

Mark 7:1-23

Pastor: Mark 7:1-23: Jesus Christ declared the dietary laws, and hence all commands, of the Mosaic Law to be obsolete.

“The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’ And He said to them, ‘Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN” [Isaiah 29:13, LXX]. Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’ He was also saying to them, ‘You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, “HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER” [Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16]; and, “HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH” [Exodus 21:17]; but you say, “If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),” you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.’ After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, ‘Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.’ When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:1-23).

The statement of Mark 7:19, which appears in most contemporary English Bibles as, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (RSV), is taken by many, many Christian examiners as a proof text used to support not only the abolition of the Torah’s dietary code, but frequently also that the Law of Moses on the whole has been abolished for the post-resurrection era.¹ Today’s Messianic movement, which tends to favor not only a post-resurrection validity for God’s Torah, but also is most friendly toward a kosher-style of diet, definitely needs to have a good handle on the content of Mark 7:1-23. The scene which involves the statement made in Mark 7:19 needs to be placed into the context of what is recorded, not only with the subject matter in view properly evaluated, but also critically considering what others have said about this section of the Gospel of Mark, as well as various translation issues concerning the phrase *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα). Most unfortunately, the collective engagement of today’s Messianic community with Mark 7:1-23, leaves many with not knowing at all what to do.

Why is understanding Mark 7:1-23 important? James R. Edwards summarizes,

“7:1-23 are the longest conflict speech in the Gospel of Mark...Mark labors to clarify that the essential purpose of the Torah, and hence the foundation of morality, is a matter of inward purity, motive, and intent rather than of external compliance to ritual and custom. The controversy...cannot be interpreted as a case for Christian antinomianism but rather for the recovery of the true intent of the Torah.”²

¹ This entry has been adapted from the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

² James R. Edwards, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 214.

While it can be appreciable that a commentator like Edwards attempts to view the scene of Mark 7:1-23, as focusing the attention of readers onto the high ethical and moral imperatives of God's Torah—as will be seen, most Christian examiners, *including* those who favor some post-resurrection level of validity to Moses' Teaching, will end up dismissing the Torah's dietary code. A more detailed and text-conscious approach to Mark 7:1-23 on the whole—and not a mere haphazard quote of Mark 7:19 (which will be often generously referenced by those who believe that the Torah has been abolished)—is certainly warranted.

7:1 The narration opens with the statement, “The *P'rushim* and some of the *Torah*-teachers who had come from Yerushalayim gathered together with Yeshua” (Mark 7:1, CJB/CJSB). Various Pharisees and scribes (“*Torah* scholars,” TLV) had come to Galilee to see the Messiah, but there was likely an intention beyond just encountering Him, on the part of these Jewish religious leaders. In all probability, hearing about some of Yeshua's profound statements, teachings, miracles, and prophetic actions, these leaders wanted to evaluate who He was, seeing if they had anything in common *as well* as to consider how traditionally observant Yeshua and His Disciples were.

7:2 What they witness on the part of Yeshua's Disciples, is something that they were not pleased with: “they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed” (Mark 7:2, RSV). Rendered as either “impure” (NASU) or “defiled” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, TNIV/2011 NIV), the Greek adjective *koinos* (κοινός) mainly “**pert. to being of little value because of being common, common, ordinary, profane**” (BDAG).³ The Moffat New Testament actually has, “They noticed that some of his disciples ate their food with 'common' (that is, unwashed) hands,” with “common” notably placed in quotation marks. *Koinos* is likely the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *chol* (חל), which *CHALOT* defines as, “**profane**, approachable & usable w/o ceremony,”⁴ hence meaning “common,” but not necessarily the same as “unclean” (Heb. *tamei*, טמא; Grk. *katharos*, καθαρός). In the scene of 1 Samuel 21:4, for example, David was told by the priest, “There is no ordinary bread [*lechem chol*, לחם חל] on hand, but there is consecrated bread.”⁵

Mark 7:2 states how Yeshua's Disciples had *koinais chersin, tout' estin aniptoīs* (κοιναῖς χερσίν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἀνίπτοις), “impure hands, that is, unwashed.” *BDAG* details for the adjective *aniptos* (ἀνίπτος), “**unwashed**,” how “Acc. to a rabb. rule, going beyond the Torah, it was necessary to wash one's hands before a meal.”⁶ This is reflected in the CJB/CJSB rendering, “without doing *n'tilat-yadayim*” (discussed further). R. Alan Cole is keen to indicate that the issue of unwashed hands is one of ancient Jewish tradition and custom, for which Yeshua and His Disciples could be criticized:

“They here attacked the disciples...on a point of ritual, not of faith, and a point of ritual drawn not directly from the law, but from the body of explanatory tradition that was growing up round the law, later codified to form the Mishnah and Gemara, the modern Jewish Talmud. Of course, if the disciples were found to be ignorant of the ‘oral tradition’, the inference as to the ignorance of their rabbi would be obvious.”⁷

7:3 The narration further interjects, “For the Pharisees, in fact all the Jews, will not eat unless they wash their hands ritually, keeping the tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:3, HCSB). In view is clearly *tēn paradōsin tōn presbutērōn* (τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων), “the rules handed down by the elders” (Common English Bible). As the Jewish historian Josephus would note, “the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.297),⁸ with an extra-Biblical practice involving handwashing clearly the main issue of Mark 7:1-23. A related purification practice is detailed in John 2:6: “Now there were six stone

³ *BDAG*, 552.

Some versions incorrectly render *koinos* as “unclean” (LITV, HCSB, TLV) or “ritually unclean” (CJB).

⁴ *CHALOT*, 104.

⁵ Cf. some of the discussion of C.E.B. Cranfield, *Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 232; Larry W. Hurtado, *New International Biblical Commentary: Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 112.

⁶ *BDAG*, 83.

⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 182.

⁸ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 355.

waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification⁹, containing twenty or thirty gallons each” (cf. Luke 11:37-41). A summary of some of the traditions regarding ritual washing are seen in the Mishnah:

“He who pokes his hands into a house afflicted with *nega*—‘his hands are in the first remove of uncleanness,’ the words of R. Aqiba. And sages say, ‘His hands are in the second remove of uncleanness.’ Whoever imparts uncleanness to clothing, when in contact [with them], imparts uncleanness to the hands—‘So that they are in the first remove of uncleanness, the words of R. Aqiba. And sages say, ‘So that they are in the second remove of uncleanness.’ Said they to R. Aqiba, ‘When do we find that the hands are in the first remove of uncleanness under any circumstances whatsoever?’ He said to them, ‘And how is it possible for them to be in the first remove of uncleanness without his body’s [being] made unclean, outside of the present case?’ ‘Food and utensils which have been made unclean by liquids impart uncleanness to the hands so that they are in the second remove of uncleanness,’ the words of R. Joshua. And sages say, ‘That which is made unclean by a Father of Uncleanness imparts uncleanness to the hands. [That which has been made unclean] by an Offspring of Uncleanness does not impart uncleanness to the hands.’....Said sages, ‘The matter is clear. That which has been made unclean by a Father of Uncleanness imparts uncleanness to the hands. [That which has been made unclean] by an Offspring of Uncleanness does not impart uncleanness to the hands’” (m.*Yadayim* 3:1).¹⁰

Mark 7:3 does say *hoi gar Pharisaioi kai pantes hoi Ioudaioi* (οἱ γὰρ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι), “for the Pharisees and all the Jews...,” but this is best taken to be a generalizing statement of the wider Jewish community, and not every single Jewish person. C.E.B. Cranfield notes, “πάντες [*pantes*, ‘all’] is probably an exaggeration, but it seems likely that these rules of ritual purity were widely observed.”¹¹ In the *Letter of Aristeas* it is witnessed, “Following the custom of all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea in the course of their prayers to God...” (305).¹² In the Torah, priests had to wash their hands (Exodus 30:19¹³; 40:31¹⁴), with similar purification later observed by the common people (Judith 12:7¹⁵). Washing of hands was enjoined with a blessing, as would be codified in the Talmud: “*When he washes his hands, he says, ‘Blessed is he who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us concerning hand-washing’*” (b.*Berachot* 60b).¹⁶ Ben Witherington III describes the following, per what is probably witnessed in the ritual washing of vs. 2-3:

“It was Pharisaic practice to wash diligently before eating. In order to understand the Pharisees, one must recognize that they attempted to apply the Levitical laws for the cleanliness of priests to everyone (see Exod. 30:19; 40:13). They in a sense believed in a real priesthood of all believers, and therefore all the Jews were called to priestly cleanliness.”¹⁷

What was involved in the ritual handwashing of Mark 7:3, is specified in the source text with, *pugmē nipsōntai* (πυγμαῖ νίψωνται), “with a fist they wash” (Brown and Comfort).¹⁸ The term *pugmē* is literally “a fist,” with *BDAG* noting how *pugmē nipsōntai* “in N.T., is interpr. = πύκα [*puka*], *diligently*; or = πυκνά [*pukna*], *often, with*.”¹⁹ *Pugmē*, appearing in the dative case (indicating indirect object), has been taken variably as “to the wrist” (ASV), “with the fist” (LITV), “up to the wrist” (Moffat New Testament), or “up to the elbow” (TLV). It has also been rendered a little less literally as “carefully wash” (NASU), “give/have given their hands a

⁹ Grk. *kata ton katharismōn tōn Ioudaiōn* (κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμόν τῶν Ἰουδαίων); “according to the purifying of the Jews” (YLT).

¹⁰ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 1126.

¹¹ Cranfield, *Mark*, pp 232-233.

¹² R.J.H. Shutt, “Letter of Aristeas,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 33.

¹³ “Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it” (Exodus 30:19).

¹⁴ “From it Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet” (Exodus 40:31).

¹⁵ “So Holofernes commanded his guards not to hinder her. And she remained in the camp for three days, and went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and bathed at the spring in the camp” (Judith 12:7).

¹⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

¹⁷ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 224.

¹⁸ Brown and Comfort, 145.

¹⁹ *BDAG*, 896.

ceremonial washing” (NIV/CJB/CJSB), or “have washed their hands in a particular way” (Phillips New Testament). Edwards further explains,

“Various suggestions have been advanced to explain it, including washing with a handful of water, washing hands while clenched as fists, or rubbing the fist of one hand into the hollow of the other. Which (if any) of these is correct can only be guessed. The first hypothesis may be slightly preferable on the grounds that unclean hands are a ‘first-grade uncleanness’ (e.g., *m. Yad.* 3:1 [previously quoted]), that is, one that can be cleansed by a minimal amount of water—perhaps the amount held in ‘cupped hands’ (*m. Yad.* 2:1)²⁰.”²¹

David H. Stern, in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, more broadly states,

“Mark’s explanation of *n’tilat-yadayim* [נטילת ידײם], ritual handwashing, in these verses corresponds to the details set forth in the Mishna tractate *Yadayim*. In **the marketplace** one may touch ceremonially impure things; the impurity is removed by rinsing **up to the wrist**. Orthodox Jews today observe *n’tilat-yadayim* before meals. The rationale for it has nothing to do with hygiene but is based on the idea that ‘a man’s home is his Temple,’ with the dining table his altar, the food his sacrifice and himself the *cohen* (priest). Since the *Tanakh* requires *cohanim* to be ceremonially pure before offering sacrifices on the Temple altar, the Oral *Torah* requires the same before eating a meal.”²²

Cleanliness is something that is certainly regulated in the Torah, involving various rituals to be followed after the birth of a male child (Leviticus 12:2-3), contact with a corpse (Numbers 19:1-10), various skin diseases (Leviticus 13:8) or sores (Leviticus 15), and even purity instructions issued in terms of normal sexual relations (Leviticus 20:1-22; Deuteronomy 20:20-21). Interestingly enough, the *Archaeological Study Bible* notes how, “In the New Testament, although there is a transference from the outward to the inner, there is no relaxing of the basic requirement for purity itself (Mt 5:27-28; 19:3-9; Mk 10:2-22; 1 Co 5:9-13; 6:18-20; 7:8ff.)”²³ No disparagement of physical cleanliness need be implied, with a priority placed on inward cleanliness of the heart or mind.

7:4 It is further asserted, “When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles” (Mark 7:4, NIV). There is obviously nothing inherently wrong with washing one’s hands, or one’s utensils, especially when coming in from a public place. In times both ancient and modern, people in agriculture handling animal manure and waste, should surely wash their hands—if not bathe—before sitting down to eat a meal. Yet the rationale for the handwashing in Mark 7:2-3, in terms of the Jewish religious leaders who intended to criticize Yeshua’s Disciples, probably had much more associated with it than just washing one’s hands of dirt or grime. Much of the motivation for the type of cleansing had to do with Jewish contact with pagans,²⁴ and/or those fellow Jews of lesser religious observance.

7:5 The scene emerges, as “The Pharisees and *Torah* scholars questioned Yeshua, ‘Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders? Why do they eat bread with unwashed hands?’ (Mark 7:5, TLV). In Mark 7:5, we likewise see a diversity of renderings for *koinais chersin* (κοινᾶις χερσίν): “impure hands” (RSV, NASU), “defiled hands” (NRSV, ESV, TNIV/2011 NIV), “‘common’ hands” (Moffat New Testament, Phillips New Testament), or even “‘common’ unwashed hands” (Montgomery New Testament).

The inquiry made by the religious leaders was intended to cast doubt on the validity of Yeshua’s ministry. In the Mishnah, it is witnessed how serious some Jewish authorities considered ritual washing to be, as one sees the statement, “But whom did they excommunicate? It was Eliezer b. Hanokh, who cast doubt on [the sages’ ruling about] the cleanness of hands” (*m. Eduyot* 5:6).²⁵ Perhaps not because of the actual

²⁰ “[I]f one poured water for one hand with a single rinsing, his hand is clean. [If he poured] for two hands with a single rinsing—R. Meir declares unclean unless he will pour a quarter-*log* of [of water]. [If] a loaf of heave offering fell [on the water a quarter-*log* in quantity which has been poured on the hands in a single rinsing], it is clean. R. Yose declares unclean” (*m. Yadayim* 2:1; Neusner, *Mishnah*, 1124).

²¹ Edwards, *Mark*, pp 206-207.

²² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 92.

²³ Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1639.

²⁴ Cf. Edwards, *Mark*, pp 205-206.

²⁵ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 654.

hygienic benefit of ritually washing hands, but instead the spiritual and/or sociological value held by many of His contemporaries, Yeshua the Messiah did not customarily follow the detailed handwashing before meals (Luke 11:37-38).²⁶ As will be seen, the Lord used the instance here as an opportunity to communicate some vital truths to His audience.

7:6-8 In light of what Yeshua will be communicating in Mark 7:6-13 following, Cole properly tempers readers, “No-one ever disputed the earnestness of the Pharisees in keeping these traditional observances, nor disputed that such customs were genuine historical traditions, nor denied that they were originally aimed at the honouring of God, as being extensions, perhaps legitimate, of biblical principles already given by revelation.”²⁷ Yeshua’s rebuke of the values held by those following a handwashing tradition here, should not be taken as a blanket disdain for all forms of ancient (or even modern) Jewish tradition, and certainly not for physical cleanliness. The issue, as is explained in the wider context of Mark 7, concerned the motives of the people involved, and the values that they held.

Yeshua responded to the criticism about why His Disciples did not wash their hands before eating, with the very poignant accusation that His Pharisaical and scribal accusers were hypocrites (Mark 7:6). From the source text, and in a classical sense, a *hypokritēs* (ὑποκριτής) was “one who plays a part on the stage, a player, actor” (LS).²⁸ So, in terms of washing one’s hands before eating, the action of Yeshua’s detractors was ultimately only concerned with some degree of outward cleanliness, but not at all with the much more imperative inward factor of heart purity. *Yeshua’s detractors were only playing a part.* Isaiah 29:13 is quoted by the Messiah in Mark 7:6-7: “Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote.*’” The challenge to be confronted, as issued by Yeshua to these people, is that “You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition” (Mark 7:8, NRSV).

Various Christian examiners have noted that Yeshua neither followed nor endorsed a selection of the traditions and customs of Second Temple Judaism, namely those which very clearly nullified or subverted clear Torah commands. A commentator like Cranfield suggests, “Jesus challenges the authority of the oral law radically. It pretended to be a fence to protect the Law from infringement, but in actual fact it tampered with the Law. Jesus charges the Pharisees and scribes with actually disobeying the Law of God through their exaggerated reverence for their oral law.”²⁹ This is useful to keep in mind, per the issues in view in Mark 7, and the later statement of Mark 7:19.

Cranfield (and various others) goes on to conclude, though, that Yeshua rejected *all* of the Oral Torah as just human tradition. Yet, those who are engaged in more targeted Jewish New Testament studies might not draw such a broad proposition, and instead emphasize that more case-by-case or issue-by-issue specificity is needed. Mark 7:9-13 following especially emphasize the sort of Jewish tradition that Yeshua the Messiah was radically opposed to, which nullified clear Torah commandments.

7:9-13 Yeshua goes on to specify the types of human ordinances which were to be specifically classified as nullifying His Father’s commandments. The Lord first asserts, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!” (Mark 7:9, NIV). This is then followed with a quotation of the Fifth Commandment in Mark 7:10a: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Exodus 20:12; cf. Deuteronomy 5:16). The Torah-prescribed penalty for violating much of this, which is doubtlessly intended to highlight the high importance of the Fifth Commandment, is asserted in Mark 7:10b: “He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:17; cf. Leviticus 20:9).

Contrary to demonstrating fidelity to the Fifth Commandment of honoring one’s parents, and all of the necessary actions involved with giving due respect to one’s father and mother, Yeshua notes what was

²⁶ “Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined *at the table.* When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal” (Luke 11:37-38).

²⁷ Cole, pp 182-183.

²⁸ LS, 844.

²⁹ Cranfield, *Mark*, 236.

apparently a practice in some parts of Second Temple Judaism. He says in Mark 7:11-12, “But you say if anyone tells his father or mother, ‘Whatever you might have gained from me is *korban* (that is, an offering to God),’ then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother” (TLV). The Hebrew term *qorban* (קָרְבָּן לַיהוָה) appears in the Torah, in a place such as Leviticus 1:2: “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD [*qorban* לַיהוָה, *ADONAI*] you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.” Mark 7:11 employs the Greek transliteration *korban* (κορβάν), noted by *Thayer* to be “an offering, the Septuagint everywhere δῶρον [*dōron*], a term which comprehends all kinds of sacrifices, the bloody as well as the bloodless,” and “a gift offered (or to be offered) to God.”³⁰ A *qorban* (or corban, korban) was a gift, which one would swear as dedicated to God. As indicated by the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, it involves “the language of an oath, which assigns to the object subject to the oath the status of a Temple offering, hence rendering the object forbidden for secular use.”³¹ Such a vow would often involve money or property. Its practice is attested by the First Century Jewish historian Josephus:

“This is declared by Theophrastus, in his writings concerning laws; for he says that ‘the laws of the Tyrians forbid men to swear foreign oaths.’ Among which he enumerates some others, and particularly that called Corban: which oath can only be found among the Jews, and declares what a man may call ‘A thing devoted to God’” (*Against Apion* 1.167).³²

It is to be recognized that taking oaths and vows were often something viewed with some degree of seriousness by many within Second Temple Judaism (cf. Philo *Hypothetica* 7.3-5). Even while offering or dedicating something to God and not to secular usage, is not something dishonorable—Yeshua places honoring one’s parents at a much higher level. The custom of *qorban*, as being targeted in Mark 7:10-11, most likely involved a religious Jew taking family funds intended to support parents in their old age, and giving them as an offering to the Temple instead. As Proverbs 28:24 indicates, “He who robs his father or his mother and says, ‘It is not a transgression,’ is the companion of a man who destroys.” This appears to be what is precisely the case of the *qorban* offering spoken against by the Messiah. It does not matter to the Lord if family money is declared as intended for the Temple; if family money was first intended to support one’s aged father and mother, then the Fifth Commandment has been violated. And also not to be overlooked, is how Yeshua was quite keen to emphasize the honoring of *both* father *and* mother. A sentiment appearing in the Mishnah inappropriately declared that the father was superior to the mother, and that honoring the father was more important than honoring the mother:

“‘The father comes before over the mother in all places [in Scripture]. Is it possible [that the reason is] that the honor owing to the father is superior to the honor owing to the mother? Scripture states *you shall fear every one his mother and his father* (Lev. 19:3), teaching that the two are deemed equivalent.’ But: Sages have stated: The father comes before over the mother under all circumstances, because both he and his mother are liable to pay honor to his father” (m.*Keritot* 6:9).³³

This is certainly the kind of example of subverting Holy Scripture, which would have rightly merited Yeshua forthrightly stating, “You revoke God’s word by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things” (Mark 7:13, HCSB). Interestingly enough, the Mishnah records how the Jewish Sages would rule how a vow could be broken because of the overriding need to support aging parents:

“R. Eliezer says, ‘They unloose a vow for a person by [reference to] the honor of his father or mother.’ And the sages prohibit. Said R. Sadoq, ‘Before they unloose a vow for him by [reference to] the honor of his father or mother, let them unloose his vow by reference to the honor of the Omnipresent. ‘If so, there will be no vows!’ But sages concede to R. Eliezer that, in a matter which is between him and his mother or father, they unloose his vow by [reference to] the honor of his father or mother” (m.*Nedarim* 9:1).³⁴

³⁰ *Thayer*, pp 355-356.

³¹ “korban,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 373.

³² *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 783.

³³ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 851.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 423.

The condemnation of the *qorban* in Mark 7:10-13, where family funds intended to support aged parents were instead given as a Temple offering—as an obvious sign of pseudo-spirituality—is intended to condemn some of the reasons that sat behind the ritual handwashing that Yeshua's Disciples did not perform. The condemnation of these kinds of traditions, where the high ethical imperatives of God's Torah were subverted, does not all of a sudden mean that there were not various, mainline Jewish customs and traditions observed by Yeshua and His Apostles. Yeshua would give some level of credence to the authority of the Pharisees and scribes (Matthew 23:2-3), while at the same time criticizing such leaders with their frequent dismissal of matters of holiness and social justice.³⁵ Yeshua's criticism of various Pharisees, both here in Mark 7 and elsewhere, hardly made Him a Sadducee—as our Lord firmly opposed the Sadducees on the most foundational issue of the resurrection (Mark 12:24).

7:14-16 Enough of an audience was present witnessing Yeshua, the Pharisees, and the scribes interacting, so that He would need to direct them to the intention of what He had just spoken about *qorban* (Mark 7:14). Wanting to place a high emphasis on the required internal purity of heart and mind, Yeshua communicated, "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him" (Mark 7:15, ESV). The verb of note is *koinōō* (κοινῶω), "to make common, to defile, profane" (LS),³⁶ with the Phillips New Testament offering the rendering, "There is nothing outside a man which can enter into him and make him 'common'. It is the things which come out of a man that make him 'common'!" Yeshua hit hard against an over-reliance on external rituals over against internal heart matters, a manner of teaching which had been employed by the Prophets of Israel who preceded Him:

"Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. 'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 1:10-20).

"I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; and I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves. Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus,' says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts" (Amos 5:21-27).

In these above references, things had apparently gotten so bad for many in Ancient Israel, that God-prescribed Torah practices such as the Sabbath or appointed times were labeled via the possessive pronoun "*your(s)*." This placed the burden of proof on those *limited human people* who thought that just going through

³⁵ Consult the exegesis paper on Matthew 23:2-3, "Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?" by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

³⁶ LS, 440.

the motion of keeping external commandments, that their internal heart attitudes and morality would not matter that much. **God would have nothing to do with this!**

Noting what Yeshua says in Mark 7:15, “Nothing outside you can defile you by going into you. Rather, it is what comes out of you that defiles you” (TNIV), Edwards appropriately explains,

“This simple pronouncement actually assumes the rabbinic theory that interior spaces were the most susceptible of defilement and thus most in need of cleansing. In a brilliant reapplication and extension of his opponents’ guiding principle, Jesus applies the theory of vessel defilement to *persons*, as if to say, ‘If the inside of vessels contaminates them, how much more so the inside of persons?’ Uncleanness and defilement are matters of intention and the heart, not the violation of cultic rituals and formalities.”³⁷

No one should ever dispute the Messiah’s most critical word **about defilement ultimately coming from what sits inside** a man or woman, but too many Christians today—to the opposite extreme of Yeshua’s detractors—have gone to the point of concluding that just about any and all external purity instructions of the Bible have little or no relevance for the post-resurrection era. *Yeshua’s intention was to hammer home the point that not washing hands*, i.e., cleansing oneself of the presumed defilements of outside people, *does not ultimately matter when one’s heart and thought life is defiled*.

And with the issue of ritual handwashing of outside defilement in specific view, PHEME PERKINS astutely points out how “The original challenge did not concern food that is either impure or non-kosher but ritual washing associated with meals,” but then goes on to claim that “Mark’s Gentile audience clearly did not observe any restrictions about foods,”³⁸ which may imply that even the basic direction of the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21), that forbade blood and strangled meats, was not even followed by them. Diagnosing what the actual issue is, is quite important, if Mark 7:19 is to be properly evaluated (discussed further).

7:17-18 When hearing what Yeshua had communicated, the Disciples were not fully clear on what He meant (Mark 7:17). The narrative describes, “And he said to them, ‘Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him’” (Mark 7:18, ESV). The Lord’s intention was to point to them how the lack of ritual handwashing—as one would be apparently cleansed from the impurities of outsiders—would mean very little if the heart and mind were imbued with ungodly thoughts and motives (Mark 7:20-23).

7:19 Noting from the text how the original issue was a ritual handwashing that was not necessarily practiced by Yeshua’s Disciples (Mark 7:1-5), and how ultimately that outside impurities cannot defile people (Mark 7:14, 18), a perplexing remark, as appears in most of today’s English Bible versions, appears: “since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)” (Mark 7:19, ESV). The statement “Thus he declared all foods clean” is widely taken to be a parenthetical remark issued by John Mark as narrator of this Gospel, to a predominantly non-Jewish, Roman audience, which might have asked questions about food and eating. A minority view, as will be noted, takes all of Mark 7:19 as being a part of the dialogue issued by Yeshua, and that there has most likely been a translation error into English. There are various Messianic people who take the latter third of Mark 7:19 as just being an (anonymous) editor’s remark (or a modern English translator’s remark!), and perhaps inauthentic to the Gospel of Mark,³⁹ and have just cut corners with Mark 7:19 entirely from English versions.

It is unsustainable from a textual standpoint to claim that the last third of Mark 7:19 is inauthentic to the Gospel of Mark, so instead various grammatical and translation issues have to be considered from the source text. Simply consider how two different Greek interlinear versions have chosen to render Mark 7:19, and pay special attention to the last third of the verse:

³⁷ Edwards, *Mark*, pp 212-213.

³⁸ PHEME PERKINS, “The Gospel of Mark,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 8 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 607.

³⁹ Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*, revised edition (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013), 173 actually comes close to saying this:

“...the statement may be a scribal addition...We cannot be sure that it comes from Mark itself...”

hoti ouk eisporouetai autou eis tēn kardian all' eis tēn koilian, kai eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai, katharizōn panta ta brōmata (ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα)

because it does not enter of him into the heart but into the stomach, and into the latrine goes out, **cleansing all – foods** (Brown and Comfort)⁴⁰

because it does not enter his {into} {the} heart, but {into} his stomach, and goes out into the latrine?" **(Thus he declared all {the} foods clean.)** (Mounce and Mounce)⁴¹

There is disagreement surrounding Mark 7:19 as to whether the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα) regards a statement made by the narrator/author/compiler/editor of the Gospel of Mark, **or** whether this is a continuing remark from *eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai* (εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται), “goes out into the sewer” (NRSV), speaking of the process of excretion. The former is the majority view both among Mark commentaries and English versions, although the latter view is not without some firm substantiation. It is to be noted, though, that with “*Thus He* declared all foods clean” (NASU) being the majority view, that this has been paraphrased quite beyond an acceptable point in various English versions. The following chart offers a selection of English Bible renderings of Mark 7:19, so you can gauge an appropriate window of how this verse has been approached, and to further consider how various lay readers may consider it:

⁴⁰ Brown and Comfort, 147.

⁴¹ William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 159.

MARK 7:19	
SOURCE TEXT	VARIED TRANSLATIONS
<p>ὅτι οὐκ εἰσπορεύεται αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἔκπορεύεται, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα;</p> <p><i>hoti ouk eisporeuetai autou eis tēn kardian all' eis tēn koilian, kai eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai, katharizōn panta ta brōmata;</i></p>	<p>Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? (KJV).</p> <p>because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, <i>thus</i> purifying all foods? (NKJV).</p> <p>This is because it does not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the waste-bowl, purging all the foods (LITV).</p> <p>since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) (RSV).</p> <p>For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") (NIV).</p> <p>Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.) (NLT).</p> <p>It doesn't enter your heart but your stomach, works its way through the intestines, and is finally flushed." (That took care of dietary quibbling; Jesus was saying that all foods are fit to eat.) (The Message).</p> <p>That's because it doesn't enter into the heart but into the stomach, and it goes out into the sewer." By saying this, Jesus declared that no food could contaminate a person in God's sight (Common English Version).</p> <p>Since it does not reach and enter his heart but [only his] digestive tract, and so passes on [into the place designed to receive waste]? Thus He was making and declaring all foods [ceremonially] clean [that is, abolishing the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical Law] (The Amplified Bible).</p>

Just about every modern commentator on the Gospel of Mark holds to the view that *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* means "Thus he declared all foods clean" (RSV/NRSV/ESV), and that this is an explanatory statement made by the narrator/author/editor of this Gospel, to predominantly non-Jewish readers.⁴² This can be especially piqued, at times, given the traditional composition of the Gospel of Mark being tied to the

⁴² Cole, pp 186-187; Hurtado, 111; Perkins, in *NIB*, 8:607; Witherington, *Mark*, 227; Edwards, *Mark*, pp 212-213; R.T. France, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp 291-292.

Apostle Peter's testimony to John Mark (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.1.1; Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15),⁴³ and hence various interpretations of Peter's vision of Acts chs. 10-11 (discussed further).⁴⁴ Beyond this, there are many who take the translation "Thus he declared all foods clean" to the extent of it meaning that all external aspects of the Mosaic Torah, beyond that of the dietary laws, have been quantitatively abolished and are irrelevant for the post-resurrection era.

There are those who are much fairer to the subject matter of the kosher dietary laws, in their view of Mark 7:19. William L. Lane is one who notes, "Jesus had no intention of denying that the purity laws occupy a significant place in the Mosaic code (Lev. 11:1-47; Deut. 14:1-20) or of detracting from the dignity of men who suffered death rather than violate the Law of God governing unclean foods (I Macc 1:62f.). Rather he presses home the recognition that the ultimate seat of purity or defilement before God is the heart."⁴⁵ Favoring the rendering of the 1901 American Standard Version, "*This he said*, making all meats clean," Lane's further remark is somewhat revealing: "It expresses the implication of Jesus' teaching, but not what he actually said at the time."⁴⁶

The main challenge, to be recognized regarding Mark 7:19, is that the view of Yeshua "declaring all foods clean," i.e., asserting that unclean meats like pork and shellfish can now be eaten, **has absolutely nothing to do with the context of what has been described in the preceding section**, where failure to observe a ritual handwashing before eating was instead the issue. Joined with this was a discussion about the unethical nature of Yeshua's detractors presenting the *qorban* before God. **What is actually asserted by the Messiah in Mark 7:19 is what happens to bread eaten with unwashed hands.** Edwards correctly states what the intention of Mark 7:19 begins as, by stating, "Food may enter the mouth, but it all ends up in the same place." Like most commentators, Edwards unfortunately further states, though, "Mark understands Jesus thereby to declare all food clean."⁴⁷ While he favors the view of *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* to mean "Thus he cleansed all foods" (*WBC*),⁴⁸ Robert A. Guelich still has to describe for readers of Mark's Gospel how the actual or original issue was not the dietary laws of the Torah:

"[T]he community in no way understood Jesus' 'original' response in 7:15 to be in reference to the Levitical food laws. In fact, it was precisely the Pharisees' use of 'tradition' to contravene the Mosaic law that made them 'hypocrites.' So one could evidently still take seriously 7:15, buttressed by the argument in 7:6-13, in the narrow terms of 'defiled hands' and follow the Levitical food laws."⁴⁹

The minority view of *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα), continuing what is stated in *eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai* (εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκπορεύεται)—meaning that Mark 7:19 is all about bodily excretion—is something that examiners of the Gospel of Mark have definitely had to reckon with. Noting the NIV rendering of Mark 7:19, "For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.')." Larry W. Hurtado summarizes,

"Most modern translations and commentators understand the Greek phrase this way. In Greek, the phrase is a participial clause, reading literally after the preceding sentence 'cleansing all foods.' The phrase as translated here is taken as Mark's own comment and the participle is taken as dependent on 'he asked' in v. 18. The phrase could also be understood as dependent on the immediately preceding clause thus: 'and goes on out of the body, cleansing all foods,' meaning that all foods wind up in the same place! The KJV renders the phrase quite literally."⁵⁰

Guelich, being more specific about the Greek grammatical issues in play, provides the analysis,

⁴³ Consult the entry for the Gospel of Mark in the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

⁴⁴ Cf. Cole, 187.

⁴⁵ William L. Lane, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 255.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *Mark*, 212.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, Vol. 34a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 372.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁵⁰ Hurtado, pp 113-114.

“This comment raises two issues: to what does it refer and from whom does it come? Grammatically, this participial construction hangs awkwardly without obvious syntactical connection...[Some] view it as a possible anacoluthon drawing on an obvious, if sarcastic, conclusion that the digestive process ‘cleanses all foods’...Most, however, take καθαρίζων [*katharizōn*] to agree syntactically with the subject of λέγει [*legei*] in 7:18, i.e., Jesus...Jesus not only declared food eaten with ‘defiled hands’ to be clean but ‘all foods.’”⁵¹

Ultimately, the main reason why *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* is widely rendered as “Thus he declared all foods clean” in Mark 7:19, is because in Mark 7:18 preceding, *legei* (λέγει), “He says,” a third person active singular, agrees with *katharizōn* (καθαρίζων), a nominative (case indicating subject) masculine present active participle. A Reformed interpreter like Cranfield—who thankfully does have a widescale favorable view to the so-called “moral law” of the Torah still being valid in the post-resurrection era⁵²—also concludes that *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* is a statement reliant upon *legei*:

“The words καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα are best explained as the evangelist’s own comment, drawing out the implication of Jesus’ words with an eye on the contemporary problem of what was to be the Church’s attitude to Jewish ideas about clean and unclean foods...This interpretation goes back to the Greek Fathers. The words are then grammatically dependent on καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς at the beginning of v. 18, καθαρίζων agreeing with the subject of λέγει.”⁵³

It is, of course, possible to view the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* in Mark 7:19, in line with some agreement with *legei* in Mark 7:18, and conclude that the statement did not intend to nullify the kosher dietary laws, but instead issue a declaration that the Biblically permitted foods can be eaten with unwashed hands. This view is witnessed in the CJB/CJSB rendering, slightly paraphrased, “Thus he declared all foods ritually clean,” with Stern concluding in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*,

“Yeshua did *not*, as many suppose, abrogate the laws of *kashrut* and thus declare ham *kosher*! Since the beginning of the chapter the subject has been ritual purity as taught by the Oral *Torah* in relation to *n’tilat-yadayim* (vv.2-4&N) and not *kashrut* at all! There is not the slightest hint anywhere that **foods** in this verse can be anything other than what the Bible allows Jews to eat, in other words, *kosher* foods.”⁵⁴

Still in front of the Greek reader, though, is why *katharizōn* (καθαρίζων) as a present active participle, “cleansing,” is widely rendered in the past tense in English versions. Some have thought that it is **only** the variant reading of *katharizon* (καθαρίζον), a nominative neuter present active participle that appears in the Textus Receptus, the source text of the KJV, which would allow for the translation “purging all meats.” The weight of textual evidence in favor of the nominative masculine present active participle *katharizōn* (καθαρίζων), is quite strong,⁵⁵ but even with this, there are interlinear versions such as those of Alfred Marshall, which render *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* as “purging all – foods.”⁵⁶ Perhaps because he is more a professor of literature than a theologian, and is not fully committed to certain biases, Willis Barnstone’s (liberal) *Restored New Testament* actually has this same rendering for Mark 7:19: “Since it doesn’t enter the heart but the stomach and goes into the sewer, purging all foods.”⁵⁷

The thought that the masculine participle *katharizōn* in Mark 7:19 must be connected to the verb *legei* or “He says” in Mark 7:18, is something that has been challenged. In his paper “Mark 7:19b—A Short Technical Note,” Tim Hegg has noted some of the grammatical issues present in this verse, making a good

⁵¹ Guelich, 378.

⁵² Cf. Cranfield, *Mark*, pp 244-245.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁵⁴ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 93.

⁵⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 95.

⁵⁶ Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 125.

⁵⁷ Willis Barnstone, trans., *The Restored New Testament* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 168.

Another rendering of Mark 7:19 to be considered could be from the 2012 dynamic equivalency version *The Voice*: “because it doesn’t go into their hearts. Outside things go through their guts and back out, thus making all foods pure.” *The Voice* does, however, have a footnote, stating, “The earliest texts say ‘Jesus declared all foods pure’” (Ecclesia Bible Society, *The Voice Bible: Step into the Story of Scripture* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012], 1212).

case for the masculine participle *katharizōn* not needing to be associated with *legei* in Mark 7:18. Hegg first details,

“Does the fact that the participle καθαρίζων is nominative masculine mean that its only possible subject within the immediate context is Yeshua? Actually, there is another alternative. It is well known in Greek grammar that the nominative singular participle may sometimes refer to something within the previous context or to something implied in the context not explicitly mentioned, even though it may not be in the same grammatical case.”⁵⁸

Hegg goes on to list several examples from the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, where there is not complete case or number agreement (Luke 24:47; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; James 3:8). Most importantly, though, he references several Greek grammars which note some of the challenges present with Mark 7:19 and the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*:

A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Blass and Debrunner): “Such incongruities are found occasionally in other books of the NT are to be regarded as either more excusable or as a corruption of the text...Mk 7:19 καθαρίζων...referring to πᾶν το...18 or to ἀφεδρώνα?”⁵⁹

Biblical Greek (Zerwick): “In vulgar usage there is to be seen a tendency to neglect concord, both for gender and for case, in words used in apposition, and especially in participles so used...”

“The exegesis of a passage is affected by this tendency in only one case, namely Mk 7.19, where we have, with reference to pure and impure foods: ¶ And he said to them...do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so is evacuated (εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρώνα ἐκπορεύεται) καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα. Some refer to the participle καθαρίζων to the subject of the whole sentence (Jesus), understanding ¶ He said (this) purifying = declaring pure all manner of food ¶, the words καθαρίζων...not being those of Our Lord, but an explanation added by the evangelist...Others however take καθαρίζων as equivalent to καθαρίζοντα, referring to ἀφεδρώνα, thus understanding ¶...into the privy which purifies all manner of food ¶...As we have seen, this latter interpretation is linguistically possible, or at least, would be quite admissible...”⁶⁰

Noting the fact that *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα) or “purging all the foods,” is a continuing statement from *eis ton aphedrōna ekporeuetai* (εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρώνα ἐκπορεύεται) or “into the latrine,” **is grammatically acceptable**—even if not widely accepted—is important for a correct evaluation of Mark 7:19 within the wider context of Mark 7:1-23. Hegg astutely draws the conclusion:

“[T]he need to understand the final clause of v. 19 as Mark’s editorial conclusion is removed if, in fact, καθαρίζων can have an antecedent with which it does not share grammatical concord (as noted above). In this case, the antecedent of καθαρίζων could be either ἀφεδρώνα (‘latrine’) or the excrement itself (which is spoken of only euphemistically as that which goes out into the latrine). This allows the final clause of v. 19 to function normally as the conclusion of Yeshua’s argument, namely, that as it pertains to food, what comes forth from the bowel does not defile, because it goes out into the latrine and is properly purged. In contrast, what comes out of the heart does defile, both the one from whom it proceeds as well as others. Therefore, Yeshua’s teaching is that one should be more concerned about what goes into, and comes forth from the heart rather than whether one eats food with hands that have not been washed.”⁶¹

In Hegg’s article, he offers his own rendering, modifying the New American Standard of Mark 7:18-19:

⁵⁸ Tim Hegg. (2005). *Mark 7:19b—A Short Technical Note. Torah Resource*. Retrieved 29 April, 2014, from <<http://torahresource.com>>.

⁵⁹ F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 76.

⁶⁰ Maximilian Zerwick S.J., *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 1963), pp 5-6.

⁶¹ Hegg, “Mark 7:19b—A Short Technical Note.”

18 And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and goes out into the latrine, cleansing all foods (from the body)?⁶²

There is at least one well known evangelical Christian theologian, who has noted the validity (even if in a footnote) of Mark 7:19 pertaining to excretion and not a declaration of unclean meats as acceptable for eating. Previously (1994) in his examination of the Book of Leviticus in the *NIB* series, Walter C. Kaiser concluded on Leviticus 11, “In Mark 7:19, Jesus ‘declared all foods clean’ (NRSV). By so saying, Jesus abrogated the distinction that had held up to this time between clean and unclean foods.”⁶³ But in 2009, making reference to the 2005 edition of the book *Holy Cow!* by Hope Egan, he described how this book “has called my attention to the fact that the Greek manuscripts of Mark 7:19 do not have the words: ‘Thus he [Jesus] declared,’ followed by the translation ‘all foods clean.’ But a better rendering of ‘all foods clean’ can be seen in Jesus’ point that the bread passed through the digestive system and left the body, and thereby we have the translation, ‘purging all foods.’”⁶⁴ Indeed, the expanded conclusion of Mark 7:19, in light of the issue being ritual handwashing, should be obvious:

Bread eaten with unwashed hands does not ultimately defile a person, as the human body is strong enough to purge a foodstuff that is eaten with any dirt or grime via the digestive process.

There are a series of Messianic and Hebrew/Hebraic Roots Bible versions, which render *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* along the lines of excretion of digested food being the issue:

“For it does not enter into the heart but into the stomach, and then is eliminated, **cleansing/cleaning out all foods**” (TLV/*Messianic Jewish Shared Heritage Bible*-TLV).

“because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, then into the latrine, **cleansing all the food in this way**” (The Messianic Writings).

“because it is not going into his heart but into his stomach, **after the stomach cleanses all the food**, then it goes out into the latrine” (Power New Testament).

“because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and goes out into the latrine, purging all the foods” (PME).

7:20-23 Having just noted how eating bread with unwashed hands is not a huge issue, as it is purified out of the body via excretion (Mark 7:19), and thus can ultimately not defile, Yeshua does specify what does especially defile: “What comes out of a person is what defiles him” (Mark 7:20, ESV). This is important to keep in mind not only in terms of the ungodly statements and claims made of others that frequently are issued from the human mouth—but also for considering the attitude or manner in which the criticism of Yeshua’s Disciples was made (Mark 7:5). What comes out of the mouth of a human being, issues from the heart—and far too frequently *an evil and decrepit heart* at that:

“For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23, NRSV).

Mark 7:21-23 is hardly the only vice list witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures, where one encounters a classification of common human sins (Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:2-5). How easy or how difficult was it—with this scene caused by criticism of Yeshua’s Disciples not washing their hands—for the audience to take seriously the admonition to evaluate the internal purity of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Walter C. Kaiser, “The Book of Leviticus,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:1083.

⁶⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 61 fn#7.

their hearts and minds? For those who practiced a ritual handwashing, or any sort of washing, would they at all pause for a moment while making themselves physically clean *and think about the inward cleanliness God requires even more?*

Mark 7:1-23 application Many of today's Christian theologians and laypersons, because Mark 7:19 is almost universally translated as "Thus he declared all foods clean" (RSV), think that the ultimate issue in view in Mark 7:1-23 is the kosher dietary laws being abolished. Our analysis has shown how the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* can be legitimately translated as "**purging all the foods**" via excretion, which is not only a continuing part of the Messiah's sentence, but also keeps the whole narration and dialogue contextually coherent. Yet even with the majority Christian position on Mark 7:1-23 opting for the Torah's dietary code being abolished, an interpreter like Perkins fairly advises, "Most Christian readers today habitually think of purification rites and kosher food rules as evidence of an unenlightened Jewish legalism. This prejudiced view must be set aside..."⁶⁵ But usually where scholars advise temperance and tolerance, individual Christians take a mistranslated "Thus he declared all foods clean" and turn it into a widescale abolition of all external instructions of God's Law.

Today's Messianic movement has not often had a very good handle on Mark 7:1-23, and what to do with the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*, widely because congregational leaders and teachers do not often possess adequate Greek language skills. But, there are several approaches witnessed by those who have engaged with this passage, and Mark 7:19 in particular, across our faith community.

The apologist Michael L. Brown, noting a statement from the Midrash, is quite open to the dietary laws being abolished, with Mark 7:19 and "Thus he declared all foods clean," being a likely support text. Apparent abolition of the dietary laws for him serves as a sign of the future Messianic Age breaking into the present evil age (cf. Galatians 1:4), and thus a proof of Jesus' Messiahship, no less!⁶⁶ This is something that admittedly does not sit well with many, especially in view of Matthew 5:17-19.

Hope Egan's book *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?*⁶⁷ and Aaron Eby's *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut*,⁶⁸ although not as grammatically technical as the analysis we have just offered on *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*, would both agree that the issue in Mark 7:1-23, and Mark 7:19 in particular, is purification via bodily excretion.

Another view one may encounter, held particularly in sectors of Messianic Judaism which adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology model, is that based on the presumed audience of the Gospel of Mark, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19, RSV) is a word intended for non-Jewish Believers and not for Jewish Believers.⁶⁹ Non-Jewish Believers should regard things like pork or shellfish to be clean *to them*, but Jewish Believers should not regard these meats as being clean and must continue following the laws of *kashrut*. This might be thought to have Biblical support from the fact that in the later account of the Gospel of Matthew, which is widely believed to have been written for a mainly Jewish audience, the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* does not appear:

"Peter said to Him, 'Explain the parable to us.' Yeshua said, 'Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man'" (Matthew 15:15-20).

⁶⁵ Perkins, in *NIB*, 8:608.

⁶⁶ Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume Four: New Testament Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), pp 273-282.

Brown makes note of *Midrash Psalms* 146:7, "What is meant by '[the LORD] frees the prisoners'?...Some say that every creature that is considered unclean in the present world, the Holy One blessed be He will declare clean in the age to come."

⁶⁷ Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Shelbyville, TN: Heart of Wisdom, 2012), pp 103-108.

⁶⁸ Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), pp 29-39.

⁶⁹ David J. Rudolph. (2002). *Yeshua and the Dietary Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b*. Retrieved 29 April, 2014, from <<http://rabbidavid.net>>.

Cf. also Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp 52-58.

The thought that Mark is pretty much just a Gospel for the nations at large, and that Matthew is a Gospel for the Jewish people, is not based on as a firm foundation as some Messianic Jewish leaders may want to think. Much of the thinking behind Messianic Jewish leaders who adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology, is based in the Galatians 2:7-9 acknowledgement that the Apostle Paul was sent to the uncircumcised or the nations, and the Apostle Peter was sent to the circumcised or the Jews—apparently two distinct branches of the Body of Messiah to be served independently of one another. We should be more readily inclined to think that these two unique missions are the result of Paul and Peter’s skills and abilities, with the scholar Paul being far more metropolitan and educated than the fisherman Peter, and hence able to reach those in the Mediterranean basin better than Peter. *It should never be thought, though, that Paul never served his fellow Jews, or that Peter never served those of the nations.*⁷⁰ In fact, it should not at all be overlooked that the Gospel of Mark is traditionally believed to have been composed via the oral testimony of the Apostle Peter to John Mark, as noted by the Second Century Christian apologist Irenaeus:

“Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1).⁷¹

By the standards of Messianic Jewish bilateral ecclesiology, the Gospel of Mark itself, being somewhat Petrine, should not really concern Greek and Roman interests of the First Century as much as Jewish interests. Of course, this is an inappropriate standard to which to hold, because Mark writing his Gospel via Peter in Rome (cf. 1 Peter 5:13) was most probably composed as a teaching and preaching tool with the needs of the locals in mind. When Matthew employed Mark as a source for his own Gospel, with more Jewish people intended as his audience (most likely in Antioch),⁷² he probably could see how *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* could be taken by some as abolishing the Torah’s dietary laws—even if not at all intended by Mark—and specified in his narration what the actual issue was: “Don’t you grasp that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and then is ejected into the sewer?...[T]o eat with unwashed hands does not make the man unholy” (Matthew 15:17, 20b, TLV).

A wide number of people within today’s Messianic movement, would agree that the issue within Mark 7:1-23 pertains to a ritual handwashing, and that Mark 7:19 and *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* involves bodily excretion, **not** an abrogation of *kashrut*. However, even with the Torah’s dietary laws not being the issue of this passage, it is quite fair and appropriate to observe how there are many Messianic Believers who would, even if just subconsciously, think that keeping a kosher-style diet is a bit more important than making sure that one’s heart and mind are cleansed of ungodly thoughts and attitudes. There are plenty of people in today’s Messianic movement who might have a correct interpretation of Mark 7:19 and “purging all foods,” but there might not be enough people in today’s Messianic movement who have implemented the ever-more important word of Mark 7:20-23 following—and are able to balance their eating with their ethics and morality.

Noting a variety of passages beyond Mark 7 (Galatians 2:1-12; Romans 14:1-23; Acts 10:1-44; 15:1-29), Hurtado points out that “down to the present time the question is raised by some Christian groups and is sometimes a matter of concern for scrupulous (and often young) Christians,”⁷³ as it involves what Believers are to do with external instructions from the Tanach or Old Testament. The implication of this statement is that there are many, perhaps young and naïve (and immature?) Believers, who think that it is important for God’s people to observe both internal and external instructions of His Word. Today’s broad Messianic movement would fit into the category of such “groups,” as it does widely advocate that the kosher dietary laws were not abolished by Yeshua, and should be followed today. It will be up to each of us as individuals to live forth the imperative of making sure that our hearts and minds are clean before the Lord, as we strive to be holistic in our obedience to His commandments both internal and external.

⁷⁰ Consult the analysis of Galatians 2:7-10 in the publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* by J.K. McKee.

⁷¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 414.

⁷² Consult the entry for the Gospel of Matthew in the workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

⁷³ Hurtado, 112.