge

The woman is introduced to the narrative in 5:25 as someone who has been ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος (in a flow of blood)<sup>106</sup> for the extent of 12 years. This woman fits the category of impurity that is described in Lev 15:25–30. There does not need to be any explicit mention of purity here, as it would be implicitly understood that purity is a concern.<sup>107</sup> In this state whatever this woman touches becomes unclean and whoever touches what she touches becomes unclean. Thus, it may appear scandalous that she is out in a crowd that is pressing upon Jesus. It is likely that in such a crowd she will come into contact with other Israelites; she is not keeping the prescription of Lev 15:31 to keep her uncleanness separate from others. This violation of the regulations is heightened when the woman is described as intending to come in the crowd from behind and touch (the verb is ἅπτομαι) Jesus' garment. The narrator explains her motivation: She has heard of Jesus and was saying, "If I touch even his garment I will be saved/healed (σωθήσομαι)." The woman's approach to Jesus demonstrates faith, yet, according to the commands of Lev 15:25–30 whatever she touches (e.g., Jesus' garment) becomes unclean, and whoever touches what she touches (e.g., Jesus by virtue of wearing his garment) becomes unclean. Yet after she touches Jesus immediately the flow of blood dries up and the woman feels

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<sup>106</sup> The LXX translation of מְדַבֵּר from Lev 15:25 is ῥύσει αἵματος. See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 359, where he translates ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος "in (the power of) a flow of blood."

<sup>107</sup> When compared to the cleansing of the leper, fewer interpreters see purity as a theme in this miracle account, but there is still a smaller consensus that this is the case. See, e.g., Cranfield, *Mark*, 184; Lane, *Mark*, 191; Grundmann, *Markus*, 150; Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 296; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 201; Stock, *Method and Message of Mark*, 171; Brooks, *Mark*, 93; Witherington, *Mark*, 187; Edwards, *Mark*, 163; France, *Mark*, 236; Moloney, *Mark*, 107; Culpepper, *Mark*, 172–73; Stein, *Mark*, 267; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 371. Some interpreters go further and argue that the woman's touching Jesus may have rendered him unclean. See Mann, *Mark*, 284 and 286; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 357–58 and 366; Iersel, *Mark*, 205; and Hooker, *Mark*, 149.

that she is healed (the verb is ἰάομαι) in her body.

Nevertheless, Jesus knows that power has gone out from him. He asks (and keeps on asking), “Who touched *my* garment?” The woman responds with fear and trembling. When considering the background of Lev 15:25–30 and the warning in Lev 15:31, such a response to Jesus’ question makes sense: The woman is afraid because she has violated the Torah and possibly defiled Jesus by touching him while she was in this unclean state. Such fear would explain also her humble posture, falling down before Jesus before she tells him everything. It could be that she is expecting words of condemnation from the man she has potentially defiled. Yet, to the possible surprise of this woman (and anyone familiar with Leviticus 15), Jesus tells this woman that her faith has saved her and sends her off in peace.<sup>108</sup> Jesus himself does not appear concerned about being touched and so made unclean by this woman.

This story parallels the cleansing of the leper from Mark 1:40–45: In both stories an individual whom the Torah designates as unclean violates the regulations by coming to Jesus and seeking cleansing (the leper) or salvation (the woman). Jesus willingly touches the leper. The woman touches Jesus, and is perhaps afraid of his anger, but he is not concerned. The leper is cleansed by Jesus. The woman is saved by Jesus. Jesus declares the leper “clean” apart from the Torah, and though Jesus does instruct the leper to fulfill the commands of Moses from Leviticus 14 “as a witness to them,” the man fails to do this—but is nevertheless still clean. Jesus sends the woman away in peace. Note that this time he does not instruct her to carry out the ritual and offer the sacrifice commanded in Lev 15:28–30. He sends her away in peace without any further

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<sup>108</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 366 and 372–73, where he discusses the meaning of the perfect active verb σέσωκεν. He argues that here the verb does not have the “weak understanding” of merely “heal,” but it entails rescued from sin, death, the forces of evil, and all that is opposed to the reign of God. To this it might be added that Jesus also has saved this woman from her ritual/Levitical impurity that would have kept her banned from the community of Israel and from the presence of God at the Temple.

instruction. Thus, he purifies her also apart from the regulations of the Torah.

This is now the second episode in which Jesus demonstrates his authority to remove Levitical impurity. Once again he appears to operate with certain authority with respect to the Torah. The eschatological reign and rule of God brings purity to the unclean, but the means by which this happens is in the activity of Jesus, not through the regulations of the Torah.

### The Raising of Jairus' Daughter

The story of Jairus' sick daughter begins in 5:21, but is interrupted by the story of the woman with the flow of blood in 5:25. This first story resumes in 5:35 with the announcement that the girl has died. Jesus goes to her dead body and takes the hand of the child (κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ παιδίου). According to Num 19:11–13, Jesus' act of taking the dead girl by the hand makes him unclean.<sup>109</sup> In response to this Jesus will be unclean for seven days and should be sprinkled with the water of impurity on the third and seventh days. If he fails to purify himself in this way, his impurity remains on him and should be cut off from Israel, according to Num 19:13. Yet the girl is brought back to life. What is more, Jesus appears unconcerned about touching a dead body, just as he was earlier unconcerned about being touched by a woman with a flow of blood.

It must be noted also that in this third miracle account the problem of impurity directly

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<sup>109</sup> Fewer interpreters see purity as theme in this account when compared to the cleansing of the leper and the woman with the flow of blood. For those who do see purity as a theme, see, e.g., Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 302; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 364–65; Witherington, *Mark*, 190; and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377. James A. Brooks explicitly adds that Jesus may have become ritually impure by touching the dead girl. See Brooks, *Mark*, 95. It may be noted further that only those commentators who see impurity as a theme in the account of the woman with the flow of blood also see this in the account of Jesus raising the dead girl. That the theme of purity is not more widely recognized in this story is surprising given the argument of Kazen that impurity by means of contact with corpses was “more clear-cut” in the Second Temple era than even that with that with lepers or people with discharges. See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 197–98.

concerns *Jesus himself* (and even more than it does the dead girl). The regulations of Numbers 19 prescribe what would happen *to living persons* when they come into contact with a dead body. Jesus is the living person who touches the hand of a dead girl and so has risked becoming unclean. There is no indication in Mark's narrative that Jesus follows the ritual prescribed in Num 19:11–13 to cleanse himself from such possible uncleanness. Nor in Mark's narrative would this be required of Jesus if he is, indeed, “the Holy One of God” who possesses a unique holiness that cannot be defiled. Thus, Jesus' deliverance of this girl from death is also accomplished apart from the Torah since he takes her hand and yet remains unaffected by the regulations of Numbers 19. What is more, the girl is delivered from death, so the matter of impurity no longer applies.

### Conclusion

Jesus delivering of the woman and the girl demonstrate again what was established in the story of the cleansing of the leper. Jesus possess a unique authority over impurity, even impurity as defined by the Torah. What is more, he accomplishes the cleansing of Levitical uncleanness *apart from the regulations of the Torah*. Thus, although in Mark 1:44 he instructs the leper to fulfill what has been commanded in Leviticus 14 “as a witness to them,” in 5:34 he sends the woman away in peace without instructing her to fulfill what was commanded in Leviticus 15. What is more, there is no indication in the narrative that Jesus fulfills what is commanded in Num 19:11–13 regarding his own body that has been (theoretically) rendered unclean because he has touched a corpse. Reading all three miracles accounts together in light of Num 5:1–4, note that Jesus himself has become the third person who would have to be excluded from the camp based on his physical contact with a corpse. Yet Jesus appears unconcerned. In fact, after Jesus' actions the woman is saved/healed and the dead girl made alive. Just as their impurity is removed

by Jesus, the necessity of following the regulations is removed. Jesus purifies the unclean, and he purifies the Levitical impurity *apart from the Torah*.

### Conclusion

Marcus and Voelz argue for reading the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 together in light of Num 5:1–4. Again, the regulations of Num 5:2 call for expelling from the camp—and in this order— anyone with a skin disease, anyone with a discharge, and anyone unclean with respect to a dead body. These three miracles then proceed in this order. In Mark 1:40–45 Jesus cleanses someone with a skin disease. In Mark 5:25–34 Jesus saves/heals (and thus cleanses) someone with a discharge. Finally, in Mark 5:35–40 Jesus himself has become the third person who would have to be excluded from the camp based on his physical contact with a corpse. Regarding the significance of reading this way, Marcus says of Jesus’ healings that “he can do so because his healing power is the power of God’s new age, and the coming eschaton has ramifications for the interpretation and even the substance of the Law. . .”<sup>110</sup> Marcus thus associates these three miracles with the reign of God that has come in Jesus and he sees here implications of these miracles for the relationship of the Torah and its interpretation to this reign of God.

Voelz concurs with Marcus and makes two further points: First, “the characteristics of the old aeon, including its strictures, no longer apply.”<sup>111</sup> Voelz agrees with Marcus that there are implications of these three miracles to the application of the Torah now that the eschatological reign and rule of God has come in Jesus. Thus, Jesus can come into physical contact with the

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<sup>110</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 367–78.

<sup>111</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377. Voelz relates this point further to his interpretation of Mark 2:18–22. The interpretation of this passage will be taken up in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

unclean without himself being effected by such contact. Second, “the problems of the old aeon have already begun to, and will at the end of time fully, pass away.” The day will come when there will no longer be those with skin disease, unclean discharges, or dead.<sup>112</sup> These three miracles thus indicate that what Jesus does in these miracles anticipates what will be fully realized at the consummation of the new aeon. For this reason, reading these three miracles in light of Num 5:1–4 shows that the eschatological reign and rule of God in Jesus brings deliverance to those defined as unclean by the regulations of the Torah *and* that those regulations will no longer apply in the reign of God. The two examples of people who should have been “banned from the camp”—the leper and the woman with the flow of blood—are purified and saved by Jesus, and so no longer need they be banned. Jesus himself (knowingly) becomes an example of one who might be unclean with respect to touching a dead body, but in so doing he delivers the girl from death. The regulations once enforced by the command given in Num 5:2 no longer apply in the work of Jesus as he purifies the unclean.

That each miracle is accomplished through Jesus coming into physical contact with each individual raises the perceived risk involved in each interaction, for it could be perceived that Jesus becomes unclean in each case. This, however, only further indicates Jesus’ authority not only to purify the unclean, but to do so in spite of what the Torah commands. In these three miracles Jesus cleanses someone who is unclean as defined by the regulations of the Torah, and in each case he does this apart from the regulations of the Torah. This indicates that in Mark’s narrative Jesus does possess a unique authority and lordship not only in respect to purity/impurity, but also a unique authority with respect to the Torah.

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<sup>112</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377.

## CHAPTER THREE

### JESUS AND LEVITICAL IMPURITY, PART TWO: THE HANDWASHING CONTROVERSY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE REGARDING JESUS' AUTHORITY WITH RESPECT TO THE TORAH

#### Introduction

At the conclusion of the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23, Jesus' dominical pronouncement to the crowd in 7:14b–15 is explained further to his disciples in 7:18–19a. Then the author in a parenthetical statement in 7:19b indicates that Jesus has cleansed all foods (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα). Purity/impurity is a concern throughout this passage. In Mark 7:1–5 the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes complain that Jesus' disciples eat bread “with unclean/common hands” (κοινᾶς χερσίν), and by this it is meant hands that are “unwashed” (ἀνίπτοις). Jesus' opponents thus raise the question of purity in this confrontation. When Jesus later addresses the crowd in Mark 7:14b–15, he declares that there is nothing that goes into a man that is able to defile him/make him unclean, but that it is what comes out of a man that defiles him/makes him unclean (the verb κοινόω is used two times). In Mark 7:17–23, Jesus further explains this saying to his disciples, and Mark adds the parenthetical remark that Jesus has cleansed (the verb is καθαρίζω) all the foods. Jesus' explanation concludes in 7:20–23 with the declaration that it is the evil things that come out of man that defile him/make him unclean (the verb is κοινόω). The use of the adjective κοινός in 7:2 and 5, the use of the verb κοινόω in 7:15 (twice), 7:18, and 7:23, and the use of the verb καθαρίζω in 7:19b all indicate that the question of purity—more narrowly, what it is that defiles a man—is a concern in this controversy.

It is another question about whether Jesus' declaration to the crowd in Mark 7:14b–15 as



interpreted in 7:18–19a is understood to speak to Leviticus 11 and so abrogate the regulations regarding the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Here the focus must be upon Mark 7:19b: *In particular, what is the referent of the words πάντα τὰ βρώματα in Mark 7:19b?* A straightforward reading of these words suggests that they refer to “all the foods,” and this would then include the foods once categorized as unclean according to Leviticus 11. Thus, James W. Voelz translates καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα as “purifying all the foods (that there are).”<sup>1</sup> This translation indicates that in his view there are no foods that are not included in the phrase πάντα τὰ βρώματα. Indeed, most studies on Mark 7:1–23 concur that underlying Jesus’ confrontation with the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes over ritual handwashing were concerns about purity that were an important expression of Jewish religious piety during the Second Temple era. Among these studies there is also a large consensus that the participle clause καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα in 7:19b is a parenthetical comment where Mark adds his own direct interpretation on the significance of Jesus’ sayings in 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19b. There is consensus also that the clause is to be understood in a straightforward manner where the referent of πάντα τὰ βρώματα actually is “all the foods”—even food forbidden in Leviticus 11.<sup>2</sup>

Reading with the consensus of opinion, then, the adjective πάντα indicates that there are no

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<sup>1</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 449, where he translates Mark 7:19c “purifying all the foods (that there are),” indicating his view that there are no foods that are not included in the phrase πάντα τὰ βρώματα.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding all three of the points of this consensus outlined here, see again, Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc*, 190; Cranfield, *Mark*, 241, 243–45; Taylor, *Mark*, 344–45; Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 61; Lane, *Mark*, 255–56; Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, 144–45; Räisänen, “Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15,” 82; Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity*, 50–51; Mann, *Mark*, 317; Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity in Mark’s Gospel,” 107–08; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 219–20; Cole, *Mark*, 190; Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark*, 208–09; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, 49–51; Culpepper *Mark*, 118; Brooks, *Mark*, 118; Hooker, *Mark*, 179; Gundry, *Mark*, 355–56; Iersel, *Mark*, 245; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 457–58; Witherington, *Mark*, 228–29; Edwards, *Mark*, 212–13; France, *Mark*, 289–92; Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 61; Moloney, *Mark*, 143–44; Collins, *Mark*, 356; Stein, *Mark*, 345–46; and Meier, *Law and Love*, 362, 390.

foods which are not included in the phrase πάντα τὰ βρώματα and further that the participle clause in 7:19b demonstrates that at least on the narrative level Jesus is depicted as abrogating the food laws of Leviticus 11 in his address to the crowd in 7:14b–15.

Robert C. H. Lenski and Clinton Wahlen, however, challenge the consensus and argue that Mark only sees Jesus as speaking about foods that were already deemed clean according to the food laws of Leviticus 11. Lenski argues that Jesus at this time in his ministry did not possess any authority to abrogate Leviticus 11 and that the abrogation of these laws would only come later after his resurrection.<sup>3</sup> Wahlen goes further to argue that Jesus never had such authority or even any intention of abrogating Leviticus 11, and then further that the early church as well never interpreted Mark 7:19b to imply the abrogation of Leviticus 11. In arguing this Wahlen points out that the matter under debate is only whether food could be made unclean by eating it with unwashed hands, not whether Jesus' disciples could eat foods declared unclean according to Leviticus 11. According to Wahlen, Jesus teachings in Mark 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a would thus be limited in scope to the question raised by the initial complaint in 7:1–5.<sup>4</sup> Wahlen thus interprets καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα in 7:19b to mean “thus cleansing all (permissible) foods.”<sup>5</sup>

Again, most interpreters—including Lenski and Wahlen—do agree that purity is a concern in the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23. Wahlen, however, calls attention to the potential problem that, if Jesus in Mark 7:18–19a is depicted as cleansing foods once defined as unclean according to Leviticus 11, then he has gone beyond the original complaint in 7:1–5

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<sup>3</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 294.

<sup>4</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 72–83.

<sup>5</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 78.

about the disciples eating with unclean/unwashed hands. The concern of the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes is not that the disciples were eating unclean foods, but that they were eating with unwashed hands. Thus, according to Wahlen, it is not logical that Jesus would use this as an opportunity to nullify Leviticus 11.<sup>6</sup> To Wahlen's complaint the interpreter may also consider the fact in his response to his opponents in Mark 7:13a Jesus accuses them of nullifying the Word of God (as found in the Torah) through their tradition. Yet Jesus himself is depicted as going beyond this if he actually abrogates a section of the Torah in his speech to the crowd in 7:14b–15. Thus, a reading of this passage must explain these seeming inconsistencies, both how Jesus moves from a complaint about handwashing to abrogation of Leviticus 11 *and* then how Jesus can accuse his opponents of nullifying God's commandments only to go ahead himself and nullify a section of God's commandments.

Both Lenski and Wahlen also raise the question of whether or not Jesus even had the authority at that time (Lenski) or ever (Wahlen) to abrogate Leviticus 11.<sup>7</sup> Generally, the matter of Jesus' authority with respect to the entire Torah is *not* recognized even by the majority of interpreters who do agree that that Mark 7:19b represents the abrogation of Leviticus 11.<sup>8</sup> While the matter of Jesus speaking beyond the scope of his opponents' complaint involves the reading of the dynamics of Mark 1:1–23, the question of Jesus' overall authority with respect to the Torah will involve the larger narrative of Mark's Gospel. Thus far in this dissertation we have argued strongly that in the narrative Jesus is depicted as one who has authority over the Levitical impurity defined in passages such as Leviticus 13–14, Leviticus 15, and Num 19:11–22. Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 73–74.

<sup>7</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 294 and Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Moloney, *Mark*, 142; France, *Mark*, 292; Witherington, *Mark*, 230–31; and Neyrey, "Idea of Purity," 113.

cleanses people who are unclean as defined by the Torah by healing them, and each time he does this he comes into physical contact with such people. *Do the three miracles inform how the reader is to understand the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23 and in particular how the author in 7:19b appears to understand the significance of Jesus’ words in 7:14a–15?*

Jesus’ authority with respect to the Torah as depicted in Mark’s Gospel is the major question to be considered in this chapter. There are two other questions that will be considered in order to understand the narrative dynamics of Mark 7:1–23: One question is the purpose of the handwashing tradition that is the basis of Jesus’ opponents’ complaint. Underlying the tradition is the belief that hands could be or become unclean and so need to be washed/purified. *What was the nature of such impurity and what was the perceived danger of eating with unwashed hands?* A second question regards the impurity of the unclean animals in Leviticus 11. *Did the impurity of these animals involve the same kind of contact-contagion impurity that appears to be operative when people had skin diseases, discharges, or came into contact with dead bodies? Was there a perceived danger of becoming unclean by eating such meat (other than violation of Yahweh’s commandments)?* In order to address these questions, one must consider the literary and historical background of the handwashing controversy.

### **Literary and Historical Background**

In Mark 7:1–5 the Pharisees and Jerusalem scribes complain that Jesus’ disciples do not follow the handwashing tradition of the elders by eating their bread with unclean/unwashed hands. What was the purpose of this tradition and why do Jesus’ opponents consider this a serious enough violation to bring this complaint to Jesus? While addressing the crowd in Mark 7:14a–15, Jesus appears to assume that the concern for his opponents is possible self-contamination through ingesting unclean food: οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου

εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν (“there is nothing outside of a man by going into him which is able to defile him/make him unclean”). The perception would be that such contamination could come as the result of eating food with unwashed hands. If πάντα τὰ βρώματα in the parenthetical remark in Mark 7:19b refers to animals/meat defined as unclean according to Leviticus 11, then the assumption again appears to be that eating such meat would also cause someone to become unclean. The text of Mark’s Gospel appears to lead its readers to this conclusion: The question at stake is whether or not *in the eschatological reign and rule of God as inaugurated by Jesus* eating unclean food—whether unclean because it has been touched by unclean hands or unclean because of the regulations of Leviticus 11—can cause a person to become unclean. Underlying this discussion then there are two matters, the background text of Leviticus 11 regarding the question of unclean meats and the handwashing tradition. Scholars have discussed the historicity of the assertion made in the parenthetical statement of Mark 7:3–4 regarding the pervasiveness of the handwashing tradition. They have also discussed the general purpose of this handwashing tradition. *Is it correct to assume that Jesus’ words in Mark 7:14b–15 indicate that there was a belief that both any food touched by unclean hands and any foods defined as unclean according to Leviticus 11 would, if consumed, contaminate the individual who eats them?*

#### Old Testament Background: Leviticus 11

Leviticus 11 contains the regulations that distinguish between, on the one hand, animals/meat that can be eaten by the people of Israel and, on the other hand, animals/meat that are unclean (טמא) and so cannot be eaten. These regulations actually do not concern the initial controversy of Mark 7:1–5 about handwashing, but are arguably the subject of Jesus’ redefinition of what makes a man unclean in Mark 7:14b–15 as then explained in 7:18–19a, especially as

understood in light of the parenthetical statement in 7:19b.

Leviticus 11 appears to begin a section of Leviticus that continues through Lev 15 or Lev 16.<sup>9</sup> The regulations of Lev 11 are distinct from what follows in Lev 12–15 in that the subject of Lev 11 is not conditions that make a woman or man unclean and so can result in their being kept in seclusion (as with a woman after childbirth) or expelled from the camp (as with skin diseases and discharges), but the distinction God makes between which animals can be eaten and which animals cannot be eaten.<sup>10</sup> According to Kleinig, these regulations (he refers to Lev 11 as a speech) is divided into three main sections: Lev 11:1–23 contains the instructions on which animals may be eaten and which animals are unclean. Leviticus 11:24–40 contains instructions on impurity that comes through contact with the carcasses of animals. Then Lev 11:41–45 returns to the theme of the first section and contains instructions regarding the avoidance of eating unclean meat. Thus, according to Kleinig, Lev 11:1–23 and 11:41–45 frame this speech. Leviticus 11:46–47 then contain a summary and conclusion to this speech.<sup>11</sup>

In Lev 11:1–23 there are four categories of animals that are presented. Lev 11:2–8 discusses the four-legged animals that are clean or unclean. Regarding the unclean four-legged animals, the command in Lev 11:8 is that the people of Israel can neither eat their meat nor touch their carcasses because they are unclean (טמא). Leviticus 11:9–12 discusses the water creatures that are clean or unclean. The unclean water creatures, both their meat and their carcasses, are to be regarded as a “detestable thing” (שִׂקְצָה) as repeated four times in this section). Leviticus

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<sup>9</sup> See the discussion above on the general structure of Leviticus 11–15.

<sup>10</sup> See again Douglas, *Leviticus*, 176–78, where she argues that Lev 12–15 is a literary unit because it deals specifically with the impurity of people.

<sup>11</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 249–50.

11:13–19 discusses the “birds” that are to be regarded as a “detestable thing” (שֶׁקִי, as repeated two times in this section). Finally, Lev 11:20–23 discusses the “winged insects” that may be eaten or that are to be regarded as a “detestable thing” (שֶׁקִי, as repeated two times in this section).

Leviticus 11:24–40 then deals with the impurity that results from touching carcasses of both unclean and clean animals. According to Kleinig, the instruction in 11:24 introduces the section that follows.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the basic instruction that is repeated several times is found in this verse: Whoever touches the carcass of an unclean animal becomes unclean (טָמֵא) until evening. Leviticus 11:29–38 discusses in particular the impurity of animals that swarm/crawl along the ground and how their carcasses can defile those who touch them, but also other things touched by them—material, pottery, food, liquids, and cooking vessels, but not running water or seeds that have been planted in the ground. Lev 11:39–40 then discusses how people also become unclean by touching or eating the flesh of the carcasses of clean animals; anyone who touches or picks up the carcass of even a clean animal becomes unclean.

Leviticus 11:41–45 then returns to theme of what may not be eaten. Here the instructions focus specifically upon not eating animals that swarm/crawl along the ground. Such animals also are to be regarded as a “detestable thing” (שֶׁקִי). In Lev 11:43 there is a penultimate warning where the verbal cognates of טָמֵא and שֶׁקִי are used:

אַל-תִּשְׁקְצוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכָל-הַשָּׂרִץ הַשָּׂרִץ וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם וְנִטְמַתֶּם בָּם:

“Do not make detestable [the piel of שֶׁקִי] your lives/selves/souls by means of any

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<sup>12</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 245.

swarming thing that swarms; and do not make yourself unclean [the piel of טָמֵא] by means of them and do not become unclean [niph'al of טָמֵא] by them.”

The warning includes both actively becoming unclean (הִשְׁקֵצוּ and הִטְמְאוּ), theoretically by eating or touching such animals, yet it also includes passively becoming unclean (נִטְמְמוּ), perhaps by being touched by such animals or through contact with the various materials that can be contaminated by such animals as outlined in Lev 11:29–38.<sup>13</sup>

According to Lev 11:44a, the basis for this instruction lies in the identity and holiness of Yahweh:

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדְשְׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי

“Because I am Yahweh your God, and you will consecrate yourselves [hithpa'el of קָדַשׁ], and you will be holy, because I am holy.”

Then follows the final warning in Lev 11:44b about not becoming unclean by means of animals that swarm along the ground. Yet the underlying concern established here in 11:44a is the holiness of Yahweh versus the impurity represented here by the animals that swarm upon the ground. Kleinig argues that the instruction in Lev 11:43–45 serves as a final prohibition regarding purity and sanctification that appears to conclude all of these instructions (as well as more specifically the instructions regarding the animals that swarm on the ground).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that there is a concern in Leviticus 11 both about actively becoming unclean by eating unclean meat, eating from the carcass of a clean animal, or touching the carcass of an animal, yet also about passively becoming unclean through perhaps unintentionally coming into contact with “swarming things” or materials they have contaminated. This may to some degree provide light on regarding the handwashing tradition where there also appears to be concern about unintentionally contracting impurity by unknowingly coming into contact with persons or things that are unclean. The use of the niph'al of טָמֵא in Lev 11:43 does perhaps imagine a scenario where this could happen.

<sup>14</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 249 and 251.



In this passage it is clear that touching the carcasses of the unclean animals and touching or eating from the carcasses of clean animals will make a person unclean. This type of impurity then appears to fall into the category of contact-contagion impurity, the same type of impurity presented in Lev 12–13.<sup>15</sup> According to Lev 11:40a anyone who eats the meat from the carcass of a clean animal becomes unclean. Yet a central question for the sake of this investigation is whether or not eating the meat of an unclean animal would also make a person unclean. It would be a violation of God’s instructions, *but would it make a person unclean?* On the one hand, it might seem obvious from the context that if touching the carcass of any animal makes a person unclean and eating from the carcass of a clean animal makes a person unclean, then eating unclean meat would make a person unclean, *that this indeed is the whole point of this particular body of legislation.* What is more, one could not eat unclean meat without coming into with physical contact with such meat.

On the other hand, the instructions never make this point explicit.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Johnson M. Kimuhu argues that while touching the carcass of an unclean animal would make a person unclean, such impurity is not transferred by eating unclean meat.<sup>17</sup> Kleinig, however, argues that the consumption of unclean meat would make the person unclean by directly contaminating the throat through physical contact.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the penultimate warning in Lev 11:43 appears to

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<sup>15</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 89–90.

<sup>16</sup> In a similar fashion it is never made clear in Leviticus 13–14 that touching or being touched by an individual with a skin disease will transfer impurity, though Kleinig argues that this may be assumed from the overall context of Leviticus 11–15. See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 248, 251, and 255–56. Interestingly, many other interpreters do not directly address the question of whether eating unclean meat causes the individual to contract impurity.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 380.

<sup>18</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 248 and 255–56. Kleinig translates the piel of שָׁפֵיץ in Lev 11:43 “to make disgusting,” and he interprets the direct object נַפְשֵׁיכֶם (“yourselves”) to refer more specifically to the throat—“to disgust your

embrace any possible connection with unclean animals, to include eating them or touching them. What is more, as a major purpose of these regulations is to instruct the people of Israel concerning the animals that they can or cannot eat (see Lev 11:41b and 11:42b), it appears a reasonable conclusion that eating unclean meat would make one unclean.

Yet, if the regulations of Leviticus 11 underlie the parenthetical statement in Mark 7:19b where “all the foods” is referring to the animals/meat distinguished in the regulations here, then it appears as if Mark understands that in the old dispensation eating unclean meat would have been the cause of uncleanness. In Mark 7:14b–15 Jesus speaks about ingesting/consuming food (“there is nothing outside of a man which by going into him is able to defile him/make him unclean”). Based on Jesus’ words, what was once the cause of impurity (ingesting the meat of animals declared by Yahweh to be unclean according to Leviticus 11), is no longer the cause of impurity. If one were to consider the regulations of Leviticus 11 according to the logic of Mark 7, then the basic concern underlying the regulations is that if someone were to eat the meat of unclean animals, then they would become unclean by coming into contact with and ingesting such meat, that is, becoming unclean by what is outside of them going into them and entering their body.

#### Handwashing in the Second Temple Era

The narrative of Mark 7:1–23 begins with the question about handwashing, and so this handwashing tradition must also be considered. Two questions have been discussed regarding this tradition. First, in light of the parenthetical explanation in Mark 7:3–4, there is the question about how widespread this tradition was (and so if Mark’s explanation is historically accurate).

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throats.” Kleinig, 242.

Mark informs his readers that “all of the Jews” participated in this handwashing tradition. *Was this tradition as widespread as Mark asserts?* Second, there is the question about the purpose of this tradition. *Why did the Pharisees and “all the Jews” wash their hands before eating?* Jesus’ words in 7:14a–15 appear to indicate that the purpose of washing one’s hands before eating was to prevent a person from ritually defiling himself/making himself unclean by ingesting that which is unclean. *Was this the purpose for this handwashing tradition?*

It must be noted at this point that an interpreter taking a narrative critical approach is not necessarily concerned about these historical questions when interpreting the narrative of Mark. If the task is to read Mark as *story/narrative*, then the implied reader assumes the world of Mark’s narrative for the sake of reading this story. He knows what the author wants him to know, and he believes what the author wants him to believe. Thus, if the author of Mark assumes in Mark 7:3–4 that the handwashing tradition was widely practiced among the Jews, then the reader must adopt this as knowledge necessary to read the narrative of Mark, and this in spite of whatever historical evidence there may or may not be to support this knowledge. If the words of Jesus in Mark 7:14b–15 indicate that the purpose for washing hands before eating was to prevent a person from contaminating himself by consuming what is unclean, then the reader must also assume this knowledge in order to read Mark. Again, the implied reader of Mark establishes what he knows primarily from the text of Mark itself.<sup>19</sup> Yet the historical questions will be considered as Mark appears to assume such knowledge on the part of the reader.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See again Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star*, 75–110, where he discusses how the actual reader reconstructs what the implied reader is to know and believe in order to read a narrative as intended by the author.

<sup>20</sup> See Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 34, where he argues that narrative criticism is not completely ahistorical as the authors of the Gospels assume knowledge on the part of the reader without fully imparting such knowledge. Yet here it must be pointed out that Mark in chapter 7 does assume the “historical truth” of at least two things pertinent to this discussion: First, the handwashing tradition was widely practiced not just among the Pharisees, but among all of the Jews. Second, the purpose of this tradition was to prevent people from defiling themselves by consuming food

Regarding the historicity of 7:3–4, Adolf Büchler argues that this parenthetical explanation is not historically reliable. According to Büchler, the handwashing practice was only observed by Pharisees who were also priests; it was not practiced by all of the Jews or even by all of the Pharisees.<sup>21</sup> More recently, E. P. Sanders has argued that Pharisees did not normally wash their hands before handling food for ordinary meals.<sup>22</sup> John Meier has also dismissed the historicity of 7:3–4.<sup>23</sup> Yet Büchler’s view regarding the non-pervasiveness of the handwashing tradition has been rejected by most other contemporary scholars.<sup>24</sup> Eyal Regev argues on the basis of archaeological evidence that the handwashing tradition referenced in Mark 7:1–5 was widely practiced among Jews both early in the Second Temple era (predating even the emergence of the Pharisees as a sect) and throughout the Diaspora as well as in Palestine.<sup>25</sup> In light of this arising consensus against Büchler, one can decide in favor of the historical veracity of Mark 7:3–4. Not only is this demanded by the text, but there is also external evidence that suggests the handwashing tradition was indeed widespread at the time of Jesus.

Regarding the purposes of the handwashing tradition, again, a narrative critical approach emphasizes what the text itself appears to assert in Mark 7:14b–15: The purpose of the ritual handwashing appears to be the prevention of ritually defiling oneself/making oneself unclean. Though the text does not describe in further detail the full rationale behind this tradition, the

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that might make them unclean.

<sup>21</sup> Büchler, “The Law of Purification,” 34–40.

<sup>22</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 250.

<sup>23</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 399–400.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussions in Westerholm, *Jesus and the Scribal Authority*, 63–65 and Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Regev, “Pure Individualism,” 176–202. According to Regev, the parenthetical statement in Mark 7:3–4 is not even hyperbolic, but an accurate description of the purity practices in Second Temple Judaism.

purpose does appear to be the prevention of self-contamination. The discussion in much of the scholarly field about this matter has been in response to the debate between Sanders and Jacob Neusner. Neusner argues that this tradition emerged because of the desire among the Pharisees to maintain a priestly standard of ritual purity in everyday life, and that this was done in an attempt to sacralize private life.<sup>26</sup> Sanders, however, argues that there is no evidence that the Pharisees attempted such a higher standard of purity, and so he concludes that they did not, in fact, wash their hands before ordinary meals (see above).<sup>27</sup> John C. Poirier agrees with Sanders' challenge of Neusner on why Pharisees washed their hands (that is, they did not do it to imitate the priests).<sup>28</sup> Yet he also acknowledges that handwashing was a widespread practice within Diaspora Judaism of the Second Temple era.<sup>29</sup> Poirier argues that the handwashing was done to avoid contaminating *the interior* of one's body. In his explanation of the Pharisaic view on purity, the exterior of the body could be cleansed through washing (as mentioned in Mark 7:3–4), but the interior of the body could not. Thus, the interior of the body was to be protected by washing hands before eating food.<sup>30</sup> In a similar line of thought, Thomas Kazen argues contra Sanders that the handwashing practice was related to what he classifies as contact-contagion impurity, and so it was done in an attempt to prevent a person from defiling himself by ingesting

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<sup>26</sup> Neusner, "Emergent Rabbinic Judaism in a Time of Crisis," in *Early Rabbinic Judaism*, SJLA 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 44 and *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Ktav, 1979), 83, and *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism*, BJS 15 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 72–74. See also Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 246–67 and Gedalyahu Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 190–234 for arguments that support this view that the Pharisees attempted to imitate the Temple priesthood in their observance of purity.

<sup>27</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 131.

<sup>28</sup> John C. Poirier, "Why Did Pharisees Wash Their Hands?" *JJS* 47 (1996): 220.

<sup>29</sup> John C. Poirier, "Why Did Pharisees Wash Their Hands?" 222–27. Note that, because of the pervasiveness of handwashing customs, Poirier is also inclined to view Mark 7:1–23 as an authentic and reliable reflection of what was practiced in Diaspora Judaism. Poirier, 224.

<sup>30</sup> John C. Poirier, "Why Did Pharisees Wash Their Hands?" 227–33.

impurity.<sup>31</sup>

According to the arguments made by Poirier and Kazen, the handwashing tradition was a means to deal with contact-contagion impurity, and so this tradition was more closely related to the legislation of Leviticus 12–15 than Leviticus 11: There was a perceived danger that an individual might inadvertently become unclean by coming into contact with a person or an object that was ceremonially unclean because of the regulations set out in Leviticus 12–15.<sup>32</sup> This person then might inadvertently contaminate his food by touching it with unclean hands. This person then might eat this unclean food and so contaminate the interior of his body. The avoidance of such unintentional contamination was either one reason that this handwashing tradition arose in Second Temple Judaism or one reason that this tradition was defended and encouraged once it became a standard practice among the Jews.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

Leviticus 11 provides background for Mark 7:19b (“cleansing all the foods”) and not for the handwashing tradition which was cause of the complaint from Jesus’ opponents. Yet Leviticus 11 and the handwashing tradition have a parallel concern: There was a belief that impurity could be ingested by consuming either meats declared unclean in Leviticus 11 or by consuming permissible foods that were rendered unclean when touched by unclean hands.<sup>34</sup> A

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<sup>31</sup> Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 67. Note that Kazen sees the impurity of unclean animals and contact-contagion impurity as separate categories.

<sup>32</sup> In light of the instruction in Lev 11:29–37 regarding how the carcasses of animals that swarm/crawl can defile various materials they might touch, then it could be argued that Leviticus 11 should be considered with Leviticus 12–15 as yet one other possible means by which a person might unwittingly become ritually unclean.

<sup>33</sup> See again Poirier, “Why Did Pharisees Wash Their Hands?” 222–27 and Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 67.

<sup>34</sup> See Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah*, 67.

belief that consuming unclean meats would defile a person makes sense in light of the legislation of Leviticus 11. The legislation is clear that touching the carcass of any dead animal and eating the flesh from the carcass of a clean animal makes a person unclean. Logically, if eating the flesh from the carcass of a clean animal makes a person unclean, then how much more so if one eats meat from an unclean animal. Leviticus 11:43 appears to make this case at least regarding eating the meat of animals that swarm along the ground. In this verse the people of Israel are warned against making themselves detestable, making themselves unclean, or becoming unclean (passively) with respect to these creatures. The immediate context for this warning is the command not to eat these creatures; therefore, it can be assumed that making oneself detestable would be the result of eating such a creature. Kleinig then argues that this warning in Lev 11:43 should be understood to interpret this entire set of regulations: Eating unclean meat would make someone detestable and unclean.<sup>35</sup>

Wahlen is correct when he notes that the handwashing tradition is not directly related to the legislation of Leviticus 11. The complaint in Mark 7:1–5 is not that some of Jesus’ disciples were eating meats forbidden in the Torah, but that they were violating the tradition of the elders by eating bread (permissible food) with unclean/unwashed hands. Poirier, Kazen, and others argue that the impurity at stake with this tradition was more likely that which Kazen labels “contact-contagion” impurity, that is, impurity regulated by Leviticus 12–15. Someone who is unclean contaminates anyone or anything they touch. If a clean person inadvertently touches or is touched by anyone who is unclean or who has been made unclean, then this person also becomes unclean. Thus, the handwashing tradition appears to be an attempt to prevent such

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<sup>35</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 248 and 255–56.

impurity from entering into a person's interior body. Thus, although the handwashing tradition was not directly related to Leviticus 11, there is nevertheless an indirect connection: This tradition too concerns the possibility of someone ingesting impurity and so contaminating himself—here by eating even permissible foods that are rendered unclean by being touched with unwashed hands.

In light of these arguments, one can conclude that the explanation given by Jesus for this practice in Mark 7:14b–15 reflects the historical situation at the time of his ministry: This tradition was followed as a way to prevent someone from becoming unclean through ingesting something unclean. In this way the tradition is connected to the legislation of Leviticus 11 where Yahweh identifies animals whose meat, if ingested, would also make a person unclean. Thus, Mark makes a logical connection between what Jesus says about the handwashing tradition to the more important matter of the actual legislation in the Torah. In dismissing the handwashing tradition as unnecessary for its intended purpose, Jesus' words also apply to the distinction of meats. Although the legislation clearly identifies some animals as unclean and forbids the people of Israel from eating their meat, Jesus' words imply (and Mark's gloss declares) that this is no longer the case.

### **Mark 7:1–23**

#### **Overview of the Passage**

The narrative of the handwashing controversy begins in Mark 7:1–5 when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who came down from Jerusalem (the Jerusalem scribes) see that some of Jesus' disciples are eating bread with unclean/common (κοινῶς), that is, unwashed (ἀνίπτοις) hands. They then bring this question/complaint to Jesus: “Why are your disciples not walking according to the tradition of the elders, but are eating bread *with unclean hands*.” The main



concern raised by Jesus' opponents is that his disciples are not following the tradition of the elders. Yet the specific tradition at stake is that of handwashing. The complaint brings up the matter of purity, but this specific problem about eating with unwashed hands is not made explicit until Jesus addresses this later in 7:14b–15, that is, that eating with unwashed hands can make a man unclean (κοινός). It is important to note that the question at stake here is not a command of the Torah itself, but the tradition of the elders.

The narrative is interrupted by a parenthetical remark in 7:3–4 where the author explains to the readers this and other traditions related to purity. These include the handwashing which is the basis of the complaint; the washing of oneself after coming from the marketplace; and the washing of various vessels related to the cooking and storage of food. The author explains that these activities were observed, but not necessarily why they were observed. *Does the author assume such knowledge as to why these traditions were followed?* The mention of marketplace (ἀγορά) provides a possible link to what comes immediately before this narrative. While in Gennesaret one of the places mentioned where the sick would touch Jesus were the marketplaces (6:56). If one were to be concerned with contracting impurity unknowingly, then the marketplace would be one locale where this could likely happen. Thus, “all the Jews” wash themselves before eating after coming from the marketplace. This stands in contrast to Jesus' behavior as one who walks through the marketplace and allows himself to be touched by people who may likely be viewed as unclean. While Jesus appears as one who is “unclean and unconcerned,” most of the Jews are depicted as following this tradition to rid themselves of such impurity. *One may wonder at this point if the opponents' complaint against the disciples is actually more a veiled complaint against Jesus himself as he may be perceived as someone who has not taken seriously the observance of purity.*

Jesus' response to this complaint comes in three parts: First, Jesus addresses his opponents in 7:6–13. Second, Jesus addresses the crowd in 7:14b–15. Finally, Jesus explains things further to his disciples in 7:17–23. Of this three part response it should be observed that Jesus does not directly address the original complaint when he responds to his opponents in 7:6–13. Instead he attacks the tradition which is the basis of their complaint and so accuses them of nullifying God's word/command through their tradition. It is when he addresses the crowd—not his opponents—that Jesus responds to the complaint. This response is found in 7:15: “There is nothing outside of the man by going into him which is able to make him unclean, but the things which come out of the man are the things that make the man unclean.” Given the complaint about the handwashing tradition, this statement communicates at least a dismissal of this tradition and so their complaint: If nothing outside of a person by going into him can defile him, then food touched and then eaten with unwashed hands cannot defile a person. One might argue that at this point in the narrative there is no explicit reason for considering the commands of Leviticus 11 as this legislation has not been a part of the discussion. Nevertheless, if what Jesus says is true, then Leviticus 11, since this legislation deals with what may and may not be eaten, would also fall under Jesus' words.

It is in the third part of his response in 7:17–23 that Leviticus 11 now also comes into consideration, in particular when considering the parenthetical statement of 7:19b. When they are in a house (and so away from Jesus' opponents and the crowd), Jesus' disciples request an explanation of his words to the crowd in 7:14b–15. The first part of this explanation in 7:18–19a deals with the first part of Jesus' saying; this pertains to what is on the outside that goes into a man, namely, food that is eaten. The parenthetical remark of 7:19b—καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα—is inserted by the author to explain the full significance of this saying. Again, Lenski

and Wahlen argue that the referent of πάντα τὰ βρώματα can only be permissible foods because either Jesus did not have the authority at this time (Lenski) or ever (Wahlen) to cleanse the foods forbidden in Leviticus 11 and/or Jesus' response is limited in scope by the initial complaint about eating permissible foods with unwashed hands.<sup>36</sup> A straightforward reading of πάντα τὰ βρώματα, however, would suggest that all there is no food that is not included in this phrase as πάντα means "all." This is reading is also suggested by the words οὐδέν ("nothing") in 7:15 and πᾶν τὸ ἔξωθεν ("everything outside") in 7:18. It appears as if Jesus' words embrace every food that a person could eat, and thus also now the meat of the unclean animals. Thus, one argument that favors the majority position is a straightforward reading of the text.

*Yet what more can be said about what is happening in the parenthetical statement of 7:19b with respect to the wider narrative of Mark's Gospel? What can be said when comparing this text with the other texts where Jesus deals with impurity?*

#### Mark 7:1–23 and Purity in Mark's Gospel

Once again, as an interpreter tries to arrive at the significance of the things, deeds, situations, etc. that are depicted in a text, he can establish an interpretative matrix to determine what items are to be interpreted together. He can matrix items in same context, items with similar features, items depicted by similar vocables, and items that seem to have relatively independent importance.<sup>37</sup> When considering the other passages thus far identified where purity is an important theme, it can be noted that the handwashing controversy comes in the narrative after the first two full exorcism accounts of Mark 1:21–28 and 5:1–20 and after all three of the

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<sup>36</sup> See Lenski, *Mark*, 294 and Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 72–83.

<sup>37</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 158–61, where he discusses how to interpret level 2 signifiers.

miracles involving physical contact with an unclean person in Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43. Reading these passages together in an interpretive matrix, Jesus has already cleansed the Levitical impurity of the leper in Mark 1 and both the woman with the flow of blood and the dead girl in Mark 5. Thus, Jesus’ cleansing of all the foods in Mark 7:14b–15 as explained in 7:18–19a comes after he has already demonstrated his authority to cleanse individuals who are unclean according to the legislation in the Torah.

What is more, in the three healings/miracles Jesus has demonstrated a unique authority with respect to the Torah: In Mark 1:41 Jesus touches the leper and so he willingly risks becoming unclean himself. When he declares the leper to be clean, he is (at least to a degree) circumventing the process outlined in Lev 14:1–42 and assuming the authority of the priest to make this “performative” pronouncement upon this man. Jesus does instruct the leper to follow the Levitical instructions “as a witness to them,” but the leper does not do this and nevertheless remains one who has been declared clean. Of course, this man’s leprosy has actually departed from him, and he is cleansed. In Mark 5:27–29 the woman with the flow of blood touches Jesus’ garment and so risks making it and so him unclean; yet she is saved from her flow of blood. Rather than express anger at this woman for her violation of the instructions in Leviticus 15, Jesus sends her away in peace. Yet this time he notably does not instruct her to offer the sacrifice commanded in Lev 15:28–30. Then in Mark 5:41 Jesus takes the hand of a dead body and raises the girl back to life; in touching the dead body Jesus risks becoming unclean, but there is no mention in the narrative of Jesus following the instructions of Num 19:11–22. In fact, it should be noted that in none of these three incidents does Jesus need to cleanse himself: First, in each case he has overcome the malady—skin disease, discharge, and death—that are the cause of the uncleanness. Second (and perhaps more importantly), by virtue of his reception of the Holy

Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is depicted as one who possesses a unique holiness and so cannot be made unclean, not even through interaction with unclean spirits or physical contact with unclean persons.

Thus, in each of the three miracles involving Levitical impurity, Jesus purifies the individual he encounters through his own authority and so *apart from the Torah*. In this way he demonstrates a unique authority with respect to the Torah. This significance—that Jesus has a unique authority with respect to the Torah—arises from interpreting Jesus’ actions in each incident on level 2. Nowhere in these passages does the author explicitly say that Jesus has authority over the legislation of Leviticus 13–14 and Leviticus 15, but such authority is demonstrated in Jesus’ actions. Therefore, when Jesus does not tell the woman who is saved from the flow of blood to go offer the sacrifice commanded in Leviticus 15, it might appear as if Jesus is abrogating these instructions. Therefore, when the author in the parenthetical remark of Mark 7:19b declares that Jesus has abrogated the food laws of Leviticus 13, this declaration already follows upon Jesus in his actions both acting as if he has authority with respect to other legislation involving purity *and* acting as if those passages are no longer applicable to him as he conducts his ministry of initiating the reign of God. When all of these Markan passages are read together, what seems to be implicit in the earlier miracles is now explicit in Mark 7:19b: Jesus has authority to purify what is impure, an authority that now extends also to the animals/meat defined as unclean in Leviticus 13. What is more, in doing this Jesus declares this legislation from the Torah to be invalid.

The significance of what happens in Mark 7:14b–15 and 7:18–23 is then further illustrated as the narrative continues in 7:24–8:10. First, in the third full exorcism account Jesus is depicted as casting an unclean spirit out of the daughter of Syro-Phoenician woman. Then Jesus continues

to engage in further ministry among Gentiles. Voelz entitles his treatment of the exorcism account of 7:24–30 as “Clean and Unclean—A Concrete Example” and notes in his introduction to this section that Gentiles were considered unclean and so outside of the reign of God. Yet just as Jesus has cleansed all foods, so now he brings cleansing to Gentiles and brings them under the reign of God.<sup>38</sup> Jesus has authority both to purify Levitical impurity among the people of Israel and to purify the unclean Gentiles and bring them under the reign of God.

### Conclusion

In the miracle and exorcism accounts Jesus’ authority with regard to purity has been demonstrated primarily through reading the significance of his actions (on level 2). In his dominical statements in Mark 7:14–15 and then Mark 7:18–23, the narrator further depicts Jesus as abrogating one section of the purity code in the Torah explicitly through a level one saying. Through his actions Jesus has removed Levitical impurity (the three miracles). Now in his words he abrogates one section of the Torah, and so demonstrates further his unique authority with respect to the Torah. The significance of this redefinition of impurity is demonstrated in the narrative when Jesus engage in ministry among Gentiles in Mark 7:24–8:9.

### Other Passages Where Jesus Interprets the Torah

Other passages in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus is questioned about the Torah also support the view of Mark 7:1–23 for which this dissertation is arguing. In each case Jesus typically responds in ways that parallel the pattern in Mark 7: First, he dismisses the interests or traditions of Pharisees or scribes. Second, he redirects the debate toward God’s original intent at creation

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<sup>38</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 475.

for how people should live in relationship to him and one another. These other passages include the Sabbath controversy in Mark 2:23–28 and the question about divorce in Mark 10:2–12.

Many of the interpreters who read 7:19b as an indication that Jesus has dismissed the food laws of Leviticus 11 do not then necessarily conclude that this indicates that Jesus is presented as one with a unique relationship of authority with respect to the Torah. If the relationship of Jesus to the Torah is discussed at all, one tendency is to limit such authority that he might possess only to the purity code. Jesus in 7:19b is thus often said to dismiss the purity or ceremonial requirements of the Torah while maintaining the moral requirements.<sup>39</sup>

One major exception to this general approach regarding the relationship of Jesus to the Torah in Mark 7, however, is presented by Voelz in his commentary on Mark's Gospel. Contra the opinions of most other interpreters, Voelz does argue that Jesus' sayings in this passage depict him as one who has authority over *the entirety* of the Torah.<sup>40</sup> According to Voelz, such authority is first depicted in the Sabbath controversy of 2:23–28 (where purity is not a concern), but then ultimately finds its explanation in the parables of the cloth and the wineskins in 2:21–22 that immediately precede the Sabbath controversy.<sup>41</sup> Jesus' teaching in 7:1–23 is then consistent

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<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Cranfield, *Mark*, 245, who argues that Jesus only abrogated some elements of the Law, the ceremonial requirements; Moloney, *Mark*, 142, who argues that the Markan Jesus is making a distinction between "moral impurity" and "ritual impurity"; France, *Mark*, 292, who argues that the distinction is between "defilement in moral terms" and "external matters"; Iersel, *Mark*, 246–47, who argues that "rejection of the dietary laws by Mark . . . does not imply the rejection of the Torah itself"; Witherington, *Mark*, 230–31, who argues that Jesus is here maintaining "strict moral purity" and argues that "personal sin, not physical impurity now defiles"; and Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," 113, who argues that Jesus established "new rules of purity" based in "the core of the Law" (i.e., the Ten Commandments) rather than "the fences of men" (i.e., the rabbinic observances) and so was not "replacing" but merely "reforming purity." See also Gundry, *Mark*, 356 and Hooker, *Mark*, 181, where these authors argue that Jesus only abrogated *one part* of the Torah, the dietary laws. See also Neusner, *Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 60, who argues regarding this passage and Jesus' healings of the leper and the woman with the flow of blood that Jesus was more interested in "ethics" than "bodily afflictions" or "unclean hands and food." See also Taylor, *Mark*, 344–45 and Collins, *Mark*, 345–46, where in their commentary on this passage neither author directly addresses the significance of the dominical sayings regarding Jesus' relationship to the Torah.

<sup>40</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 469–70.

<sup>41</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222–24.

with these earlier teachings.

In the Sabbath controversy of 2:23–28 Jesus defends his disciples when they are accused by the Pharisees of “doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath” after the disciples “make [their] way plucking heads of grain.” Jesus’ response to his opponents is divided into two parts, 2:25–26 and 2:27–28. Each response is introduced with similar words—καί λέγει αὐτοῖς in 2:25 and καί ἐλέγεν αὐτοῖς in 2:27. In 2:25–26 Jesus defends his disciples by referencing the incident in 1 Samuel 21 where David was given the bread of the presence while fleeing from Saul. Such bread was reserved only for the priests (Lev 24:9), but Jesus points out that not only did David eat this bread, *but also those who were with him ate this bread*. In 2:27–28 Jesus explains the purpose of the Sabbath (2:27) and then claims a unique authority for himself with respect to the Sabbath—“as a result the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” In Jesus’ final statement in this passage, it arguably appears as if Jesus is claiming here to have a unique authority with respect to the Torah, or at least with respect to the Sabbath regulations.

Voelz draws attention to Jesus’ two-part response to his opponents in the controversy of 2:23–28 and sees a pattern where Jesus first addresses the matter of the tradition (part one) and then speaks about the Torah itself (part two).<sup>42</sup> In the first part of his response (2:25–26) Jesus addresses the accusation of his opponents (2:24) and here speaks *to the matter of tradition*, to “the Pharisees’ approach to the Law and to their legalistic traditions” where they in their tradition are “demanding more than the Law of Moses requires.”<sup>43</sup> Jesus’ use of the story from 1 Sam 21 shows first “that God ‘does not sweat the small stuff’ as far as food acquisition is

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<sup>42</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222–24.

<sup>43</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.



concerned.”<sup>44</sup> Yet Jesus’ use of this story is also based in Jesus’ identity as the messianic Son of David. According to Voelz, Jesus’ argument is that in eating the bread of the presence David (the type) *and his companions* “participated in the OT foretastes of the eschatological reign and rule of God” which in Mark’s Gospel is now actually initiated by Jesus (the antitype).<sup>45</sup> Since this reign has come in connection with Jesus, the Pharisees cannot accuse Jesus’ disciples who, as David’s companions before them, are participating with the royal king in his mission. It should be noted that in this first part of the response, Jesus does not quibble with his opponents over the legal technicalities of their interpretation of the Sabbath regulations. Instead he dismisses the notion that their approach applies at all to his disciples by means of this reference to 1 Samuel 21.

In the second part of his response (Mark 2:27–28) Jesus speaks to the Sabbath regulations in the Torah itself, and here he speaks “to deeper, more foundational, more important truths”: Where the Pharisees appear to see the Sabbath law/regulations as supreme and so man as subject to the Sabbath, in 2:27 Jesus argues that “God’s foundational creative will” is that the Sabbath was made for man.<sup>46</sup> This move then “relativizes both the place of *the Mosaic Law* and of the traditions [emphasis added]” as they apply to God’s people in the new age.<sup>47</sup> Then in 2:28 Jesus declares that he as the Son of Man has authority over the Sabbath. Voelz reads this statement in light of the earlier “Son of Man statement” of 2:10 where Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive sins *on the earth*: All creation is subject to the Son of Man, *who is also the very Son of*

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<sup>44</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.

<sup>45</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 223–24.

<sup>46</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.

<sup>47</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.

*God*, and this includes the Sabbath.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Voelz concludes further that Jesus is here depicted as not only having authority over the Sabbath laws, but over the all of the regulations of the Torah in as much as these no longer bind God's people within the new age that has already come in Jesus. In effect, Jesus is here presented as the τέλος νόμου—"the end of the Torah" (Rom 10:4)—"both as its goal *and as its termination* [emphasis added]."<sup>49</sup>

An important part of Voelz' analysis of this passage, however, is that he reads the Sabbath controversy of Mark 2:23–28 as a single literary unit with the question about fasting in 2:18–20 and the parables of the patch/cloth and the new wine/old wineskins in 2:21–22. Voelz argues that there is an intercalation here where the two stories of Jesus defending his disciples (2:18–20 and 2:23–28) frame the parables (2:21–22).<sup>50</sup> Both stories involve controversies over eating. In both stories Jesus' disciples are accused of wrong doing and Jesus then defends them from their accusers. In the first story the accusation is worded in terms of what the disciples *are not* doing: "Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" In the second story the accusation is worded in terms of what the disciples *are* doing: "Look, why are your disciples doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" What is more, in both stories it is arguable that the accusation of Jesus' disciples is actually an accusation of Jesus himself. As the central part of this intercalation, the parables then serve to interpret *both* of the

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<sup>48</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 194–96; 223. In discussing the forgiving of the paralytic in 2:1–12, Voelz argues that Jesus, the Son of Man, has authority to forgive sins because he is also the Son of God in the flesh; the scribes are correct that forgiveness can only occur when God is involved, yet in Jesus' actions God *is* involved. Voelz, 195. According to Voelz, the phrase "on the earth" indicates that that in Jesus God has actually come among his people and so forgiveness is not some "heavenly dispensation" but rather it is realized here on the earth itself. Voelz, 195–96.

<sup>49</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 223. See also Cranfield, *Mark*, 244–45, where he in his interpretation of 7:19c also concludes that Jesus in Mark is depicted as the τέλος νόμου. Cranfield goes on, however, to argue that Jesus' authority is only with respect to the ceremonial laws, not to the entire Torah itself.

<sup>50</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 210–24.

outside stories and not just the incident depicted in 2:18–20.<sup>51</sup>

Voelz then interprets the parable in this way: The patch of unshrunk cloth and the new wine are “metaphors for the characteristics of life within and under the eschatological reign and rule of God;” the old cloak and the old wineskins are “metaphors for the characteristics of life” under the Torah. If the two configurations are mixed, then the old configurations will burst. Thus, the new age that has come in Jesus destroys the old covenant. Voelz argues that the distinction at stake is that the Torah relied upon “overt obedience to the letter of the Law to establish the separateness of God’s people,” but the new age will operate on the basis of “the spirit of the law.”<sup>52</sup> Voelz then draws attention to the actions of Jesus thus far in the narrative (up to 2:28) that depict him breaking the specifics of individual regulations: He has touched a leper (2:41) and he allows his disciples to work on the Sabbath (2:23). These actions function “to destroy the entire system that comprises the regulations of the old covenant.”<sup>53</sup> This again indicates that Jesus in Mark’s Gospel is depicted as τέλος νόμου—“the end of the Torah.”<sup>54</sup>

Voelz then detects a pattern in Jesus’ teaching: Jesus will move from the regulations of the Torah back to God’s foundational will at creation and in this he will emphasize “relationships” over “regulations.”<sup>55</sup> This is what Jesus is then depicted as doing in 2:27: He recalls God’s will for the Sabbath and man’s proper relationship to the Sabbath (and so to God who created it). Then in 2:28 Jesus, as the Son of Man who is also the Son of God, claims for himself the authority to teach what is the purpose of the genuine Sabbath and thus to allow his disciples to

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<sup>51</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 210; 221–22.

<sup>52</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 221.

<sup>53</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 221.

<sup>54</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.

<sup>55</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222.

“work” on the Sabbath.

Yet it is important to note in Voelz’ analysis here that this is not merely some arbitrary or capricious exercise of authority over the Torah that Jesus is displaying. It is not as if Jesus is depicted merely as overturning some regulations and not others. Rather the basis for Jesus’ authority over the Torah is based in his mission as the Son of Man who is also the Son of God to initiate the eschatological reign of God. In this reign the old regulations will no longer apply to God’s people. This is what the parables of 2:21–22 indicate. This is then what Jesus practically demonstrates when he defends his disciples in 2:23–28. As Voelz argues, this is not an arbitrary authority limited to parts of the Torah, *but rather authority with respect to the entire Torah*. Of the new age that has come in Jesus and what this means for the relationship of believers to the Torah, Voelz explains thus:

“In the coming of *the* Son of Man, then, the circle attains a kind of closure. The Sabbath laws—in all their specificity—are not congruent with the original foundational expression of the purpose and will of God, *and* they are also not congruent with the final/eschatological expression of that will and purpose. . . Therefore, those who are one with *the* Son of Man receive in him the freedom of the contours of the original creation, which is under his command, as well as the contours of the new creation, which his visitation has brought us.”<sup>56</sup>

Jesus’ disciples would thus not look to the Torah (the old garment/old wineskin), but to God’s foundational will at creation and, more importantly, then also to the teaching and work of Jesus who has initiated the eschatological new age (the patch/the new wine).

Another passage where Jesus speaks authoritatively regarding the Torah is found in Mark 10:2–12. In this passage, Jesus responds to the question about divorce in the same way as he does when questioned about the Sabbath in 2:23–28: He moves from the regulations of Deut

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<sup>56</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 223.

24:1, 3 to God's original will regarding marriage as expressed in Gen 1:27 and 2:24. In making this move, Jesus again moves from the regulations of the Torah to focus upon the relationship of husband and wife that God intended at creation, a relationship that should not be broken by divorce.

In his interpretation of Mark 10:2–12, Voelz emphasizes these parallels between Jesus' response to the question about divorce and his earlier response to the question about the Sabbath.<sup>57</sup> In Mark 10:3–4, Jesus draws attention directly to the teachings of Deut 24:1, 3, and so he ignores the Jewish traditions in his discussion; his focus is upon "Moses," that is, the regulations of the old age.<sup>58</sup> Then, in Mark 10:5–9, Jesus sets the Torah in contradistinction with "the more basic and enduring will of God" revealed at creation.<sup>59</sup> Voelz argues the eschatological reign and rule of God as it is inaugurated by Jesus is then congruent with God's original will expressed at creation.<sup>60</sup> Since the Sabbath must now be understood in terms of its original purpose at creation—as an intended blessing for humanity—so marriage must also be understood—as an enduring relationship created by God that must not be ended; God's primary concern is and remains about relationships (here between husband and wife).<sup>61</sup> Thus, divorce is recognized as the result of human sinfulness and not as a part of God's original design.<sup>62</sup> What is more, by answering the Pharisees' question in this way, Jesus again demonstrates his unwillingness to be subject to the Torah (here Deut 24:1, 3) and his authority over it (here by

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<sup>57</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 719.

<sup>58</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 719.

<sup>59</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 719–21.

<sup>60</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 720.

<sup>61</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 720 and 722.

<sup>62</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 719.

dismissing the teachings on divorce and emphasizing instead God's enduring will). Voelz says of this incident, "a new patch arrives and new wine is come (2:21–22), as it were, in its proleptic manifestation" and "Jesus is contrasting God's *original* plan/design/creation and *later* (Mosaic) regulations."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, if an interpreter reads with Voelz on the function of Mark 2:18–28 in the wider narrative of Mark's Gospel, then this understanding of Jesus' relationship to the Torah will inform the reading of the handwashing controversy in 7:1–23 and, now also, the question about divorce in 10:1–12: Contra the positions taken by Lenski and Wahlen on Jesus' relationship to the Torah (positions that assert the continuing validity of the Torah as such<sup>64</sup>), the narrative of Mark's Gospel has thus far depicted Jesus as one who does have authority to dismiss the food laws of Leviticus 11, and also the allowance of divorce in Deut 24:1, 3. In bringing the new age, Jesus is replacing the old age. He is the Son of Man who is Lord of the Sabbath and "the end of the Torah." Such a man would also possess authority to abrogate Leviticus 11. Thus, a straightforward reading of 7:19b suggests that this is how the author explains what Jesus has just done in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a—"cleansing all the foods."

Now a final question, raised in objection to this view, must be addressed: What should be said about the logical consistency of Jesus' overall response to his opponents in 7:1–23? Is it

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<sup>63</sup> Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 722.

<sup>64</sup> Lenski, *Mark*, 197. Note that Lenski does recognize that Jesus would have such authority *after* Pentecost. According to Lenski, as a man Jesus was subject to the Torah until his death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement. Lenski thus appears not to see the new age as truly dawning until the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost. This reading thus contrasts with others (like Voelz) who see the baptism of John, the baptism of Jesus, and the proclamation of Jesus in Mark 1:14–15 as evidence that God's reign was already initiated in Jesus even before his death and resurrection.

See also Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 79 and 84–85. Note that Wahlen, unlike Lenski, never argues that Jesus would possess such authority over the Torah even post-resurrection. Thus it is his view that even Mark would not recognize that 7:19c could refer to foods forbidden in Leviticus 11. Wahlen, 84.

necessary that Jesus stick to the point of the accusation in 7:5 regarding handwashing? Would it be inconsistent and self-contradictory for him to accuse his opponents of setting aside the commands of God (7:8) only later himself to abrogate the Levitical food laws?

The incident in 7:1–23 again involves the disciples of Jesus being accused by his opponents—“Why are your disciples not walking according to the tradition of the elders, but are eating bread with defiled hands?”<sup>65</sup> The introduction to the narrative (7:1–2) and the parenthetical statement that explains the purification practices (7:3–4) indicate that what is at stake here *for the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes* are the purification rituals practiced within Second Temple Judaism and the handwashing tradition in particular. In responding to this accusation Jesus first addresses his opponents in 7:6–13. Then he addresses the crowd in 7:14a–15. Then finally he explains his “parable” in 7:15 privately to his disciples in 7:17–23. In his address to his opponents, however, Jesus does not appear to answer their accusation directly, but instead offers his own harsh counter-accusation where he dismisses their approach to Torah-observance through their traditions. That Jesus would address his opponents in this way may not be surprising to the readers of Mark’s Gospel: Thus far we know that the Pharisees have plotted to destroy Jesus (3:6) and the Jerusalem scribes have accused him of having Beelzebub/an unclean spirit (3:22, 30). Such characters may not be worthy of a respectful reply. It is in his address to the crowd that Jesus appears to defend his disciples regarding the charge in 7:5—“There is nothing outside of a person which goes into him which is able to defile him, but the things that come out of a person are the things that defile the person” (7:15). In the least this statement

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<sup>65</sup> As noted above, the accusation made in 2:19 is addressed in terms of what the disciples are not doing—they do not fast. The accusation made in 2:24 is addressed in terms of what the disciples are doing—what is unlawful on the Sabbath. Interestingly, the accusation in 7:5 is addressed in terms of both what the disciples are not doing—walking in the traditions—and what they are doing—eating with unclean hands.

would mean that Jesus' disciples are not in danger of impurity because they are eating with unwashed hands. Yet, when Jesus explains this parable to his disciples, the author understands his explanation to mean that in his address to the crowd Jesus is "cleansing all the foods." Again, a straightforward reading to the Greek suggests that this includes the foods categorizes as unclean according to Leviticus 11.

According to Voelz, Mark 7:1–23 depicts Jesus as responding to the complaint of 7:5 in two distinct parts, and this two-part response then parallels Jesus' response to the complaint about his disciples gleaning grain on the Sabbath in 2:23–28: First Jesus addresses the tradition; second he then speaks about the Torah itself.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in part one (7:6–13) of his response, Jesus speaks against the traditions that the Pharisees have added to the Torah and that then go beyond what the Torah requires, overburden people, and could even trump the actual commands of God.<sup>67</sup> In part two of his response (7:14b–15 and 7:18–23), however, Jesus moves beyond discussing of the oral tradition of the scribes to the matter of the regulations of the Torah itself. This parallels Jesus' response to the Pharisee's accusation in 2:24 when he first addresses the matter of their tradition of keeping the Sabbath (2:25–26) and then addressed the Torah itself (2:27–28). Thus, just as Jesus in 2:23–28 *intentionally* moves from addressing tradition to addressing the matter of the Sabbath regulations themselves, so also in 7:1–23 Jesus *intentionally* also moves *beyond the confines of the question in 7:5* and from addressing the tradition to speaking to the food laws themselves. In 7:6–13 the focus of Jesus' address is upon the "the improper imposition of human laws," but in 7:15 and then 7:18–23 the focus is upon "the Mosaic

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<sup>66</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 222–24 and 469–71.

<sup>67</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 469.



Law itself.”<sup>68</sup>

Voelz then argues that in depicting Jesus as Lord over the Sabbath earlier in the narrative and now as one who abrogates Leviticus 11 (7:19b), Mark continues to portray Jesus as one who has such authority with respect to the Torah.<sup>69</sup> According to Voelz, Jesus is here depicted not only as abrogating Leviticus 11, but the *entirety* of the Mosaic Law, and (as in Mark 2:28) Jesus does this based in his unique authority as “the Son of Man.”<sup>70</sup> The reader of Mark might recall the controversy of 2:23–28 and understand 7:1–23 in light of this. Again, both stories involve Jesus defending his disciples after his opponents accuse them for their actions. Reading with Voelz, both have Jesus respond in a two-part pattern where he first addresses the tradition of his opponents and then addresses the Torah itself. What is more, in both stories Jesus is depicted as first dismissing the traditions of his opponents and then displaying authority with respect to the Torah: He defines the purpose of the Sabbath and claims to be Lord of the Sabbath in 2:27–28; he redefines purity and in so doing purifies all the foods in 7:15 and 7:17–23.

That Jesus’ words in 7:14a–15 and 7:18–23 mark one turning point in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel is evident in that the handwashing controversy is followed immediately by a series of narratives wherein Jesus engages in mission among the Gentiles (7:24–8:9). After cleansing all the foods, Jesus now brings the reign of God to those outside the old covenant who, prior to this pronouncement, would have been viewed as unclean. In fact, the first incident in this series of narratives involves the third exorcism account where Jesus casts an unclean spirit out of a Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter, thus bringing purification to a Gentile. This movement of

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<sup>68</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 469–70.

<sup>69</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 471–74.

<sup>70</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 470–71.

the narrative into the Gentile world has great significance: Since the food laws of Leviticus 11 would have proven to be one major barrier to Gentile inclusion in the reign, it makes all the more sense that 7:19b would also include foods once categorized as unclean. Thus, Voelz calls the story of this exorcism “a concrete example” to show how, just as with the foods, Gentiles now are *not* outside of the purifying power that comes with the reign of God in Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

Voelz’ reading of 7:1–23 does answer the problems that arise from Wahlen’s reading of this incident: Is Jesus bound to address only the necessity of the handwashing tradition that underlies the question asked in 7:5? Jesus is not, in fact, bound by the specific concerns raised by his opponent’s question anymore here than he is by the question in 2:24. In his two-part response he intentionally moves beyond the confines of that question and turns from discussing the scribal tradition to discussing the Torah.

Of course, whether or not the words of Jesus in 7:14a–15 and 7:18–23 appear to be inconsistent with his earlier remarks in 7:6–13 will ultimately depend on whether any individual reader agrees with Voelz that Mark consistently portrays Jesus as the Son of Man who has such authority. Voelz nevertheless makes a case for how 7:1–23 can be understood in light of 2:23–28 and then especially the parables of 2:21–22 to show that Jesus in Mark’s Gospel has the authority to cleanse the unclean foods of Leviticus 11. This appears to be just what a straightforward reading of the author’s comment in 7:19b seems to indicate—καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα (“cleansing *all* the foods”).

### Conclusion

The handwashing controversy in Mark 7:1–23 represents a kind of climax for how the

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<sup>71</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 475.

theme of Levitical impurity functions in the narrative of Mark's Gospel. Mark 7:1–23 can be read together with the three miracle accounts of 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 as these four events each deal with Levitical impurity as defined in the Torah. In the miracle accounts Jesus acts as if he has a unique authority with respect to the purity regulations when he ignores those regulations by coming into physical contact with unclean persons. What is more, in each of those miracles Jesus overcomes the Levitical impurity in each case by operating by his own authority and *apart from the regulations of the Torah*. Though it is not stated explicitly in the text in each case, it is arguable that the significance of each of these miracles is that the regulations of Leviticus 13–15 and Numbers 19 no longer apply, or at least that Jesus acts as if they no longer apply. This is most evident when Jesus does *not* command the woman saved from the flow of blood to observe what was commanded in Leviticus 15 regarding presenting a sacrifice and presenting herself to the priest. In his actions Jesus demonstrates a unique authority with respect to these regulations of the Torah.

In the handwashing controversy of Mark 7:1–23, however, the author in the parenthetical statement of 7:19b explicitly states that here Jesus moves beyond acting as if he has a unique authority with respect to the purity regulations in the Torah (as he does in the three miracle accounts) and instead through his dominical sayings in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a he actually abrogates the food laws of Leviticus 11 so that these laws are no longer applicable. What is implicit in the three miracle accounts is now explicit in 7:14b–15 and 7:18–19a: Jesus has authority with respect to the purity regulations of the Torah. The theme of Levitical impurity thus functions in the narrative of Mark to demonstrate that Jesus has a unique authority with respect to the Torah.

That Jesus' authority with respect to the Torah extends beyond the purity regulations is

then established by other passages in Mark's Gospel where Jesus speaks to the regulations of the Torah. The important passage in establishing this pattern is found prior to handwashing controversy in Mark 2:18–28. In the brief parables of the old cloak and the old wineskins Jesus explains what is now happening as he is inaugurating the reign of God. The new age has arrived and so those under the reign of God are no longer under the Torah as it was in the old covenant; the old age and the new age do not mix. The pattern for how Jesus will not teach about the Torah and tradition is established in the Sabbath controversy of 2:23–28: Jesus dismisses the tradition (as he also does in 7:6–13 during the handwashing controversy). Then when speaking to the Torah, Jesus moves from the regulations of the Torah to God's foundational will at creation. Finally, in declaring that he, the Son of Man, is Lord even of the Sabbath, Jesus claims for himself a unique authority with respect to the Torah. This pattern of moving from the regulations of the Torah to God's foundational will is also found when Jesus speaks about divorce in 10:2–12, and so again Jesus speaks as if he has a unique authority over the Torah. Thus, Jesus declaring all foods clean in 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19a as interpreted by the parenthetical statement of 7:19b is not an isolated occurrence in the narrative, as Jesus has already claimed such authority with respect to the Torah in 2:28 when he claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath. Thus, according to the narrative of Mark, Jesus' authority is not merely over the purity regulations and Levitical impurity as demonstrated in the three miracles of 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 and in the handwashing controversy of 7:1–23, but with respect to the entire Torah. Mark 7:19b indicates that Jesus in Mark's Gospel is not merely the Lord of the Sabbath, but the Lord of Torah itself.

The placement in the narrative of the pivotal passage of 2:18–28 does help to explain one apparent anomaly in the narrative. Jesus appears to command the leper in 1:44 to obey Leviticus 14 by presenting himself to the priest and offering the sacrifice commanded by Moses (even

though the leper does not do this). As presented above, some interpreters argue that this indicates that Jesus is not operating with a unique authority with respect to the Torah. Yet in Mark 5:34, Jesus does not offer a similar command to the woman, that is, that she obey the instructions in Leviticus 15 by presenting herself to the priest and offering the sacrifice commanded there. At the narrative level this can be explained by noting the position of these two miracles with respect to Mark 2:18–28. The cleansing of the leper takes place *before* Jesus has fully explained the conditions of the new age and how the Torah does not apply to those under the reign of God as it did in the old covenant; thus, Jesus commands the cleansed leper to fulfill the regulations of Leviticus 14. Yet the saving/healing of the woman with the flow of blood takes place *after* 2:18–28. Now that Jesus has fully explained the conditions of life in the new age and under the reign of God and also established his authority with respect to the Torah, he sends this woman away in peace and does not bother telling her to fulfill the regulations of Leviticus 15. It is as if the regulations of Leviticus 15 no longer apply to this woman, for, indeed, in light of Jesus’ teaching in Mark 2:18–28, it is now clear that those regulations do not apply.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### JESUS AND NON-LEVITICAL IMPURITY: THE EXORICISM ACCOUNTS

#### Introduction

The central text examined in this chapter will be the first exorcism/miracle in Mark's Gospel (1:21–28) where, for the first of eleven times, the narrator refers to a demon as πνεῦμα ἁκάθαρτον (“an unclean spirit”). This account will be read in light of the description of the ministry of John the Baptist (1:1–8) and the baptism of Jesus and the initiation of God's reign (1:9–15). This account will also be read together with the Beelzebub controversy (3:23–30) that emphasizes the point that Jesus casts out demons in connection with the Holy Spirit. This first exorcism account will then be interpreted in light of the other exorcism accounts in the Gospel of Mark. This first exorcism will be interpreted as programmatic for the other three full exorcism accounts, and, together, these four exorcism accounts will be used to establish that Jesus uses his authority to deliver both Jews and Gentiles from the impurity represented by these unclean spirits, a deliverance that eliminates important distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. The uncleanness of the spirits is not a Levitical uncleanness, but, rather, a generic or cosmic uncleanness that is associated with idolatry and general opposition to God and his reign inaugurated by Jesus. Yet, Jesus is depicted as having a unique authority over these spirits and the impurity that they represent. In the narrative that follows 1:21–28, Jesus' authority to cast out these unclean spirits, and hence his authority over this generic, non-Levitical impurity that they represent, is foundational to his unique authority over every kind of impurity that there is, including Levitical impurity (see the discussion in chapters 2 and 3, above).

## **An Overview of the References to Exorcisms, Unclean Spirits, and Demons in Mark's Gospel**

As an interpreter tries to arrive at the significance of the things, deeds, situations, etc. that are depicted in a text, he can establish an interpretative matrix to determine what items are to be interpreted together. He can matrix items in context, items with similar features, items depicted by identical vocables, and items that seem to have relatively independent importance.<sup>1</sup>

Since the exorcism accounts in Mark's Gospel share similar features, *viz.*, Jesus casts unclean spirits/demons out of people who are possessed by them, these accounts can be read together in such an interpretative matrix. The account of the accusation of the scribes who come down from Jerusalem and Jesus' response to them in Mark 3:22–30 can also be matrixed with the exorcism accounts, since this account involves an interpretation offered by Jesus' opponents of the exorcism accounts. The exorcism accounts also use the same or similar vocables to label the spirits—πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean spirit”) or δαιμόνιον (“demon”)—and to describe the action of casting them out—the verb ἐκβάλλω (“cast out”). Thus, these various accounts can be interpreted together because they share both similar features and similar vocabulary.

The first exorcism account in Mark 1:23–28 also contains the noun phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (1:23) in the prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, a prepositional phrase in an adjectival relationship with the noun ἄνθρωπος. This exact phrase is also used to describe the Gergesene demoniac in 5:2. This provides further cause to read together the exorcism accounts of Mark 1:23–28 and 5:1–20.<sup>2</sup> A parallel passage to Mark 1:23 (and 5:2) is then found

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<sup>1</sup> See again Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 158–61 where he discusses how to read level 2 signifiers.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ is not used in Mark's Gospel to describe any of the other individuals who are possessed/oppressed by unclean spirits/demons. The verb ἔχω is used to describe the relationship of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman to the unclean spirit (7:25) and of the possessed boy to the dumb spirit (9:17) in the other two exorcism accounts. These two individuals “have” an unclean spirit/dumb

in Mark 3:22 where the scribes who have come down from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of casting out demons ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων; here the prepositional phrase is used adverbially to modify the verb ἐκβάλλει. Yet a similar prepositional phrase is found *before* the first exorcism account in Mark 1:8: John the Baptizer foretells that that the one stronger than he who is coming after him will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ; note that here the prepositional phrase is used adverbially to modify the verb βαπτίσει.<sup>3</sup> The use of similar prepositional phrases in these four passages (Mark 1:1–11; 1:23–28; 3:22–30; and 5:1–20) gives reason to read them together.

In reading these various accounts together, then, one must pay attention to any definite clues which the text offers regarding the significance of these events. For instance, the response of the onlookers in Mark 1:27, both to Jesus’ teaching (Mark 1:21–22) and to the exorcism, emphasizes Jesus authority, which includes authority over unclean spirits: “he even commands *the unclean spirits*, and they obey him.”<sup>4</sup>

#### References to Exorcisms in Mark

In the Gospel of Mark there are four full narrative accounts in which Jesus casts out unclean spirits/demons. These are found in 1:21–28 (the man in the synagogue of Capernaum); 5:1–20 (the Gergesene demoniac); 7:24–30 (the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter); and 9:14–29 (the deaf-mute boy). References to other exorcisms are also found in 1:34; 1:39; 3:11–12; 3:15; 6:7; and 9:38. As events that share similar features—that is, accounts where Jesus (or his

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spirit.

<sup>3</sup> The first exorcism account of Mark 1:23–28 then might also arguably be matrixed with the proclamation of John the Baptizer (Mark 1:7–8) and the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11) because they appear in the same context, at the beginning of the narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Note that emphasis based on word order in the Greek text will be shown through the use of italics.



apostles as suggested in 3:15 and 6:7 and the outsider in 9:38) perform exorcisms of unclean spirits/demons—these accounts can be read together in an interpretative matrix.<sup>5</sup> Such a reading might initially see as significant the description of Jesus as one who again and again exercises authority over the demonic realm (and who shares this authority with his apostles). This explanation *and more* is stated specifically by the onlookers at the conclusion of the first exorcism 1:27: τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο; διδασχὴ καινὴ κατ' ἐξουσίαν· καὶ τοῖς πνεύμασιν τοῖς ἀκαθάρτοις ἐπιτάσσει, καὶ ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ (“What is this? A new/different teaching according to authority; he commands *even the unclean spirits*, and they obey him”). This specific declaration offers one other possible interpretation as to the significance of this first exorcism: The first point established by the narrator in 1:21–22 and restated by the witnesses is that Jesus’ teaching (διδασχὴ καινὴ κατ' ἐξουσίαν) is itself “new/different” and “exuding authority.”<sup>6</sup> What is more, his authority over unclean spirits further verifies his authority as a teacher who teaches a new teaching.<sup>7</sup> All further accounts of exorcisms might then be understood in light of the

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<sup>5</sup> Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 159.

<sup>6</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1–8*, 156 and 158–59. Voelz translates the ὥς plus the particle clause (ὥς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων) as “exuding authority,” and this translation is reflected above. He notes that such a clause with ὥς can convey either the subjunctive understanding someone has or the subjective impression that someone conveys to others, and here he opts for the latter use: The impression that Jesus makes upon his hearers is that he exudes authority. Where this clause is specifically discussed in any further detail, one alternative understanding is that it denotes the manner and quality by which Jesus taught. For instance, see John Chijioke Iwe, *Jesus in the Synagogue at Capernaum: The Pericope and Its Programmatic Character for the Gospel of Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 1:21–28*, ST 57 (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universatà Gregoriana, 1999), 54–55.

Yet, see Smyth, paragraph 2086, where he discusses participles of cause or purpose following ὥς: “This participle sets forth the ground of belief on which an agent acts, and denotes the thought, assertion, real or presumed intention, in the mind of the subject of the participle verb or of some other person mentioned prominently in the sentence, without implicating the speaker or writer.” This supports as viable the translation offered by Voelz.

<sup>7</sup> See J. J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 70–72 and Moloney, *Mark*, 56. Both authors argue that based upon his miracles—and according to Moloney especially the exorcism in Mark 1:21–28—Jesus would have been viewed by “the folk people” as a teacher who was also a healer, with the healings serving to validate his role as teacher.

significance of this first exorcism: Again and again Jesus will exercise authority over unclean spirits/demons. Again and again as he casts out other unclean spirits/demons throughout the narrative, Jesus will establish his authority *as a teacher*, an authority that is initially recognized in the context of teaching (1:21–22) at the Capernaum synagogue at the beginning of his ministry (1:27).

In reading the exorcism accounts together, then, it can generally be noted that all of these accounts establish Jesus' unique authority over the demonic realm. What is more, the interpretation regarding Jesus' authority that is offered in 1:27 by the witnesses of the first exorcism can be considered again when interpreting each subsequent account: All of the exorcism accounts together continue to give evidence that Jesus' *teaching* is new/different and authoritative.

Note also in the account of Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22–30 that Jesus' opponents are fully aware of his success as an exorcist. In 3:22 they offer their own explanation as to the significance of these events—namely, that Jesus has been working in concert with the demonic realm! *Yet in this there is offered an alternate interpretation of the significance of the exorcisms than that offered by the narrator in 1:21–22.* What is more, Jesus responds with his own explanation regarding the significance of the exorcisms in the parable of the strong man in 3:27: Jesus is stronger than Satan (the strong man) and, in the exorcisms, he is delivering people out of Satan's realm.<sup>8</sup> Thus, this passage should also be matrixed with the exorcism accounts as offering further significance to all of the exorcisms: As Jesus casts out unclean spirits/demons, he is delivering those who had been subject to Satan's rule and control.

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<sup>8</sup> See Moloney, *Mark*, 82 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 261.

Such a conclusion might be assumed already in the first exorcism account without such an explanation, but Jesus' explanation makes it clear to the reader that what is happening in all of the exorcism accounts: In the exorcisms he is pillaging Satan's house by delivering people for demonic possession.

Clinton Wahlen suggests a specific interpretative matrix when he reads the four full exorcism accounts together in light of Jesus' teaching ministry. He argues that these four accounts can be viewed in a chiasmic ABBA pattern in which the first and the last accounts involve the exorcism of an Israelite in the land of Israel while the second and third accounts involve the exorcism of a Gentile outside of Israel in Gentile territory.<sup>9</sup> Wahlen concludes that the significance in this arrangement of the exorcism accounts is that they together depict the universal nature of Jesus' mission, that he gathers all who respond to his teaching, whether Jew or Gentile.<sup>10</sup>

To this general overview there are other interesting parallels among the four accounts: Again, the first two exorcisms each involve a man who is described as being ἐν πνεύματι ἁκαθάρτῳ (1:23 and 5:2). Reading with Wahlen on this point, then, it is notable that both a Jew in Israel and a Gentile outside of Israel are described as ἐν πνεύματι ἁκαθάρτῳ, and both are delivered from this state by Jesus. The last two exorcism accounts each involve a parent interceding to Jesus for the deliverance of a child from possession/oppression by an unclean spirit: first a mother interceding for her daughter in 7:24–30 and then a father interceding for his

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<sup>9</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 98. See also Pimentel, "The 'unclean spirits,'" 173 where he sees a similar function to the exorcism accounts in Mark.

<sup>10</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 98–99. In addition, Wahlen matrixes the exorcisms with the two miraculous feeding accounts, one for Jews (6:35–42) and one for Gentiles (8:1–9) so further to establish his argument that Jesus' mission in Mark is universal in nature, ultimately embracing Gentiles as well as Jews.

son in 9:14–29. Once again, it is notable that a both a Gentile child outside of Israel and a Jewish child in Israel are subject to demonic possession, and both are delivered by Jesus. The chiastic relationship between the four full exorcism accounts that Wahlen detects can be laid out thus:

A: In the land of Israel, Jesus delivers a Jew who is ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάκρτω.

B: In Gentile territory, Jesus delivers a Gentile who is ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάκρτω.

B: In Gentile territory, Jesus delivers a Gentile’s daughter who *has* an unclean spirit.

A: In the land of Israel, Jesus delivers a Jew’s son who *has* an unclean spirit.

Considering this chiastic pattern even further, note that first exorcism is the first miracle that Jesus performs in Galilee while the exorcism in Mark 9 is Jesus’ final miracle in Galilee. Thus, Jesus’ entire ministry in the north is framed on either side with exorcisms, specifically exorcisms of Jewish individuals in the land of Israel. Note that the other exorcisms recorded in 1:34, 1:39, 3:11–12, and, as might be assumed, in the mission of the Apostles (6:7) and by the outsider (9:38) take place in the land of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

#### References to πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean spirit”) in Mark

Mark uses the noun phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean spirit”) eleven times in his narrative. Ten of these uses occur in accounts of (or brief references to) exorcisms where Jesus (or his disciples) casts out unclean spirits. The eleventh occurs in 3:30 at the conclusion of the account of Jesus’ confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes (after the Scribes from Jerusalem

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<sup>11</sup> Yet in the list of place names in Mark 3:7–8 from which the crowds who surrounded Jesus came, there is included “[the region] around Tyre and Sidon.” Theoretically, some of the exorcisms described in 3:11–12 may have involved people from this region, and so Jesus would have also delivered Gentiles from the possession of unclean spirits *in the land of Israel*. Nevertheless, this is not specifically stated in Mark 3 and the four full exorcism accounts do stand out as significant events—significant enough to be narrated in full rather than merely summarized—over and against the brief summaries about exorcisms in the other passages. Perhaps those coming from around Tyre and Sidon should be seen as proleptic to the incident of the exorcism in 5:1–20.

claim that Jesus has been casting out demons ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων), when Mark says: ὅτι ἔλεγον πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει, “...because they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” The use of this phrase suggests that these accounts should be interpreted together.

Three of the uses of the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον appear in the first exorcism account of 1:21–28. First, in 1:23 a man “in their synagogue” (ἐν τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτῶν) is described as being ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ.<sup>12</sup> In 1:26 the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον refers to the same unclean spirit as identified in 1:23.<sup>13</sup> In 1:27 the plural τοῖς πνεύμασιν τοῖς ἀκαθάρτοις appears in the direct discourse spoken by ἅπαντες (“all”) and here refers to any unclean spirits that there are, not just the one that was cast out of the man by Jesus. In 1:27 the onlookers express their astonishment at Jesus’ authority as demonstrated by his teaching and now also this exorcism; they interpret the exorcism of this one unclean spirit to indicate that Jesus has such authority over other unclean spirits as well—“he even commands *the unclean spirits*, and they obey him.” This same pattern will then be followed in the exorcism accounts that follow, as Jesus continues to command the spirits, and they continue to obey him.

The prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (1:23) obviously expresses the basic idea of demon possession: The man “has an unclean spirit,” that is, he is possessed by this spirit. Voelz, however, argues that the phrase has a more focused and intentional connotation: this man was “within the power/sphere of an unclean spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Voelz further argues that there is a distinct

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<sup>12</sup> Note that in this sentence it is the man (ἄνθρωπος) who is the subject of the verbs ἦν and ἀνέκραξεν, not the unclean spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Note that in this sentence the unclean spirit is now the subject of the participles σπαράξαν (in which he is acting upon the man, here referenced by the pronoun αὐτόν) and φωνῆσαν and the indicative ἐξῆλθεν.

<sup>14</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 156 and 159. See also France, *Mark*, 103 where he argues that the prepositional phrase has the sense “under the special influence of the spirit.” Most other commentators read this prepositional

parallel in the phraseology of the accusation of the Jerusalem scribes against Jesus in 3:22 that Jesus was casting out demons ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων—according to Voelz, not “by the leader of demons,” but “*within the power/sphere of the leader of demons*” (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

According to Voelz, the significance of this parallel is that Jesus is actually the one who is operating in league with the Holy Spirit—indeed, at his baptism he was possessed by the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>—and so it is a serious charge and grave error for the scribes to claim that *this* Spirit is Satanic.<sup>17</sup> While the man in the synagogue in Mark 1:23–28 is within the power of that unclean spirit, Jesus has the same relationship with the Holy Spirit. In light of the narrative of the ministry of John the Baptizer and Jesus’ baptism, this makes sense: John foretells that Jesus will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ—“with the Holy Spirit” (see 1:8). At his baptism the Spirit comes down into Jesus (1:10). Jesus is possessed by the Holy Spirit just as this man in the synagogue is possessed by this unclean spirit. This unclean spirit is thus in fundamental opposition to Jesus,

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phrase to mean “with an unclean spirit.”

<sup>15</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 252 and 261. Note that most English translations read this prepositional phrase introduced with ἐν as expressing means/personal agency, “by the leader of demons.” This use of ἐν to introduce personal agency is presented as a possibility in BDAG (see BDAG, s.v. ἐν, 6), yet this use is limited. (Note that the entry in BDAG references the parallel passage in Matt 9:34 as an example of ἐν having this function—“by the leader of demons.”) See, however, Smyth, paragraphs 1488–90, where it says that the dative case is typically only used to express personal agency with perfect or pluperfect passive verbs; other verb tenses (and voices) use the genitive case with ὑπό to express personal agency. Smyth, paragraph 91. Yet Smyth allows that rarely the dative is used to express personal agency with other verb tenses (and voices) (see Smyth, paragraph 90) or when the subject is “impersonal” or “personal and the person is treated as a thing in order to express scorn” (see Smyth, paragraph 92). Thus, if the entry in BDAG were a possibility—ἐν to express personal agency—it would follow the rare exception to the general rule that is discussed in paragraph 90 of Smyth.

One other way to defend the majority translation would be to claim that ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων is a Hebraism where ἐν parallels the use of the preposition אֵל to denote means. Indeed, Voelz detects this use of ἐν in the phrase ἐν παραβολαῖς in Mark 3:22, yet he also notes that this usage is very rare even in the Old Testament. See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 256, fn. 17. Therefore, it is unlikely that ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων is a Hebraism where ἐν expresses means/personal agency.

<sup>16</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 263.

because Jesus is acting in the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit. This is evident in how the unclean spirit identifies Jesus in 1:24: ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (“the Holy One of God”).<sup>18</sup> Jesus has the Holy Spirit, and so he is holy (ἅγιος); the unclean spirit, however, is unclean/impure (ἀκάθαρτον). There is here a clash between the holy and the unclean as shown by the spirit each individual has, and under whose influence/control each is operating: Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the man in their synagogue, an unclean spirit.<sup>19</sup>

In this confrontation, the fundamental opposition between Jesus and the satanic realm may be understood in terms of “holiness” (represented by the Holy Spirit who possesses Jesus) in opposition to “uncleanness/impurity” (represented by the unclean spirit that possesses the man).<sup>20</sup> Thus, this incident in the synagogue should be read in light of what has come before in Mark’s narrative: Jesus’ reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism in Mark 1:10 is the incident that indicates that he is the stronger one who, as foretold by John, would baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (1:8) and who by virtue of his own baptism can be identified as ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (1:24). Thus, based on the use of the prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ in 1:23, the events of 1:21–28 can be matrixed both with John’s proclamation and Jesus’ baptism in 1:7–11 as well as with the accusation of the Jerusalem scribes in 3:20–30.

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<sup>18</sup> See Iersel, *Mark*, 136, where he relates the title “the Holy One of God” to Jesus’ reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism and where he emphasizes that the Holy Spirit and the demons are here depicted as “counterparts.” See also Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 36; Grundmann, *Markus*, 59–60; Lane, *Mark*, 73–74; Hooker, *Mark*, 64; Gundry, *Mark*, 75; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 192; and France, *Mark*, 103 and 107. See also Neyrey, “Idea of Purity,” 94–96, where he suggests that the distinction between “unclean and clean” is actually a distinction between “unclean and holy.”

<sup>19</sup> This identification is unique in Mark as elsewhere the unclean spirits identify Jesus as “Son of God” (3:11) or “Son of the Most High God” (5:7).

<sup>20</sup> See Haidt, *Righteous Mind*, 170–77. Haidt, a “moral psychologist,” identifies sanctity/degradation as one of the five moral foundations underlying human nature. It is interesting to note that in his analysis of various human cultures Haidt uses the word *sanctity* (*holiness* or *sacredness* rather than *cleanliness*) to denote the “positive” pole in this dichotomy. According to Haidt, it is *sanctity* that best describes what opposed *degradation* or *impurity*.

The use of the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον in 1:23, 26, and 27 also provides justification for reading the first exorcism account with other passages where the phraseology πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον/πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα occurs and for understanding these later texts in light of it. Indeed, there are similar narrative dynamics that recur when Jesus encounters these other “unclean spirits.” Such spirits are introduced as those who know Jesus’ identity: he is the one who is inaugurating the reign and rule of God as God’s agent. These unclean spirits lie outside of God’s reign and rule and so are opposed to Jesus’ divine mission. He who is holy—Jesus has received the Holy Spirit—will overcome and cast out what is unclean.<sup>21</sup> To consider the further incidents briefly in turn:

In 3:11, in the midst of the “summary statement” of 3:7–12, the plural τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα appears as the subject of the verbs. Two themes established in 1:21–28 are evident in this passage. First, the unclean spirits are aware of Jesus’ identity, as here they address him as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (“the Son of God”). Also, the description of Jesus’ interaction with unclean spirits in 3:11–12 verifies the declaration of the onlookers at the synagogue in 1:27, namely, that Jesus has authority over unclean spirits: He commands them and they obey him.

In Mark 3:20, at the conclusion of the account of Jesus’ confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes (3:22–30), the singular πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is used as the direct object of the verb ἔχει—ὅτι ἔλεγον· πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει (“because they were saying, ‘He has *an unclean spirit*’”). This is the narrator’s explanation of Jesus’ warning in 3:29 regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The actual accusation in 3:22 was Βεελζεβοὺλ ἔχει (“He has *Beelzebul*”)

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<sup>21</sup> See the introductory discussion of the relationship between uncleanness and exorcisms on pages 23–32, above, especially the view of Voelz (31–32).



and ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια (“By” or “In/Within the sphere of the leader of demons he is casting out demons”).<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, Jesus’ opponents in this passage offer their own interpretation as to the significance of Jesus’ exorcisms, and then in 3:27 Jesus offers his own counter-interpretation in the parable of breaking into the house of the strong man. The blasphemous nature of their claims about Jesus stem from the fact that since the Holy Spirit came into Jesus at the baptism in 1:10, Jesus might now be described as ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (“within the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit”). Thus, Jesus’ opponents are actually calling the Holy Spirit “Beelzebul” and “the leader of the demons,” that is, “an unclean spirit.” Again, Jesus’ counter-explanation in 3:27 of what is happening indicates that the exorcisms show his authority over Satan and that he is delivering people from the satanic realm. This underlying reality, then, is what takes place when Jesus deals with other “unclean spirits” in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel.

There are three references to an “unclean spirit” in the account of the exorcism of the Gergesene demoniac in 5:1–20. First, in 5:2, this man whom Jesus and his disciples encounter is also described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned above, in Mark’s narrative both a Jewish man in Israel and a Gentile man outside of Israel experience this condition and are then delivered by Jesus. In 5:8 the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον is used as the direct object of the verb ἔξελε. In 5:13 the phrase τὰ πνεῦμα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα is used as the subject of the verb εἰσηλθόν. In both cases the phrase refers to the same unclean spirit as first mentioned in 5:2.

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<sup>22</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 256 and 261 for a discussion of the translation of the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων.

<sup>23</sup> Note that in this sentence it is the man (ἄνθρωπος) who is the subject of the verbs ἦν and ἀνέκραξεν, not the unclean spirit.

Again, the man with the unclean spirit identifies Jesus (“son of the most high God” [5:7]), and Jesus asserts his superior authority in casting “legion” into the swine (5:11–13).

In 6:7 the phrase ἐξουσίαν τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων (“authority over the unclean spirits”) is used to describe the authority Jesus delegates to his disciples as he sends them out in mission. That this authority indicates that the disciples will be able to cast out (the verb is ἐκβάλλω) the spirits is established in 3:15, where Jesus gives them authority ἐκβάλλειν τὰ δαιμόνια (“to cast out demons”).

In 7:25, πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον describes the spirit which possesses the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (in this sentence πνεῦμα is the direct object of the verb εἶχεν). In 9:25 τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ describes the spirit that possesses the deaf-mute boy (in this sentence πνεύματι is the direct object of the verb ἐπετίμησεν).

In summary: the significance of what it means that the spirit in Mark 1:21–28 is “unclean” applies to other “unclean spirits” in the narrative: These spirits are opposed to the Holy Spirit whom Jesus received at his baptism and in whom Jesus is now acting as he teaches and casts out unclean spirits/demons. This explains in part the nature of their impurity in the narrative: They are opposed to Jesus and the Holy Spirit whom Jesus received, and so they are outside of the eschatological reign and rule of God which Jesus is proclaiming and inaugurating. What is more, Jesus continues to demonstrate his authority over them: He commands them, and they obey him.

#### References to δαιμόνια (“demons”) in Mark

Mark refers to the spirits as δαιμόνια (“demons”) eleven times in Mark 1:1–16:8.<sup>24</sup> Two

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<sup>24</sup> Two further occurrences appear in the Long Ending, at 16:9 and 17.

uses of the plural form δαιμόνια appear in Mark 1:29–34. This pericope describes events that follow the incident in the synagogue in Capernaum narrated in 1:21–28. Jesus and the four fishermen go to the home of Simon and Andrew where Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law (and where they presumably spend the Sabbath day). After it becomes evening (and the Sabbath has ended), people begin to bring to Jesus “the sick and those possessed/oppressed by demons (τοὺς δαιμονιζομένους).”<sup>25</sup> In response, Mark says in the final verse, Jesus “healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out (ἐξέβαλον) many demons (δαιμόνια πολλὰ), and he did not permit the demons (τὰ δαιμόνια) to speak openly, because they knew him.” The description of these exorcisms at the conclusion of this account arguably frames the story of Jesus at Simon’s house with the incident at the synagogue, for both conclude with exorcisms. In this context, the word δαιμόνιον may be seen to function as a synonym for πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον.<sup>26</sup> Note these similarities in the referents that are described: They know who Jesus is and apparently try to identify him. Jesus silences them. Jesus casts them out. Thus, these demons are as of the same class as the spirit encountered in Mark 1:21–28: they are unclean spirits. In casting out these many demons, Jesus continues to cast out what the narrative has established to be unclean spirits.

The plural form δαιμόνια is then used six times in five other passages that refer to

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<sup>25</sup> The verb δαιμονίζομαι is used to describe those who are possessed/oppressed by demons and as such is a cognate of δαιμόνιον.

<sup>26</sup> On this point see Hooker, *Mark*, 63; Gundry, *Mark 1–8:26*, 56; Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 159; and F. Hauck, “ἀκάθαρτος,” *TDNT* 3:227–28. Regarding which label has priority, it should be noted that the first time such a spirit is introduced in the narrative of Mark as a character, the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is used instead of δαιμόνιον, and so the reader’s first sense of what this spirits are is that they are “unclean spirits” and then only later “demons.” Thus, when discussing the relationship of these two words as synonyms, it may be better to say “the demons are unclean spirits” rather than “the unclean spirits are *merely* demons.”

exorcisms: in the “summary statement” describing Jesus’ exorcisms in 1:39, in the commissioning of the 12 where they are given authority to cast out demons in 3:15, two times in the accusation of the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22, when the apostles perform exorcisms in 6:13, and in the complaint about the outsider who is performing exorcisms in 9:38. The singular δαιμόνιον is used three times in the account of the exorcism of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (in 7:26, 29, and 30), and it is clear that this descriptor refers to the πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον first identified in 7:25. These passages clearly indicate the synonymous nature of the two labels πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον and δαιμόνιον. The synonymous nature of these two labels for these spirits, πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον and δαιμόνιον, is also demonstrated in the mission of the apostles in Mark 6 as the disciples are given authority over “unclean spirits” in 6:7, and then are depicted as casting out “demons” in 6:13. Thus, in Mark’s narrative the “demons” should in no way be understood as some sort of entity distinct from the “unclean spirits.” Furthermore, the first time these characters are introduced in the narrative, the label used is πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον. This suggests that πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is the primary label for these spirits, making δαιμόνιον a synonym for πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον.

#### The Use of the Adjective ἀκάθαρτος in the Gospel of Mark

Mark uses the adjective ἀκάθαρτος exclusively in the noun phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον to describe these spirits as unclean/impure. It is of note, then, that Mark does not use this adjective to describe any character who may be subject to Levitical impurity. *What is the nature of the impurity of these spirits as it is understood in the narrative of Mark?* Based in the narrative itself, the impurity of these spirits appears in contrast to Jesus who received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, who is possessed by the Holy Spirit, and who is the Holy One of God. This contrast is

evident in the exorcism account of Mark 1:23–28 when considering the opposition between Jesus who will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ and who has received the Holy Spirit with the man in the synagogue who is ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ. This contrast is also evident when the scribes from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of operating ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, while the narrative has established that he received the Holy Spirit. These spirits are impure because they are opposed to Jesus, they are opposed to all that he does in inaugurating the reign of God, and they are opposed to the Holy Spirit whom he received at his baptism.<sup>27</sup> It appears in Mark's Gospel that the uncleanness/impurity of these spirits is understood primarily in terms of their relationship to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the reign of God.

Arguably, there may be some connection made between the unclean spirits who possessed the Gergesene demoniac and Levitical impurity (Mark 5:1–20): The possessed man lived among the tombs; the demons were cast into a herd of swine.<sup>28</sup> Yet, in the narrative, this man is not a Jew, and so he is not subject to the Levitical code. Thus, overall, in particular on the basis of the first exorcism account, such a connection between the impurity of these spirits and Levitical impurity is not emphasized in the narrative of Mark's Gospel. This indicates that the impurity of these spirits is *a different kind of impurity* than Levitical impurity. Again, this appears to be an impurity defined ultimately by their contrast with and opposition to Jesus, the Holy Spirit whom he received at his baptism, and his mission of inaugurating the reign of God.

Drawing attention to this particular use of ἀκάθαρτος in Mark's Gospel is necessary for

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<sup>27</sup> See Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 36; Grundmann, *Markus*, 59–60; Lane, *Mark*, 73–74; Hooker, *Mark*, 64; Gundry, *Mark*, 75; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 192; France, *Mark*, 103 and 107; and Iersel, *Mark*, 136.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Gundry, *Mark*, 248; Witherington, *Mark*, 181; France, *Mark*, 277; Edwards, *Mark*, 155; Stein, *Mark*, 251; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 342; and Moloney, *Mark*, 101–06.

several important reasons. First, some interpreters, either explicitly or implicitly, do connect the impurity of these spirits in some way with Levitical impurity, though they do not fully explain what this connection implies.<sup>29</sup> Still others deny that the adjective ἀκάθαρτος has any special meaning at all when used to describe these spirits, but rather that πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον should merely be understood as a synonym for δαιμόνιον.<sup>30</sup> In the case of this latter interpretation, one would not need to discuss the nature of the impurity of these spirits at all since the adjective ἀκάθαρτος has lost any particular meaning in its use in Mark's account. Thus, a focus on how Mark actually uses this adjective is crucial in order to respond to such interpretations, either that ἀκάθαρτος refers to Levitical impurity or that πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is a mere synonym for δαιμόνιον.

Second, in the LXX ἀκάθαρτος is regularly used to translate the Hebrew adjective נָמָץ, to denote uncleanness/impurity according to the purity code.<sup>31</sup> Consider, for instance, the following important passages: In Lev 11:4 the forbidden animals are labeled ἀκάθαρτον in place of נָמָץ; ἀκάθαρτος is then used a total of 31 times throughout Leviticus 11 to translate נָמָץ. In Lev 13:11 a leprous man is labeled ἀκάθαρτος in place of נָמָץ; ἀκάθαρτος is then used a total of eight times in Leviticus 13 to translate נָמָץ. In Lev 15:2 a man after experiencing an emission is labeled ἀκάθαρτος in place of נָמָץ; ἀκάθαρτος is then used a total of 26 times

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<sup>29</sup> See Grundmann, *Markus*, 59; Taylor, *Mark*, 173–74; Swete, *Mark*, 19; Brooks, *Mark*, 50; Mann, *Mark*, 212; and Edwards, *Mark*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> See Cranfield, *Mark*, 74; Guelich, *Mark 1–8*:26, 56; and Stein, *Mark*, 87. See also Witherington, *Mark*, 91, n. 11 where he makes this argument while commenting upon the exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28, even though he later he argues that the “uncleanness” of the spirit matters when commenting upon the exorcism of the Gergesene demoniac. Witherington, 181.

<sup>31</sup> See Haupt *TDNT*, 3:427–28. Haupt, however, also notes that ἀκάθαρτος is also used to describe impurity related to idols (Haupt, 427), though he does not emphasize this point.

in Leviticus 15 to translate נִמְצָא. In Num 19:11 a person who has touched a dead body is labeled ἀκάθαρτος in place of נִמְצָא; ἀκάθαρτος is then used a total of 13 times in Num 19:11–22 to translate נִמְצָא. Based on this use of the adjective ἀκάθαρτος in these passages from Leviticus and Numbers, one familiar with the LXX might assume that there is a normal connection between ἀκάθαρτος and Levitical impurity. Thus, when applied by Mark to describe the spirits, one might argue that these “unclean spirits” have an impurity that somehow relates to impurity as defined by the Torah.

Thus, it is important to note that *nowhere in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel does the author make such use of ἀκάθαρτος to describe Levitical impurity.* The author does not use this adjective in Mark 1:40–45 to describe the leper (even though it is used that way by the LXX in Leviticus 13). He does not use it in 5:21–43 to describe either the woman with the flow of blood (even though it used that way by the LXX in Leviticus 15) or Jesus after he touches the dead girl (even though it used that way by the LXX in Num 19:11–22). What is more, he does not use it in 7:1–23 to describe either the condition of those who do not wash their hands before eating or forbidden foods (even though it is used that way by the LXX in Leviticus 11 to describe the unclean animals). Rather, Mark uses this adjective specifically to describe the spirits/demons who are in opposition to Jesus and his ministry. What is more, as discussed above, the nature of their impurity appears connected to their opposition to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the reign of God rather than the regulations of the Torah.

Thus, when ἀκάθαρτος is used to describe these spirits in Mark’s narrative, the nature of the impurity represented by these spirits comprises what might best be described as a “non-Levitical impurity,” “an impurity that is not defined by the Torah,” or “an impurity that is outside of the Torah.” One might call this a “*generic impurity*” since in Mark these spirits are active

among both Jewish and Gentile characters. It might even be called a “*cosmic impurity*,” as its nature is really directed to opposition to the holiness of God as revealed in the reign of God inaugurated by Jesus by the satanic forces which are outside of this reign.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the signifiers which Mark uses to denote that which is unclean, Voelz notes that when the author does discuss what is unclean in terms of the covenant, he uses the adjective κοινός (see Mark 7:2), which, when used by Mark, does not denote opposition to God as does ἀκάθαρτος, but rather ritual or Levitical impurity.<sup>33</sup> Though these two adjectives are in the same semantic field, Mark uses them in distinct ways within his narrative. Ultimately the meaning of ἀκάθαρτος is based on how it functions in this particular narrative, not how it is used in the LXX.<sup>34</sup>

#### What Can Be Known and Believed about Unclean Spirits Based on the Text of Mark

A first point (which has been not stated outright in the discussion thus far) is that these unclean spirits do exist and, as described by Mark, were active at the time of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Clinton, “Exorcism of History,” 225, where he emphasizes the cosmic nature of Jesus’ exorcisms as they signify “the end of Satan’s regime,” and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 163, where he describes the confrontation between Jesus and the unclean spirit in Mark 1:21–28 as “a war of the worlds.”

<sup>33</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 452–54. Voelz argues that as used in Mark κοινός bears the same meaning as ἀκάθαρτος as used in the LXX. As such this adjective as used in Mark describes those who are marginalized “within the reign” rather than what is outside of the reign. He notes that the verb καθαρίζω is then used in Mark as the solution for what is κοινός, not what is ἀκάθαρτος. Voelz, 453. Here it may be noted that Jesus’ actions with respect to the unclean spirits/demons is never καθαρίζω, but ἐκβάλλω: Jesus does not cleanse these spirits, but rather he casts them out of the people who are possessed. Though in this action the people once possessed may experience a “cleansing,” the spirits/demons themselves remain “unclean.”

<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, one might conclude that interpreters who insist that ἀκάθαρτος denotes some type of Levitical impurity because this is how the adjective is used in the LXX are not reading as the implied readers of Mark, and so they are arriving at an “unexpected reading” of the text, a meaning the author did not intend for his readers.

<sup>35</sup> See Chilton, “Exorcism of History,” 230–33, where he discusses how many modern interpreters dismiss the existence of demons and so dismiss the historicity of the exorcism accounts in Mark (and the other Gospels). Chilton allows that the historical Jesus did perform exorcisms in a historical context where people believed that demons did exist. Though not practicing narrative criticism, Chilton nevertheless does argue for a “suspension of disbelief” in



The unclean spirits are the same as demons as the labels δαιμόνιον and πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον are used synonymously. If one accepts the narrative world of Mark's Gospel, then this is a world where there are demonic forces that can be labeled "unclean spirits" and who are active in the world of men, and most often with malicious intent as to the welfare of people.

Second, as "demons" these spirit are associated with and subject to Satan and his reign (βασιλεία) and house (οἰκία) (Mark 3:23–25). The Jerusalem scribes associate the activity of demons to the Satanic realm (3:22), and Jesus does not disagree with them on this point; he disagrees only regarding their accusation that he, too, is associated with and subject to Satan (3:23–30). Given their association with Satan, these unclean spirits are in opposition to God and Jesus.

Third, as part of their activity in support of and subject to Satan, the unclean spirits are able to possess/oppress human beings. In such a state the unclean spirits can control the speech of their "human host" (1:23) and even speak through the possessed human (5:7). In such a state the unclean spirits can also control the bodily actions of their "human host," it seems often with intent to harm the possessed human (1:26; 5:5; 9:22). This state of possession is described in three ways. First, the person so possessed can be described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (1:23; 5:2), and this is the first way Mark describes such a state. Again, most translations render this prepositional phrase as "with an unclean spirit," but here we follow Voelz, who argues for the translation "within the sphere/power of an unclean spirit."<sup>36</sup> This translation does emphasize how the possessed person is, indeed, under the power and influence of the unclean spirit; this is

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order to delve into the theological meaning of the exorcisms in Mark, where the significance of the exorcisms, according to him, is that Jesus' coming brings the end of Satan's rule. Chilton, 225.

<sup>36</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 156.

evidenced by how the unclean spirit can both speak through its human host and control the human's actions (again often for the harm of the human). Second, this state can be described with the verb δαιμονίζομαι (1:32) where the human is possessed/oppressed by a demon. Third, the state can be described with the verb ἔχει, denoting that the possessed person simply “has” an unclean spirit/demon (7:25; 9:17).

A fourth point is that the activity of these unclean spirits appears universal in scope. They are capable of possessing/ oppressing all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, adults or children. They are active outside of the land of Israel among the Gentiles, yet they are also active within the land of Israel among Jews. That the unclean spirits could operate in Israel among the Jews might have appeared shocking to some of the original readers of Mark's Gospel. Jerome H. Neyrey argues that, according to what he calls “Jewish purity maps” which were operative in first century Judaism, the land of Israel would be considered “pure” and “holy” while Gentile lands would be considered “unclean.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, at least a Jewish reader would not be surprised to find that the unclean spirits were operative on the other side of the lake in the country of Gergesene (5:1–20) or in the regions of Tyre (7:24–30); these Gentile lands were “unclean” and so would be subject to the malicious activity of these unclean spirits. Yet, it would be shocking that an unclean spirit would be operative in the land of Israel, and then most especially in a synagogue (1:21–28).<sup>38</sup> The initial exorcism in this Gospel is perhaps the most shocking of all in that it indicates that the unclean spirits can possess/ oppress Jews and can be active in the land of

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<sup>37</sup> Neyrey, “Idea of Purity,” 92 and 95.

<sup>38</sup> Neyrey, “Idea of Purity,” 95. Neyrey's discussion of the various purity maps (of place, people, things) always moves from what is most unclean to what is most clean. His theory holds that first century Judaism viewed Gentile lands as most unclean, the land of Israel as clean, and then places such as the Temple in Jerusalem as most clean. Synagogues too, because they have been set aside for a special use, would be a particularly “clean” place. But this is not what is depicted in Mark 1:21–28.

Israel, *even in a synagogue*.

A fifth (and obvious) point is that, because it is not a good state for the humans to be possessed/oppressed by such spirits, to have the unclean spirits expelled is a form of deliverance. Jesus' exorcisms are thus acts of deliverance and salvation for the sake of the people who are freed from demonic possession/oppresion. Thus, after the first exorcism, people bring the demon possessed/oppressed people to Jesus in order that he might cast the demons out of these people in the same way other bring the sick to be healed (1:32–33). It is perceived to be a good thing for the formerly possessed/oppressed that Jesus casts out the unclean spirits/demons.

Sixth, as these spirits are associated with Satan, they are thus also opposed to Jesus and his initiation of the reign of God. This opposition is depicted in the first exorcism account of 1:23–28, and it can be understood as an opposition between the Holy Spirit whom Jesus received and the unclean spirit that controls the man in the synagogue. This is a basic opposition between the one who is holy (ἅγιος) and those that are unclean (ἀκάθαρτα). That this opposition between the holy and the unclean is what is at stake is emphasized again in Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22–30. They accuse of Jesus of operating within the sphere/power of an unclean spirit, yet the narrative has established that Jesus has the Holy Spirit; the scribes are depicted as grossly misinterpreting the significance of the exorcisms.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The following elements of this conflict are repeated several times in Mark's Gospel: The unclean spirit/demon recognizes Jesus and then tries to identify him; however, Jesus commands the spirit and it obeys him. In light of the parable of the strong man in Mark 3:27, the exorcisms involve Jesus "pillaging the strong man's house" and so overcoming the satanic realm. See Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 37, 88, and 116–17. According to the narrative reading of Mark provided by Kingsbury, the chief conflict driving this story is that between Jesus and the authorities. Kingsbury, 66. Jesus demonstrates his authority from the beginning of his ministry, yet the authorities reject this authority, and this eventually results in Jesus' crucifixion. The final resolution of this conflict, however, is suspended from the story of Mark as it will not take place until Jesus returns on the Last Day. Kingsbury, 88. Another area of conflict in the narrative of Mark is that involving Jesus and his own disciples. According to Kingsbury, the source of this conflict is "the disciples' remarkable lack of comprehension and their refusal to come to terms with the central purpose of Jesus' ministry or the true meaning of discipleship." Kingsbury, 89. The resolution of this conflict too is suspended from the narrative (if the narrative ends at 16:8) as it will take place when

Seventh, these spirits are ἀκάθαρτον, that is, they are unclean. This knowledge would stem from the fact that the narrator first introduces these spirits in 1:23 as a class of characters with the label πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, and only later does he use the label δαιμόνιον. Thus, it seems unlikely that πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον is a *mere* synonym for δαιμόνιον. This appears to be all the more true because of the basic opposition between *holy* and *unclean* in the exorcism account of 1:23–28 and how this opposition is again highlighted in 3:22–30. As argued above, the nature of the “uncleanness” of these spirits does not appear to be Levitical as there is never any connection made in Mark’s Gospel between the uncleanness of these spirits and any passage regarding purity from the Torah. What is more, the author uses another adjective (κοινός) to describe ritual/Levitical impurity. Rather, the uncleanness of these spirits is related more to their opposition to Jesus who received the Holy Spirit and now operates in/within the sphere of the Holy Spirit (even as they operate in/within the realm of Satan). Again, the opposition appears to be between the holiness of Jesus and so the contrasting impurity of these spirits.

Finally, Jesus, as “the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit,” that is, as one who has received and is even possessed by the Holy Spirit, and as the one who is “the Holy One of God,” has a unique authority over these spirits and by this authority he casts them out of people who are

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Jesus reunites with his disciples in Galilee as promised in 16:7. Kingsbury, 116–17. Thus the narrative of Mark reserves the resolution of these two major areas of conflict until a future time that is suspended from his narrative. Kingsbury does briefly mention Jesus’ conflict with the satanic realm and emphasizes Jesus’ victory over Satan and the unclean spirits. Kingsbury, 37.

Yet Kingsbury does not argue that Jesus conflict with the satanic realm is a major area of conflict in the narrative. If one were to identify Jesus v. Satan and his unclean spirits/demons as another major area of conflict in the Gospel of Mark, then the reader might see that this particular area of conflict is more clearly resolved in the story via the interpretative matrix found in the chiasmic relationship of the four full exorcism accounts identified by Wahlen. See Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 98–99. Though Jesus’ conflict with the authorities and with his disciples is suspended from the story, Jesus’ victory over the satanic realm is complete and so as a result even now “Jesus is gathering together all who respond to his teaching, both Jew and Gentile.” Wahlen, 99. This is not to say that there will not yet be a final resolution of Jesus struggle with Satan on the Last Day, but in the narrative of Mark Jesus’ victory over Satan is already accomplished for those who have been delivered by Jesus.

possessed/oppessed by these spirits. Such activity emphasizes Jesus' function as an authoritative teacher who offers a "new teaching" (1:27). Since these spirits are ἀκάθαρτον, the exorcisms of Jesus apparently involve a "cleansing" or "elimination of impurity" *for the individuals who were once possessed/oppessed by these spirits*. Such individuals are rescued from a state where they were ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ. Yet the unclean spirits themselves remain "unclean" and so outside of the reign of God. As with the activity of the spirits, Jesus' authority is also universal in scope: He is able to free all people from satanic oppression, both Jews and Gentiles, both within the land of Israel and in the lands of the Gentiles. Jesus has a unique authority over the "generic," "cosmic," and "non-Levitical" impurity represented by these spirits. In casting out these unclean spirits among all people, Jesus brings a "cosmic purity" to all people, a purity that comes with his inauguration of the reign of God.

### Conclusion

Based on features of the narrative as examined thus far, there is a connection between impurity and these unclean spirits who appear in the narrative. The text describes demons eleven times with the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ("unclean spirit"). The first exorcism account in Mark 1:21–28 establishes the opposition between Jesus and the unclean spirit, and this opposition is cast in terms of the opposition between the one who is holy and those spirits that are unclean; this understanding is then highlighted again in Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22–30. The uncleanness of the spirits is not a Levitical impurity, but it is more related to their opposition to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the reign of God. By casting such spirits out of people, Jesus demonstrates his authority over these spirits, rescues people from satanic oppression (described as pillaging Satan's house in 3:27), and so brings purity to such people by removing from them these unclean spirits. The uncleanness of these spirits is best

described as “non-Levitical impurity or “generic,” as it can afflict anyone, Jew or Gentile. Yet given the cosmic nature of Jesus’ struggle with Satan, this impurity might also be labeled “cosmic impurity.” Nevertheless, there is no necessary connection between the impurity represented by these spirits and impurity as defined by the Torah.

### Background Literature

As this dissertation will attempt to investigate how the adjective ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean”) functions in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel when applied to the demons, it will interact with Old Testament passages that have a particular focus on any connections made between demons and a concept of impurity. Two important recent studies on the historicity of the exorcism accounts in the Gospels in light of the background in Second Temple Judaism are *Jesus the Exorcist* by Graham H. Twelftree and *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* by Clinton Wahlen. Regarding the significance of ἀκάθαρτον when used to describe the spirits, Twelftree argues only that this is evidence of the “Semitic origins of the story,” though he does allow that the use of the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον may be characteristic of Mark.<sup>40</sup> Wahlen, however, attempts to understand how the nature of this impurity of the spirits would have been understood in light of the Old Testament (and then later Jewish literature).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, WUNT 54 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 60. Twelftree’s interests are primarily in establishing the historicity of the exorcism accounts and discussing the implications of this for the practice of exorcisms today (Twelftree, 9–12) rather than analyzing how these accounts function in the narratives of the Gospels. See also Ernst Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1950), 14 and Pimental, “The ‘unclean spirits,’” 173–74 for a similar arguments regarding how ἀκάθαρτον (“unclean”) indicates a Semitic background for the origins of these the exorcism stories.

<sup>41</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 24–59. Regarding the later Jewish literature, Wahlen’s summary shows that the typical adjective used to describe demons was “evil” (πνεύματα πονηρά) with ἀκάθαρτον used less frequently. Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 30–40. In fact, it appears as if the one clear use of ἀκάθαρτον to describe demons in the intertestamental Jewish literature is in *The Testament of Benjamin* 5:2 where the Greek reads the plural τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα. See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 33–34, fn. 54 for his discussion of the translation issues regarding *1 Enoch* 99:7. While the extant Greek text reads πνεύμασιν πονηρ[οῖς] (“evil spirits”),

Wahlen’s contribution in this investigation is two-fold: First, he draws attention to Zech 13:1–2 as one place in the Old Testament where a phrase similar to πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον appears, the construct phrase רוּחַ הַטְמָאָה (spirit of uncleanness). This is the closest Old Testament parallel to the noun phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον of Mark’s Gospel. Second, Wahlen also argues that there is a connection between the promised future purification of the house of David and Jerusalem found in Zech 13:1 and the ministry of John the Baptist. He thus provides an argument for establishing this passage as a possible background for the overall narrative of Mark’s Gospel and for the exorcism accounts in particular.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding other Old Testament passages regarding “general purity” that might underlie the narrative of Mark’s Gospel, both Francis Moloney and James W. Voelz argue that the promise for a future purification of Israel found in Ezek 36:25ff is fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist: John’s ministry initiates God’s eschatological activity and Jesus’ ministry then continues toward the fulfillment of this promise.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, some interpreters of Zech 13:1 argue that it reflects and further proclaims the earlier promise of Ezek 36:25–26.<sup>44</sup> If such a reading is valid, then Zechariah 13 would be matrixed with Ezekiel 36. Then, if Zechariah 3 can be matrixed with both John’s ministry and the exorcisms (as Wahlen argues), then Ezekiel 36 can also be matrixed

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Wahlen opts to read “unclean spirits” based on the Ethiopic text and Tertullian’s Latin translation. Thus, there are two possible uses of the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον in literature of the intertestamental period.

<sup>42</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 26–30.

<sup>43</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 33–34 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 104–05 and 112–14.

<sup>44</sup> See Paul Lamarche, *Zecharie IX–XIV: Structure Littéraire et Messianisme* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1961), 85, David L. Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 123, and Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NCIOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 725. See also Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 30, where he also sees a connection between Zech 13:1–2 and Ezek 36:17–32 via the theme of “purifying waters.” In n. 34, however, Wahlen dismisses any connection made between Zech 13:12 and the temple motif of Ezek 47:1–12 as Wahlen does not see the promised purification foretold in Zech 13:1 as connected in any way to the Temple and priesthood.

directly with John's ministry (as Moloney and Voelz argue) and indirectly with the exorcisms.

### Ezekiel 36:25

Moloney and Voelz argue that Ezek 36:25ff can be connected to the baptism of John as recorded in Mark 1:4–5 and then to Jesus' ministry that follows the ministry of John. According to these interpreters, the "eschatological purification of Israel" that was promised in Ezek 36:25 was fulfilled first in the baptism of John and then in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

Ezekiel 36:25–26 appears in the larger context of the oracle contained in Ezek 36:16–38.<sup>46</sup> The theme of this larger oracle is understood by some interpreters as focused upon Yahweh's task of restoring his honor, his reputation, or his good name where, in order to do this, Yahweh must restore the people of Israel whom he has punished for their sins.<sup>47</sup> Thus, since the task falls to Yahweh to restore his honor, this oracle emphasizes that this restoration will be the work of Yahweh, and not the work of the people of Israel.<sup>48</sup> The promise is that God will act, and Israel will receive and only then respond. As Daniel L. Block argues, "the declaration abandons all hope that Israel, in her present condition, can achieve the ideals of the covenant relationship originally intended by Yahweh. The status quo can be altered only by direct divine intervention."<sup>49</sup> Horace Hummel divides this oracle into three sections: (1) Yahweh's motives for

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<sup>45</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 35 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 102–03.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, trans. by James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 241; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 337 and 356; and Horace Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 1049.

<sup>47</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 246–47; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 337–43; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 442; and Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1049.

<sup>48</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 431; Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1049 and 1052; and Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 220–24.

<sup>49</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 356.



restoring Israel (36:16–21); (2) the actions Yahweh will perform on Israel’s behalf to restore them (36:22–30) and (3) Israel’s fitting response to Yahweh (36:31–36).<sup>50</sup> The verse under consideration here (36:25) falls in the second section of this oracle where Yahweh identifies what he will do to restore Israel.

The oracle begins in 36:16 with the prophetic introduction “the word of Yahweh came to me, saying.” Then in 36:17 Yahweh identifies the initial problem, namely the nation of Israel’s sin. Their sin is described with reference to purity. When they were settled in their land, the nation of Israel defiled (the verb is the piel of טָמַא) the land by means of their ways and their deeds. Though these “ways and deeds” are not yet defined, they are compared to “the uncleanness of impurity” (כְּטִמְאַת הַנְּדָה). Here the noun טִמְאַה (uncleanness) is used in a construct chain with the noun נְדָה. In most English translations, נְדָה is understood to denote the impurity associated with menstruation (see, e.g., Lev 15:19).<sup>51</sup> Yet, נְדָה is also associated with corpse impurity (see, e.g., Num 19:13).<sup>52</sup> The point of the comparison, however, is not that this impurity of the land is the result of female bodily emissions or physical contact with a dead body, but the source of the defilement is from the actions of the people of Israel, and these actions have resulted in the defilement of the land similar to the impurity related to menstruation and/or contact with dead bodies.

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<sup>50</sup> Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1049.

<sup>51</sup> See also Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 246; Brandon L. Fredenburg, *Ezekiel* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 316 and Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 346–47. These authors all identify the impurity of 36:17 as analogous to the impurity associated with menstruation.

<sup>52</sup> See Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 222, who sees נְדָה in Ezek 36:17 as connected exclusively to corpse pollution. Others, however, see נְדָה as connected to both the impurity of menstruation and corpse impurity. See, e.g., Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 446 and Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 222. Of this type of impurity, Bowen identifies it as “curable uncleanness.” Bowen, 222.

The actions of the nation which have defiled the land are specifically identified in 36:18: They are guilty of murder (“the blood they have shed upon the land”) and idolatry. It is through such murder and idolatry, in particular, that Israel has polluted the land—“you have defiled it” (וּבְלִילֵיהֶם טָמְאוּהָ). In this way the word נָדָה from 36:17 is used to denote not Levitical impurity, but impurity related to the sins of murder and idolatry, a Levitical term used to describe what would be *non-Levitical* impurity. Block argues that 36:18 alludes to Num 35:29–34 where it says that the shedding of blood pollutes (the hiphil of נָדָה) the land to such a degree that only the execution of the murderer can cleanse the land (Num 35:33). Block also sees the accusation of murder in 36:18 as an allusion to child sacrifices mentioned earlier in Ezek 20:26 and 23:36–38.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the source of defilement of the land are the murders (perhaps more specifically child-sacrifice) and idolatry committed by the people of Israel. For this Yahweh poured out his wrath upon Israel (36:18) and scattered them among the nations (36:19).

Yet God’s judgment on Israel has led to a second problem: Now Yahweh’s great name is profaned (the verb is the piel of הָלַל) among the nations because Israel has had to leave his land and now live among the nations (36:20). As the God of Israel, Yahweh was obligated to defend both the land and its people. Yet this too is Israel’s fault: Since their sins drove Yahweh to punish them and drive them out of the land, they have made Yahweh look dishonorable in the eyes of the nations, and so they have profaned his holy name among the nations (36:21). Israel is scattered among the nations because of their sins; therefore, they are to blame for the profaning of Yahweh’s great name by those very same nations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 346–47.

<sup>54</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 348–49. According to Block, the problem is that the nations, as outside observers, will draw the wrong conclusions about Yahweh’s motivations and character by failing to see the human causation underlying what happened to the people of Israel.

It is, therefore, for the sake of vindicating his holy name among the nations—and not for the sake of Israel itself—that Yahweh is going to act (36:22). What follows in 36:23–30 are a series of 22 future promises/predictions that Yahweh makes regarding his restoration of the people of Israel. Eighteen of these promises are made using perfect waw-consecutive verbs and four promises are made using imperfect verbs in the Hebrew, indicating that all of these promises are looking to future actions. The first two promises articulate Yahweh’s primary motive for acting in this way: “I will sanctify my great name. . .and the nations will know that am Yahweh” (36:23). These first two promises are set off from the others by the prophetic formula “a declaration of Lord Yahweh” (נְאֻם אֲדֹנָיִי יְהוָה). Block then divides the twenty promises that follow into three groups: three promises about the future regathering of Israel to the land (36:24), twelve promises about the future transformation of Israel (36:25–28), and five promises about the future blessing of Israel (36:29–30).<sup>55</sup>

It is in this second section of the oracle that 36:25, the verse Moloney and Voelz see as fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist, is found; the promises in this verse, in fact, begin the section of 12 promises about “the transformation of Israel.” We break the Hebrew text of this verse into the following two lines based on the placement of the athnach on the second main verb of Line 1 (וּטְהַרְתֶּם):<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 349–59. Though this is a helpful breakdown of these promises, I question Block’s decision to read the first promise in 36:29 under the category “blessings of Israel” as this promise returns to the theme of purification found the first promise under the category “transformation of Israel.” So it appears that in the promises where Yahweh focuses upon his deliverance of Israel from their sins, sins described in terms of impurity in 36:17–18, he begins and ends with promises to remove the impurity.

<sup>56</sup> Note that dividing this verse into two lines as done here is standard among the commentaries. See, e.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 243 and Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 349. The English translations, however, are divided on whether or not the second verb וּטְהַרְתֶּם should be read to begin the second of three lines to read “You will be cleansed from all of your impurities.” Note that the LXX does divide this verse into three lines.

Line 1: וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מַיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטָהַרְתֶּם

Line 2: מִכָּל טְמְאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-גּוֹלִיכֶם אֶטְהַר אֶתְכֶם:

Line 1: “And I will sprinkle upon you clean water, and you will be clean.”

Line 2: “From all of your impurities and from all of your idolatries I will clean you.”

Note, however, that an alternate reading is possible if one were to ignore the *athnach* and read the perfect waw-consecutive וְטָהַרְתֶּם as the beginning a longer sentence that includes at least the prepositional phrase (מִכָּל טְמְאוֹתֵיכֶם) that follows: “And I will sprinkle upon you clean water, *and you will be clean from all of your impurities.*” This, indeed, appears to be how the LXX reads this verse. Based upon this reading, I here divide the text into three lines:

Line 1: καὶ ῥανῶ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ὕδωρ καθαρόν,

Line 2: καὶ καθαρισθήσεσθε ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν εἰδώλων ὑμῶν,

Line 3: καὶ καθαριῶ ὑμᾶς.

Line 1: “And I will sprinkle clean water *upon you*,”

Line 2: “And you will be cleansed from all of your uncleanness and from all of your idolatries.”

Line 3: “And I will cleanse you.”

Note, however, that in both versions this first promise regarding “the transformation of Israel” reflects the problem identified in 36:17: The people have defiled the land through their murder and idolatry. The word used for impurity here is טְמֵאָה, the more general Levitical term for uncleanness, rather than נִדָּה from 36:17, which refers specifically to menstruation or corpse

impurity.<sup>57</sup> Yahweh will sprinkle clean water upon them and they will be clean; he will cleanse them from all of their impurities (perhaps this is a reference to the murders mentioned in 36:18) and all of their idolatries.<sup>58</sup> The use of the verbs זָרַק and ῥανῶ (sprinkle) throughout the Old Testament is typically associated with the sprinkling of blood (see Exod 24:8); thus, this use of these verbs with “clean water” in 36:25 to describe such cleansing is unique.<sup>59</sup> In the Hebrew, the verb טָהַר is used two times in this verse, first in the qal (“you will be clean”) and then in the piel (“I will cleanse you”). In the LXX καθαρίζω is used to translate טָהַר.

The promises regarding “the transformation of Israel” continue in 36:26ff with the promises that Yahweh will give them a new heart, plant a new spirit within them, remove their stone heart and replace it with a heart of flesh, plant his Spirit within them and so cause them to walk in his statutes and laws. Ezekiel 36:29a then contains another reference to uncleanness that can link with 36:17–18 and 36:25:

וְהוֹשַׁרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם

“And I will deliver you from all of your impurities.”

The word used for impurity here is again טְמֵאוֹה from 36:25 rather than נִדְה from 36:17.

Here the hiphil of יָשַׁע (deliver, rescue, save) is used in place of טָהַר: Yahweh will *deliver* them from their impurities. Again, these impurities in 36:29a likely refer to the murder and idolatry of 36:17–18 through which the nation of Israel has defiled the land.

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<sup>57</sup> Bock, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 354.

<sup>58</sup> See Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1026, where he argues that the word for idol (גִּלּוּל) refers to “fecal deities,” thus amplifying the impurity associated with such idols. See also Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 346–47, where he argues that גִּלּוּל literally means “pellets of dung.”

<sup>59</sup> Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1051.

The promise in 36:25 (that is then echoed again in 36:29a) is that Yahweh will act decisively with respect to the sins of murder and idolatry committed by the nation of Israel. As these sins are likened to impurity—either menstrual impurity, corpse impurity or both—through which they have defiled the land, the promise is that Yahweh will sprinkle them with clean water, they will be clean, and he will cleanse them from all of their idolatries and all of their impurity. The problem is impurity (even if here moral impurity); the solution will be sprinkling with water and cleansing.

Some interpreters think that these promises were fulfilled (at least in part) in the context of Israel's restoration to the land at the end of the exile.<sup>60</sup> Yet other interpreters see these promises as eschatological and so looking to the future beyond the return of the exiles from Babylon. Block sees all of these promises as pointing to some still yet unfulfilled future actions of Yahweh to restore the nation of Israel.<sup>61</sup> Zimmerli and Hummel see Ezek 36:25 in particular as promising an eschatological purification that was *not* fulfilled with the return of the exiles and is likely connected to Christian baptism.<sup>62</sup>

In their interpretation of Mark's Gospel, however, Moloney and Voelz associate this promise of Ezek 36:25ff with the ministry and baptism of John the Baptist.<sup>63</sup> Moloney sees the connection between Ezek 36:25–27 and John's proclamation in 1:7–8. John foretells that “the mightier one” will come after him; while John baptizes with water, the coming one will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The flow of the actions in Ezek 36:25–27 matches these words. First

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<sup>60</sup> See Odell, *Ezekiel*, 442–43; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 431 and 446–47; and Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 220–24.

<sup>61</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 365–67.

<sup>62</sup> See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel II*, 249 and Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1052. Hummel qualifies his association of 36:25 with Christian baptism by arguing that it refers to baptism “by analogy.” Hummel, 1053.

<sup>63</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 35 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 102–03.

Yahweh will sprinkle the people of Israel with water (36:25). Then Yahweh will put his spirit within them (36:27).<sup>64</sup> When the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus at his baptism, this signifies that Jesus will be the one to baptize with the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Maloney makes the case that Ezek 36:25–27 is fulfilled in the ministry of John (here Yahweh sprinkles with water) and the ministry of Jesus (here Yahweh puts his Spirit into the people).

Voelz makes the connection between the ministry of John and Ezek 36:25–26 by calling attention to Mark’s pairing of the signifiers in the genitive phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας (“a baptism of repentance”) in Mark 1:4. He then notes that the word βάπτισμα links to Ezek 36:25 where Yahweh promises that he will sprinkle the people of Israel with clean water and cleanse them. The word μετανοίας links with Ezek 36:26 where Yahweh promises to give a “new/different heart” and a “new/different spirit.”<sup>66</sup> This promise in Ezek 36:25 that God would sprinkle his people with water was likely nonliteral in its original context, that is, the promise was that God would cleanse his people of sin, but not necessarily through a water-ritual (any more than the promise to remove their heart of stone in 36:26 is a literal promise regarding an actual heart-transplant). Voelz, however, references this as an example of a pattern which he argues is common in the historical move from Old Testament promise to New Testament fulfillment: Often Old Testament promises that are nonliteral/metaphorical are *literally* fulfilled in the New Testament narrative.<sup>67</sup> In this way the nonliteral promise in Ezek 36:26 that Yahweh

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<sup>64</sup> Maloney, *Mark*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Maloney, *Mark*, 36.

<sup>66</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 102–03. Note that Voelz quotes Ezek 36:25–26 from the LXX rather than the MT. As mentioned above, in the LXX 36:25 is structured into three lines rather than two lines in the MT, and the second verb begins a clause/line rather than concluding a clause/line. The LXX uses the adjective καινός, ἢ, ὅν for which Voelz leaves open the option of translating as “different.” He later more fully discusses the distinction between καινός and νεός in his interpretation of the first exorcism of Mark 1:21–23. Voelz, 161.

<sup>67</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 113. See also Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 273–74 for a fuller discussion of this

will sprinkle with water is literally fulfilled when Yahweh, through John the Baptist, cleanses the people with water.

Later, then, when commenting upon the baptism of Jesus, Voelz argues that in receiving baptism, Jesus identifies with the people of Israel and now takes upon himself the role of Israel, the people of God.<sup>68</sup> If this is the case, that is, Jesus in his baptism is assuming the role of Israel, then perhaps one other connection can be made between Ezek 36:25–27 and the beginning of the Mark’s Gospel: In Ezek 36:27a, Yahweh promises **וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְכֶּם** (“and I will put *my Spirit* [note emphasis] within you [literally “into your inward parts”]). Yahweh is speaking to Israel and promising to put his Spirit within them. In Mark’s account of the baptism of Jesus (1:10), the Spirit as a dove comes down [literally] “into him” (καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὥς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν). In Ezek 36:27 God promised to put his Spirit into the people of Israel. In Mark’s account of the baptism, God literally sends his Spirit “into Jesus”; if Jesus embodies Israel, then the promise of Ezek 36:27 is arguably fulfilled at Jesus’ baptism.

In summary, in Ezek 36:25ff Yahweh promises to restore the people of Israel after he has removed them from the land and sent them among the nations. The people of Israel sinned against Yahweh through their murder and idolatry, and these sins are described as “defiling the land.” It is now impossible for them to return to covenant-faithfulness on their own, so Yahweh alone must act to restore Israel. Yahweh will begin his transformation of Israel by cleansing them: He says that he will sprinkle them with clean/pure water, and they will be cleansed from their uncleanness and idolatry. Here the concept of impurity is used to describe not Levitical

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interpretative insight about prophecy-fulfillment often being characterized by moving from the metaphor to the literal.

<sup>68</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 133.



impurity, but moral impurity associated with murder, idolatry, and so their rejection of the covenant with God; God, therefore, will restore the people through an act of purification/cleansing. Yahweh further promises that he will transform the people with respect to their heart and mind by giving them new hearts and putting his Spirit into them.

Interpreters of Ezekiel do not agree on when this transformation would take place, but some do connect Ezek 36:25 with Christian baptism. Moloney and Voelz, however, connect Ezek 36:25ff with the baptismal ministry of John the Baptist and then the subsequent ministry of Jesus; this is the point where Yahweh begins his transformation of Israel. The motif of “sprinkling with water,” though likely nonliteral in 36:25, is *literally* fulfilled when John actually baptizes the people of Israel with water. Again, the impurity at stake in this passage, and so in John’s baptism if one reads with Moloney and Voelz, is that associated with Israel’s past sins of murder and idolatry and so their violation of the covenant with God. As one who received the Holy Spirit and will baptize with this Spirit, Jesus’ ministry then continues this ministry of the purification initiated through John the Baptist. Fulfilling the promises of Ezek 36:25ff, this is a ministry to cleanse the people of Israel of the uncleanness associated with these specific sins—murder and idolatry—for which Yahweh removed their fathers from the land. The idea then might be that even with the restoration of some of the exiles to the land and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, Yahweh had not yet brought about this eschatological purification of his people; this does not take place until the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, as described in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel.

#### Zechariah 13:1–2

Wahlen argues that the only clear parallel in the Old Testament to the “impure spirit” of Mark 1:23, where the spirit might be a demon (rather than some special angel or messenger of

Yahweh), is found in Zech 13:2 with the phrase **רוּחַ הַטְּמֵאָה**.<sup>69</sup> Such a connection between this **רוּחַ הַטְּמֵאָה** and demons is perhaps suggested further by the LXX translation of this phrase as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον (“the unclean spirit”), where the Hebrew noun **הַטְּמֵאָה** is translated as the adjective ἀκαθάρτον. Though the literal translation of this Hebrew construct chain is “the spirit of uncleanness,” this is a likely an example of the attributive use of an adjectival genitive in Hebrew where the construct noun functions to give an attribute of the head noun.<sup>70</sup> Thus, a better translation into English would be “the unclean spirit,” and this reading of the construct chain is apparent in the LXX translation τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον. Wahlen argues that the use of the phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον in Mark’s Gospel confirms the LXX translation as valid, and so in turn he suggests that Zech 13:2 refers to a specific demonic entity—“the unclean spirit”—rather than to some impersonal quality or force.<sup>71</sup> Yet this interpretation that **רוּחַ הַטְּמֵאָה** refers to a demonic entity is not held by all interpreters of Zech 13:1–2.<sup>72</sup>

Zechariah 13:1 is read as either the conclusion of an oracle that begins in 12:1 or the beginning of an oracle that continues in 13:2–6.<sup>73</sup> Zechariah 9–14 contains two sections that look

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<sup>69</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 26–27.

<sup>70</sup> See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 148–51.

<sup>71</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 25–29. Note that in Mark 1:26 there is found a similar form of this phrase as found in the LXX translation of Zech 13:1 (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον) where the noun is definite and the adjective follows the noun with the article in repeat position. In Mark 1:26, however, the referent of this phrase is the unclean spirit already introduced in the narrative in 1:23.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 88–89 and Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Zechariah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 165–67 where both authors argue that this spirit of impurity is not a personal entity, but more a sense or quality of uncleanness associated with the false prophets.

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 86 and Wolters, *Zechariah*, 424 where they argue that 13:1 should be read with the previous section. Those interpreters that read 13:1 with what follows appear to assume this is the case (based on the chapter division?) without further comment. See, for instance Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 361 and Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 269–72, though Petterson does see the connection between 13:1 and chapter 12 (but also chapter 14). Petterson, 272. See also Boda, *Zechariah*, 721–25 where he first

to future events that the people of Judah will experience, and these are commonly defined as a “first oracle” (Zechariah 9–11) and a “second oracle” (Zechariah 12–14).<sup>74</sup> Each of these two “oracles” begins (see 9:1 and 12:1) with the “prophetic superscription” מִשָּׁא דְּבַר־יְהוָה (“an oracle: the word of Yahweh”), and, again, they each appear to look toward Israel’s future.<sup>75</sup>

Anthony R. Petterson, however, calls attention to the sometimes disjointed nature of Zechariah 12–14 and so the difficulty of determining how this section of Zechariah is to be organized and read.<sup>76</sup> Yet Petterson does draw attention to one literary device that unites Zechariah 12–14: The eschatological phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (“on that day”) occurs throughout this section of Zechariah.<sup>77</sup>

Zechariah 12 tells of the preservation of Judah, the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the midst of a future war in which the nations attack Judah and Jerusalem; Yahweh will defeat the nations and restore Judah, the house of David, and Jerusalem.<sup>78</sup> The promises of Zech 13:1–2, if read with what comes before in Zechariah 12, might then be said to take place in the context of this deliverance from the nations. Zech 13:3–6 then foretells either the end of the prophetic movement or the judgment and removal of the false prophets.<sup>79</sup>

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translates 13:1 with what follows in 13:2 as if it were the same unit, but then later also suggests that 13:2 initiates a new section of the prophecy. Boda, 725. Whether 13:1 should be read with 12:1–14 or 13:2ff will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 98 and Boda, *Zechariah*, 681.

<sup>75</sup> Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 254–57 and Boda, *Zechariah*, 681–83.

<sup>76</sup> Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 257.

<sup>77</sup> Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 260. Petterson sees this phrase as pointing to “the day when God establishes his kingdom of glory on earth.” See also Boda, *Zechariah*, 686. Boda sees this phrase as looking to “an undisclosed future time.” Note that “on that day” occurs seven times in Zechariah 12, three times in Zechariah 13, and eight times in Zechariah 14.

<sup>78</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 686.

<sup>79</sup> There is disagreement among the interpreters of Zech 13:2–6 about whether or not the prophets referred to in 13:2 are any and all prophets or more specifically false prophets who are associated with idolatry. If the former, then the promise here speaks to the end of the prophetic movement, a movement that included genuine prophets who promoted the genuine worship of Yahweh. For a presentation of this position, see Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 377–78 and Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14*, 128. If the latter, then the promise speaks to the removal and judgment

When read together in the Masoretic text, Zech 13:1–2 consists of three lines with 13:1 comprising one line and with 13:2 comprising two lines, and where the athnach under עוד divides 13:2:

Line 1: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה מְקוֹר נִפְתָּח לְבֵית דָּוִד וּלְיֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לְחַטָּאת וּלְנֶדֶה

Line 2: וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נֶאֱמָר יִהְיֶה צְבָאוֹת אֶכְרִית אֶת־שְׁמוֹת הָעֲצָבִים מִן־הָאָרֶץ

וְלֹא יִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד

Line 3: וְגַם אֶת־הַנְּבִיאִים וְאֶת־רוּחַ הַטְּמָאָה אֲעָבִיר מִן־הָאָרֶץ

Line 1: “On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for impurity.”

Line 2: “And it will be on that day, declares Yahweh of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will not be remembered again.”

Line 3: “And also I will cause the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness to pass away from the land.”

Lines 1 and 2 are linked by the repetition of the eschatological phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (on that day). The prepositional phrase “on/in that day” is used here and earlier in Zechariah (see Zech 12:3) likely to denote some future occasion beyond the present context of Zechariah’s ministry.<sup>80</sup>

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only of false prophets who are associated with the idols of 13:2a. For a presentation of this position, see Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 89; Webb, *Zechariah*, 67; Al Wolters, *Zechariah* (Leuven: Peeters, Bondgenotenlaan, 2014), 426; and Boda, *Zechariah*, 726–34. It appears as if the consensus among most contemporary interpreters is that the passage speaks about the judgment of false prophets and that false prophets are under consideration here because of the mention of idols in the same immediate context in 13:2. Yet the reason this is a question is that the word הַנְּבִיאִים in 13:2 is not qualified with any adjective that would indicate “false prophet,” and so this literally reads “the prophets”; this leaves open the possibility that any and all prophets are being discussed (as some interpreters do argue). See also C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Minor Prophets*, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 394, where the author argues both that there will first be an end of the prophetic ministry and this then will become the basis for how the people of Israel will know that anyone claiming to be a prophet is will be a false prophet.

<sup>80</sup> See Boda, *Zechariah*, 701–02 where he comments upon the use of the prepositional phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (“on that day”) in Zech 12:3, noting that the use of this phrase suggests some future date beyond the post-exilic

Two things will happen in the future “on that day,” the opening of the fountain in line 1 and the cutting off of the names of the idols and the removal of the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness/the unclean spirit in lines 2 and 3. Lines 2 and 3 are linked by repetition of the phrase מִן־הָאָרֶץ (“from the land”). That this will take place in the future is shown by the use of one imperfect verb in line 1, the use of an perfect waw-consecutive at the beginning of line 2 (which links line 2 to line 1), and then the use of three imperfect verbs in lines 2 and 3. What is more, there is a chiastic pattern in lines 2 and 3: In line 2 the word order is verb followed by the direct object, while in line 3 the direct objects are followed by the verb.

Again, according to this promise, two things will happen in the future: First, according to line 1, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and impurity. No explicit agent is expressed for the action of the niph'al participle נִפְתָּח. Yet, given the promise in 12:10 that Yahweh will pour out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem רוּחַ חַן וְיִתְחַנְּנוּם (“a spirit of grace and supplication”)<sup>81</sup>, it may be implied that Yahweh is also responsible for the opening of this fountain.<sup>82</sup> As in Ezek 36:17, the word for “impurity” is נִדָּה, the word associated with menstrual or corpse impurity, yet here it is paired with חֲטָאָת and so is likely associated with moral sin (as is the case also in Ezek 36:17).<sup>83</sup>

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Persian context. See also Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 257–58 where he lists “in that day” with other vocables that foretell a future, eschatological visitation of God.

<sup>81</sup> See Boda, *Zechariah*, 711 where he translates this construct chain “a spirit of favor and pleading for favor.” Boda suggests a possible connection between the promise of Zech 12:10 and Ezek 36:26–28 where Yahweh promises to give the post-exilic community “his Spirit,” yet Boda appears to view this “spirit” in Zech 12:10 as a spirit that is distinct from Yahweh’s Spirit, and so he refers to רוּחַ here repeatedly as simply “a spirit” so that the two Old Testament passages are not a precise parallel. Boda, 713–17.

<sup>82</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch, *Minor Prophets*, 393 where the author makes this point by interpreting Zech 13:1 in light of 12:10. See also Boda, *Zechariah*, 725, where he connects Zech 13:1 with Ezek 36:25 and argues that Yahweh is at least the agent of the sprinkling/washing of the recipients with this water.

<sup>83</sup> See Boda, *Zechariah*, 723–24.

The implication appears to be that the fountain that is opened will wash away this sin and impurity, though it is not stated explicitly in 13:1.<sup>84</sup>

Second, in lines 2 and 3, Yahweh will act himself to cut off the names of the idols from the land and to cause the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness/the unclean spirit to pass away from the land. If line 1 is read with lines 2 and 3, then the sin and impurity in line 1 appear to be linked specifically to the idolatry mentioned in line 2, and so the cutting off of the names of the idols may parallel the cleansing of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem as a necessary continuation of the purification initiated in 13:1.<sup>85</sup> The prophets and the unclean spirit in line 3 likely are also associated with idols of line 2, and Yahweh's removal of these from the land parallels the cutting off of the names of the idols. Read together there is a promised cleansing of the people by means of the fountain that will be opened (line 1) and then a cleansing of the land by the removal of the idols, the prophets, and the unclean spirit (lines 2 and 3).

Before considering the possibility that Zech 13:1–2 may be alluded to in Mark's Gospel, there are *three* questions that arise in the interpretation of these verses that must be discussed. The first question is whether these two verses are meant to be read together or if 13:1 concludes one section of the prophetic oracle that began in 12:1, while 13:2 begins another section. If read together, Yahweh's actions of removing the idols, the (false) prophets, and the unclean spirit in 13:2 in some way specifically follow the opening of the fountain in 13:1. Mark A Boda, for instance, translates these verses together and reads 13:1 with what follows in 13:2. He detects a movement from a focus on God's grace in 13:1, where there is a promised washing away of moral impurity (that, he notes, even the priestly code could not accomplish) to a focus on

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<sup>84</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 725.

<sup>85</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 724–25.

judgement in 13:2–5, where God will cleanse the land through capital punishment (the removal of the false prophets).<sup>86</sup> Yet, at the same time, Boda argues that the use of the prophetic formula “a declaration of Yahweh” in 13:2 may indicate that this verse is the beginning a new section of the oracle.<sup>87</sup> If not read together, then there may not be any necessary connection between these two events—the opening of the fountain for sin and impurity and then Yahweh’s removal from the land the names of the idols, the prophets, and the unclean spirit.

A careful analysis of the Masoretic text appears to suggest that the two verses can be read together. First, and most obviously, 13:2 immediately follows 13:1, and it is linked to 13:1 by the imperfect waw-consecutive וַיְהִי. Then also, as mentioned above, both verses contain the eschatological phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, thus both speaking to some (the same?) future occasion. What is more, the paragraph markers in the Masoretic text also indicate that 13:1–6 is a paragraph. In the Masoretic tradition 12:14 concludes a paragraph/thought unit, and then 13:1 begins the next paragraph/thought unit that continues through 13:6. In the Masoretic tradition, then, 13:1 is to be read with 13:2 and what follows.<sup>88</sup>

A number of interpreters, however, read 13:1 as the concluding line of a section that begins in 12:1, and so they read 13:2 as the beginning of a new thought unit.<sup>89</sup> These interpreters

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<sup>86</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 724–25. Boda, of course, is assuming that the removal of the false prophets will be accomplished through their being put to death. Thus the false prophet’s attempts to escape detection in 13:3–6 is to avoid punishment. Boda, 729.

<sup>87</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 725.

<sup>88</sup> Note, however, that the editors of BHS print Zech 13:1 as the conclusion of a section that begins with 12:9 and then 13:2 as the beginning of a new paragraph. This indicates that their position is that 13:1 concludes the previous section.

<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 86 and Wolters, *Zechariah*, 424, where they argue that 13:1 should be read with the previous section. Those interpreters that read 13:1 with what follows appear to assume this is the case (based on the chapter division?) without further comment. See, e.g., Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 361 and Boda, *Zechariah*, 721–22. Yet Boda also suggests that 13:2 initiates a new section. Boda, 725.

then emphasize the promised cleansing for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 13:1 as the conclusion to the promises of renewal, restoration, and protection for Judah in Zech 12:1–14; they then do not comment on the relationship of 13:1 to 13:2. There are, indeed, several literary connections that unite 13:1 with the previous section of 12:1–14. First, there is the repetition four times of **בֵּית דָּוִד** (“the house of David”) in 12:7, 8, 10, and 12, and then a fifth time in 13:1. Then there is the repetition four times of **יְרוּשָׁלַם תְּשִׁבִי** (“the inhabitants of Jerusalem”) in 12:5, 7, 8, and 10, and then a fifth time in 13:1. There is also the pairing of these two groups—“the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem”—in 12:7, 8, and 10, and finally a fourth time in 13:1. This suggests a literary connection between 13:1 and 12:1–14. Thus, a literary argument can be made to argue that Zech 13:1 is both connected to the earlier oracle of 12:1–14, and yet also that it is connected to 13:2 and what follows.

Yet there is also a parallel between Zech 13:2 and what comes before in 12:1–14. As mentioned above, in 12:10 Yahweh promises to pour out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a “spirit of grace and supplication,” and in 13:2 he promises to remove from the land “the unclean spirit.” There are introduced in the wider context of 12:1–13:6 two rival “spirits,” viz., one that Yahweh will give to the people and one that he will remove from the land. Thus, even 13:2–6 can be read with 12:1–14. We will thus assume that there is no rigid division at 13:1 that forces the reader to interpret 13:1 with only what comes before or what comes after.<sup>90</sup>

A second question involves the question of the referent of **הַטְּמֵאָה הַרוּחַ** of Zech 13:2. *Is*

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<sup>90</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch, *Minor Prophets*, 379–95, where he alone of the authors surveyed treats Zech 12:1–13:6 as one unified section, what he calls “the first half of the second prophecy [referring to Zechariah 12–14]. Keil and Delitzsch, 379.



this referring literally to a specific demonic entity? Again, Wahlen argues that this does refer to a specific demonic entity, and he sees this argument confirmed by the translation in the LXX and then by the Gospel of Mark with the use of the noun phrase πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον.<sup>91</sup> Wahlen argues further that the impurity of this demonic being is likely related to “the influence which it exerts over the land [which] leads the people into impure practices” such as idol worship and false prophecy.<sup>92</sup> David L. Peterson appears to allow that this could be a personal spirit,<sup>93</sup> but argues that it is not clear in Zech 13:2 what this spirit is or what it represents; Peterson does not even see a clear connection between this spirit and the idols (though they are placed together in 13:2).<sup>94</sup> Al Wolters sees this unclean spirit as an entity that vies with the Spirit of Yahweh.<sup>95</sup> Generally, however, most other interpreters do not identify הַטְּמֵאָה הַזֶּה as a personal demonic entity but, rather, as an impersonal force associated with the idols and the (false) prophets; it is a very real thing that must be removed, but not necessarily a personal spirit or demon, and so the removal of this “unclean spirit” would actually be accomplished through the cutting off of the names of the idols and the removal of the false prophets.<sup>96</sup> If this is the understanding of the referent of הַטְּמֵאָה הַזֶּה, then a connection between 13:2 and the exorcisms of Mark’s Gospel may not appear so obvious.

It might be argued that the choice here is whether or not we should understand הַטְּמֵאָה more literally, so that it describes a personal being, or nonliterally, so that it describes an impersonal

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<sup>91</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 26–30.

<sup>92</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 29.

<sup>93</sup> Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14*, 123 and Boda, *Zechariah*, 725–26.

<sup>94</sup> Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14*, 125–26.

<sup>95</sup> Wolters, *Zechariah*, 426.

<sup>96</sup> See Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 88–89 and Webb, *Zechariah*, 165 and 167;

force.<sup>97</sup> Boda, in fact, discusses such a distinction in the meaning of רוּחַ when discussing 13:2. He first argues that רוּחַ can refer to “various entities which exist in the heavenly realm, whether in the council of Yahweh. . .or not”—a kind of literal meaning of the word. Then he argues that רוּחַ also may refer to a general tone or quality in a human being—a kind of nonliteral meaning of the word. He finally argues that in Zech 13:2 רוּחַ refers to a force at work among the false prophets.<sup>98</sup> Thus, rather than see רוּחַ in 13:2 as referring literally to a demonic entity, Boda sees it as referring nonliterally to a force that animates the false prophets. Note again that this is how Boda also interprets רוּחַ in 12:10: It is not Yahweh’s spirit, but some quality given to humanity.<sup>99</sup>

This question is important for reading Zech 13:2 as possible background literature for Jesus’ exorcisms in Mark’s Gospel, because if the רוּחַ הַטְּמָאָה of 13:2 is a demonic entity, then there is (as Wahlen argues) a clearer connection between this Old Testament passage and Jesus’ ministry of exorcisms. Yet, if רוּחַ is referring to some impersonal tone, quality, or force, then the connection is less obvious. This dissertation, however, will argue that the decision to read רוּחַ הַטְּמָאָה in Zech 13:2 as referring to a personal demon or an impersonal force is ultimately immaterial to establishing a connection between Zech 13:2 and Jesus’s exorcisms. If רוּחַ in 13:2 refers to a personal demonic entity, then the connection is more obvious between the promise in 13:2 that Yahweh will remove the unclean spirit from the land and the ministry of Jesus when he

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<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of this distinction between literal and nonliteral use of language, see Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 168–77.

<sup>98</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 725–26.

<sup>99</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 713–17.

does remove an unclean spirit from a man in Israel in Mark 1:21–28. Yet even if רִיחַ in Zech 13:2 functions nonliterally to refer to some impersonal tone, quality, or force, this could be another example of the phenomenon described above where a nonliteral promise in the Old Testament is literally fulfilled in the New Testament.<sup>100</sup> Thus, even if הַטְּמָאָה רִיחַ in Zech 13:2 refers to the removal of some impersonal force from the land, in the New Testament Jesus literally removes personal demonic entities that are referred to as “unclean spirits.”

Of this demonic “impure spirit” of Zech 13:2, Wahlen notes one important point of distinction between how this spirit operates in Zechariah and how the spirits operate in Mark’s Gospel. In Zech 13:2 the unclean spirit pervades the whole land and leads the people of Israel collectively into impure activities (idolatry and false prophecy), but in Mark’s Gospel the unclean spirits possess and control only certain individuals.<sup>101</sup>

A third question is the possible connection of Zech 13:1 to the prophecy of Ezek 36:25. A number of commentators argue that there is such a connection and thus that the author of Zech 13:1 was familiar with the text of Ezekiel 36.<sup>102</sup> Boda argues that there is a strong connection between Zech 13:1 and Ezekiel 36: “The use of the water here to bring cleansing for this impurity, however, most likely reflects Ezekiel 36, where the sin of idolatry which brought impurity (36:17) is cleansed by Yahweh sprinkling clean water on the restoration community (36:25).”<sup>103</sup> Boda argues that the cleansing of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Zech 13:1 is likely the same cleansing promised in Ezek 36:17. Both involved a washing with

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<sup>100</sup> See again Voelz, *What Does This Mean?*, 273–74 for a discussion of this phenomenon.

<sup>101</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 29 and 66.

<sup>102</sup> See Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 85 and Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14*, 123.

<sup>103</sup> Boda, *Zechariah*, 725.

water. Both involve the removal of impurity where this impurity is related to the sin of idolatry (if one reads 13:1 with 13:2). Both involve the direct intervention of Yahweh to deal with the impurity of his people. Wahlen also sees such a connection between Zech 13:1 and Ezekiel 36 as well, and notes further that “apparently neither the priests nor the messages of the prophets (cf. vv. 3–6) have succeeded in dispelling the unclean spirit. To the contrary, this spirit appears to be so captivating that God himself must intervene to remove it. What is more, somewhat reminiscent of Ezek 36:17–32, the divine intervention takes place in connection with purifying waters.”<sup>104</sup>

One important point about such a possible connection between Ezek 36:17 and Zech 13:1–2 is that from the point of view of the author of Zechariah, this promised eschatological washing of the people from the impurity of their sins (promised earlier in Ezekiel) has *not* yet taken place. The restoration of some of the exiles to the land and the rebuilding of the Temple have not yet brought about this cleansing as this event is still a future event. From Zechariah’s perspective, this purification is from sin and uncleanness is the same one promised earlier in Ezekiel, and so it is still yet to take place “on that day.”

*In light of this discussion, can Zech 13:1–2 be matrixed to the narrative of Mark’s Gospel?* Following the same pattern offered by Moloney and Voelz in their interpretation of Ezek 36:25ff and the account of John’s ministry in Mark’s Gospel, Zech 13:1–2 can arguably be linked both to the ministry of John the Baptist and the subsequent ministry of Jesus. The eschatological promise in these verses is that “on that day” there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and *uncleanness* (טִּבְעָרָה) (13:1). The implication is that this

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<sup>104</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 29–30.

fountain is for their purification from sin and uncleanness. This promise can be matrixed (and is matrixed by some interpreters) with the promise of an “eschatological washing” of Israel from the impurity of their idolatry and murders as found in Ezek 36:25. Then, if Ezek 36:25 is matrixed to the ministry of John the Baptist as the fulfillment of this promise (as described in Mark 1:1–8), then so could the promise of Zech 13:1 be matrixed to the ministry of John. Note that both Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1 involve the washing away of impurity, and that this impurity in the wider context of both Old Testament passages is connected to the sin of idolatry (and thus Israel’s violation of the covenant). In both passages Yahweh himself will act to cleanse his people from this sin, and if the connection is made between these promises and Mark 1:1–8 (as Moloney and Voelz argue is the case with Ezek 36:25 and Wahlen argues is the case with Zech 13:1), then this promised fulfillment is accomplished through the baptismal ministry of John. In both cases it is likely that the promised washing was understood nonliterally in the prophetic texts, but then this was literally fulfilled when John actually baptized/washed the people with water.

There is perhaps one other literary connection between Zech 13:1 and Mark’s Gospel: One of the two groups that will be cleansed of their sins and uncleanness in Zech 13:1 is “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (יִשְׂרָאֵל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם). In Mark 1:5, among the two groups said to come to John to be baptized, are οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες (“all the inhabitants of Jerusalem”). Mark 1:5 may thus contain an allusion to Zech 13:1 and so indicate that the promised fountain which will be opened to cleanse “the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness” is to be associated with the baptism of John.

Finally, these two Old Testament passages provide interpretative background not only to John’s ministry, but even more to Jesus’ exorcisms. Zechariah 13:2 says that “on that day”

Yahweh will cut off the names of the idols and will cause the prophets and *the spirit of uncleanness/unclean spirit* (רוח הַטְּמֵאָה) to pass away from the land (13:2). Just as Moloney and Voelz associate the promises of Ezek 36:26ff with the ministry of Jesus, so also the promise of Zech 13:2 can be associated with the ministry of Jesus. In particular, Jesus' exorcisms indicate that Jesus is the one through whom Yahweh will remove the unclean spirit from the land, and then here it is noteworthy that Jesus' first miracle in Mark's Gospel is an exorcism (Mark 1:21–28). As Moloney and Voelz make the case regarding Ezek 36:25ff, Yahweh's eschatological deliverance of Israel as promised in Zech 13:1–2 is also fulfilled in the ministries of John and Jesus as narrated in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>105</sup>

### Conclusion

Both the ministry of John the Baptist in Mark 1:1–8 and the first, paradigmatic exorcism in Mark 1:21–28 can be matrixed with Old Testament passages such as Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1–2. Both of these Old Testament texts speak to a future cleansing of the people (Ezek 36:25) or the people and the land (Zech 13:1–2) from the impurity associated with idolatry (both passages) and murder (the Ezekiel passage). Though both passages use the word נִדָּה to describe this uncleanness, and though this term is used to describe Levitical impurity associated with

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<sup>105</sup> There is perhaps one other allusion that could be detected when considering Zech 12:10 and the narrative of Mark's Gospel. In 12:10 it is promised that Yahweh will pour out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem רֹחַ חַן וְיִתְחַנְּנוּ (‘‘a spirit of grace and supplication’’). In Mark 1:8 John the Baptist foretells that one is coming who will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. Thus, the narrative of Mark's Gospel also sees the day coming when the stronger one who is coming after John will give the Holy Spirit. Again, whether or not רֹחַ in Zech 12:10 refers literally to the Holy Spirit or to some quality or tone that will be given to the people, this promise with nonliteral language in the Old Testament could be literally fulfilled in the New Testament. In other words, this pouring of this ‘‘spirit of grace and supplication’’ will be fulfilled when God, through Jesus, literally gives his Holy Spirit to men. This promise then could be partially fulfilled when Jesus as the representative of Israel receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism in Mark 1:9–11; in light of Zech 12:10, Jesus receives ‘‘the spirit of grace and supplication’’ when the Spirit comes down into him, and then, in light of John's words in Mark 1:8, Jesus will baptize with this Spirit.

menstruation or contact with corpses, the term is used in both texts in a “nonliteral” way to describe the moral impurity associated with idolatry (both passages) and murder (Ezekiel). Ezekiel 36:25ff and Zech 13:1–2 anticipate God’s direct intervention to purify Israel from this impurity. According to this interpretative matrix, such an eschatological washing begins to take place in the baptism of John and then will continue in the ministry of Jesus.

Zechariah 13:2 also anticipates God removing the רוח הַטְּמֵאָה (“the spirit of uncleanness”) from the land. It is uncertain if Zech 13:2 refers to a specific demon or if it more a generic term that refers to the “spirit” or quality that is associated with idolatry and the false prophets. Some interpreters do identify רוח הַטְּמֵאָה with a specific demon. Wahlen notes further the parallel between the LXX translation of רוח הַטְּמֵאָה as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον and the description of the unclean spirit which possessed the man in the synagogue as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον in Mark 1:26. Yet even if רוח הַטְּמֵאָה does not identify a specific demon, this could be another example of how an Old Testament prophecy that uses nonliteral language is then literally fulfilled in the context of Jesus’ ministry.

Based on the connections between Zech 13:1–2, Ezek 36:17–32, and then John’s ministry and the first exorcism account in Mark’s Gospel, it is profitable and valuable to read Mark’s account in light of these Old Testament passages. The impurity that is removed in the context of John’s baptism and Jesus’ ministry—in particular in the exorcisms—is not Levitical impurity but, rather, an impurity associated with Israel’s past sin and idolatry. As this is an impurity associated with the idols and so opposition to God and his reign over Israel, it represents more of a generic or cosmic impurity associated with sin and rebellion against God and his work.

### **The Initiation of the Reign of God: Mark 1:1–39**

The first exorcism account will be first be interpreted in a matrix with the other narrative passages in close proximity. Mark 1:1–20 depicts the ministry of John the Baptist (1:1–8) and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (1:9–20) with his baptism, temptation, proclamation in Galilee, and then calling of four disciples. Mark 1:21–28 depicts Jesus’ first actions after the call of the four disciples, namely, his teaching and exorcism in the synagogue in Capernaum. The first exorcism is then followed by series of other miracles that continue at least through 1:39. Wahlen identifies Mark 1:21–39 as the first “miracle cluster” in Mark’s Gospel, and so he argues that the exorcism (1:21–28), the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (1:29–31), and then the other miracles and exorcisms that follow the end of that Sabbath day (1:32–34).<sup>106</sup> In light of Ezek 36:25–27 and Zech 13:1–2, Mark’s narrative shows that in the ministries of John the Baptist and then Jesus the God of Israel is intervening to remove the impurity of his people associated with their idolatrous past.

#### **The Ministry of John the Baptist: Mark 1:1–8**

The activity of John’s ministry can be divided into two broad sections, first, his ministry of baptism (Mark 1:1–6) and, second, his foretelling of the one who would come after him (Mark 1:7–8). His mission begins with baptizing as described in 1:1–6. God’s intervention to redeem Israel begins in the south where all of Judea and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem receive the eschatological washing which God brings through John the Baptist. This ministry can be

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<sup>106</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 83–84. The placement of the cleansing of the leper (Mark 1:40–45) in the outline of Mark’s narrative was discussed in chapter 2: Wahlen and others place the cleansing of the leper with what follows in Mark 2:1–3:6. Wahlen, 83. The placement of this account in the narrative of Mark is discussed in more detail in on pages 101–03 of this dissertation.



associated with Ezek 36:25 (Maloney and Voelz)<sup>107</sup> and Zech 13:1 (Wahlen).<sup>108</sup> If Mark 1:4 is alluding to Ezek 36:25, then John's baptism constitutes a fulfillment of the promise that God would sprinkle clean water on his people and cleanse them from uncleanness and idols. If Mark 1:4 is alluding to Zech 13:1, then John's ministry fulfills what was promised to happen "on that day" when a fountain is opened (by God) for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. In light of Zech 13:2, this sin and uncleanness is associated with idols, and this reading seems even stronger if the Zechariah passage alludes to Ezek 36:25.<sup>109</sup> There might also be an allusion to לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יְרוּשָׁלַם (all the inhabitants of Jerusalem) of Zech 13:1 in Mark 1:5 where οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες (all the inhabitants of Jerusalem) is one of the two groups that came to John's baptism. In light of these Old Testament passages, John's baptism represents the promised eschatological cleansing of Israel with anticipation that God will also transform Israel (Ezek 36:26–27). It must be noted here that, if Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1 provide the background for John's ministry, then the impurity from which Israel is being cleansed is that associated with the idolatry of Israel's past, even if it includes the washing away of each individual's sins as well. According to this reading of Mark 1:4, God's promised intervention to cleanse his people from their impurity has not yet taken place until the coming of John the Baptist.

The second part of John's ministry is found in Mark 1:7–8. Here John foretells that one stronger than he comes after him, and this person will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ ("with" or

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<sup>107</sup> See Maloney, *Mark*, 33–34 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 104–05 and 112–14.

<sup>108</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 26–30.

<sup>109</sup> See Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV*, 85; Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14*; Boda, *Zechariah*, 725; and Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 29–30

“in connection with the Holy Spirit”). John’s prophecy here can be associated with what follows the promised washing of Ezek 36:25, namely, the promised transformation of Israel in Ezek 36:26–27. Another person will be the agent of this transformation. In light of Zech 13:1, the subsequent promise of Zech 13:2 to remove the names of the idols, the unclean spirit, and the false prophets also refers to the work of the man who is stronger than John and who comes after him. John’s words in Mark 1:7–8 create anticipation for the action that follows: There will be one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. In light of Ezek 36 and Zech 13, then, this same person will be the one through whom God will transform Israel (by putting his Spirit in them) and through whom he will, among other things, remove the unclean spirit from the land.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> When considering John’s prediction in Mark 1:8 that one after him will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (“with the Holy Spirit”), there arises an interesting narrative question: *Does this baptism with the Holy Spirit take place in the story of Mark’s Gospel? If so, where does this happen?* If the interpreter were to assume that Mark 1:8 is a reference to Pentecost, then this event is actually suspended from Mark’s narrative. Such a suspension of an event that the reader of Mark might expect to find in the story, however, would not be atypical of Mark’s Gospel. Given the various passion and resurrection predictions found in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33–34, and then especially Jesus’ prediction in 14:28 that anticipates a reunion with his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection, the reader might anticipate an account that tells of such a reunion between the risen Jesus and his disciples. Yet, if Mark’s Gospel ends at 16:8 (as it likely does), then such an account is suspended from the narrative. Thus, if Mark can suspend the fulfillment of 14:28 from the narrative, then he could also suspend the fulfillment of 1:8.

But not all read this way. See, e.g., Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 70–72, where Wahlen identifies the fulfillment of 1:8—what he calls “Jesus’ spirit-baptism”—with Jesus’ teaching ministry. According to Wahlen, those who accept Jesus’ “new teaching”—whether they are Jew or Gentile—are purified by Jesus through this teaching. Thus, Wahlen detects the fulfillment of 1:8 taking place whenever Jesus is teaching throughout the entire narrative of Mark’s Gospel.

Yet see also Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:9*, 1180–85 for his presentation of how Mark 1:8 is fulfilled within the narrative of Mark’s Gospel. Voelz argues that there is a strong congruence between the accounts of the baptism of Jesus (1:9–11) and the death of Jesus (15:37–39). There are three parallel occurrences that connect these two passages: First, at the baptism of Jesus the heavens are split open, and at his death the curtain of the sanctuary, which was embroidered with images of the heavens, is split from top to bottom; the verb σκίζω is used in both passages to describe this action. Second, at his baptism the voice from heaven identifies Jesus as the Son of God, and at this death the centurion confesses that Jesus is the Son of God; it is notable that the centurion is the only human character in Mark’s Gospel who makes this confession. Finally, at his baptism the Holy Spirit comes down into (εἰς) Jesus, but as he dies Jesus “breathes out” (the verb is ἐκνέω). What Voelz detects occurring in this third parallel is that at Jesus’ death the Holy Spirit who came into him at the baptism is now being breathed out, and this breathing out of the Spirit in 15:37 is the fulfillment of 1:8—“a *proleptic manifestation* of the end-time/eschatological outpouring of the Spirit as described in Joel 3:1–2” and “a breathing out of the Spirit that makes possible the recognition of Jesus and the confession of Jesus as the Son of God” (1183). It is the centurion who receives this breathed out Spirit, and so it is Jesus’ death and breathing out of the Spirit that makes the centurion’s stunning confession possible. Understood in light of Ezekiel 36, at the beginning of Mark’s narrative God puts his

## The Beginning of the Ministry of Jesus: Mark 1:9–20

According to Mark's account, Jesus is unique, first, in that, while the others who come to John come for Judea and Jerusalem, he comes from Galilee in the north. Jesus is further distinguished from the others in that at his baptism the Holy Spirit comes down into him and he is identified by the voice from heaven as being God's beloved Son. That Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at his baptism may indicate that he is the one stronger than John who will baptize ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, for he who receives the Spirit would be the one to baptize with/in the Holy Spirit.<sup>111</sup> If this is the case, then Jesus is introduced as the one who will be God's agent in bringing about the transformation of Israel promised in Ezek 36:26–27. Not only this, but there may be a partial fulfillment of Ezek 36:26 in that Jesus, as the representative of Israel, receives the promised Spirit of God, that God literally "puts his Spirit within you" when the Holy Spirit comes into Jesus. What is more, Jesus also is depicted as one who will operate in the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit<sup>112</sup> and as one who is in fact possessed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>113</sup> That Jesus is one who is in the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit is then demonstrated when the Spirit throws Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.<sup>114</sup>

After his temptation Jesus relocates to Galilee and so brings God's mission to the north, from which he has come. There he proclaims that the time is fulfilled and that the reign of God is here. According to Jesus' proclamation, the eschatological time when God will directly intervene

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Spirit into Israel in the person of his Son Jesus, but at the end of the story Jesus puts God's spirit into the centurion, and so this Gentile is *purified* and comes under the eschatological reign and rule of God.

<sup>111</sup> See France, *Mark*, 77–78, where he makes this logical connection between Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism and John's promise that he would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

<sup>112</sup> See again Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 156 and 159.

<sup>113</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 131.

<sup>114</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 126 and 136.

on behalf of Israel has arrived.<sup>115</sup> If we see Ezek 36:25–27 in the background, then such proclamation can be interpreted as the beginning of God’s efforts to transform his people, here by calling them to repentance and faith through his Son, Jesus. Jesus then calls four fishermen to be his disciples.

### The Exorcism in the Synagogue: Mark 1:21–28

After the general description of his proclamation in Mark 1:14–15 and his call of four assistants in 1:16–20, Jesus’ first act of ministry to Israel is described in 1:21–28 with the incident in the synagogue at Capernaum on a Sabbath day. First, in 1:21–22, Jesus is depicted as teaching in the synagogue, and his teaching is recognized as having authority. Mark does not describe the actual content of Jesus’ teaching, but only that his hearers were astonished at his teaching. Considering what Jesus has taught up to this point in the narrative, it is likely that this is to be understood in light of Jesus’ proclamation as described in 1:14–15, that is, Jesus has been proclaiming that the time is fulfilled and the reign of God is here.<sup>116</sup> Again, if Ezek 36:25–27 is in the background, Jesus’ teaching can be interpreted as part of God’s efforts to transform the heart of his people.

Then, in 1:23–28, Jesus performs what is both the first miracle and the first exorcism of Mark’s narrative. While he is teaching, Jesus is confronted by a man in their synagogue who is ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (“who has an unclean spirit” or “who is in the sphere/power of an unclean spirit”). Again, according to Neyrev, that this would take place in a synagogue would be surprising because, according to the “purity maps” operative in Second Temple Judaism, a

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<sup>115</sup> See Maloney, *Mark*, 49 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 146–48.

<sup>116</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 162.

synagogue would not be recognized as an unclean place.<sup>117</sup> In light of Ezekiel 36 and Zech 13, however, this incident is perhaps less surprising: According to these prophets, the people of Israel will remain unclean until God acts directly to deliver them from their impurity. According to Mark's narrative, God's intervention has begun in the south with the ministry of John the Baptist, in which God is washing and cleansing his people from their uncleanness. Only now with Jesus has this intervention come to Galilee in the north. Thus, it might even be expected that Jesus would confront such impurity in Galilee, as all of Israel had been subject to this impurity before God's intervention. Thus, Mark refers to the synagogue in Capernaum with the words ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν (in *their* synagogue [emphasis added]).<sup>118</sup> Jesus is thus bringing the reign of God into a place that is not "his" or "God's," but "theirs." Even though the occupants of this synagogue are Jews, the fact that there is an unclean spirit at work in "their synagogue" is a manifestation of their present need for eschatological cleansing, cleansing that has come where John is baptizing in the south, but has not yet arrived here in Galilee. Until Jesus' arrival, this synagogue and those within it are still outside of God's reign and so subject to the impurity that was upon all of Israel. Jesus now brings the reign to them through his teaching and this exorcism.

This man who is ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ recognizes Jesus to be ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (the Holy One of God). Such an identification of Jesus can be interpreted in light of what has occurred already in Mark 1:10: The Holy Spirit came into Jesus, and so Jesus is now the Holy One of God.<sup>119</sup> Again, this identification of Jesus by an unclean spirit in Mark's narrative is unique, as elsewhere they will identify him as "the Son of God" (3:11) and "the Son the Most

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<sup>117</sup> See Neyrey, "Idea of Purity," 92 and 95.

<sup>118</sup> See Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 159.

<sup>119</sup> See Iersel, *Mark*, 136.

High God” (5:7). The contrast and conflict erupts between that which is unclean (this spirit) and he who is holy (Jesus)—and so there is conflict between “the Holy One of God” and “the unclean spirit.”<sup>120</sup> This conflict is resolved when Jesus casts this unclean spirit out of the man. In the estimation of the witnesses, this then further demonstrates the unique authority of Jesus’ teaching (1:27).

*Can the unclean spirit that possesses the man in the synagogue be associated with the unclean spirit of Zech 13:2?* When the spirit is first identified it is with (possibly) an anarthrous noun—ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (Mark 1:23). Yet, when described the second time, it is with an article—τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον (1:26). Since this character has already been introduced earlier in the narrative in 1:23, it makes sense in 1:26 to take the article as anaphoric, as “that (definite) unclean spirit.” As we have said, however, Wahlen notes the parallel between Mark 1:26 and Zech 13:2 through the translation of רִיחַ הַטְּמָאָה in the LXX of Zech 13:2 as τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον, wording identical to that used in Mark 1:26.<sup>121</sup> If Zech 13:1 is in the background of John’s ministry as described in Mark 1:4, then this exorcism can be read as the (partial) fulfillment of Zech 13:2: Through his Son, God is removing τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκαθάρτον (the unclean spirit) from the land through the casting out of the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue. Thus, if Zech 13:1–2 is read in the background of Mark’s narrative, there is a logical progression: John’s ministry fulfills Zech 13:1 with the cleansing of Israel from sin and impurity, and Jesus fulfills Zech 13:2 when he removes at least this one unclean spirit from the possessed man. Whether or not Zech 13:2 lies behind Mark 1:23–28, however, the confrontation in this text

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<sup>120</sup> See again Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity,” 94–96.

<sup>121</sup> See Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 29.

is between Jesus' holiness and the impurity of this spirit.

#### Subsequent Miracles and Exorcisms: Mark 1:29–39 and 3:10–12

This first exorcism can be read as setting the precedent for the other exorcisms that follow: Jesus operates as “the Holy One of God,” that is, as one who has the Holy Spirit within him and acts in the sphere and power of that Spirit. The impurity of the spirits are in conflict with Jesus' holiness, and Jesus will overcome these unclean spirits by casting them out of those possessed. The impurity of such spirits is not Levitical impurity, but a generic impurity associated with both Israel's past sins and idolatry (Zech 13:1–2) and their opposition to Jesus and the eschatological reign and rule of God. Jesus, then, will bring cleansing from this generic impurity to more people.

In addition, this first exorcism account initiates a series of miracle/healing stories that continues at least through Mark 1:39.<sup>122</sup> First, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (1:30–31). Then Jesus heals other sick people and casts out other demons (1:32–34). In 1:34 Mark describes the spirits with the alternate label δαιμόνια, yet it seems evident that these “demons” are to be identified with the unclean spirit of the first exorcism. If read as a unit, the miracles thus far in this part of the “miracle cluster” (1:21–34) both begin and conclude with exorcisms. The summary of Jesus' miracle/healing ministry in 1:39 and 3:10–12 then has strong parallels with 1:32–34: Jesus preaches (1:39), heals the sick (3:32–34), and casts out demons/unclean spirits (1:39 and 1:32–34). Read in light of the first exorcism, Jesus continues to demonstrate his authority over unclean spirits and, if one reads Zech 13:2 in the background, “to remove the unclean spirit from the land.”

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<sup>122</sup> See again Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 83–84.

### Subsequent Passages that Involve “Unclean Spirits”

The first exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28 will now be matrixed with other passages in Mark’s Gospel unclean spirits or demons play a major role.

#### The First Controversy with the Jerusalem Scribes: Mark 3:22–30

In the first controversy between Jesus and the Jerusalem scribes, the scribes accuse Jesus of “having Beelzebub” and “casting out demons in connection with/within the power/sphere of the prince of demons” (Mark 3:22).<sup>123</sup> The narrator interprets Beelzebub and the prince of demons to be “an unclean spirit” (see 3:30). Thus, these scribes offer their interpretation of the significance of the exorcisms: In their interpretation of these events, the exorcisms indicate that Jesus is actually in league with Satan. Yet, Jesus offers a counter explanation in the parable of the strong man (3:27): Rather than operating in league with Satan and his demons, through his exorcisms Jesus is delivering people from captivity to Satan.

This passage further illustrates what is taking place in the exorcisms. Jesus warns them about sinning against the Holy Spirit by asserting that he has an unclean spirit. They accuse him of operating within the power/sphere of the demonic realm—of unclean spirits—but he is operating in the power of the Holy Spirit whom he received at his baptism. The explanation provided by the scribes is false.<sup>124</sup> As with the first exorcism account, this further emphasizes that Jesus overcomes the unclean spirits in connection with the Holy Spirit.

#### The Other Full Exorcism Accounts: Mark 5:1–20, 7:24–30, and 9:14–27

The first full exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28 can be matrixed with the other full

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<sup>123</sup> See again Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 156 and 159 for his discussion regarding the translation of the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων.

<sup>124</sup> This is a somewhat rare example of a level 1 explanation of events in a narrative being untrue/unhelpful.



exorcism accounts. In each of these accounts the demon is referred to at least once as πνεῦμα ἁκάθαρτον, thus implying that what happened in the Capernaum synagogue is operative in these miracles, viz., Jesus, in connection with the Holy Spirit, confronts the unclean spirits and vanquishes them. Regarding how these four full exorcism accounts stand together in the overall narrative of Mark's Gospel, the interpreter can see an ABBA chiastic pattern: The first and fourth accounts each involves Jesus casting an unclean spirit out of an Israelite in Galilee. The second and third accounts each involves Jesus casting an unclean spirit out of a Gentile outside of Israel.<sup>125</sup> Note also that Jesus' first and final miracles in Galilee each involves the exorcism of an unclean spirit.

If it is assumed that Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1–2 provide background for the ministries of John the Baptist and then Jesus, then the second and third exorcism accounts are noteworthy because these two accounts represent an extension of God's work beyond what was promised in these two Old Testament texts: God promised to cleanse the people of Israel from their sin and impurity and to remove the unclean spirit from the land (of Israel). Jesus' ministry, however, extends also to the Gentiles, and Jesus casts unclean spirits also out of people who are not of Israel. The cleansing that Jesus brings to Israel from this generic, cosmic impurity associated with the unclean spirits now also extends to the Gentiles.<sup>126</sup>

### Conclusion

This first exorcism is programmatic for establishing that Jesus overcomes unclean spirits in connection with the Holy Spirit that he received at his baptism. This is reinforced in the

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<sup>125</sup> See again Wahlen, *Impurity of Spirits*, 98–99. This view is presented in more detail on pages 30 and 163–64 of this dissertation.

<sup>126</sup> See footnote 125 in this chapter.

controversy with the Jerusalem scribes and is demonstrated again in the other three full exorcism accounts. The four full exorcism accounts together demonstrate that Jesus delivers both Jews and Gentiles from unclean spirits.

### **Conclusion**

In the narrative of Mark's Gospel, the unclean spirits have an impurity that stems from their opposition to Jesus and his inauguration of the eschatological reign and rule of God. Since he received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is possessed by and in the power/sphere of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' confrontations with the unclean spirits represents a confrontation between his (and the Spirit's) holiness and the spirits' uncleanness. This is brought out in particular in the account of the first exorcism in Mark 1:21–28 and the account of Jesus' first confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in Mark 3:22–30. In the first exorcism account, the man who was within the power/sphere of an unclean spirit identifies Jesus as "the Holy One of God." Then, in his response to the scribes who accuse him of having an unclean spirit, Jesus warns them against blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, for they have been calling the Holy Spirit whom Jesus has—or, rather, who possesses Jesus—"unclean." So, in Mark's narrative the conflict between Jesus and the demons can be understood in terms of the opposition of their uncleanness to Jesus' holiness. By virtue of Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, he has authority over unclean spirits and can overcome them by casting them out of people who are possessed. In doing this Jesus brings cleansing to such people. The impurity of these spirits should be understood as representing, not a Levitical impurity as defined by the Torah, but a generic or cosmic impurity associated with their present opposition to Jesus and his inauguration of the eschatological reign and rule of God.

The first exorcism account of Mark 1:21–28 is programmatic for the other exorcism

accounts that follow: In this account the unclean spirit recognizes Jesus and attempts to identify him. Jesus silences the spirit and casts him out of the man who is possessed. Jesus thus demonstrates that he has authority over the unclean spirits/demons, an authority he demonstrates again and again in the subsequent exorcism accounts. When considering the four full exorcism accounts together, there is a chiastic ABBA pattern in which the first and fourth tell of the deliverance of a Jew from possession of an unclean spirit within the land of Israel, and the second and third tell of the deliverance of a Gentile in land outside of Israel. Taken together the exorcisms indicate that Jesus brings cleansing from the impurity represented by these spirits both to Jew and Gentile, both within Israel and outside of Israel.

If Old Testament passages such as Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1–2 are read as providing background to the narrative of Mark’s Gospel, then it may be argued further that the people of Israel were subject to impurity because of their past idolatry and sin, but God promised to cleanse them from this impurity. The fulfillment of these promises is initiated with the ministry of John the Baptist in which his baptism constitutes the initial washing of Israel from sin with water. The implication, then, is that Jesus, the stronger one than John who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, continues this work of cleansing the people of Israel from their sin and of transforming Israel (Ezek 36:26–27). Zechariah 13:2 foresees God removing “the unclean spirit” from the land of Israel. Wahlen argues that this promise is fulfilled in Mark 1:21–28 and sees Jesus’ exorcisms here and throughout Mark’s Gospel as the fulfillment of the promises of Zech 13:2, following the fulfillment of Zech 13:1 in John’s baptism. When these Old Testament passages are read in the background of Mark’s narrative, then the unclean spirits may further be identified with the moral impurity of Israel’s past sin of idolatry.

Whether or not one sees a connection between Zech 13:2 and the first exorcism account,

the fact that Jesus casts out these spirits indicates that he is the Son of God (Mark 1:11) who is to cleanse Israel by delivering those possessed by unclean spirits from such possession, that he has the authority to bring about purification from such “generic, cosmic impurity” associated with these spirits. What is more, as the narrative of Mark’s Gospel demonstrates, this act of purification from cosmic impurity extends beyond the border of Israel and embraces also the Gentiles.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION: THE FUNCTION OF PURITY IN MARK IN ESTABLISHING THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS

#### Introduction

This dissertation has offered a reading of the miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43, the handwashing controversy of 7:1–23, and the exorcism accounts of Mark’s Gospel through a narrative critical approach in light of the Old Testament background literature and, to a limited degree, in light of how purity was likely understood and practiced in Judaism in the Second Temple era. In considering, finally, how these various accounts function together within the wider narrative, it will proceed with the following assumptions and interpretative decisions:

First, as argued by Francis J. Maloney and James W. Voelz, John’s ministry of baptism described in Mark 1:1–8 is related to purity and can be understood as the fulfillment of the promised eschatological purification of Israel found in Ezek 36:25–27.<sup>1</sup>

Second, as argued by Clinton Wahlen, John’s ministry and Jesus’ first exorcisms can be understood as the fulfillment of the promised eschatological purification of the people of Jerusalem and the house of David found in Zech 13:1–2.<sup>2</sup>

Third, as argued by Bruce Chilton, when considering the nature of the impurity of these spirits in the exorcism accounts, this impurity is related to the realm of Satan and not the regulations of Leviticus.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as argued by Voelz, this impurity represents an impurity that

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<sup>1</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 33–34 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8*:26, 104–05 and 112–14. See Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 210.

<sup>2</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 26–30.

<sup>3</sup> Chilton, “Exorcism of History,” 225.

stands outside of the reign of God as initiated by Jesus and is so opposed to this reign.<sup>4</sup> *The impurity of the unclean spirits is not identical to Levitical impurity.*

Fourth, as argued by Wahlen, the four full exorcism accounts in Mark's Gospel can be read together in an ABBA chiastic relationship in which the first and the fourth exorcism accounts each involves the deliverance of an Israelite in the land of Israel, while the second and third accounts each involves the deliverance of a Gentile in land outside of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

Fifth, as argued by Joel Marcus and Voelz, the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43, where Levitical impurity is a concern, can be read in an interpretative matrix with Num 5:1–4.<sup>6</sup> In the narrative of Mark's Gospel these three miracles proceed in the same order as the list of those people who should be expelled from the camp of Israel in Num 5:2—first someone unclean by skin disease, then someone unclean by a bodily discharge, and, finally, some unclean by contact with a dead body.

Sixth, as argued by the majority of interpreters, the participle clause καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα in Mark 7:19b is a parenthetical statement inserted by Mark into the middle of Jesus' speech to his disciples in 7:18–23, and by means of this parenthetical statement the author

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<sup>4</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 344–45.

<sup>5</sup> Wahlen, *Impurity of the Spirits*, 98–99.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 367–68 and Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 377.

intends to show that Jesus has abrogated the food laws of Leviticus 11.<sup>7</sup> The referent of πάντα τὰ βρώματα is, as argued by Voelz, “all the foods that there are.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, this dissertation reads with Voelz in arguing that the pivotal passage in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel concerning Jesus’ authority with respect to the Torah is found in Mark 2:18–28.<sup>9</sup> The parables of the old cloth and the new wine skins in 2:21–23 explain the new dynamic that is at work in the eschatological reign and rule of God as it is inaugurated by Jesus. Then, in 2:25–27, Jesus’ response to the Pharisee’s question about the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath is the first instance in Mark’s Gospel where Jesus claims for himself a unique relationship to and authority over the Torah.

## Overview of the Narrative

### Mark 1:1–15

The plot of Mark’s Gospel begins with the narrative of the ministry of John the Baptist in Mark 1:1–6. John’s ministry is characterized by him preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All of Judea and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are going out to John to be baptized by him, confessing their sins. In the text a connection is established between John’s baptizing/applying water and a washing away of sin. John’s baptism is connected to purification,

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Lagrange, *Evangelie selon Saint Marc*, 190; Cranfield, *Mark*, 241 and 243–45; Taylor, *Mark*, 344–45; Neusner, *The Idea of Purity*, 61; Lane, *Mark*, 255–56; Banks, *Jesus and the Law*, 144–45; Räisänen, “Jesus and the Food Laws,” 82; Hurtado, *Mark*, 111; Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity*, 50–51; Mann, *Mark*, 317; Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity,” 107–08; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 219–20; Cole, *Mark*, 190; Stock, *The Method and Message of Mark*, 208–09; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, 49–51; Brooks, *Mark*, 118; Hooker, *Mark*, 179; Gundry, *Mark*, 355–56; Iersel, *Mark*, 245; Marcus, *Mark 1:1–8*, 457–58; Witherington, *Mark*, 228–29; Edwards, *Mark*, 212–13; France, *Mark*, 289–92; Kazen, *Jesus and the Purity Halakhah*, 61; Moloney, *Mark*, 143–44; Boring, *Mark*, 202–03; Collins, *Mark*, 356; Culpepper, *Mark*, 229; Stein, *Mark*, 345–46; Meier, *Law and Love*, 362 and 390; Card, *Mark*, 99; Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 464 and 468–70; Atkin, *Exalting Jesus*, 155; Strauss, *Mark*, 304; and Garland, *Theology of Mark’s Gospel*, 131, 311, and 468.

<sup>8</sup> Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 450.

<sup>9</sup> See the section “Old Ways and New Ways” in Voelz, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, 210–24.

and it initiates the fulfillment of the eschatological purification promised in Ezek 36:25. John's baptism is also connected to the eschatological promised purification in Zech 13:1. When considering Ezekiel 36 and Zechariah 13 together, the washing/purification that takes place in John's baptism does not just involve the forgiveness of the individual sins of each person being baptized, but it is also a cleansing of the nation of Israel itself (Ezek 36:25) or, more narrowly, Jerusalem and the house of David in the south (Zech 13:1). This eschatological purification is to remove Israel's national sins of idolatry (Ezekiel 36 and Zechariah 13) and murder (Ezekiel 36). These sins resulted in the Babylonian captivity and the people of Israel being removed from the Promised Land. The understanding is that the initial return of some Israelites from the exile was not accompanied by this promised purification. In fact, if Zechariah 13 is read in an interpretative matrix with Ezekiel 36, the point of view in Zechariah is also that the promise in Ezekiel still had a future fulfillment from the perspective of this post-exilic prophet.

According to the narrative of Mark's Gospel, the fulfillment of this promise begins with the ministry of John the Baptist as described in Mark 1:1–8: At this time Yahweh is bringing eschatological cleansing to the people of Israel for the national sins of their past. Such a reading of John's ministry suggests that the nonliteral language of washing with water in Ezek 36:25 and Zech 13:1 is *literally* fulfilled when John uses actual water to baptize.

In Mark 1:7–8 John foretells that one stronger than he will come. This “stronger one” will baptize the people of Israel (the referent of ὁ ἄγιος in 1:8) ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (“in/with the Holy Spirit” or perhaps “in the sphere/power of the Holy Spirit”). This promise in Mark 1:8 corresponds to the promise in Ezek 36:27 that Yahweh will put his Spirit in the people of Israel. The one coming after John will in this way continue John's work by baptizing with the Holy



Spirit. The purification and restoration of Israel will thus continue in force in the ministry of this person who comes after John.

Then, in the account of Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:9–11, the Holy Spirit descends εἰς αὐτόν (“into him”). When Jesus receives the Spirit in this way, the narrative indicates that Jesus is the one stronger than John who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. It also suggests that Jesus in his person embodies Israel at this point: The promise of Ezek 36:27 is initially fulfilled when Yahweh literally puts his Spirit *into* Jesus. At this point in the narrative, Jesus is identified as the one through whom purification will continue to be brought to the people of Israel. What is more, the account of Jesus' baptism suggests that Jesus is now one who possesses the Holy Spirit and even as one who is *possessed by the Holy Spirit*. Jesus is identified as an agent of divine purity who will purify those with whom he comes into contact, and by virtue of his unique relationship with the Holy Spirit, he himself cannot be subject to any impurity outside of himself: *Jesus is one who cannot be rendered unclean*.

In the account of the temptation in Mark 1:11–13, Jesus interacts with Satan. Later in the narrative (see 3:22–30) Satan is identified as the one with whom the unclean spirits are associated. So Jesus' first interaction with impurity takes place at his temptation. Though Mark only gives a general account about what happens during this forty day period of time, Jesus' victory over Satan is evident in his proclamation of the Gospel of God in 1:14–15 and then later in the parable of the strong man in 3:27. Thus, in the first narrative event after the baptism, Jesus confronts and triumphs over the one who is seen as a source of the generic or cosmic impurity that is associated with the unclean spirits.

Jesus then proclaims the arrival of God's reign in Mark 1:14–15 and calls his hearers to repentance and faith in this Gospel. In light of what has come before—John's baptism, John's

proclamation of the stronger one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and Jesus' victory over Satan (whom the narrative will later identify as the leader of the unclean spirits)—one goal of God's reign and rule, that is, one of the things that God will accomplish through His Son Jesus, is the ongoing purification and restoration of Israel.

#### Mark 1:16–45

As Jesus begins his ministry, he again and again demonstrates a unique authority. In Mark 1:16–20 he calls four fisherman to participate in his ministry. In 1:21–28 he teaches with authority and, in the first miracle in the narrative of Mark's Gospel, he demonstrates authority over an unclean spirit. In 1:29–32 he heals Peter's mother-in-law (on the Sabbath), and then heals many sick and casts out other demons. In the "summary sentence" of 1:39 Jesus continues to teach and cast out demons. In 1:40–45 Jesus cleanses a leper, the first cleansing of Levitical impurity in this narrative and a cleansing accomplished *apart from the Torah*.

That purity is a theme in the first miracle account, the exorcism of Mark 1:21–28, is evident by the use of the adjective ἀκάθαρτος to describe the spirit. Since Mark uses this adjective only to describe these spirits, the impurity represented by these spirits is associated with Satan and his opposition to the reign of God as it is initiated by Jesus; this theme is further developed later in 3:22–30. In light of Zech 13:2, this impurity is also associated with idolatry and false prophecy, and so the sins of Israel's past. Thus, this impurity is not the Levitical impurity that is defined in the Torah. This impurity is better described as a generic or cosmic impurity. Jesus demonstrates his authority over this generic/cosmic impurity by delivering a man in "their synagogue" who was ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ ("in" or "within the sphere/power of an unclean spirit"). The general conflict that takes place is evident when this man/spirit identifies

Jesus as ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (“the Holy One of God”). What is at stake here is the basic distinction between impurity and the holiness of God as found in the Lev 11:44–45.

Zechariah 13:1–2 provides background for the narrative of Mark’s Gospel at this point. This first miracle demonstrates that Jesus is continuing the work of John the Baptist in bringing purification to Israel, here by removing τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον (“the spirit of uncleanness”) from the land. Thus, one means by which Jesus will bring purification and restoration to Israel will be through casting out unclean spirits from people who are possessed and/or in the sphere/power of such spirits. Each exorcism that follows in the narrative will continue this theme: Jesus brings purity by casting out the unclean spirits. Jesus in this way continues to demonstrate the authority to purify people of the generic/cosmic impurity represented by these spirits.

That this generic/cosmic impurity associated with the demons would be a problem among the Jews might appear surprising in light of “the purity maps” as described by Jacob Neyrey:<sup>10</sup> The land of Israel was considered clean, while the lands outside of Israel were seen as unclean. Synagogues in particular would be places that would be viewed as clean and holy. Yet, here in “their synagogue” there is a man ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ. Note, however, that this situation is *not* surprising in light of Zech 13:1–2 and, in fact, it might even be expected: The land of Israel—and so people in Israel—is subject to the influence of τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον, and this will be a problem until Yahweh removes this unclean spirit. The first miracle account suggests that the arrival of the reign of God in Jesus marks the point in time when Yahweh will remove the unclean spirits from the land in the person of his Son. Thus far Jesus is performing

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<sup>10</sup> See Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity,” 94–96.

this deliverance for Israelites in the land of Israel, and this will be depicted again in future passages where exorcisms are mentioned (see 1:32–34, 1:39, and 3:11–12).

Again, Jesus' exorcisms do not involve the legislation of the Torah. Yet, they do demonstrate two important elements in Mark's narrative: First, Jesus has a unique authority over impurity and so is the agent through whom God is fulfilling the promise of Zech 13:2, that is, removing the unclean spirit (or spirits) from the land of Israel. Second, this activity, though promised in the Old Testament, is taking place apart from the institutions of the old covenant.

In Mark 1:29–31 there is then the narrative of the first healing miracle. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, and he does this by taking her hand and so coming into physical contact with her. Though this woman is not necessarily unclean, this miracle does indicate that Jesus is willing to come into physical contact with the sick, as if such contact can in no way compromise his own purity.

That purity is a theme in the cleansing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45 is evident from both the background literature of Leviticus 13–14 and certain vocables used in the narrative: The leper requests to be cleansed, not healed. Jesus references the legislation of Leviticus 14 in his instructions to the man after the miracle. The verb καθαρίζω is used three times in this account and the noun καθαρισμός is used one time. Here the impurity is the Levitical impurity that is defined by the legislation in the Torah, specifically that found in Leviticus 13–14. Thus, in this miracle account there is a shift in focus from the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits to impurity as defined by the Torah. This is the first account in Mark's Gospel involving Levitical impurity.

One important theme in this account is that Jesus cleanses the leper by means of his own authority and so *apart from the legislation of the Torah*. This is evident in certain features of this

narrative: The leper violates the commands of Lev 13:45–46 when he comes directly to Jesus to request cleansing, yet Jesus does not rebuke the man for this violation of the Torah. Jesus touches the man, thus creating a scenario where any onlooker can claim that Jesus has become unclean. Jesus usurps the authority of the high priest as found in Leviticus 14 when he speaks a performative speech act and declares this man to be clean. Indeed, Jesus' words actually bring about the purification of this leper. The words of the high priest in the Torah, though necessary to establish an individual's new status before the community, take place *after* a skin disease has been healed. Jesus says these words *while* the skin disease is still present, yet these words accomplish what they say: The leprosy is cleansed—and so this man's status as someone who is now clean is guaranteed by Jesus' words. Jesus here for the first time in the narrative demonstrates authority over impurity as defined by the Torah, and when Jesus removes such impurity, *he does this apart from the Torah*. This miracle in this way also demonstrates that Jesus does have a unique authority with respect to the Torah.

There is, however, the matter of Jesus' command to the man that he follow the instructions of Leviticus 14, that is, show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that was commanded by Moses. This might indicate that Jesus does not see his actions as taking place *apart from the Torah*. Jesus' instructions indicate that this is to be done as a witness to them. *Yet, to what is this a witness?* Is this witness meant to show that Jesus still sees the Torah as applicable? Or is this a witness that the new age has arrived and that in the reign of God the unclean will be purified? In the end, however, these questions do not matter, *for in the narrative the man who is cleansed of his leprosy does not follow Jesus' instructions*. Thus, the leper is cleansed solely because of Jesus' words and actions, and this in spite of whatever may have been Jesus' intentions in

commanding the man to follow the instructions of Leviticus 14. The man's actions as described in the narrative thus only further demonstrate that Jesus has cleansed him *apart from the Torah*.

At this point in the narrative Jesus has demonstrated several times his authority to cleanse people of the generic/cosmic impurity associated with the unclean spirits, thus to rid Israel of the impurity that (in light of Ezekiel 36 and Zechariah 13) is associated with their national sins. This is done apart from any institutions associated with the old covenant. What is more, in cleansing the leper Jesus demonstrates his authority to cleanse people from the Levitical impurity which is based in the legislation of the Torah, and this action is accomplished apart from the instructions in the Torah. Thus, Jesus has authority to cleanse *all categories* of impurity. The first exorcism establishes a pattern through which to read the other exorcisms in Mark's Gospel—Jesus brings “general” purity to people possessed by unclean spirits. The cleansing of the leper establishes a pattern through which to read other events where Jesus will deal with situations involving impurity as defined in the Torah.

#### Mark 2:1–3:35

Beginning in Mark 2:1 there is a shift in focus upon events where Jesus meets opposition from outsiders. Jesus again and again demonstrates his authority (e.g. to forgive sins, to call sinners to repentance, to heal on the Sabbath, and, as demonstrated already, to cast out unclean spirits), yet now his actions are questioned and opposed by antagonists. This particular focus continues through Mark 3:25, and then it will continue intermittently as the narrative continues beyond this point.

Two particular events in this section of Mark's Gospel when taken together suggest that Jesus has a unique authority with respect to the Torah. In Mark 2:18–22 Jesus is questioned about why his disciples do not fast as do the disciples of the Pharisees and the disciples of John

the Baptist. Jesus responds with two parabolic statements. In the first such statement Jesus claims to be the eschatological bridegroom and his disciples are his friends: The friends of the bridegroom do not fast while he, the bridegroom, is with them. Here Jesus claims unique authority for himself, for, if he is *this* bridegroom, then his disciples apparently are not subject to expected forms of piety as practiced within first century Judaism. The second statement contains the parables of the new patch/old cloth and the old/new wine skins. These two parables together indicate that the new age has arrived in Jesus and, therefore, those upon whom the reign of God has come—namely, Jesus’ disciples—are no longer subject to the ways associated with the old covenant and the old age.

Jesus’ words about the new age then have implications for the events that immediately follow in Mark 2:23–28. In this narrative, after the disciples pick grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees question Jesus about why his disciples are doing what is not lawful. This event is to be interpreted in light of what is narrated in 2:18–22. Jesus responds in two parts: In 2:25–26 Jesus uses the Old Testament example of David and his followers eating the bread of the presence, food set aside for only the priests to eat, to show that, just as David’s followers were allowed to eat what was forbidden, Jesus followers also are also exempt from the expectations of the Pharisees. Note that rather than quibble with his opponents over the proper application of the Third Commandment, Jesus instead associates himself with David and so claims a unique position of authority with respect to the Torah, authority that then has implications for his disciples’ relationship to the Torah. Then, in 2:27–28, Jesus redefines the purpose of the Sabbath regulations by reminding his opponents of the original intent of the Sabbath at creation. Then Jesus claims for himself a unique authority with respect to the Sabbath regulations when he claims that he, the Son of Man, “is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

When Jesus cleanses the leper in Mark 1:40–45, the events of that narrative present Jesus as a man who possesses a unique authority with respect to the Torah, *yet there is no direct statement on Jesus' part that he is "Lord of the purity code."* That Jesus has such authority is a conclusion that arises from interpreting the significance of the events (i.e. reading on level 2). In Mark 2:28, however, Jesus directly claims such authority for himself with respect to the Sabbath regulations. In light of Jesus' words about the arrival of the new age in 2:21–22, such authority can be assumed with respect to the entire Torah. Thus far in the narrative this has been shown with respect to the regulations regarding skin disease in 1:40–45 and now also with respect to the Sabbath regulations in 2:23–28.

The placement of these events within the narrative of Mark's Gospel may then explain why Jesus instructs the leper to follow the regulations of Leviticus 14 (even if that man does not ultimately do this). In Mark 1:40–45 Jesus has not yet openly claimed for himself such a unique lordship over the Torah. His actions in that miracle do demonstrate that he has such lordship, but Jesus has not yet explicitly claimed such authority. In 2:18–28, however, Jesus does explicitly claim such authority for himself. Therefore, after 2:18–28 Jesus will never again command anyone with whom he interacts to follow the regulations of the Torah.

Purity arises as a theme again in the narrative of Jesus' confrontation with the Jerusalem scribes in Mark 3:22–30. This section revisits the matter of Jesus' authority over the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits. In Mark 3:22 these scribes offer an alternate explanation of the significance of Jesus' exorcisms: They claim that Jesus has Beelzebub and that he is operating in the sphere/power of the prince of demons when he casts out demons. In light of 3:30, these men are claiming that Jesus has an unclean spirit. The narrative up to this point, however, has established that Jesus has the Holy Spirit and so is



casting out demons in the sphere/power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus refutes his opponents and warns them against committing blasphemy against the Spirit. Again, the narrative has already established that Jesus has (and is possessed by) the Holy Spirit sent to him by God the Father, and it is because of this that he has unique authority over the unclean spirits.

#### Mark 5:1–43

The three miracle accounts in this section of Mark's Gospel revisit and yet expand upon what has happened earlier in the narrative with respect to Jesus and purity. The exorcism of the Gergesene demoniac in Mark 5:1–20 should be interpreted in light of the exorcism of the man in the synagogue in 1:21–28. In the exorcism of this demoniac Jesus for a second time delivers a man who is described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (“in” or “within the sphere/power of an unclean spirit”). In this second full account of an exorcism Jesus again demonstrates his authority over the generic/cosmic impurity represented (here) by a legion of unclean spirits. (When the narrative mentions other “unclean elements” [e.g. the tombs and the herd of pigs], it only brings the theme of impurity further to the fore.)

An important development in this second full exorcism account, however, is that here Jesus casts out unclean spirits *outside of the land of Israel*, and here Jesus delivers *a Gentile* from the control/possession of unclean spirits. In light of Zechariah 13, it seems appropriate that Jesus would do this for Jews in the land of Israel. That Jesus now delivers a Gentile outside of Israel from such impurity represents and expansion of his ministry toward a more universal scope. This is the first intimation in the narrative that what Jesus is doing for Israel (in fulfillment of the promises of Ezekiel 36 and Zechariah 13) will also apply to Gentiles. What is more, yet again Jesus demonstrates his authority to purify people from the “non-Levitical impurity” represented by the unclean spirits.

The next two miracles in Mark 5 each return again to the theme of Levitical impurity. On the basis of Num 5:1–4, the cleansing of the leper from Mark 1 is placed into an interpretative matrix with the saving of the woman with the flow of blood and the raising of Jairus' daughter. According to Numbers 5, people with skin diseases are to be expelled from the camp, but in Mark 1:40–45 Jesus delivers such a person by cleansing his leprosy. People with discharges are also to be expelled from the camp, but Jesus delivers such a person by saving her from her discharge. People who touch a dead body are to be expelled from the camp, yet Jesus touches a dead body—thus potentially making himself an example of this third group of “unclean people”—but the dead girl is raised to life. In the reign of God the regulations of Num 5:1–4 no longer apply. Thus again Jesus acts as if he has a unique authority with respect to the Torah.

It is not stated explicitly in the narrative that purity is a concern in the saving of the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5:25–34, yet this is evident in light of the background literature of Leviticus 15 (and Num 5:1–4). In fact, the fear that this woman experiences when Jesus repeatedly asks who touched him is better explained by pointing out that, in light of the regulations found in Leviticus 15, this woman has potentially rendered Jesus unclean by touching his garment. What is new in this narrative as opposed to the cleansing of the leper is that Jesus does *not* instruct this woman to follow the regulations Lev 15:28–30. This is now understandable in light of Jesus' words in Mark 2:21–22: The people upon whom the reign of God has come are no longer subject to the regulations of the old covenant and former age (see above). Thus, this woman is simply sent away in peace. Jesus thus again accomplishes this purification *apart from the Torah*. The narrative again presents Jesus as one who has a unique position of authority with respect to the Torah.

It is also not explicitly stated that purity is a concern in the raising of Jairus' daughter, yet again this is evident in light of the background literature of Numbers 19 (and Num 5:1–4). Jesus risks contaminating himself when he takes the dead girl by the hand, but this is not a concern in the aftermath of this miracle. Jesus thus again demonstrates a unique authority with respect to the regulations of Numbers 19. At this point in the narrative, Jesus has through his actions or his words demonstrated that he is in a unique position of authority with respect to the regulations of Leviticus 13–14, the Sabbath regulations, the regulations of Leviticus 15, and the regulations of Numbers 19.

At this point the question should be considered about whether or not the narrative of Mark's Gospel simply assumes that Jesus keeps the Torah by washing himself and his garments after touching any unclean people. *In light of the narrative, would such a washing be necessary?* Such actions on Jesus' part are, in fact, unnecessary for three reasons: First, in each miracle the problem of impurity is removed through the actions of Jesus. Rather than Jesus becoming unclean, he brings purity and restoration to the unclean. Second, since Jesus has received the Holy Spirit at his baptism and so is "the Holy One of God," it is impossible for him to become contaminated by outside impurity. Rather, again, he brings cleansing to the impure. Finally, in light of Jesus' words in Mark 2:21–22, the need for Jesus to wash is no longer necessary. The new age has arrived in Jesus' ministry, and so Jesus himself as an individual is no longer subject to the regulations of the old covenant and the former age.

#### Mark 6:53–8:9

This section of Mark's Gospel now includes what many interpreters appear to see as "the main event" when considering the theme of purity and Jesus' relationship to the Torah: In the parenthetical statement of Mark 7:19b the author indicates that Jesus has abrogated the food laws

of Leviticus 11. When reading Mark's Gospel as a narrative, however, the action in Mark 7 should be read in light of what has already taken place in the plot up to this point. Jesus has been delivering people (apparently many Jews and at least one Gentile) from the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits, and, as promised in Zechariah 13, Jesus casts out the unclean spirits *apart from the institutions of the old covenant*. Jesus has delivered three people from the Levitical impurity, and in each miracle he has operated *apart from the Torah*. Thus, Jesus' authority to cleanse what is unclean has been established in the narrative already before Jesus is depicted as "cleansing all the foods" in 7:19b. What is more, the true touchstone in Mark's narrative for explaining Jesus' relationship to the Torah are the events described in 2:18–28: The new age has arrived in the ministry of Jesus. Those people upon whom the reign of God has come are no longer subject to the old covenant and the former age. In 2:28 Jesus claims that he, the Son of Man, is Lord even of the Sabbath. *In 7:14a–15 and 7:18–19a Jesus' words further confirm that he is Lord of the entire Torah as he abrogates the regulations of Leviticus 11.*

In Mark 6:56 it says that wherever Jesus went—including marketplaces—the sick attempted to touch even the hem of his garment. As with Jesus' interaction with the leper of Mark 1 and the woman and girl of Mark 5, such physical contact leads to a scenario where Jesus could be seen as unclean by outsiders. Yet Jesus again appears "unclean, yet unconcerned" as it is impossible for Jesus to be contaminated by such potential outside impurity. In the parenthetical statement in 7:3–4 it is established not only that "all of the Jews" follow the tradition of the elders by washing their hands before eating, but also that they wash/cleanse themselves *when returning from the marketplace*. Given Jesus' actions in 6:56, the question about some of Jesus' disciples not washing their hands before eating bread might be a veiled accusation against Jesus himself for his own apparent lack of concern regarding purity.

Jesus does not directly address the question posed to him by the Pharisees and the Jerusalem scribes until he addresses the crowd (not his opponents) in Mark 7:14a–15. It is then as he explains this statement to his disciples in 7:18–19a that the author asserts in the parenthetical statement of 7:19b that Jesus καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα. What is the significance of Jesus’ declaration “there is nothing outside of the man which by entering him is able to defile him/make him unclean”? *It is that Jesus has cleansed all the foods.* The important development here is that this is the first time in Mark’s Gospel where there are clear level one signifiers that one complete set of regulations in the Torah no longer applies in the new age. It is not stated explicitly that the regulations of Leviticus 13–14, Leviticus 15, and Numbers 19 no longer apply, but this may be assumed by reading the three miracle accounts of Mark 1:40–45 and 5:21–43 on level two. Yet, here in 7:19b it is declared explicitly by the author that Jesus’ words show that the food regulations of Leviticus 11 no longer apply. Thus, Jesus demonstrates a specific authority simply to set aside a part of the Torah. Jesus also then goes on to redefine purity: It is the sinful things that come out of the hearts of men that defile them.

Then the practical implications of Jesus’ redefinition of impurity are found as the narrative continues in Mark 7:24–8:9: Jesus now engages in ministry to Gentiles that concludes with a second miraculous feeding of Gentiles just as Jesus did the same thing for Israelites in 6:32–44. The first event of this section is the third full exorcism account where Jesus delivers the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman from an unclean spirit. This is now the second time in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus delivers a Gentile from the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits. At this point in the narrative, it becomes clearer that in the reign of God even the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is passing away. Jesus can purify every type of impurity—

both the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits and Levitical impurity—everyone upon whom the new age comes receives purification from Jesus.

Note this move in the narrative between the two types of impurity: In a first cycle of miracles (Mark 1:21–45) Jesus first demonstrates his lordship over the generic/cosmic impurity associated with the unclean spirits (see 1:21–28, 1:32–33, and 1:39), and then he demonstrates his lordship over Levitical impurity (see 1:40–45). In another cycle of miracles found in Mark 5 there is this same sequence: Jesus demonstrates his lordship over generic/cosmic impurity (see 5:1–20), and then he demonstrates his lordship over Levitical impurity (see 5:21–43). This pattern illustrates the following dictum: If Jesus is Lord over everything, as illustrated in the exorcism accounts where he vanquishes generic/cosmic impurity, then he is also Lord of the Torah. Then in Mark 7 this pattern is reversed: In the handwashing controversy, Jesus demonstrates his lordship over the Torah (see 7:1–23), and then there is a shift in the narrative toward Jesus demonstrating his lordship over all people in an exorcism account and ministry to the Gentiles (see 7:24–8:13).

### Mark 9 and 10

The fourth and final full exorcism account is found in Mark 9:14–27. At this point it can be recognized that there is a chiasmic relationship between the four full exorcism accounts in the wider narrative of Mark's Gospel. The first and fourth accounts depict Jesus casting out unclean spirits from Jews within the land of Israel. The second and third accounts depict Jesus casting out unclean spirits from Gentiles outside of the land of Israel. In the second account of Mark 5:1–20 it is not yet clear that the deliverance and inclusion of Gentiles will be a typical aspect of Jesus' ministry and the inauguration of the eschatological reign and rule of God. The third account, however, follows the redefinition of purity by Jesus in Mark 7:14–23. At this point in the

narrative it becomes clear that the purification and deliverance even of the Gentiles will be a typical feature of the eschatological reign and rule of God. The first and second accounts thus both depict Jesus delivering a man—one a Jew and one a Gentile—who is described as ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (“in” or “within the sphere/power of an unclean spirit”). The third and fourth accounts both depict a parent interceding for a child—first a Gentile mother interceding for her daughter, and then a Jewish father interceding for his son. Together the four accounts indicate again what is shown when Jesus engages in Gentile ministry in 7:24–8:9: The eschatological reign and rule of God is open to Jews and Gentiles, and Jesus delivers both Jews and Gentiles from the generic/cosmic impurity represented by the unclean spirits.

It is notable also that the miracle accounts found in Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and the north are framed by exorcism accounts. Jesus’ first miracle is the exorcism of the man in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mark 1. The final miracle in Galilee is Jesus’ exorcism of the boy after the transfiguration in Mark 9. The significance of this framing of the narrative is perhaps to again emphasize that, in light of Zech 13:1–2, one chief goal of Jesus’ ministry was the removal of the unclean spirits. What is new in the narrative of Mark’s Gospel, however, is that Gentiles too are now included in this purification that was originally promised to Israel. When considering all of the exorcism accounts together it is notable that, in fulfilling Zech 13:1–2, Jesus does this on his own authority and so apart from the institutions of the old covenant.

The events described in Mark 10:2–12 then revisit the theme of Jesus’ authority with respect to the Torah. The Pharisees test Jesus by asking him if it is lawful (in light of Deut 24:1–3) for a man to divorce his wife. In a pattern that reflects Jesus’ response when questioned about the Sabbath in Mark 2:23–28, Jesus forgoes the actual legislation of Deuteronomy and directs his opponents back to creation and God’s original intentions for marriage as described in Gen 1:7

and 2:24. Then, in a pattern that reflects Jesus' response to the question about handwashing in Mark 7:1–23, Jesus later privately explains this teaching to his disciples (10:10–12). The events described here can be read in an interpretative matrix with the events of 2:18–28 and 7:1–23 to show again that Jesus possesses a unique authority with respect to the entire Torah. Jesus' abrogation of the food laws of Leviticus 11 make sense in light of what comes before (Jesus teaching on the Sabbath in Mark 2) and what comes after (Jesus teaches on divorce and marriage in Mark 10). Thus, for the disciples (and anyone upon whom the eschatological reign and rule of God has come), it is the teachings of Jesus that are authoritative and not the regulations that are found in the Torah. This is the case because the narrative of Mark's Gospel has already used the theme of purity in particular to establish Jesus' lordship over all things (the exorcisms), and so now the narrative also uses purity to establish his lordship even over the Torah.



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