Opening and Entering the Gospel of Mark:
   Jesus in the House

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies of the historical Jesus have placed greater emphasis on the spaces and places that were the context for the New Testament Gospels. This study adopts such an emphasis by exploring the 'dominant architectural marker' in Mark's gospel: the house.

An investigation of the archaeology, anthropology, and social environment of 1st-century Palestine is used to examine the boundaries present in that society. By utilizing the theories of 'liminality' as conceived by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, this thesis hypothesizes that the thresholds of houses in Mark's gospel represent the powerful social boundaries present in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Thus, when the Gospel frequently depicts Jesus opening or entering 'houses', it shows that he is superseding these boundaries, and sacralizing and purifying the space.

A study of 1st-century houses in Palestine reveals that they were bounded spaces, evidenced in 'closed' archaeological forms and social purity regulations. Mark's depiction of 'gatherings' around Jesus reveals the dynamics of social boundaries by examining 'who' was typically allowed to assemble in a house. A detailed investigation of several Markan passages shows that Jesus disregards these boundaries by allowing 'outsiders' access to the house. It is concluded that passage through a door or over a threshold represents a bridging of 'different or opposing categories', showing then that the presence of crowds and individuals gaining access to Jesus despite the prominent architecture of separation speaks powerfully about the authorial desire to show Jesus as 'opening' all of the 'house of Israel'. Jesus is seen as disregarding the liminal social restrictions in order to restore access to the divine for those previously marginalized. Jesus' actions in these houses reveal a 'purifying' theme, culminating in Mark's account of Jesus' act of cleansing the Temple.

The final chapter of the thesis considers possible links between Markan use of the house and later Christian communities. Turner's notion of communitas is applied in order to show that Markan depiction of liminal boundaries may have been significant to early Christian communities in conflict with surrounding societies.
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1 Introduction

It has been said that in the research of and 'questing' for the historical Jesus there exists a 'hegemony of time', where texts and events are evaluated and interpreted based on ideas and chronology before they are examined for their physical and spatial contexts.\(^1\) An investigation of the gospel of Mark offers significant challenges to this kind of hegemony because the gospel's unique spatial emphasis and description\(^2\) require the reader to ask what potential meaning might be implied by the author. As authors "must use techniques... relate content in words, and structure the words in some way—if [they are] to get [their] content or message across to [their] audience at all",\(^3\) the reader must consider Mark's inclusion of unique spatial descriptors. Given that the house is the 'dominant architectural marker' in Mark,\(^4\) the author's use of the house (especially when compared with the redaction choices of Matthew and Luke) illustrates a clear setting of choice.\(^5\) Such an emphasis demands attention, and constitutes the focus of this paper.

In my focus on this setting of choice, I will argue that Mark's use of the house as a setting and symbol presents Jesus as either a) providing passage

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\(^2\) For example: 1:39 has Jesus express his desire to visit 'neighbouring villages' (κωμόπολις - only NT use); 3:7 describes the regional origins of the crowds following Jesus (more specific than Mt. 4:25); 7:31 describes Jesus' journey from Tyre.


over ‘liminal’ boundaries or b) passing over them himself to establish sacred space. I will apply Van Gennep’s ‘liminality’ by considering that ‘the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of... ordinary dwelling[s].’ Therefore, to pass through a door or cross a threshold is to cross a liminal space or boundary. This ‘crossing’ is seen as significant because liminal space is that which bridges ‘different or opposing categories’, therefore placing emphasis on how Jesus ‘opens’ and ‘enters’ houses. Careful consideration of the archaeology, anthropology, and social environment of 1st-century Palestine will show that Mark’s depiction of Jesus allowing access to or crossing over into ‘houses’ results in the sacralizing and purifying of the space. Having investigated the major ‘house’ accounts in the gospel, I will conclude with an exploration of Victor Turner’s use of Gennep’s theory and how combining it with an analysis of house space in Mark hints at the audience of the Gospel.

Examinations of the house motif in Mark such as this one are part of the ‘increasing attention’ in Jesus research being paid to the ‘integrative’ factors of the New Testament texts in response to the ‘disintegrative’ ones that source and form critics have emphasized. As a result, the chief concerns of source

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6 I owe the ‘spark’ for my approach to Moxnes’ comments in the opening pages (1-6) of his book. While I do not proceed along the same trajectory as he does, I found his language of ‘a zone of possibilities’ (5) to be a great lens for viewing how ‘Jesus chose a place on the margins’ (3); the notion of ‘liminality’ derives from Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. Monika B. Visedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11. Liminal space is synonymous with transitional space, the passing from one space to another. It is the space between places. I will explore this theme further in the next chapter.

7 Gennep, 20.


criticism will not feature prominently in my approach, though there will be occasional reference made to the 'reliability' of a pericope when I feel that it is warranted. An example of an 'integrative' approach is found in Malbon's contention that space in Mark is characterized by a system of relationships (i.e. that spaces such as the Temple and house are related to each other),\textsuperscript{11} which contrasts with other analyses that refer to Mark's spatial reference points and emphasis as 'insignificant geographical notes.'\textsuperscript{12} While my study does not strictly follow Malbon's breakdown of space, it does employ her integrative approach by assuming that spatial elements in the text may betray both historical and symbolic relationships being framed by the author.

Essential to our understanding of Mark's 'dominant architectural marker', its narrative use, and its relationship to other spaces, is an acknowledgement that the 'house' falls into the category of what Moxnes calls a 'spatial locality'.\textsuperscript{13} Simply put, this means that 'house' cannot be interpreted apart from a historical context, given that houses are places that were defined by the community and by the interactions that occurred in them.\textsuperscript{14} This means that, from the onset, our understanding of house as both structure and symbol must take into the account

\textsuperscript{10} For example, John Painter, \textit{Mark's Gospel: Worlds in Conflict} (New York: Routledge, 1997), 113: dissects the emphases of Jesus vs. Mark in Mark 7:1-23, namely that the gospel author/redactor appears to 'apply' Jesus saying regarding 'washing' to food.\textsuperscript{11} Malbon, 2.
\textsuperscript{13} Moxnes, 12.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. See also Karen Wenell, \textit{Jesus and Land: Sacred and Social Space in Second Temple Judaism} (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 15: argues for space being socially produced.
the socio-historical evidence\textsuperscript{15} available to us, along with an awareness that our 21st-century definition of 'house' might, in fact, not be similar.\textsuperscript{16}

Socio-historical evidence and archeological data allow us to avoid an exclusively 'literary and non-historical' approach to houses.\textsuperscript{17} In an effort to construct an integrated methodology, this project takes a historical-critical approach to the text of Mark's gospel. This manifests itself in my evaluation of the historical and literary contexts that Mark's gospel may have emerged in, and in my attempt to apply insight to the thematic and symbolic use of the 'house' in the text. These applications will shed light on factors such as the audience of the gospel, early Jewish-Christian relations, and early Christian communities' adaptation and practice. Exploring these themes will allow for a more accurate 'reading' and interpretation of Mark's use of space, and for hypotheses on what cognitive and symbolic 'spaces' the readers or listeners to this gospel narrative may have constructed from their literary ones. Liminal boundary-crossing in Mark's narrative can then be seen as being formative for the burgeoning 'Christian' community in its interactions with first century Judaism.

\textsuperscript{15} Moxnes, 13. Doing so allows us to capitalize on the interconnectedness of place and social structures.

\textsuperscript{16} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space} (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith; Malden: Blackwell, 1991), 31: Every society produces its own space, and a study of said space is necessary to understand the rhythm of life and 'centres' (structures) of a society.

\textsuperscript{17} John K. Riches, \textit{Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 123-24: sees Malbon's approach as ignoring or avoiding socio-historical information that is essential for appropriate interpretation.
2 A ‘framework’ for the discussion

Before proceeding into the text, there are several points of significance that must be clarified in order to define the parameters of my discussion. An understanding of house vocabulary, further clarification of my use of ‘liminality’, and an overview of purity themes in the gospel will provide the necessary lens through which to view my perspective of Markan ‘houses’.

οἶκος or oikía?

As previously noted, the ‘house’ factors as the primary spatial structure in Mark’s gospel account. One English word (house) is utilized in translation to represent two different Greek terms (oikía and oîkoç) in the text. According to Malbon, the two combine for 22 spatial references and 8 metaphorical references.18 While Greek terminology originally distinguished between oikía and oîkoç,19 both retain the primary meaning of ‘house’ or ‘dwelling’ in the New Testament.

This project places its primary emphasis on the instances of oikía/oîkoç that pertain to an actual physical structure in the narrative (especially 1:29-31; 2:1-12; 2:15-17; 3:20-21, 31-35; 5:38-43; 7:17-23; 7:24-30).20 Those instances where a house may be implied (such as in the account of Jesus’ Passover meal and instruction in an ἀνώγαγαον, ‘upper room’ in Mark 14) or those figurative references found in Jesus’ temple teaching (i.e. 12:40, 13:34) will not play a role.

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18 Malbon, 108. P. Weigandt, “oikos,” EDNT 2:500-503: of note also is the fact that Mark’s use of oikía and oîkoç are not paralleled in Mt. and Lk.’s redaction.
20 All Biblical translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
in this study, with the notable exceptions being 2:2 and 3:31, where there are obvious spatial implications in the context.

The term oἰκος is used five times21 in Mark's gospel to describe the physical setting and activity of Jesus and his followers. Interestingly, only the narrative of 5:38 and the healing of Jarius' daughter is paralleled with a 'spatial' reference by another Gospel writer.22 In each of the other examples,23 Matthew and Luke edit or marginalize any reference to 'house'24 in the text. While this shows Markan usage of oἰκος as unique, Markan use of the term oικια,25 by comparison, is identically paralleled in either Matthew or Luke. Given this breakdown, I conclude that there does not appear to be a recognizable and redeemable 'pattern' in the gospel's vocabulary usage. The instances of these words in Mark do not betray any nuanced or authorial meaning and, therefore, like Malbon this study will consider oικια and oἰκος as synonyms for 'house'.

At its core, my analysis is more concerned with the literary function and implication of the house against a historical context. While Markan vocabulary may not be distinctive, what I feel is unique is the Markan conception of Jesus' ministry in houses. I will not focus on issues such as the ownership of particular

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22 Lk. 8:51, and it uses oικια.
23 Mark 2:1 (Mt. 9:1-2); 3:20 (no parallel); 7:17 (Mt. 15:1-20); 9:28 (Mt. 17:19; Lk. 9:37ff).
24 The one exception that could be made is that of Matthew implication by using the idiom κατ' ἱδιαν.
houses, but instead, will attempt to show the associations made between certain actions of Jesus and the house. And it is to these associations that my discussion of ‘liminality’ is directed.

Liminality

Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner’s anthropological studies, conducted in the early-mid 20th century, largely inform my study of Markan houses and ‘liminality’. And while my discussion of Turner will be brought in at the conclusion of my paper, a brief overview of van Gennep’s theory, conclusions, and my use of them is necessary at this point.

Van Gennep’s anthropological notion of ‘rites’ of ‘passage’ or ‘transition’ attempted to grapple with how societies classify and mark the ‘series of passages’ that every individual makes in a lifetime. These rites were conceived as occurring in three phases: a) detachment phase – where individuals experienced separation in social structure or from a set of cultural conditions, b) liminal phase – an intervening period where a person/group’s characteristics were ambiguous and social ‘place’ undefined, and c) a reincorporation phase where the subject restabilized and again had rights and responsibilities in the structure.

27 Gennep based his terminology on the Latin term limen, or ‘threshold’. These rites were seen as bridging the great ‘incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds’, and marking the ‘intermediate stage’ that individuals pass through from one to the other (1).
28 Ibid., 11: i.e. pregnancy, betrothal, initiation, adoption, aging.
I must be clear that my project does not entail a strict adherence to the anthropological structure that fuels the approach of both Gennep29 and Turner. Rather, what I propose is a reading of Mark (and specifically its 'houses') through portions of their theoretical 'lens'. Gennep's analysis focused on the dynamics of individual and group life, and in that framework he conceived of there being a great gulf between 'holy' and 'profane' worlds/spaces.30 I adopt this spatial framework, especially because such a description fits our knowledge of 1st Palestine quite well, where the sanctuary of God in Jerusalem (its space based on the premises of Ex.40:1-38 and I Kings 6-8:21) was maintained so that the people of Israel could satisfy the commands of Lev. 11:44, 19:2, 20:7, 26, and 21:6-8 to 'be holy'. The social ramifications of that command and the resulting gulf created between 'holy' and 'profane' are described in m. Kelim 1.6-9 (where the precinct of Israel is seen in concentric circles of increasing holiness, from the outskirts of the land itself to the Holy of Holies in the Temple) and t.Megillah 2.7 (where the people of the land are 'ranked' in accordance with their proximity and access to sacred space, with priests and Levites at the top while bastards and the deformed were at the bottom). Jerome Neyrey summed such a landscape up by stating that 'geography replicates social structure' and 'holiness means

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29 Ibid., 193: he warns against 'across-the-board' application of his 'rites of passage' theory given that its manifestation is not universal or uniform.

30 Ibid., v, 1. As will be discussed below, these 'classifications' are quite applicable to the socio-historical evidence that we have for the context of 1st-century Palestine and the New Testament. It must be noted for the purpose of this paper that 'sacredness' is not an absolute attribute, but a negotiated social reality in various and particular situations (Moxnes, 12). This point is significant because it allows us to grapple with what boundaries of sacredness are associated with Markan houses author and audience.
wholeness.31 In such a landscape, those living outside 'the house of Israel' (i.e. Gentiles) had no access to sacred space or God’s redemptive action. In addition to this, some of those inside ‘the house of Israel’ had limited access to that action due to the purity restrictions surrounding God’s space. Under such a rubric, the houses of Mark communicate the boundaries and restrictions around space in 1st-century Palestine. And consequently, Jesus ‘opening’ and entering of houses is seen as the ‘crossing’ of separating, liminal lines.

The context of purity

It goes without saying that one cannot read the New Testament without a serious consideration of Jewish ritual history, tradition, practice, and literature because it is within this context that Jesus and his initial followers lived their lives.32 A consideration of these themes is essential because Jesus is presented at numerous times in the Synoptic tradition as being in conflict with the teachers of the law and Pharisees, often on points of debate within Jewish culture and practice.33 This consideration is imperative for a study of Mark’s gospel given the relationship between Markan use of otkoç and various conceptions of purity that will be discussed below. In the meantime, an understanding of the ethnic and literary conceptions of Jewish purity is essential for our attempts to more

32 For an example see James Dunn’s ‘Did Jesus Attend The Synagogue?’ in Jesus and Archaeology (ed. by James H. Charlesworth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 206-222. Also note that Acts of the Apostles alludes to continued faithfulness by the apostles to the temple cult (2:46; 3:1; 5:21). While Luke appears to pit Paul’s proselytizing efforts against the desires of ‘the Jews’ (9:23; 13:45,50; 17:5,13), the apostle is unabashedly presented as maintaining Temple practice/purity (21:26).
33 i.e. Mt. 3:7; 9:11-14; 15:1-6; Mark 2:24ff; 7:1-15; Lk. 5:12-26; 5:36-6:12.
accurately conceive how these texts and narratives were read, heard, and understood.

The basis of early Judaism’s focus on ‘purity’ can be traced to the literature of the Torah, and the admonitions repeated in Levitical law. And while the origin of the tradition might be clear, there has been considerable discussion over the categorization and application of the purity laws derived from the Jewish Biblical tradition. There is, for the most part, consensus on what most scholars refer to as ‘ritual’ purity regulations. This classification refers to the conditions or states that are caused by natural and largely unavoidable (despite human volition) bodily functions, examples being bodily ‘flows’, contact with corpses, temporary or contagious diseases/illnesses. The contracting of impurity in any of these ways was not seen as a sin, but contact with an impure person or object did pass on ‘an impermanent contagion’ (i.e. Lev. 15:5,21; Num. 19). To be ritually ‘impure’ meant that one had to keep away from all holy things temporarily, especially the tabernacle (and later, the Temple) according to Lev. 15:31. This was significant given that the Temple ‘supplied’ purity with its importance in religious life, mostly on account of the fact that its continuing presence signified the favour of God. Failure to avoid sacred grounds or food

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34 For example, see Lev. 11.45, “For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy” and Lev. 20.7, “Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy: for I am the LORD your God.” (NRSV) Also, Lev. 11.44; 19.2; 20.26; 21.6; Num. 15.40.
36 Klawans, Impurity, 24-25.
38 Ibid., 15.
while impure (i.e. Lev. 7:20-21; Num. 5:1-4) was one of two ways impurity could lead to serious 'sin'. The second was that of refusing to purify oneself, as described in Num.19:13, 20.39

A more nuanced discussion arises with regards to notions of purity in ancient Judaism in the definition of what is called ‘moral’ purity,40 or what Neusner referred to as the ‘metaphor of morality’.41 The condition or status of ‘moral impurity’ was incurred by committing certain sins such as idolatry, incest, murder, improper contact with ‘sinners’, and the defiling of the land or sanctuary,42 leading to the expulsion of the people from the land of Israel according to Leviticus 18:24-30 and Ezekiel 36:19. Scholarship has shown that this classification was clearly articulated in the literature of the Second Temple period (6th century BCE-1st century CE). While ritual impurity was temporary, moral impurity implied the consequences of terrible sin and, therefore, lead to a permanent ‘degradation’ of the sinner which could only be removed by punishing or atonement.43 The implication is that moral impurity carried with it a definite social stigma, and we shall see that in 1st century, boundaries were employed to protect against moral defilement. It should be noted that during the Second

39 Klawans, 25.
41 Idea of Purity, 11. This definition sees purity as a symbol that is used to determine whether something is ethical or not. By inference, if one maintains the ethics of the law, then one is pure, and vice versa.
43 Klawans, Impurity, 26.
Temple period, Jews were ritually impure most of the time, and only attended to the religious stipulations of ritual purity when they went to the temple.\textsuperscript{44} Obviously, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, along with the centrality of its cult to Jewish life, is the cornerstone of a historical analysis of the region, time, and movement in the 1\textsuperscript{st} century. Interestingly, prior to the destruction of the Temple, opinions and beliefs regarding its purity, purpose, and role within Jewish society were very diverse. The sectarian groups within Judaism all worked through the notion that the Israelites were a priestly nation, and therefore subject to different rules than their Gentile counterparts.\textsuperscript{45} However, there were multiple expressions of this ideal.

The Pharisees attempted to apply their exact knowledge of the levitical, priestly food laws of purity to the commoner.\textsuperscript{46} The Dead Sea community at Qumran separated themselves both from Gentiles and mainstream Jewish society, called for purity outside the Temple, and claimed to have 'a monopoly' on purity distinctions.\textsuperscript{47} It is in the context of such groups that the teachings and actions of the historical Jesus emerge. Given this context, we should not be surprised to find Jesus repeatedly interacting with themes of purity in Mark's Gospel (i.e. 1:40-44; 2:1-11, 15-17; 5:22-43, etc.). Nor should we be surprised to see the interactions of Jesus in houses directly related to notions of purity in

\textsuperscript{44} Maccoby, 4.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 9, 193.
almost every instance. This type of thematic emphasis cannot be ignored given the socio-historical context of first century Palestine. It is in this context that I will build a case for interpreting the house in Mark as a sacred space whose borders/boundaries are entered and opened by the actions of Jesus, allowing those around him to cross the liminal boundaries into redemptive action. And by doing so, I hope to apply the notion of transition to the text of Mark as an attempt to conceptualize the literary and spatial challenge that the author makes to the Jewish society surrounding Jesus in his account. Having done this, Turner’s theory of *communitas* will be utilized to provide an interesting framework for how the gospel of Mark presents Jesus to a potential ‘Mediterranean’

audience/community.

**Audience**

I must offer a comment on this subject of Mark’s ‘audience’: those who may have first heard or read the account. Discussion of audience provides us with yet another contextual tool with which to interpret the themes of a particular body of literature/narrative. Much has been written on this particular subject, in many cases due to the disputed identity of the author ‘Mark’ (a subject that cannot be discussed here). I agree with those who dispute Bauckham’s theory of

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48 My study will attempt to establish a context for potential authorship and audience for Mark’s gospel. However, early westward movement by Christian missionaries quickly spread the narrative, message, and ethics of the first communities around the entire Mediterranean sea. I acknowledge the critiques of scholars such as Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures of Contact in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 5. She takes exception to the notion of Mediterranean ‘monoculture’.

49 See A.Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (ed. by Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 1: I agree with her assertion that with the study of this gospel (as with any other), one must acknowledge that it is a product of a long tradition of *multiple* authors and editors.
gospel ‘universality’,\textsuperscript{50} based on the vast body of evidence that the gospel writers did not write in a contextual ‘vacuum’ but, rather, utilized contexts with various nuances to emphasize the life and teachings of the historical Jesus.

Scholars, not surprisingly, do not agree on the location of a Markan audience.\textsuperscript{51} But it must also be pointed out that many scholars are conflicted themselves on the issue, allowing for multiple possibilities.\textsuperscript{52} My inclination is to side with the notion that much of the internal evidence of the document suggests that the gospel was produced in the east, i.e. Syria.\textsuperscript{53} Interpretive issues related to the gospel’s geographical ‘complexities’\textsuperscript{54} or its use of ‘latinisms’\textsuperscript{55} are not of primary importance to this study. Instead, the use of narratives and conflict

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Marcus, 36: adopts a Syrian setting; Martin Hengel, \textit{Studies in the Gospel of Mark} (Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 28-29: ‘presupposes’ Rome; Witherington, 21-26: claims that a setting east of Rome is highly unlikely.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 8; Marcus, 32-34.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 8, n.10. For example, she argues that Mark’s use of the expression θάλασσαν ής Γαλιλαίας (‘Sea of Galilee’) reflects Hebrew and Aramaic expression as opposed to the usual Greek and Latin names. Also, she sees the citation of words in Aramaic and Greek (e.g. 5:41; 7:11, 34; 14:32) as a sign that the audience was multilingual; consider J. Dewey, ‘The Gospel of Mark,’ in \textit{Searching the Scriptures: Volume 2: A Feminist Commentary} (ed. by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ann Brock, and Shelley Matthews; New York: Crossroad, 1994), 470-509. She argues for a ‘peasant’ audience (such as what one might find in Palestine or Syria) based on the simplicity of the Greek. Such a position contends with that of Michael F. Trainor, \textit{The Quest For Home: The Household in Mark’s Community} (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 18. He believes that Mark is writing to a pre-industrial, Mediterranean, urban audience, but does not clarify how his perspective meshes with the rural/agricultural themes of the gospel.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Witherington, 25. He points out that this could be explained based on the simple fact that the author did not likely travel with the historical Jesus.
\item \textsuperscript{55} This is a point of contention for multiple authors. However, the transmission of the gospel narrative into multiple communities with increasing Gentile populations may account for later redaction in these instances.
\end{itemize}
around such themes as 'purity'\textsuperscript{56} and 'boundaries'\textsuperscript{57} throughout the gospel hint at an audience with knowledge of these social and ethnic dynamics in 1\textsuperscript{st}-century Palestine. Identifying the audience's body of 'assumed knowledge' is not easy, but one cannot underestimate or pass over the implications of Jesus being placed in certain contexts. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I will assume that, while the gospel was not likely written in Galilee,\textsuperscript{58} the initial audience was likely a) a community with a knowledge of Galilee, b) in the eastern Roman Empire, and c) one that contained both Gentile and Jewish followers of 'τῆς ὅδοος'.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} For example, Jesus' interaction with a leper, 1:40-44; Jesus and the woman with the 'flow of blood', 5:25-34; Jesus and the temple economy, 11:15-18.
\textsuperscript{57} For example, Jesus' travel into Tyre and Sidon, 7:24, or into the Decapolis, 7:31.
\textsuperscript{58} Collins, \textit{Mark}, 101: This is largely based on there being no evidence for a significant Christian presence in the earliest period. See also Günter Stemberger, 'Galilee – Land of Salvation?' Appendix IV in W.D. Davies' \textit{The Gospel and the Land} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 409-438.
3 The search for Markan houses

A review of related and relevant research is necessary before launching into an investigation of the 'house' in Mark’s gospel. As with many studies of New Testament texts and themes, there is no shortage of commentary and opinion on this topic. The work done by scholars can (for the most part) be placed into two categories: a) studies on specific passages, often concerned with the ownership of particular houses and b) summaries of the theme of houses or space in Mark. A brief summary of the most pertinent works is included below for the purpose of contextualizing my study and claims.

Frédéric Manns’ article provides a broad outline of different approaches to the house theme in Mark. He describes the house in Mark as having a 'valence' with the church, citing various scholars before asserting that the house is a literary tool used to present the Christian community as the house of God. He also focuses on the movement of Jesus via geographical references, claiming that a literary opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem cannot be denied. While some of his insights are somewhat tenuous, I do agree with his claim that, in general, the gospel writers would have built their symbolism from a concrete reality.

Elizabeth Malbon’s work on the gospel of Mark is extensive, and the range of her contributions has established her as an authority on the context and message of the gospel. In her article "τῇ ὁλιγῇ αὐτοῦ: Mark 2.15 in Context",  

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60 ‘Le thème de la maison dans l’évangile de Marc.’
61 Manns, 5,10: where the house is a kerygmatic 'symbol' of the church.
62 For example, his claim that the literary similarity between the calling of Jesus’ disciples and Elijah’s choosing of Elisha is significant (16) seems beyond the scope of his topic.
Malbon argues for the house portrayed as being Jesus'. Her argument follows the assertions of Günter Stemberger that the house that Jesus enters is more of a literary-theological idea than a physical structure. Thus, she pursues the narrative logic and function of the house in the passage as opposed to debating its historical probability. In doing so, Malbon concludes that Jesus’ house provides an alternative to the religious establishment of his day, especially in his negating of socio-religious distinctions for ‘the marginalized’ in his house.

Malbon formed these conclusions into the more complete analysis of her book, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*. She uses Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism as a methodological tool to assert that Mark’s primary emphasis is on the opposition between chaos and order. Her main conclusions were that the house is a literarily constructed space that is in opposition to the synagogue and temple, and that Mark contains an underlying tension between sacred and profane space with the narrative progressing toward the goal of devaluing the sacred/profane distinction. While her notion of spatial importance and conflict are influential for my study, I feel that my approach places more emphasis on the

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63 Context, 282. Also notable is May, ‘Mark 2.15’, 147-49. Using Bruce Malina’s social scientific criticism and the notion of dyadic contract, May concludes that Jesus’ invitation to Levi to follow him required a response and corresponding invitation. He concludes that the house is more likely to be Levi’s, but qualifies this by emphasizing the ‘long-term’ relationship of Jesus with the marginalized: ‘the primary point of the scandal is the durative nature, not the spatial nature of this event’ (149).
64 ‘Galilee’, 409.
67 Ibid., 11.
68 Ibid., 118-19, 140.
69 Ibid., 132.
historical context while contending that the gospel appears to be offering the house as a sacred space.

John Painter provides us with another study on a specific house in Mark, focusing on the ambiguous house of Mark 3:19. However, the bulk of his study investigates the relationship between ‘disciples’ and ‘family’ in the passage.

Agreeing with ‘a growing consensus’ that Jesus established his own home in Capernaum, Painter asserts that a) Jesus’ disciples are the ones who restrained him due to accusations that he was out of his mind in vs. 21 and b) Jesus ‘redefines discipleship in terms of his family and family in terms of discipleship.’

I agree with Painter’s assertions that the redrawn familial lines are the most significant. However, I disagree with his statement that the spatial positioning of the family ‘might be important’ (emphasis mine) given that I interpret the passage on the basis of place and the characters’ relationship to it.

There are two more substantial monographs that I investigated for the purposes of this assignment. The first is an unpublished work of David May’s that focuses on houses and households. Based on the early works of social scientific scholars, May attempted to find the meanings imparted by the writer of Mark to his first readers as a means of understanding the social world of the readers. His study incorporates investigation of ‘the house’, but also that of what he calls ‘household imagery’ (i.e. kinship/familial terms), claiming that such

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71 Ibid., 498-99. He does not identify the source/evidence for this claim. However, he does acknowledge that the house in 2:15 (ἔν τῇ ὁλκῇ αὐτοῦ) is also ambiguous.
72 Ibid., 499, 511.
imagery is present in every chapter but the 4th in the gospel. May uses socio-
linguistic tools to unpack the ways house and space function in the setting of
Mark, where house as setting and house as an expression of household
language are seen as being connected. His overarching assertion is that Jesus
is seen as subverting normative values in his social context, agreeing with
Malbon on the use of house as a critique on the synagogue.

While May’s consideration of social environment is key, it does not clearly
identify a potential audience for the gospel. Such an approach is limited in its
ability to grapple with the interpretive traditions or redaction that followed the first
Christian generations, and how shifting social values may have worked their way
into the texts. My study attempts to use socio-historical information, much of it
utilized by the likes of May, to define a more specific audience and show how
houses may have been used to construct Christian identity.

The more recent, relevant and, not coincidently, extensive work on
‘houses’ in Mark is Mark Trainor’s The Quest for Home. Trainor’s analysis of
Mark is theological in nature, but broad in its inclusions and methodology. In his
study of the ‘house’, he asserts that it functions as the architectural indicator for
discipleship gathering with Jesus. He attempts to marry a social-scientific
approach to spatial inquiry (i.e. Malbon) in order to support his primary claims
that Jesus initiated a ‘household’ that was then carried and ‘reproduced’ by his
earliest followers.

74 Trainor, 77.
75 Ibid., 71, 125-127.
76 Ibid., 6.
While he does offer insight on the house as it is portrayed in Greek and Roman literature, Trainor’s analysis leans heavily on the social-scientific, while only briefly referencing the spatial relationships that appear to play a significant role in the text. In the end, I think that some of his conclusions about authorial intent in Mark’s construction clearly show the influence of two millennia of Christian theology. To say that ‘the gospel begun by Mark is continued in its audience’\textsuperscript{77} is to assume that 1\textsuperscript{st}-century community members viewed the spread of the early Christian message through a similar lens as any modern adherent, scholar, or onlooker. The point is this: Trainor’s ‘domestic reading’ of Mark is written for modern ‘home searchers and ecclesial leaders’ in their efforts to construct “Jesus’ household of disciples”.\textsuperscript{78} Its commentary on Roman houses and households is helpful, but for the purposes of this study, it does not provide adequate insight into the context of 1\textsuperscript{st}-century Palestine, nor a strong theoretical framework from which to grasp Markan community and its production/use of the text.

It must be noted that, having outlined the most recent and relevant sources on Markan houses, no significant comment has been made on the liminality surrounding them. It is in this ‘space’ that our investigation begins.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 184.
4 Opening the house

A logical place to begin this discussion of 'house' is with a consideration of what kind of physical structures Jesus may have encountered. The most common forms of 'house' in the Palestine of the 1st century CE were the insula and farmhouse. In cities or towns like Capernaum (1:21; 2:1), where Jesus is frequently depicted, insula contained several clusters of two to three rooms positioned around a courtyard, while in the countryside the rooms were often clustered at one end of a walled courtyard. The courtyard was shielded and had only one entrance, and the restricted access combined with limited windows to create privacy and seclusion from the street.

Of the houses in Mark, features are outlined that allow us to see Jesus in several kinds of houses. In 1.29ff, he is in the house of Simon and Andrew (two fishermen, 1:16), which is likely to have been a simple, one-room dwelling or part of a village insula. In 2:1 he is said to have 'come home', and in 2:4 we see

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80 Trainor, 20: argues that there were six types of housing in 1st-century Mediterranean: simple, courtyard, big mansion, farmhouse, house/shop, apartment. The 'insula' is the equivalent of Trainor's 'courtyard' (see p.26).

81 Sawicki, 18. See also Jonathan L. Reed, Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: a re-examination of the evidence (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 157. Domestic units abutted into each other surrounding a courtyard.


83 Reed, 157.

84 K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 100. They argue that fishermen would not have been either wealthy or 'middle class'.
clues that the house was likely rural and of low quality construction. The house in Mark 3 is not described, but the inference is that it is the same 'house' as the one found in Mark 2. Mark 5:38ff sees Jesus arrive at the home of Jairus the synagogue ruler, potentially a larger villa or a dominating town insula. In Mark 7:17, the house is not described but assumed to be in Galilee, while the house in 7:24 is described only as being near the city of Tyre. What this analysis shows is that descriptions of physical structure and location of Markan houses allow only minimal insight into the notion of liminality in the gospel. What must be given greater precedent are the actions of Jesus as portrayed by the author.

Interestingly, the various kinds of houses in 1:33, 2:2, 2:15, 3:20, 31, 5:38, and 7:17 all portray Jesus as being surrounded by a crowd or group of people. The lone exception in 7:24 sees Jesus interact with a solitary woman, but this will be discussed later. Jesus is portrayed as interacting with the sick in 1:33, 2:2, 5:38, with 'family' in 3:20, and with Gentiles or 'sinners' in 2:15 and 7:24. Jesus' actions in these settings are significant for various reasons that will be discussed, and the setting of the 'house' will be shown to be a sacred space that allows the marginalized through the liminal.

85 Marcus, 215: the literal Greek (ἐν οίκῳ) is idiomatic for 'at home', and Marcus states that it is probably Peter's house. If this is true, it is a curious 'omission' by the author, given that there was no trouble identifying Peter and Andrew's house in chp.1.
86 Reed, 159. The account of the paralytic's friends having to dig through the roof aligns with Reed's investigation of houses in Capernaum finished with packed mud exteriors, and a complete lack of plaster, frescoes, mosaics.
87 Marcus, 362. Jairus' wealth is implied in 5:40 because of the house having multiple rooms.
88 The text states in 5:35 that Jairus' daughter had 'died' (Ἡ θυγάτηρ σου ἀπέθανεν). I include the narrative in this passage because of Jairus' statement in 5:23 that (Τὸ θυγάτριόν μου ἐσχάτως ἔχει), 'My daughter is extremely sick' (NRSV translates it as 'at the point of death').
Scholarship is diverse in its evaluation of these crowds of Galilean inhabitants (and house occupants) from the 1st century. Galilee had a varied population, and became the major center of Jewish life in Palestine in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-35 CE). The vast majority of Jews in Galilee lived in villages and towns rather than in the more Hellenistic cities of Tiberius and Sepphoris. While Jesus could have plausibly had contact with Gentiles given the social conditions in Galilee, an intentional mission to Gentiles is difficult to support, as Jesus' travels were centered in the areas occupied by Jews. Generally, Mark places Jesus' activity firmly within the 'houses' of Israel.

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89 Gafni, 51.
90 Ibid., 52. E.P. Sanders, "Jesus' Relation to Sepphoris," in Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture (ed. Rebecca Nagy; Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996), 75-79: Sepphoris is not mentioned in the New Testament; and E. Myers 'Jesus and his Galilean Context,' in Archaeology and the Galilee: texts and contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine periods (ed. Dougles R. Edwards and C.T. McCollough; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 57-66: suggests that Jesus' lack of success is part of why we don't hear about it or Tiberius, but also that there was a sizeable Jewish population in Sepphoris; Mark A. Chancey, The Myth of a Gentile Galilee (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 79-80: argues that physical evidence for Jewish inhabitants in Sepphoris is 'unambiguous'; Sean Freyne, 'Archaeology and the Historical Jesus,' in Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays (Boston: Brill, 2002), 160-182: however, argues that Jesus' avoidance of cities is congruent with his apparent emphasis on socio-economic oppression and kinship value loss.
91 Chancey, 175, 177: he concludes that, presumably, more would have been reported had they constituted a more important part of Jesus' ministry; Collins, Mark, 9: by contrast, Collins argues that Mark may have shown Jesus in Gentile territory to 'prefigure' the mission to the Gentiles. I am inclined to agree with S.T. Parker, 'The Decapolis Revisited,' JBL 94 (1975): 437, who sees the significance of the 'Decapolis' as a mission site as being 'relatively slight'. My position and emphasis is largely based on occurrence of the site in Mark. The Decapolis is mentioned by Mark only twice, while he references Galilee twelve times. My argument is not that Gentile mission is nonexistent, but that it is not the primary motivation behind Jesus' activity in Mark's gospel.
92 If not geographically and ethnically, then this is clearly seen in Jesus initial response to the Syro-Phoenician woman, 7:27. The reference made in Mark 11.17 (and paralleled in Lk. 19.46, which curiously omits the phrase πᾶν τοῖς ἔδρασι) clearly places Jesus' actions in the 'house' of Israel. We will elaborate on both of these references later.
Without question, the 'houses' of Israel in Mark are seen as 'bounded' space; they are marked by physical, ethnic, social, and religious lines that clearly distinguish between inside and outside. Such a distinction is not surprising given that the concept of private and public space had already formed in Greek cities by 5th century BCE, the oikos being organized to distinguish between intrusive, social activity and private life. A study of the archeological record reveals a focus on purity and privacy in Galilee, and therefore supports the notion of the district being part of a Jewish context. In her unique analysis of 'commodities' moving across and through Galilee, Sawicki places significant emphasis on the door thresholds that were believed to have enabled homeowners to control who and what came into and out of their houses. Reed affirms this notion by noting that restricted access, along with obstructed windows, indicates Capernaum residents prioritized security and seclusion over and against those living in urban villas. Houses were closed off and marked by restricted access. For many Galilean residents, their courtyard demarcated between the private domain of the family and the public domain of the village.

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93 See Trainor, 73. Like him, I focus my attention on the first 8 chapters where the 'circle' of those rejecting Jesus grows.
94 Lisa C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 154-55; also Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167-243. Her study looks at the diversity of home making in the western/Greek Roman empire where attempts to 'privatize' space were meant to shelter family while projecting a notion of Roman acceptance.
95 Myers, 61; Sanders, 77.
96 Sawicki, 16-18.
97 Reed, 157.
98 Gafni, 55-6.
The application of such physical evidence to the text results in houses being seen as ‘closed’ (both socially and ethnically) symbols.

The notion of such ‘houses’ being employed by Mark faces a unique narrative challenge in the depiction of diverse and sizeable crowds in chps. 2, 3, 5, and 7. The crowds display Jesus’ growing popularity, but are not stated as being explicitly non-Jewish. Assertions that the crowds in Mark serve only as a symbol for Jesus’ following becoming too large for houses seem somewhat dubious, especially when one sees the hints of Gentile contact in Jesus’ refusing to stay in a house, deciding instead to visit neighbouring towns (1:38). It seems more appropriate to see the ‘house’ as a ‘place of gathering’ in light of the context of 2:2 (where no room was left, even ‘outside the door’), 2:15 (where Jesus eats with ‘many tax collectors and sinners’), 3:20 (where Jesus and his disciples are prevented from eating due to the crowd), and 7:17 (where Jesus leaves the crowd and clarifies his teaching to a gathering of his disciples).

However, there is variation in the ‘types’ of gathering and who is allowed to gather. The most striking characteristic of these gatherings is the presence of Gentiles in the houses Jesus is placed in, as well as the presence of crowds around these houses. There does appear to be a notion where some of the crowds represent the ‘Judaisms’ that surrounded Jesus and his ‘followers’ inside. Such a notion demands an investigation of 2:1-12, 3:20-35, 7:17-23, and 7:24-

\[^{99}\text{Chancey, 178-79.}\]
\[^{100}\text{David Rhoads and Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie, Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 67.}\]
\[^{101}\text{Collins, Mark, 177; Rhoads et al, 66.}\]
30. In each instance, Jesus is seen as ‘opening’ the house and allowing passage over a liminal boundary into sacred space.

**Mark 2:1-12**

*And again he came into Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was at home.*\(^{102}\) And many gathered together so that there was no longer any room, even at the door, and he spoke the word to them.

*And they came to him bringing a paralytic who was being carried by four men. But when they were not able to bring him to Jesus on account of the crowd they uncovered the roof where He was. And after digging through, they lowered the mat which the paralytic was lying on. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins are forgiven.’*

This narrative provides a unique portrayal of Jesus ‘opening’ the house space. We are told that the house was in Capernaum. And as already pointed out by observing the archeological record, this house likely would have had one entrance for the purpose of security. The text states that a crowd gathered to the point that the only entrance was blocked or filled by people listening to Jesus speak.

A contingent of men brought a paralytic\(^{103}\) to see Jesus. Finding the sole entrance blocked, the four men went up onto the roof and made an opening (by ‘digging through’) to lower the paralytic through. Having seen their ‘faith’,\(^{104}\) Jesus declares the man’s sins to be forgiven.

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\(^{102}\) In keeping with BAGD, 563, where ἐν οἰκίᾳ is a fixed idiom for ‘at home’. This reference has an interesting connection with the description of Jesus’ rejection in 6:4, where Jesus himself finds ‘home’ to be a liminal space.

\(^{103}\) M. Rissi, ‘παραλυτικός’, *EDNT* 3:31-32. While the man is obviously lame in this passage, a precise knowledge of ancient classification of disabilities associated with this term is impossible.

\(^{104}\) G. Barth, ‘πίστις, πιστεύω’, *EDNT* 3:91-97. This notion becomes a central theological concept for the post-Easter communities (i.e. as seen in Paul’s writings, Rom.10:9; Gal.2:16) because it denoted a correctness in one’s connection to God.
There are two 'spatial' points of interest in this passage. The first is rooted in Jesus' forgiving of sin in response to faith. This is one of two instances in Mark's gospel where, as Theissen points out, faith is a 'boundary-crossing motif.'\(^{105}\) The faith of the four men is therefore depicted, in conjunction with their 'digging', as creating an 'unorthodox' or unsanctioned opening in the house, which is directly connected to Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness.

This proclamation\(^{106}\) apparently led some teachers of the law, or 'scribes',\(^{107}\) to question Jesus' authority. And while Jesus may have infringed on priestly prerogatives by declaring sins forgiven,\(^{108}\) it appears that the key issue is his handling of the supposed connection between the paralytic's sin and his condition. There are hints that contemporary Jews may have felt that a human being on earth could forgive for God.\(^{109}\) However, the more pressing issue was that of the long-standing association between sin, healing, and forgiveness (as seen in passages such as Deut. 28:27 and Psa. 103:3) in Judaism.\(^{110}\)

As previously mentioned, the notion of sin in Judaism was never associated with the regular, and frequent, ritual impurities an individual would

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\(^{106}\) It sparks what Bultmann, *History*, classified as 'the controversy dialogue' that lasts until Mark 3:6.

\(^{107}\) See Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 151-153. He points out that the scribes are often described polemically in connection with their questioning of Jesus' authority; also Meier, 549-560. He warns against seeing the scribes as a homogeneous historical group.

\(^{108}\) Marcus, 216.

\(^{109}\) See Qumran's *Prayer of Nabonidus* (4QPrNab), where 'an exorcist' forgives sin.

\(^{110}\) Marcus, 221. Both he and Witherington (117) cite the rabbinic reference in *b.Ned.* 41a that states, 'No one gets up from his sick-bed unless all his sins are forgiven.'
encounter. Sin was associated with moral impurities (i.e. Lev. 18:24ff; 19:31) that defiled the sinner, the land (Lev. 18:25) and the sanctuary (Lev. 20:3). The key is that, while the sanctuary and people could be absolved by the atonement prescriptions, sinners would not be purified and would therefore live life in a permanent, ostracized state. Thus, the depiction of the paralytic being on the outside with no access parallels the purity restrictions he may have faced if his condition was associated with sinful actions. Jesus’ ‘healing’ and ‘forgiving’ of the paralytic can then be seen as a depiction of him opening a closed, symbolic space, allowing passage through a liminal boundary via an ‘unorthodox’ entrance ‘by faith’.

Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

And he went home. And again the crowd gathered, so that they could not even eat bread. And when those from around him heard, they went out to seize him, for they were saying that he is insane. And his mother and brothers came and standing outside they sent for him, calling him. But a crowd was seated all around him, and they said to him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are outside and they seek you.’ And answering he said to them, ‘Who is my mother and my brothers?’ Looking at those all around him in the circle he said, ‘See, my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother.’

This narrative is assumed to be taking place in Capernaum, where (again) a crowd has gathered, presumably inside the house where Jesus was located. The inference is that his ‘family’ heard that he was crazy, and set out to put a

111 Maccoby, vii.
112 Klawans, 30.
113 We assume that they are inside because Jesus and his disciples are unable to eat.
114 As translated by the NRSV. Painter, ‘House’, 504. He uses the vagueness of the expression ‘οἱ παρ’ αὐτῶν’ to contend that the disciples are the key figure in the passage. However, most scholars agree with the lexical notion (BAGD, 756) that the koine uses this expression to denote those who are intimately connected with someone (ex. Josephus Ant. 1.193).
stop to his activities. Interestingly, the charge of ‘insanity’ was common for healers and exorcists, especially those who were at variance with their nuclear families.\(^\text{115}\) To be at odds with one’s nuclear family in 1\(^{\text{st}}\)-century Palestine would have been a position of extreme tension and dishonor.\(^\text{116}\) Thus, one cannot afford to overlook the recurring theme of separation from family and house in Mark. Seen here in Mark 3, we also find notions of it in 1:18-20 (where the first disciples leave their livelihood and their father, τὸν πατέρα, to join Jesus), 6:4 (where Jesus is rejected in his ‘hometown’, τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ) and in 10:29-30 (where Jesus promises a reward to those who had left ‘house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands’, οἰκίαν ἢ ἄδελφον ἢ ἄδελφος ἢ μητέρα ἢ πατέρα ἢ τέκνα ἢ ἀγγείον).

This theme is defined further by a unique spatial depiction in 3:31-35. Jesus’ mother and brothers arrive and, just as the four carriers of the paralytic did in 2:1-12, they find that they cannot reach Jesus via the only entrance or access to the house. They are seen as being ‘outside’, while the crowd is seen as being ‘inside’ and ‘all around’ Jesus. The spatial separation between Jesus and his

\(^{115}\) Marcus, 271. While ‘insanity’ accusations may have been the motivation for Jesus’ family intervention, the narrative flow suggests another possibility. Mark 3:7-12 shows an ethnically mixed crowd pressing around Jesus. He drives out ‘unclean spirits’ (which are typical of Gentile appearances in the gospel, 5:1-20; 7:24ff), and then forms a group of followers. Is it possible that Jesus’ family took exception to his apparent disregard for ethnic and familial lines? Jesus’ response in the house does not rule out this notion.

\(^{116}\) This is a fact argued well by social scientific interpreters of the gospels. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 41, articulate the dominance kinship has as a category of social organization; also Santiago Guijarro, ‘The Family in First-Century Galilee’, in Constructing Early Christian Families: family as social reality and metaphor (ed. by Halvor Moxnes; New York: Routledge, 1997): 42-65, outlines family as the ‘central institution’ of Mediterranean society; Moxnes, 28-29, describes how οἶκος often implies a social group in domestic space, as well as the importance of kinship to secure identity and the preservation of genealogies.
family is accentuated in his redefining of normal kinship relationships by equating them with those ‘in the house’ doing the will of God. Interestingly, we see another contemporary hint of ‘house’ and a community being associated in the Qumran communities’ Damascus Document 3:19, where ‘the house’ (originally designating a family) became a term for a community or religious group. When viewed against this context, Mark 3:20ff appears to show the moving of Jesus’ followers from one ‘house’ (their own families or social networks) into another (his house, defined by a reordering of kinship). Such a presentation illustrates the authorial presentation of Jesus ‘opening’ the house, allowing those who are ‘outside’ to traverse the liminal boundaries into a new sacred space defined by familial-like connections.

**Mark 7:17-19**

And when he went away from the crowd, he entered the house, his disciples asking him about the parable. And he said to them, ‘You also do not understand? Can you not see that anything going into a person is not able to make him unclean, because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of him into the toilet?’ He was pronouncing all food clean.

While the physical structure and location of the house in this passage is ambiguous, the impact of Jesus’ statement upon ‘the house’ is anything but unclear. In order to understand Jesus’ declaration, a brief description of food restrictions in the 1st century is essential.

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117 Collins, 235; Painter, Gospel, 511. Also of note is Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity: in the World of the Early Christians* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 63-96: he argues that early Christians were not unique in their use of fictive kinship language.  
The beginning of Mark 7 tells us that some Pharisees and certain scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, 'gathered around' (συνάγονται) Jesus. They apparently took exception to Jesus' disciples eating with 'profane'/impure/unclean (κοινός) hands, which Mark clarifies as not being washed (ἀνίπτως). The inference from vss. 3-4 is that their challenge stemmed from their strict framework and following of a tradition surrounding food consumption, a tradition stemming from instructions in the Torah (Lev. 7:19-21; 21:1-8) that they applied 'to everyone.' Holy food was to be 'eaten in a state of purity.' Scholars generally support the notion that the Pharisees applied these strict notions of ritual purity to their eating outside of the Temple, and we also see strict guidelines surrounding the sacred meals of the Qumran community (1QS 6:4-5). While we will touch on this again in our later discussion of Mark 2:15ff, it is quite clear that eating was a boundary-drawing process in 1st-century Palestine (as it was in much of the ancient world). Interestingly, the archeological record supports the idea that the focus on food purity was not

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119 F.G. Untergassmair, κοινός, κοινώ, EDNT, 302-303: all 14 references of the verb κοινός imply the sense of 'pollute/profane/desecrate.'
120 Note the mention of 'unwashed' hands in connection with libations offered to Zeus, Hesiod, Works and Days, 725.
121 Witherington, 224: claims that they did so on the basis of Ex. 30:19; 40:13.
123 Meier, 320: in keeping with his overarching methodology for his Marginal Jew volumes, he identifies this theme by use of 'multiple attestation', citing m. 'Or. 2:12, Matt. 23:25-26, t. 'Abod. Zar. 4:9, and m.Yad. 4:6; Neusner, Idea of Purity, 61, 65-67: though his sources are not always clear. See also Günter Stemberger, Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 89. His discussion highlights the use of the term 'tradition' (ταράγοντας) in vs. 3 and its association in other instances (i.e. Josephus, Ant. 13.297, 18.408ff, Gal. 1:14) with Jewish ancestry. Mark use of this term to describe Pharisaic practice is curious because it implies authority and establishment, which may be done purely for rhetorical usage later in 7:8-9. Stemberger notes this comparison.
purely a sectarian 'enterprise'. It appears that many Jews in smaller towns and rural settlements were committed to ritual purity, based on the proliferation of stone vessels that were created for the purpose of maintaining food purity regulations.\textsuperscript{124} These conclusions make it clear that the context of both hand-washing related to food and food regulations themselves would have made Jesus' declaration controversial.

Klawans contends that the emphasis of this chapter is hand-washing, summarized clearly in 7:15 when Jesus implies that what comes out of someone defiles them.\textsuperscript{125} He suggests that an interpretation of Mark 7:19b\textsuperscript{126} is better done through the lens of 7:15 because Jesus would not have challenged the Torah's instruction but may have merely been challenging Pharisaic sectarian interests.\textsuperscript{127} While this may be true, we must also consider the fact that vss. 20-23 compare the external food purity regulations of 1\textsuperscript{st}-century Palestine with a list of internal and defiling actions articulated by Jesus.

For from within, out of the heart of men, wicked considerations come out: illicit sexual practice, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, evil eye, slander, pride, foolishness. All these wicked things come out from within, and defile the person.

\textsuperscript{124} Regev, 182-183. The number grew significantly between the time of Herod until the Bar Kokhba revolt.

\textsuperscript{125} Impurity, 147. The authenticity and prominence of this saying is supported by various scholars (i.e. Hengel, 13). Such a position is not incoherent if one considers that Mark was involved with Peter (Eusebius, History, 3.39.15), who is recorded in Acts as having a similar experience that related to food regulations in chp. 10:9-45 where a voice tells him to 'Α σι νδές έκαθόρισεν σου μη κοινου (That which God has called 'sacred' you should not call 'profane').

\textsuperscript{126} Klawans, Impurity, 147: he calls 19b an 'explanatory gloss'; Painter, Gospel, 113: notes that 7:19 is a Markan 'clarification' of what Jesus says in 7:15.

\textsuperscript{127} Impurity, 147.
Surprisingly, there is a 'degree of correspondence' between this list and those sins that ancient Jews would have perceived to be morally defiling.128 For example, deceit (δόλος) was considered a source of moral impurity in the Temple Scroll,129 and slander, or blasphemy (βλασφημία) resulted in similar impurity according to the tannaitic tradition.130 What such examples show is that Jesus' notions of moral impurity (as defined by the Markan account) may have fallen within the boundaries of what some Jews felt was defiling. However, when combined with the saying of 7:19, Jesus is clearly seen as opening 'the house' by subordinating the restrictive demands of food purity laws to a different measure of purity.131 This measure of purity would have allowed those beyond the liminal boundaries of food purity to have access to sacred space by upright, moral action.

Mark 7:24

From there he (Jesus) left and went away into the region of Tyre. And he went into a house, and he did not want anyone to know, but he was not able to be hidden. And immediately a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard about him, came and fell down at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syro-Phoenician by descent; and she begged him so that he would drive the demon out of her daughter.

And he said to her, 'Let first the children be fed, for it is not good to take the bread of the children and to give it to the dogs.'

But she replied and said to him, 'Master, even the dogs under the table eat from the crumbs of the children.' And he said to her, 'On account of this word you may go, the demon has gone out of your daughter.'

Having gone out into her house she found the child lying on the bed and the demon had gone out.

128 Ibid., 148.
130 Klawans’ commentary on the Sifre to Deuteronomy 23:10, Impurity, 124-125; Witherington, 230: notes the similarity between the list and the one found in Qumran’s Rule, 1QS 4:9-11, where a connection appears to be made between internal evil and external activity.
131 Witherington, 233: refers to the passage as a potential ‘transcending [of] Jewish particularism.’ However, I think that Klawans’ argument is a better conception of how Jesus’ notions may have compared with what some Jews may have felt was defiling.
This passage is the last in my study that focuses on 'the houses' in Mark and Jesus' opening of them. However, it also provides a transition into the remaining discussion, as Jesus' action inside the house is significant. I will elaborate more on this below.

The account begins with Jesus' movement from Galilee to the 'region of Tyre.' As might be expected in Mark's 'spatial-sensitive' narrative, such a move denotes a significant theme. Galilee, the centre of the gospel's depiction of Jesus' activity, was the 'northern outpost' of Jewish territory.\(^{132}\) Thus, Jesus' movement to the north\(^{133}\) is a depiction of a journey 'to the fringes', and this is not a point that can be quickly overlooked.

Tyre (along with Sidon, located to the north, and included in some textual variants) is portrayed negatively in the Hebrew Bible (i.e. Isa. 23:1-12; Ezek. 26-28; Joel 3:4-8), often criticized for the wealth and materialism of its culture.\(^{134}\) In

\(^{132}\) Stemberger, *Galilee*, 415.

\(^{133}\) It should be mentioned that 'geographical discourse' (i.e. the framing of groups based on their location) is common in the New Testament. Any journey north of Jerusalem took a traveler through Samaria, a region with a long-standing history of ethnic and geographical conflict with the 'true' Israelites. This historical discourse is clearly seen in the marginalizing of the Samaritans in scholarship. See Jürgen Zangenberg, 'Between Jerusalem and the Galilee,' in *Jesus and Archaeology* (ed. James Charlesworth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 393-432: not a single village site from the Hellenistic or Roman period has ever been systematically excavated in Samaria, "most of the rural life in Samaria was more or less 'anonymous'"; also Rainer Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 140: such omission and muting of a people's 'voice' results in marginalization, and clearly reinforces the 'slanting' of the discourse. The clearest example of underlying geographic and ethnic boundaries in the New Testament texts comes in John 4:1-29, where Jesus interacts with a Samaritan woman on notions of temple superiority.

\(^{134}\) Note the similarity to accusations leveled against 'the neighboring peoples' that were synonymous with Gentiles in the post-exilic texts. For example: Ezra 2:68-3:3, 4:1-4; Neh. 4:1ff; 6:1ff. Kessler, 137: this classification implies the class conflicts between ethnic groups (where exilic returnees assumed a higher class). Of note too are labeling...
addition to this, we must also consider the fact that the Roman Empire's extensive and 'extractive' economic practices may have drained natural resources and produce (i.e. fish, oil, wine) from Palestine and funneled them out via the Phoenician coast. If such practices were common in the 1st century, then it is plausible to suggest that this narrative emerges out of socio-economic tension, especially if one considers the evidence for violence between Jews and 'Tyrians'. Such a context clearly shows that Tyre would have been seen or interpreted as being 'beyond the boundaries' of Galilee.

Jesus goes into the region (τὰ ὄρια) of Tyre. This term denotes geographical movement and the passing over of boundaries into 'frontier', which only serves to heighten the notion that Jesus has passed into a different space. Upon his arrival, Jesus enters a house and, quite curiously, attempts to stay out of sight. The reasons for this 'secrecy' are not clear. I would propose that the aforementioned ethnic tensions between Jews and those living in the coastal lands to the north could be the source. It may not have been safe for Jesus and his followers to openly work or teach in this region. However, given that such an explanation may not be completely plausible, I shall adopt a literary references in prophetic texts such as Amos 6:4-7 which cite the surplus/decadence of the north.

Hanson and Oakman, 100-105 especially. The term 'extractive' is used by them to simply articulate the practices whereby the 'elites' removed the surplus from the land and its inhabitants in order to maintain 'their valued leisure lives.'

As Marcus suggests, 462.


This term is used four times in Mark (5:17; 7:24, 31; 10:01), each time denoting passage either to or from Gentile space. Compare this with the use of the term χώρα in Mark 6:55 where, upon Jesus' arrival in the 'foreign' space of Gennesaret, the crowds spread throughout the 'region' or district (BAGD, 897). Interestingly, this term can refer to the open or 'undefined' area around a city.

We see hints of Gentile hesitancy or resistance in/around the Decapolis in Mark 5:14-17 in response to Jesus' healing of the demoniac.
explanation which holds that Jesus’ ‘hiddenness’ is described so as to illustrate the significance of the woman’s actions in the following verses.

The woman is not named,\textsuperscript{140} but is described as being Ελληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει: Greek, Syro-Phoenician by race or descent. She is defined by her ethnicity both in this description and in the dialogue that follows,\textsuperscript{141} a factor that fits well with the notion that Markan narrative emphasizes the Jewish character of Jesus’ homeland and the non-Jewish/Gentile character of foreign lands.\textsuperscript{142} Her reason for approaching Jesus is because her daughter is currently the victim of a demon; this marks the second time (cf. 5:1-20) in the Markan narrative that Jesus passes into Gentile space to be met by those who are demon possessed.

Such a feature is not surprising given that ‘no fact about Jesus...is so widely and repeatedly attested in the New Testament gospels as the fact that he was a healer of people in mental and physical distress.’\textsuperscript{143} Given the widespread theme of miracles and healing in Mark,\textsuperscript{144} it is no surprise that such accounts happen to be set in houses.\textsuperscript{145} However, Jesus’ encounters with illnesses with demonic associations do require some investigation. That there would be an association between demonic powers and illness in Mark is not surprising, as

\textsuperscript{140} Kelly Iverson, \textit{Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: ‘Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs’} (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 47: notes this fact as a key distinguishing characteristic in the ‘obvious’ comparison between Jairus (in chp. 5) and the woman.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{142} Malbon, \textit{Mark}, 40-44.
\textsuperscript{143} Stevan L. Davies, \textit{Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trace, and the Origins of Christianity} (New York: Continuum, 1995), 66.
\textsuperscript{145} 1:29ff, 2:2ff, 5:38ff, and 7:24ff respectively.
some commentators have emphasized that Jesus’ mission in Mark is centred on cleansing the world of demons. Of the instances of Jesus dealing with illness in houses, 1:29ff and 7:24ff have clear allusions to demonic influence and, hence, to the house being ‘occupied’.

In the account in 1:29ff of Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, there are features of exorcism, but we will discuss this episode in the next chapter. Our present focus on the Syro-Phoenician’s daughter is classified (vs. 25) as being strictly a possession by an evil or ‘unclean spirit’ (πνεῦμα ἁκάθαρτον). Interestingly, in Babylonian and Jewish texts demons are seen as occupying the sick, so that “the sick man is the ‘house’ of the evil spirit.” This provides insight into the Markan narrative, especially the assertion attributed to Jesus in 3:27, which shows the author’s belief that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms were a manifestation of God’s rule being re-established among the sick and oppressed in 1st-century Galilee. Thus, by healing and exorcizing, Jesus was liberating spaces and ‘houses’ that were occupied and dominated by evil forces.

Jonathan Smith has hypothesized that ‘demons serve as classificatory markers which signal what is strong and weak, controlled and exaggerated in a

146 Ernst Käsemann, Jesus means freedom (tr. Frank Clarke; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 58. See also Craig A. Evans, “Jesus’ Exorcisms and Proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the Light of the Testaments”, in The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity (ed. by Ian H. Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006): 210-236. Argues that Jesus would have been amongst other ‘exorcists’ (see Mark 9:38), and that the concept of angelic/demonic warfare was prevalent in late antiquity.

147 Interestingly, Mark’s account of Jesus in a house in chp. 3 centres on accusations of Jesus himself being possessed by demons.


149 Collins, Mark, 233, points to the pre-existing theme of ‘binding’ and God’s rule in Job 40:26, 29 and I Enoch 10:8.
given society at a given moment.\footnote{Jonathan Z. Smith, “Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity,” ANRW 16.1: 425-439.} The use of such a perspective centres on trying to understand the ‘relations and boundaries of a society.’\footnote{Moxnes, 129.} This is applicable to this study because possession in Mark (5:2ff; 7:24ff; 9:14ff) does appear to link with general features in antiquity where demons are seen as living and operating in wild, uninhabited places such as outside the city.\footnote{Smith, 427.} Generally, this meant that those ‘possessed’ or afflicted were separated from civic society.\footnote{Eric Sorensen, Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity (Chicago: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 127.} The most poignant example of this in Mark comes in the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician girl (vs.30). This analysis combines with the previously discussed context to show Jesus as being on the geographic fringes of Jewish territory where he liberates an ‘oppressed’ individual who would normally live outside the realm of divine action.\footnote{Jesus’ initial ethnically defined statement to the woman in 7:27 places her on the ‘outside’.}

The significance of this depiction is made clear when one evaluates the dialogue between Jesus and the Gentile mother. Jesus responds to the mother’s ‘begging’ (ιπρωτα) with a cryptic statement that borders on a racial slur.\footnote{Iverson, 46, 51, points out that the notion of πρωτον χορτασθαι in vs. 27 must be read through the context of Mark 3:7-12 and 5:1-20 where Gentiles did have some contact with Jesus. Considering these earlier references would mean that Jesus’ statement was not exclusionary but preferential. Jesus’ reply assumes that his ministry was primarily among the Jews.} While the meaning of Jesus’ saying is debated by scholars, I would tend to side with an interpretation similar to Susan Miller’s in which Jesus’ words are seen as parabolic and, therefore, rooted in a context in which the symbols and references
would have been intelligible to his audience. Miller’s analysis notes Jesus’ contrast of the Gentile girl to children (τὰ τέκνα), a description which portrays the Jewish people as true/pure ‘descendents’.\(^{156}\) Regardless of whether one adopts this entire analysis, it is the strongest because of its basis in the key theme of the passage, which plays on ethnic identity. Jesus’ calling the woman and her daughter ‘dogs’ (τοῖς κυνάριοις), a statement that would have most certainly been derogatory, reinforces the ethnic focus of the pericope.\(^{157}\)

The woman’s reply, which appears to help her pass a type of test,\(^{158}\) does two things. First, it appears to change Jesus’ demeanor and response in the narrative. Secondly, and on a secondary level, it communicates a level of faith that associates her with other ‘boundary-crossers’ in Mark’s gospel because Jesus performs a miraculous action in response to her persistence. This ‘faith’ is alluded to in the fact that *the woman’s words* are what cause the exorcism to take place.\(^{159}\) Jesus is still seen as the source of the miracle in the narrative, but it must be noted that this is the only reference in Mark\(^{160}\) where Jesus performs a miraculous action without being physically present or without uttering a command. Thus, the passage shows the ‘faith’ of the Gentile woman crossing

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\(^{156}\) Susan Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 96-98.

\(^{157}\) Iverson, 48, claims that most scholars agree that the term was offensive (cf. *TDNT* III 1101-1102); Marcus, 464, argues that the woman may be presented as being unclean based on the image of dogs, whose activity (Ex. 22.31; 1 Kings 4.11) associated them with scavenger behaviour that was seen as impure (*b. B. Qam.* 83a); F. Dufton, ‘The Syro-Phoenician Woman and her Dogs’, *ExpTim* 100 (1989), 417, notes that Jesus refers to scavenger dogs (which were unclean, as Marcus outlines) while the woman is talking about domesticated, household dogs. This seems like a bit of a stretch to me, as I’m not sure the audience would have been dissecting the narrative to this degree.

\(^{158}\) Marcus, 468.

\(^{159}\) There appears to be a temporal association between the woman’s statement to Jesus and the perfect ἔξεληλυθεν.

\(^{160}\) There are similarities in Matthew’s depiction of Jesus and a centurion (8:5).
two boundaries. The first is that of the physical house, implied in the ethnic
restrictions that Jesus appears to reinforce. However, Jesus is seen as being
unable to escape notice, and by the end of the passage he ‘opens’ the house to
the Gentile woman. The second boundary is that of the physical distance
between Jesus and the woman’s daughter. She may have crossed the liminal
boundary to gain access to Jesus,161 but it is just as crucial that Jesus’
restorative action is seen as ‘leaving’ the house because of the woman’s faith.
This clearly shows Mark 7:24-30 as a clear transition from an emphasis of Jesus
‘opening’ houses to one of his actions ‘inside’ them.

Summary

A study of 1st-century houses reveals that, regardless of form, they were
bounded and guarded against the outside world. These ‘boundaries’ took shape
in both the ‘closed’ archeological forms and restrictive purity regulations. Mark’s
frequent depiction of people ‘gathering’ around Jesus works through the
dynamics of boundaries by exploring ‘who’ is allowed to gather. In Mark 2:1-12,
the paralytic is excluded by his condition and potential impurity until faith gets him
‘in’. Mark 3:20ff sees Jesus’ family on the ‘outside’ of the house gathering in
what can be seen as a re-ordering of kinship, a vital component of ‘house’
boundary. In Mark 7:17, Jesus sits in a house and declares that all food is pure,
opening the sacred space of the table to those who previously would not have
been able to access purity. And in Mark 7:24-30, Jesus goes beyond the
‘boundaries’ of Israel to allow for Gentile redemption. In each of these instances

161 It should be noted that there is no depiction of difficulty in her getting into the house
(unlike what we see in chp. 2 and 3).
it appears that Jesus allows for gathering in or access to the house. If passage through a door or over a threshold represents a bridging of ‘different or opposing categories’, then the presence of crowds and individuals gaining access to Jesus despite the prominent architecture of separation speaks powerfully about the authorial desire to show Jesus as ‘opening’ the ‘house of Israel’. The house in Mark’s narrative becomes a setting where the traditional/liminal boundaries are opened, and where the ‘outsider’ is able to access the sacred.
5 Entering the house

We now turn our discussion to those houses in which the actions of Jesus
will be our focus. In the previous chapter I emphasized the 'opening' of houses
for those on the outside to cross the liminal boundaries. In doing so, Jesus is
seen as creating a sacred space in the house that is accessible. In this chapter,
the emphasis is on Jesus' entrance to the house, and what his 'arrival' entails
and represents. The actions performed by Jesus in these houses have a
'purifying' theme, culminating in Mark's account of Jesus' activity in the Temple.

Mark 1:29-31

And immediately after coming out of the synagogue they went into the
house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.
But Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with fever, and immediately they spoke to him
concerning her. And coming to her, he took her hand and raised her up;
and the fever let her go, and she began serving them.

In the immediately preceding episode, Jesus is seen as performing an
exorcism in the middle of the synagogue on the Sabbath. The significance of
Jesus dealing with an 'unclean spirit' in the sacred space\textsuperscript{162} of the synagogue
cannot be understated. It appears to be the only instance in the gospel where
Jesus has to deal with a spirit 'inside', as the exorcisms in Mark 5 and 9 take
place outdoors and, along with the incident in Mark 7 (as previously discussed),
in what Malbon refers to as 'foreign lands'. In order to grasp the intentions of the
author, we must proceed (along with Jesus and his disciples) to our focus
passage, and into 'the house'.

\textsuperscript{162} Witherington, 88, cites \textit{b. Ber.} 6a and \textit{y.Ber.}5.1.9a as evidence that synagogues
were 'religious' spaces. See also Josephus, \textit{JW} 2.285-91, 7.43-44.
As mentioned in my summary of physical space at the beginning of chapter 4, this house may have been a simple building or part of a village grouping of houses.\textsuperscript{163} Jesus enters the small house and is immediately updated on a woman's condition, or perhaps informed why she is lying down as they enter the room. The remainder of the story follows the Hellenistic pattern of miracle accounts,\textsuperscript{164} with Jesus 'raising' the woman, the fever 'leaving', and the woman apparently restored enough to conduct household work.\textsuperscript{165}

Some commentators have noted that this passage contains a suggestion of a demon or 'unclean spirit'.\textsuperscript{166} Fever was often regarded as being caused by a demon in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{167} Notably, the community at Qumran had a clear and well-articulated belief in the immediacy and power of 'unclean spirits' (i.e. 11QPs 19.1-18), including those that cause fever or chills (4Q560). This association provides more insight when we consider that the Qumran community saw a) unclean spirits as proceeding from Satan to cause pain and disease, and

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\textsuperscript{163} See n.82.
\textsuperscript{164} Miller, 19.
\textsuperscript{165} 'Domestic' activity can be implied by the verb διορκέω.
\textsuperscript{166} Collins, Mark, 174, points to the literary allusion (in 1:31) to fever being an entity that can enter or leave a person; Marcus, 199-200, posits that the wording of the fever leaving parallels the language of the spirit leaving in 1:26. He also argues that Mark's theme of spiritual 'contention' fits into Jewish apocalyptic notions, citing 1QS 3:15-4:26. Some scholars (J.G. Cook, 'In Defense of Ambiguity: Is There a Hidden Demon in Mark 1.29-31?' NTS 43 (1997): 184-208; and Miller, 21) dismiss the notion of a demon being present by arguing that Mark generally distinguishes between exorcisms and healings, or that exorcisms precede healings. While a good observation, such an analysis does not consider the impact of space or boundaries to an interpretation of exorcism. I would contend that it does not matter when exorcisms occur in Mark's gospel, but where.
\textsuperscript{167} Theissen, 86: points out that Lk. 4:38-39 has more distinct features of exorcism; Dale B. Martin, Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocrates to the Christians (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37, places this account in a context (going back to the ancient Greeks) where the majority believed that diseases were caused by a god or other superhuman being; Cook, 198, claims that a demonic explanation for the fever came to be popular along with demonology and magic in late antiquity.
\end{flushright}
b) disease as being the result of sin.\textsuperscript{168} Cook notes that Deut. 28:22 in LXX uses the same word for fever as our Markan passage, with the inference being that God could send fever to the disobedient; this would mean that this passage portrays a woman judged for her sins being healed by Jesus.\textsuperscript{169} Such an interpretation hinges on an interpretation of the verb ἀφίημι that emphasizes the fever's 'releasing' as being caused by Jesus.\textsuperscript{170} This line of reasoning sees the action of Jesus as parallel to the parable of the strong man in Mark 3, where Jesus' establishing of 'the kingdom' (see Mark 1:14-15) is set within the context of 'a house' that must be purified.

Jesus' action is all the more crucial when we consider the cultural nature of 'body definition' whereby, as Jon Berquist points out, the ancient Israelites cleaned, altered, and guarded their bodies in an attempt to define themselves.\textsuperscript{171} This understanding of body as a lens for culture allows us to see how significant the narrative depiction is. In a culture of purity and architecture of separation, a woman in the house is afflicted/invaded with an unwanted 'contagion'. Jesus' crossing of boundaries and purifying of the house are significant when the woman and her 'house' are seen as the 'house of Israel'.

\textsuperscript{169} Cook, 192-194.
\textsuperscript{170} See Miller, 21-22, for this type of theological perspective.
\textsuperscript{171} Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 6, defines his thesis by arguing that cultures locate meaning in bodies, and end up defining themselves by defining bodies (i.e. which bodies are best, what body 'practices' are acceptable).
Adopting this interpretation means that Jesus’ entering of the house can be seen as the crossing of a liminal line in order to bring sacredness to what was previously an ‘impure’ and separated space. While a theological explanation that focuses only on Jesus’ driving out of the fever/demon may suffice, it is also important to consider that δόξημι and its interpretation as ‘to forgive’ would have social ramifications here as it did in Mark 2:1-12. This is especially true in a purity society such as 1st-century Palestine where the woman’s (suspected) moral defilement would have brought shame to her entire household. Jesus’ crossing over the limen and purifying of the house (by purifying the woman’s body) would, with such an understanding, imply a restoration for all those ‘dishonored’ by affliction.172 Regardless of whether one interprets Jesus’ action as having ‘theological’ or social implications, his crossing of a liminal boundary into the house (and his ‘cleansing’ of it) is significant.

Mark 2:15-17

And he (Jesus) went out again alongside the lake. And all the crowd came around him and he taught them. Passing along he saw Levi the one of Alphaeus seated at the toll booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And after getting up he followed him. And it happened that Jesus reclined in the house of Levi,173 and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and his disciples. For many were also following him. And scribes of the Pharisees, having seen that Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Having heard them Jesus said ‘The strong do not have need of a doctor but the sick do have need. I have come not to call the righteous but rather sinners.


173 As mentioned earlier, my primary focus is not on the contention of Malbon, ‘Context’, 282 that the house was Jesus’. While Painter, ‘House’, 499, acknowledges that the house in 2:15 (ἐν τῇ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) is ambiguous, I side with the notion that the house is Levi’s (see Marcus, 225; and especially May, ‘Mark 2:15’, 149).
This passage immediately follows Jesus' healing of the paralytic, where he is seen as ‘opening’ the house to those in his society whose access to sacred space was restricted. Jesus is depicted as continuing his ministry around the lake, and his invitation to Levi is part of Mark’s depiction of him forming a community of followers (started in 1:16-18, and completed in 3:14-19 just before Jesus’ redefining of familial lines as already discussed). In order to grasp the significance of Jesus’ entering of ‘the house’ in this passage, we must consider notions of purity as they relate to Levi’s status as a ‘tax collector’, Jesus’ dining in Levi’s house, and the scribal/Pharisaic protest.

Citizens of Judea and Galilee were subjected to various forms of taxation in the early 1st century. These included a head or ‘poll’ tax paid to Roman collectors, tax paid to the religious elite in Jerusalem (out of devotion to the Law, Deut.14:22), and regional charges paid to the Herodian coffers centred in Sepphoris and Tiberius. Estimates of the total percentage of produce that Palestinian residents would have been compelled to pay range from 12-50%. In addition to these levies was a ‘land tax’ that was applied to the transporting of goods; it would have been collected at booths (τὸ τελώνιον) such as Levi’s.

Therefore, the τελώναι that Jesus was associating with were most likely 'toll' collectors.\(^{176}\)

The historical view of 'toll' or tax collectors is clearly negative.\(^{177}\) New Testament portrayals maintain this perspective of controversy, seen especially in Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus in Luke 19 where he receives the chief tax collector's hospitality, inspiring a negative response from onlookers.\(^{178}\) The account in Mark 2 clearly maintains this perspective, especially when the term τελώναι is associated or paired with ἁμαρτωλοί (sinners), which implies a notion of moral impurity. As one scholar puts it, Jesus' eating guests were 'real criminals', not just unwashed ones.\(^{179}\)

This fact forces us to grapple with the implications of 'eating' in the text. It is no mystery that dining in the ancient world was a projection of social regulation either by inclusion or exclusion.\(^{180}\) The case of the Pharisaic protest to Jesus' eating partners in this passage was based on their own gathering in the home, seeing faithful observance to the law as happening in field, kitchen, bed,

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\(^{176}\) John R. Donahue. 'Tax Collector'. ABD 6:337-338.

\(^{177}\) Collins, *Mark*, 194; Donahue, 338; Marcus, 225; Michel *TDNT* 8:99. They cite (amongst others) rabbinic sources (*m.Ned*. 3.4; *t.B.Mes* 8.26; *m.Tohar* 7.6, which compare collectors with the moral corrupt and defiled) and Lucian (*Pseudologista* 30-31, who compares tax collecting with robbery).

\(^{178}\) Mikeal C. Parsons, "Short in Stature: Luke's Physical Description of Zacchaeus," *NTS* 47 (2001): 50-57, using an approach that considers physiognomy in the ancient world, he argues that Luke's audience would have heard a 'double entendre' in the story of the tax collector. Zacchaeus was born a sinner (evidenced by his size), and he lived as a sinner (evidenced in his implied cheating and exploitation).

\(^{179}\) Maccoby, 149

street.\textsuperscript{181} For them the meal in the house was a reflection of temple purity and, therefore, it required boundaries in support of that purity. And they were not alone. A study of the Qumran community reveals that meals played an important role in group formation and identity (see Community Rule 1QS 6.2-6 [cf.6.16-17.24-25] and Messianic Rule 1QSα 2.17-22).\textsuperscript{182} The Messianic Rule text appears to give evidence of a 'belonging by eating' practice, the adverse effect being that one could not participate in the community or its sacred rituals without adhering to meal requirements and stipulations.

These stipulations were in place because, for sectarian groups such as Qumran, all 'outsiders' (and especially Gentiles) were considered to be ritually defiling as a result of their morally sinful behaviour.\textsuperscript{183} By comparison, in mainstream Jewish society contact between 'the righteous' and sinners would not necessarily violate norms of ritual purity.\textsuperscript{184} However, Gentiles were associated with moral corruption (due to practices such as 'idolatry'), and therefore contact was discouraged or prohibited.\textsuperscript{185} In this context, Jesus

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Neusner, Impurity, 67. Neusner in History of Mishnaic Law of Purities 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 99, makes the point that the rabbis shifted the focal point of purity discussion from the temple to the table; Neusner, Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 174, 228. The Pharisees compared their table at home to that of the Temple.
\item Klawans, Impurity 82.
\item Ibid, 137; also Klawans, Notions, 290, because Gentiles were not susceptible to ritual impurity.
\item Klawans, Notions, 291, 295, cites the stances against intermarriage in Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as the moral purity obsession of the Jubilees; consider Klawans, Impurity, 132, because we can't be certain that the Pharisees believed in the doctrine of
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
appears to have taken a side in an ongoing debate among Jews about how ritual and moral impurity were supposed to relate to each other. Note that Jesus calls his scribal/Pharisaic critics 'righteous' in the 'physician' dialogue at the end of the episode. Jesus' use of the term κακῶς (with its implication of morality) in the following comparison hints at the fact that he may not have been disagreeing with their classification of his meal partners but with their treatment of them (i.e. exclusion from table fellowship).

Such religious 'compromises' made by Jesus are best seen against the backdrop of purity 'fever' that marked Palestine in the 1st century. As mentioned in the first section, the construction of Galilean homes and their thresholds hinted at the occupants' desire to control the flow of people and materials through their space. When coupled with the proliferation of ritual baths (miqveh, pl. miqva'ot) that emerged among both Jews and Samaritans in post-2nd century BCE, it is obvious that Jesus' discussions of purity take place within a charged context.

This is especially true when we consider that, while the specific use of miqva'ot is impossible to pinpoint, the proliferation of stone vessels for containing food

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moral defilement, but the continuity from Hebrew Bible, Second Temple literature, and tannaitic sources hints at the fact that Pharisees very well would have.

186 Klawans, Impurity, 145.
187 Craig Evans, 'Jesus and the ritually impure,' in Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 353-376: sees this saying as authentic based on later polemic/conflict with early rabbinic tradition.
188 BAGD, 399. This form implies moral intention: 'the bad', 'the wicked'.
189 Jonathan D. Lawrence, Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 158, 183. Most miqva'ot range from the Herodian Period (mid 1st BCE) to temple destruction, and there was a large degree of variation found in practices and belief during the period; Y. Magen, 'The Ritual Baths (Miqva'ot) at Qedumim and the Observance of Ritual Purity Among the Samaritans,' in Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents (eds. F. Manns and E. Alliata; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 181-192. See also Sawicki, 23-26; Wenell, 68-79.
shows that many Jews in smaller towns and rural settlements were committed to non-priestly purity before prayer/reading/meal-making.\(^{190}\)

In his work on the parables of Jesus, Bernard Scott argues for an interpretative approach that accounts for Judaism's focus on the Torah, acknowledging that its religious leaders carried the 'burden of its preservation.'\(^{191}\) Jesus' crossing of purity lines (i.e. eating with the morally suspect) would have been perceived as 'a cavalier attitude toward the Law' and thus, would have 'hasten(ed) the process of social disintegration.'\(^{192}\) Such a perspective meshes with the presentation of Pharisees in Mark's gospel and their assertion of purity outside Jerusalem (i.e. 2:16; 7:1). Mark's narrative suggests that their presence and confrontation with Jesus throughout the locales of Palestine (such as the house of Levi) was meant to control sacredness that was felt and idealized beyond the Temple.\(^{193}\)

At the end of the episode, Jesus declares that he came to 'call' (καλέω) and 'heal'/purify sinners. Both of these actions must be viewed in direct 'contradiction' to the sectarian separations and boundary-drawing that marked 1st-century Palestine. By entering the house of Levi (a known sinner with morally defiling qualities) and eating, Jesus is presented as crossing a liminal boundary

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\(^{190}\) Regev, 184.

\(^{191}\) *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 233. He points to the hints of such a perspective in the rabbinic tradition, as seen in Rabbi Eleazar's parable to Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, where the Law is depicted as both blessing and burden, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (selected by C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe; London: MacMillan and Co., 1938), 672.

\(^{192}\) Marcus, 230.

\(^{193}\) Wenell, 82-83.
and bringing sacredness to the 'impure' table of marginalized tax collectors and sinners.

Mark 5:38-43

While he was still speaking some came from the house of the synagogue ruler saying that 'Your daughter has died; why still trouble the teacher?' But Jesus, paying no regard to the message just spoken said to the synagogue ruler, 'Do not fear, only believe.' And he did not allow anyone to accompany him except Peter and James and John.

Having gone to the house of the synagogue ruler, he observed a commotion and much mourning and lamenting, and having gone inside he said to them, 'Why are you wailing and mourning? The child is not dead but asleep.' And they began deriding him.

But having thrown them all out, he took the father and mother with him, and went in to where the child was. And taking the hand of the child he said to her, 'Talitha koum' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up.'

And immediately the little girl got up and walked around, for she was twelve. And immediately they were beside themselves with great amazement. And he admonished them greatly that no one should know these things, and to give her (food) to eat.

The above account of Jairus' (a synagogue ruler, 5:22) daughter is actually the second of two sections in the narrative divided by the description of a woman who suffers from a 'flow of blood' (ἐν ὄσει αἵματος). Jesus is on his way to Jairus' house (surrounded by crowd) when he is touched by the woman.

Marcus notes the similarity between the description of her condition and that of those afflicted by 'unclean spirits' in Mark 1:23 and 5:2.194 Regardless of the source of her condition, she would have been ritually unclean based on the stipulation in Lev. 12:7 and 15:19-33. Whether her perpetual and long-standing condition resulted in the stigma of moral defilement is debatable. However, she is depicted 'on the outside' and having to fight through a crowd that was pressing around Jesus (reminiscent of Mark 2:1-12). And parallel to that narrative, Jesus recognizes the woman who has, by faith, crossed boundaries in order to get to

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194 Marcus, 357.
him. He identifies her as ‘daughter’ (Θυγατέρα), a term that indicates that she may have been restored to society without shame.\textsuperscript{195}

Immediately following the woman’s restoration, our narrative begins with Jairus receiving word that his daughter has died. The significance of the synagogue ruler’s house being ‘invaded’ by illness must be noted, but unlike the presentation of Peter’s house in Mark 1, the illness/affliction has run its course. While Jairus’ ‘house’ appears to have been devastated by physical illness, it is also depicted as containing another ‘illness’: a lack of faith. Jesus overhears those ‘from Jairus’ house’ and their encouragement to leave him alone, but responds with two imperative commands (Μη φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευε) to Jairus. The second of these is an admonition to ‘believe’ which, based on his actions in 5:22 (falling at Jesus’ feet), implies that Jairus already had faith and needed to persist.\textsuperscript{196} This is significant, as Jesus appears to be saying, ‘You’ve crossed one boundary by believing. Now keep on believing!’ The effect is one of foreshadowing. Following this, we see the first of two ‘restrictions’ imposed by Jesus, as he does not allow any of the crowd or, more importantly, those ‘from the house’ to accompany them back.

Jesus’ encouragement to Jairus is juxtaposed with the scene that meets them at the house. The implication of the terminology is that there was chaos and confusion in the house, accompanied by loud noise. Jesus announces that

\textsuperscript{195} M.A. Tolbert, ‘Mark’, in The Women’s Bible Commentary (ed. by C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 263-74; also Neufeld, 64, his term ‘body of dishonor’ could be applied here.

\textsuperscript{196} Marcus, 362.
the girl is 'only sleeping', a reference to his ability to 'wake her up', and is immediately 'derided' by the surrounding crowd. Whether they are extended family or professional mourners is not important. What is notable is Jesus' 'casting' them (ἐκβαλλω) out of the house. The association between the use of this term in this passage and the exorcisms in Markan exorcisms must be noted. Spatially, Jesus is seen as crossing a liminal boundary into 'the house', and then 'purifying' the house. This 'driving out' of the crowd qualifies as the second 'restriction', and appears to be directly connected to the notion of 'faith'. And as a boundary-crossing agent, faith facilitates Jesus' movement further into the house to where the girl is lying.

The narrative flow of the passage does not hint at the tremendous stigma the touching of corpses incurred in Levitical law (i.e. Num. 19:16). The human corpse was the greatest source of impurity in Judaism, a fact that is supported by the incidences of miqva’ot used for 'gradual purification' around tombs. However, there does not appear to be a concern on Jesus' or Mark's part to deal with this issue. Instead, the focus appears to remain squarely on the notion of faith.

The evaluation of houses in Mark as spaces of illness that Jesus crosses into (followed by consequent 'purification' via healing or 'exorcism') also provides insight when one looks at spatial relationships in Mark. Jesus' actions (and

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197 Ibid., 362; Painter, Gospel, 94: she should be understood as being physically dead.
198 Marcus, 371, notes that there are other instances of 'restricted' access in Mark 7:33; 8:23; Acts 9:40. Each is related to a healing.
199 Maccoby, 1.
200 Regev, 185, 'many Jews...were committed to life in a constant state of purity not connected with priestly dues and the Temple cult.'
‘success’) in Galilee can be compared to Mark’s presentation of his activities in Jerusalem, which are devoid of healings and exorcisms.\textsuperscript{201} In Mark, the only places where healings were either restricted or absent are places where there was an apparent lack of faith.\textsuperscript{202} The account of the Syro-Phoenician woman\textsuperscript{203} shows how, on the outside of the ‘house’ of Israel, Jesus is ‘believed in’, resulting in a successful healing. By contrast, the response and rejection of Jesus in Jerusalem depicts lack of faith as the primary illness. This is also depicted in Markan use of the verb ἔκβάλλω\textsuperscript{204} in 5:38ff, where Jesus’ ‘in-house’ healing of Jarius’ daughter is not possible until Jesus removes the deriding (unbelieving) mourners.

A consideration of spatial relationships cannot ignore this comparison between Galilee and Jerusalem. It reaches a climax when Jesus enters the Temple and ‘expels’ (ἔκβάλλω) the money changers in Jerusalem, depicted in Mark 11:15-19.\textsuperscript{205} Jesus is depicted as entering the Temple only to begin


\textsuperscript{202} The clearest example comes in 6:4-6, which is set in Jesus’ hometown. The implication is that in his own ‘home’ Jesus was unable to cross the liminal space. Compare with the interesting declaration attributed to Jesus in Mt. 11:2lff against those that did not respond in repentance.

\textsuperscript{203} Especially when viewed with its parallel in Mt 15:21-28.

\textsuperscript{204} Of 18 uses in Mark, 11 relate directly to interaction with evil spirits. Marcus, 372: hypothesizes that the author may be trying to imply with this word that Jesus’ healings were part of war against demonic powers. Compare with Sorensen, 95-96, 127: he observes that very seldom in earlier Greek literature does disease possess the individual in ways depicted in the New Testament (where demons afflict humans out of rebellion against the divinity). He notes Sophocles’ depiction [Soph. Trach. 568-87; 672-722; 995-1000; 1045-1055; 1100-1105] of Heracles being mortally afflicted by divine agency.

\textsuperscript{205} I am well aware that many commentators see this account as part of a greater discourse on the Temple (i.e. Painter, Gospel, 156, refers to it as ‘a tale within a tale’). However, a full analysis is not possible given my focus on spatial elements in the narrative.
‘throwing out’ those buying and selling. Regardless of whether Jesus was calling the Temple and its entire ritual process into question, it appears that the emphasis of the passage is a spatial one. Mark’s emphasis is on ‘the cleansing’ in combination with the saying attributed to him:

"Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers." (NRSV, italics mine)

Mark’s gospel is the only account that includes the phrase ‘for all the nations’, which is virtually identical to the LXX. Such an inclusion appears to match the emphasis (throughout the gospel) that Mark places on Jesus ‘entering’ a ‘house’ or space. This emphasis is clearly present here when one considers that the Temple, which was seen as ‘housing’ the presence of the Hebrew God, was off limits to both the ritually and morally impure (i.e. Gentiles). Thus, this passage depicts Jesus as crossing a liminal boundary to ‘purify’ a ‘house’ that is meant for all those excluded from sacred space.

**Summary**

Markan placement of Jesus in the houses of 1st-century Palestine is not coincidental. As previously argued, an awareness of the archeological record

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206 Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 782, hints at the use of this term pointing to profane or defiling activity.

207 Malbon, 121.

208 Parallels in Mt. 21:13 and Lk. 19:46.

209 Klawans, Notions, 292, 297. While Gentiles may not have been assumed to be morally impure, they were inherently ‘profane’ (of lesser status), and therefore banned from entering the Temple.

210 While not set in a house, of note is the account in 3:1-6 where Jesus heals the man with a withered hand. The entire interaction sets Jesus against the Pharisees and the ‘synagogue’. Jesus appears to be crossing liminal space into the Sabbath for the afflicted and ‘withered’ in Israel. It could also be posited that Mark is symbolically critiquing Judaism through the presentation of illness being present in its sacred space and time (the synagogue and the Sabbath have not aided the afflicted).
shows that Palestinian 'houses' were clearly bounded and guarded. While I contended earlier that Jesus is depicted as 'opening' the 'house of Israel' and allowing others to cross the liminal borders, this chapter has shown that Mark intended to emphasize Jesus as crossing the liminal boundaries. In each passage, Jesus' 'entering' results in a cleansing or purifying that redefines 'sacredness', culminating in his 'entering' and cleansing of the Temple.
6 Conclusion

A study of 'houses' in the gospel of Mark clearly indicates that the author uses them to convey his primary themes. This is not surprising given that an author intends to 'connect' with an audience, using contexts and symbols that will be identified so that meaning can be established. In the case of the 'house' in Mark, my study has emphasized that it is used as a setting for the actions of Jesus. These actions, interpreted with van Gennep's notion of the 'liminal', depict Jesus as 'opening' the house. This was illustrated in the story of the paralytic, Jesus' defining of 'family', his 'loosening' of food restrictions, and his healing of a Gentile girl where he allows access to the sacred for those to whom it was previously unavailable. The 'liminal' was also seen in Jesus 'entering' the house, where he restores Peter's mother-in-law, eats with 'sinners', raises Jarius' daughter, and 'cleanses' the Temple. In these instances, Jesus crosses the 'threshold' in order to 'restore' sacredness to those either afflicted or marginalized by 'impurity' and unbelief. While the 'liminal' provides an intriguing theoretical lens through which to view Mark's gospel, the question remains why early Christian adherents and communities remembered and conceived of Jesus in this way. My concluding comments aim to propose some 'answers' to this question.

To do so I must turn, at last, to Victor Turner's work on the liminal. Basing himself on Gennep's framework, Turner specifically focused on and investigated those who go through 'change of place, state, social position and age':\textsuperscript{211} those

in *liminal* space. He saw a negation of structure and hierarchy in liminal spaces, where those confined to the 'outside' of society met to form what he called 'communitas'. In Turner’s anthropological field studies, individuals and groups passing through liminal time or space were found to develop intense camaraderie. Interestingly, rank and status often disappeared in a form of egalitarianism, a factor that Turner associated with the ambiguity surrounding those ‘in’ liminal space because they were between ‘the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.’ He concluded that the emergence of *communitas* as a form of ‘anti-structure’ in such liminal cases revealed two ‘models’ for human interrelatedness: a) one that is hierarchical, political, legal, and economic and, b) another that has little to no ‘structure’ while allowing for a ‘communion of equal individuals.’ He stated later that liminality is ‘...a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change, in a way that the central tendencies of a social system can never quite succeed in being.’

How does this mesh with my study of houses in Mark?

It is no secret that the house (οἶκος) is the prominent term and symbol for early, post-Easter Christian communities. The use of the term in later contexts shows that Markan use of the house was either formed by emerging notions of

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212 Turner, 96: prefers *communitas* over 'community' because it focuses on the relationship between individuals 'in' the group instead of on the spatial associations (i.e. 'shared living area') made with the word 'community'.

213 Ibid., 95.

214 Ibid., 96.


identity or used to construct those emerging notions of identity. In other words, there may be a connection between the symbolic use of houses in Mark and later Christian communities. This connection appears significant to our discussion of liminality, especially when the gospel depicts Jesus and his followers as being ‘outside’ mainstream society and defining themselves against that society.

Without question, the conflict portrayed in the Markan text between Jesus and the ruling Jewish authorities seems to suggest a later community ‘in tension’ with its Jewish heritage.217 It has been posited that the ‘suffering’ motif that emerges in the middle of the Gospel (8:34ff) hints at a community experiencing persecution or suffering.218 It is plausible that the themes emerge in connection with the Jewish revolts in the first and second centuries, especially if the revolutionaries took exception to a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians.219 Accounts such as the one in Mark 3 where Jesus has to deal with family criticism and dissuasion are seen as certainly resonating with a later ‘Markan’ community dealing with similar issues.220

Such a community could definitely have interpreted Mark’s description of Jesus’ teaching and his secrecy injunctions as reinforcement of the community’s separation from the world (‘anti-structure’).221 In addition, it has been argued that Mark’s focus on Andrew and Peter’s house early in his narrative reflects a

217 Telford, 17.
219 Marcus, 24.
220 Ibid., 285.
221 Watson, 62. Riches also makes a case for the community as a ‘sect’ marked by exclusivity and tight boundaries (91-96). This does not appear to mesh with his earlier assertion that Jesus created liminal space for those excluded by or trapped in a sect.
historical reality in which people thought Jesus' earliest gatherings took place in private buildings for group cohesion and identity ('communitas'). Malbon sees the shift from the crowds to the disciples (as the chief recipients of teaching) in houses as a sign that Jesus and his following had established their own place of congregating. While the high incidence of early Christian communities being founded in houses is not unusual, it is important to understand that Mark's presentation of the house as an 'alternative' space of divine action is likely a large indicator of shifting symbolism. This shift appears to show emerging Christian groups gathering in the model of Turner's communitas as they define themselves against the surrounding structure.

This idea is justified further if we accept that the houses in Mark may symbolize a sacred space conceived in early response to the Temple's destruction at the hands of the Romans in 70 CE. In fact, research has shown that Matthew also reformulated notions of sacred and profane in the context of early Jewish-Christian communities. Thus, the houses of Mark may have provided early Christian adherents with the proof texts and examples necessary

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223 Malbon, Mark, 118.
224 Ibid., 117-126. She outlines the house in 'opposition' to synagogue and temple.
225 The symbolism in Acts 10 is powerful in the interaction between Jewish peasant (Peter) and centurion elite (Cornelius). The unexpected manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the house of Gentile converts is part of why this narrative is a proof text for a growing emphasis on salvation for the Gentiles.
227 Riches, 229.
to conceive of 'liminal passage' in their homes during the formative years of early
Christian centuries. In those houses, Mark's conception of Jesus 'opening' and
'entering' appears to mimic Turner's notion of structure being negated in
*communitas*. The depiction of the sick, pure, impure, possessed, male, female,
strong, righteous, and wicked gaining access to divine action would have
resonated with early Christian audiences living outside the boundaries of
mainstream society. By 'superseding' structure, Jesus is depicted as 'opening'
and crossing the liminal boundaries around sacred space. And in doing so, the
'house' becomes the place for 'a communion of equal individuals.'
Bibliography


