MARK 7 : 1-23 — "TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS"

by YOCHANAN RONEN *

The philological approach of the "Jerusalem School" of synoptic inter-
pretation, as represented by Robert Lindsey,[1] a Baptist scholar, and
David Flusser,[2] Professor of Jewish literature of the Second Temple
period, is illustrated in this article by an analysis of Mark 7 : 1-23.

This school of research holds to the theory of Lukan priority. Its Lk-Mk-Mt
scheme has been suggested before;[3] in fact, it is one of the remaining
three basic options after the statistical work of De Solages.[4]
Mark 7 : 1-23 was chosen because of the great number of "innovations"
it exhibits, that is, the number of words appearing in this chapter which
cannot be found anywhere in Luke. The rationale of choosing this chapter
is as follows: The chapter of Mark containing the most innovations vis-à-vis
Luke will be the best place to watch Mark at work; since he is operating

* Yochanan Ronen is a Lutheran theologian residing in Jerusalem. He is presently
preparing his doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University under the direction
of Professor David Flusser.
1. Lindsey, R. L. The English introduction and preface of *A Hebrew Translation
of the Gospel of Mark,* 1973 — which supersedes the 1969 edition, said the article
by Lindsey, "A Modified Two-Document Theory of the Synoptic Dependence and
Interdependence", *Novum Testamentum,* Vol. 6, 4 (1963), pp. 239-263.
2. Flusser, David *Jesus.* Herder and Herder: New York, 1969.
3. Lockton, W. *Church Quarterly ,Review,* 1922. (See Lindsey, Mark, pp. 22, 32.)
4. See reference to De Solages in Morgenthaler, *Statistische Synopse* (Zurich:
Gotthelf, 1971), pp. 18-24, esp. p. 21.

there with his maximum degree of freedom as over and against his chief source, Luke, it should be possible just there to most easily observe Mark's own personal method or style of arranging his materials.

The gospel of Mark contains 1,345 different words,[5] 383[6] of which are not found in Luke. No comprehensive study has yet been made of all these words.[7] Indeed, the selection of Mark 7 for this paper was based only on a sub-category within these 383, in fact a very limited sub-category : those 45 *non-LK* words which occur once in Mark, once in Matthew, and *nowhere else* in the entire New Testament. Seven of these words occur in Chapter 7 of Mark, i.e., more of these non-Lk words appear in this chapter of Mark, than in any other chapter.

If we consider the 61 additional non-Lk words which occur once in Mark, once in Matthew and *also elsewhere* in the New Testament, we can add six more words, so that even in this sub-category of 106 (45 + 61) words (out of the total of 383 non-Lk words in Mark) we already have 13 concentrated in Mark Chapter 7 ! This should be indication enough that this chapter will prove interesting to Lukan priorists as a chapter where one can expect to observe Mark at work.[8]

Application of the hypothesis of Lukan priority requires that whenever Mark differs from Luke the question must be asked : "Why did Mark make these changes?" Before concocting yet further hypotheses about possible oral traditions, it seems wise to attempt a thorough search for literary precedents that could have served as inspiration for Mark's changes. Accordingly, a search should be made throughout the other parts

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5. Morgenthaler, R. M. *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes,* (Zurich: Gotthelf, 1958), p. 171.
6. Morgenthaler, *ibid.,* from his chart on pp. 170-171 (this chart successfully categorizes 511 possibilities (!) of combinations of word-sharing between different sections of the New Testament), and from pp. 67-157 where he lists the entire 5,439 words, total vocabulary of the Greek New Testament and gives the breakdown of occurrences by listing how many times each word occurs in each book.
7. Of the 383 non-Lk words in Mark there are 88 words occurring in Mark and nowhere else in the New Testament (Morgenthaler, *Statistik,* p. 170) of which 46 can be found in the Septuagint; so that leaves 42 words occurring in Mark and nowhere else in the whole Bible. Of these 42, R. Mackowski (*What Mark Said,* Ph.D. dissertation at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1971) chose 25 for intensive study. 18 proved to be Koine colloquialisms and 7 are known nowhere else in the world.
8. This is especially true, since we see Matthew's obvious respect for these Mark "innovations", because he has all but one of them in his parallel chapter 25!, i.e., he has copied almost all, even though they are only one-time Mk words.

of the New Testament, the Septuagint, and other contemporary literature. Only when such a thorough search has been completed does it make sense to conjecture further about non-literary sources. In the case of Mark, this search for literary precedents proves highly revealing of the character of Mark at work.

The emerging picture being developed by Lindsey and Flusser gives as a characterization of Mark as a dramatizer. As a veritable word genius, Mark employs his intensely active associative mind in the recalling of words, phrases and ideas that enable him, as a beautiful example of a Jewish "targumist" of those days, to dramatize and enliven a narrative by retelling it and expanding it in a novel way.[9] Continued word for word copying seems nearly forbidden to such a writer, and frequently when Mark is not "innovating", he is most avidly *exchanging* words, whether rearranging and reversing word orders on substituting synonyms.[10]

The pericope, Mark 7 : 1-23 (about "Concern over Defilement" or "Concern over the Traditions of the Elders"), appears in a series of nine pericopes "introduced" by Mark between the Triple Tradition pericope ("Feeding the Five Thousand") which precedes the nine, and the Triple Tradition pericope ("Peter's Confession") which follows the nine. Matthew follows along after Mark's insertion of this non-Lk series, except that he drops the ninth, so that Mark is left alone in giving the story of the blind man at Bethsaida.

In this series of nine, Mark 7 : 1-23 on the "Traditions of the Elders", appears third (after "Walking on the Water " and "Healings at Gennesaret"), and it is the only pericope in this series to have a Lk parallel, Luke 11 : 37-41, although out of another context. In Luke, *Jesus* gets a breakfast invitation by a Pharisee after some early morning *teaching,* whereas in Mark, after *healings,* there is no invitation but just some Pharisees gathering around to comment to Jesus on how the *disciples* are eating.

The other pericopes, in this Mk series of nine, have no Lk parallel, although the seventh and eighth, which are also about Pharisees ("Seeking

9. McNamara, M. *Targum and Testament,* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1972) pp. 69-78 on "Characteristics of Targumic Renderings"; Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash,* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1963) pp. 201-202, on character of Midrash; Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud,* (New York: Bantam, 1976) p. 223f., on Midrash (Halakhic Exegesis).
10. Lindsey, *Mark,* on "synonymic exchange", p. 26-31, esp. p. 30.

a Sign" and "Being Dangerous Leaven", respectively), do have some parallel thoughts in Luke, Chapter 11, but only in a couple of scattered verses.

Taking Lk 11 as the inspiration for the first part of Mk 7, we note the following :

1. Marks adds information:
    a) Several Pharisees are present, not one.
    b) Scribes are present, too.
    c) They all come from Jerusalem.
2. He drops information:
    a) There is no friendly breakfast invitation of Jesus by a Pharisee.
3. He makes changes:
    a) "Having breakfast" is changed to *"eating"*, a kind of synonym.
    b) It is the *disciples* who are eating with *unwashed hands,* rather than Jesus who astonishes the Pharisee (a hemerobaptist?) by not "dipping" before breakfast.[11]
    c) The astonishment of the Pharisee is dramatized into a direct question: "Why do you eat with hands *defiled*?"
4. Mark inserts two verses of explanation so that (non-Jewish Greek?" readers will be sure to realize that it defiles a Jew to eat with unwashed hands, Mk 7 : 3-4.[12]

Now these actions give a picture of Mark that is consistent and makes some sense: Mark dramatizes by dropping the friendly breakfast invitation of a single Pharisee and gets a whole crowd of threatening Judeans (from Jerusalem) around Jesus. He spares Jesus the brunt of the accusation

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11. See *Encyclopedia Judaica* on "Sects, Minor — Hemerobaptists" by Menachem Mansoor (vol. 14, p. 1087); it gives the following quote from Tosefta Yadayim 2:20:
    "The morning bathers (Tovelei Shaharit) said to the Pharisees: 'We charge you with doing wrong in pronouncing the Name without having taken a ritual bath.' Whereupon the Pharisee said: 'We charge you with wrongdoing in pronouncing the Name with a body *impure within.*' "
    In vol. 2, p. 82 *ibid.,* under "Ablution", Raphael Posner suggests that these "morning bathers" may be perhaps identified with the Hemerobaptists, "but more likely were an extreme group within the general Pharisaic tradition (Ber. 22a; Rashi, *ad loc.*)."
    It was Professor David Flusser in his seminar on the synoptics at the Hebrew Universiity of Jerusalem who first paid attention to this whole question of the Pharisee's reaction to Jesus failing "to dip before breakfast" — when Jesus would be pronouncing the Name in the blessing before eating.
12. See Lindsey, *Mark,* p. 10, on the question of these explanatory passages inserted by Mark.

by turning it against the supposed misbehaviour of the disciples. He not only drops the whole internal Jewish issue of whether one should ritually dip (baptize) his body before breakfast, but helps the Greek reader further with extra explanations.

How much sense does it make to reverse this dependence and imagine that we can here observe Lk at work ? Luke would have to drop the Judean crowd in order to present a friendly breakfast invitation by a Pharisee following a teaching session instead of a healing meeting. He would suppose his readers to be so familiar with Jewish matters as to drop an explanation of defiled hands, and dare to introduce a question of the necessity of ritual bathing before breakfast. He would make Jesus himself suspect of misbehaviour instead of the disciples, but tone down the direct accusing question to an observation of the Pharisee's astonishment. Is this likely? The Jerusalem school holds it more likely that the Lk version represents a stage of the tradition closer to its Jewish sources, and that Mark is doing the re-working.

When Jesus addresses the Pharisees as "fools" (Lk 11 : 40), why does Mark change this to "hypocrites" and then launch out on his own with a quote from Isaiah to which is attached a whole sermonette elaborating on the theme of defilement?

The word "hypocrites" occurs only in the synoptic gospels in the entire New Testament: in *Mark* it occurs only once and that is here in our pericope; *Matthew* uses it in his parallel to our passage, plus 12 more times; Luke uses the word three times in contexts earlier than ours, but never in Luke was Jesus specifically addressing the Pharisees.

However, our Luke parallel, Lk 11, which begins with a Pharisee's breakfast invitation to Jesus, does continue with a whole series of woes on the Pharisees (and then on the lawyers), and the first thing Jesus says when he finally turns to his own disciples is: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is *hypocrisy*" (Lk 12 : 1). Since, therefore, Mark saw the word here, in this only slightly different form, and in this direct continuation of Luke's parallel text, I suspect that just here is where he picked it up.[13] But what turned Mark's mind to Isaiah ? There are three possibilities, all three of which may have been in operation in Mark's *dynamic* mind.

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13. All three synoptists have the word "hypocrisy" once each, but never in parallel contexts.

The first possibility: the word "fools", ἄφρων appears dozens of times in the Septuagint as the translation of some 13 different Hebrew words. Twice it translates ,,,, one of which is found in Is. 59 : 7, where διαλογισμοὶ ἀφρόνων translates מחשבות־און. It is far fetched to suppose that this alone turned Mark to Isaiah — but a lit less far-fetched when we notice that Mk 7 : 21 also has the word διαλογισμοί This is only a hint and not a satisfying one.

The second possibility: What about "hypocrites" as a help? It is only found twice in the Septuagint and in the wrong places — Job 34 : 30, 36 : 13 (and once "hypocrisy" in Macc. 6 : 25). However, Ag, Th, and Sm all use "ὑποκριτής" for "חנפים" in *Isaiah* 33 : 14, and, moreover, for וילבו יעשה־און לעשות חנף, in *Isaiah* 32 : 6, they all use "ὑπόκρισις". So this word could, more likely, have turned Mark's mind to Isaiah, and then especially to Isaiah 29 : 13 which so vividly spells out exactly what hypocrisy is.[14]

The third possibility: the best guess about how Mark arrived precisely at Is. 29 is that he did so via Colossians, Chapters 2 and 3. This unusual insight, that Colossians may have turned Mark precisely to the 29th chapter of Isaiah, came quite by surprise while searching for possible literary precedents for the expression : "traditions of the elders". The only place this expression can be found in the entire New Testament is in our context! Mk 7 has it twice, and Mt 15, the direct parallel, picks it up once.

This expression has not been found *anywhere* else! A long search through Hebrew concordances and dictionaries finally turned up "traditions of the *fathers* as "קבלת־אבות" or as "מסורת־אבות" (see Ben Yehuda under "קבלה" and "מסורת") — and this positive expression can be found once also in the New Testament, Galatians 1 : 14, "traditions of my fathers", and there also used positively. But nowhere is the negative expression "traditions of the elders", which is introduced here by Mark.

The solution came in tracking down the contexts of the word "tradition" through all 13 times it occurs in the New Testament. One soon arrives at an expression in Colossians 2 : 8, where the context makes clear that it has a powerfully negative connotation : "Take heed lest anyone make a prey of you through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the traditions of men, .. and not according to Christ"! But this expression

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14. Surely Jesus did quote Isaiah frequently, and why not also on the subject of "hypocrisy"? That alone could be enough to turn Mark's mind to Isaiah once he saw the word "hypocrisy" in Luke.

is "traditions of *men*". Who dared to identify these men as being the *"elders"*?!

Mark had precedent in Lk 9:22 (parallel to Mk 8:31) for negative use of "elders", because there, in the first Passion Prediction, Jesus foretells that he will be "rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes". Pe haps this precedent helped, if not explains, Mark's outspoken identification of "men" as being the "elders"![15]

The most exciting discovery comes when one *continues* to read in Colossians. Consider that Mark read (in Lk 11) that Jesus was accused in regard to misbehaviour related to the proper preparation for eating. Suppose that he remembers Colossians 2:16-17, *"Don't let anyone judge you in meat or drink or in respect of feast or new moon or sabbaths which are a shadow of the things to come. . .",* and remembers *further,* Col. 2:20-22, "You have died with Christ and are set free from the ruling spirits of the universe. Why, then, do you live as though you belonged to this world? Why do you obey such rules as 'Don't handle this', 'Don't taste that', 'Don't touch the other'? All these things become useless, once they are used. They are only *man-made rules and teachings* (TEV) " Note this: "man-made rules and teachings" in Colossians.

For this expression, "rules and teachings of men", *Paul writes* (Col. 2 : 22), " τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων" and the *Septuagint of ISAIAH 29:13* reads "ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας". Here is our point of contact, our best explanation of how Mark thought of Isaiah![16]

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15. Such an identification by Jesus himself could fit the fact that the elders were furious enough to agree with the high priest to hand him over to the Romans, but note that the reason for their anger in Lk 22:66 is Jesus' identification of himself as the "Son of Man".

16. Dr. Flusser feels that the Septuagint rendering of Isaiah 29:13 emphasizes the word "men" more strongly than does the Massoretic text — in the expression "traditions of men". He suspects that this may be the consequence of a conflict in how one reads the spelling of a word in the previous phrase: Does the word-in-question end in "י" (yod) or in "ו" (waw)? Should the spelling be "ותהי" ("become") With the Masoretes? Or should it be "ותהו" ("confusion") with the Septuagint? The Masoretes wrote: "their worship of me has *'become'* a learned commandment of men". The Septuagint translator wrote: "their worship of me is *'confusion'*, they teach the commandments of men and instructions". To chose the reading "confusion" leaves the remainder dangling (מצות אנשים מלומדה), so Flusser suggests that this may be why the Septuagint translates it as if it too had been written differently (מצות בני אדם ותורות) of rather, if not written differently, the Septuagint gets this different nuance of meaning from the remainder, i.e., a greater emphasis

A final clincher (for this observation that the accusation against Jesus reminded Mark of what *Paul* said about not accepting such accusations) comes in the windup of Jesus' sermonette on defilement. Mark writes that Jesus concluded his words with a *list of evils* (that defile a man) — and this gives us a fourth contact, because continuation of the Colossians passage *also* has a list of evils (Col. 3: 5-8)!

A summary of the above argument is as follows: Mark reads in Luke of a situation where Jesus is accused and then answers, and this reminds him of what Paul says in Colossians 2 and 3, because:

1. there is a similar situation, viz. accusations in matters of rules about eating etc., and how to react to such accusations;
2. the negative use of the expression "traditions of men" in Colossians may explain how Mark thought to introduce a similar negative expression "traditions of the elders", not found in Luke;
3. Paul's use of a Septuagint phrase from Isaiah 29: 13 may explain how Mark thought to introduce a quote from this same Isaiah passage in his text;
4. the list of evils may explain how Mark thought to introduce words of Jesus on defilement where a list of evils is also contained... even three of the same evils are listed.

Is all this chance? The use of similar words in dealing with a similar topic may well prove nothing in terms of literary dependence, but here are FOUR STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS of similarity that are NOT internally, naturally related. Lindsey's theory of frequent Markan dependence on Pauline letters as sources for his innovations vis-à-vis Luke has now taken a considerable leap from theory toward fact for me personally after the above discovery.[17]

Once the general picture of Mark's working style emerges, many smaller details began to fit into place as well. Even though they could not prove anything individually, it becomes impressive to see how they fit the general picture.

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on men as acting on their own as over and against God, a greater antagonism. (Cf. *Mark* by Vincent Taylor, [New York: St. Martin's, 1976], pp. 337-8.)

The Dead Sea Scrolls add "כ", i.e., "כמצות" (become *like* a learned commandment of men), and Flusser suspects that this addition may have been a deliberate correction of the Septuagint version.

17. See Lindsey, *Mark*, pp. 51-53, on Mk dependence on Pauline letters.

Let us consider the verb "to defile", κοινοῦν, as an example. It occurs 14 times in the New Testament: once in Hebrews 9:13, three times in Acts (10, 11, 21) and ten times in our pericope! (it occurs 5 times in Mk 7, and 5 times in Mt 15.)[18]

Now, where did Mark pick up this non-Lk word which he introduces here?

1. He has read Lk 11 about washing/bathing.
2. He has noted the question of proper cleansing of impurities.
3. Now he remembers God *cleansing defiled* things in Peter's vision (Acts 10-11), especially when he reads Lk 11:41 "πάντα καθαρὰ ὑμῖν ἐστιν" and remembers specifically Peter's wording in Acts 11:8-9 "πᾶν κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον οὐ δέ ποτε εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ στόμα μου" and the reply of the voice from heaven "Ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἐκαθάρισεν, σὺ μὴ κοίνου".
4. He introduces from Acts 10-11 the notion of *defilement* [into the Lk discussion of *cleansing* the inside and outside so that *all* will be clean] and builds a whole semonic point on Peter's comment about nothing unclean *entering* his *stomach* by making the point that it is not what *enters* that *defiles*.

SUMMARY of MARK AT WORK

I. Mark *SEES* in Luke 11-12 a situation of *ACCUSATION* and *ANSWER* and notices specifically words that he picks up in some form or another:

— θαρισαῖος
— εἰσελθὼν
— καθαρίζετε
— τοῦ ποτηρίου
— ἐβαπτίσθη
— πονηρίας
— ἔσωθεν/ἔξωθεν
— (ἄφρονες)
— ὑπόκρισις
— πάντα καθαρὰ

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18. There are four instances where these words occur not only in this parallel pericope, but in parallel sentences — which accounts for four of the five times in Mk and likewise for Mt, and that leaves only two occurrences of "defile" which are not so precisely parallel though still in the same parallel pericope.

II. Mark *REMEMBERS*:

    A) He remembers Collossians 2-3:
1) The admotion accepting such accusations.
2) παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων.
3) τὰ ἐντάλματα διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθώπων which then in turn reminds him of ISAIAH 29: ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας.
4) the idea of a list of evils;[19]

    B) He remembers in Acts 11 the discussion of clean and defiled foods which God cleanses, specifically:
1) παν κοινὸν ἐκαθάρισεν... μη κοίνου.
2) εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ στόμα.

III. Mark *INTRODUCES* his own novel organization of materials;

    A) The ACCUSATION is put in a new explanatory framework diverted from Jesus to the disciples with various further innovations vis-à-vis Luke 11:
1. "washing (new in Mk) — instead of "dipping" in Lk.
2. "tradition of men" (Col. 2: 8).
3. "elders" (Lk 9: 22).
4. "defile" (Acts 11: 9).

    B) The ANSWER of Jesus is greatly expanded, primarily via inspiration from Paul (Col. 2-3):
1. Isaiah 29 is quoted and applied (see key phrase in Col. 2).
2. Example of present hypocrisy is given — Moses honoured with lips only.
3. Sermonette on defilement is composed with words and themes resonant of:
(a) Lk 11 — being "fools" _ ("without understanding", Mk
·   7: 18).
    — theme of "cleanliness": "inside" and "outside".
(b) Acts 11 — not being "defiled" by what "enters the stomach", but that "all is cleansed".
(c) Co. 3 — list of evils to be avoided.

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19. Possibly he also remembers such lists of evils as in Rom. 1:29ff or Didache 5:1ff. Note that ten out of Mark's twelve evils are found in the Didache list — which is, however, twice as long; so maybe these similarities are coincidental except for an interesting fact that both lists begin in the plural and later switch to the singular.

One day in the not too distant future there will hopefully be enough of these philological discoveries to consolidate the picture of Mark's method now emerging from the Jerusalem school. The intensively associative and dramatizing mind of Mark may then be recognized as causing what to us has been the "synoptic problem", but is now somewhat less a problem when we recognize the style of Mark at work.[20]

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20. In Kuhn's book on *Scientific Revolutions* (which, he says, take decades to occur), he indicates that a faulty and troublesome theory will not be rejected till a new and viable ALTERNATIVE theory is proposed. But such a new theory, he adds, must be not only more consistent and comprehensive but also more "aesthetic"! The theory of the Jerusalem school makes a claim to fulfill these requirements. Instead of having to conjecture about the reasons for Luke's supposed changes of Mark, the reversal of this direction of dependence now enables us to get a clear, consistent, and comprehensive picture of Mark at work (using Luke).

Mark is finally seen at home in a setting that makes his style comprehensible; he is seen as an intensely Jewish targumist and midrashic preacher with an amazing penchant for dramatizing, turning words around and around, rephrasing statements of others in his own way and pulling in various quotes and word associations from all over. Nearly 80% of the pericopes that he shares with Luke have been EXPANDED into LONGER texts than the Lukan parallels because of all this activity. (In fact, out of the total word count of the entire Markan text of 11,078 words, Mark's parallels with Luke contain 8,242 words, whereas the word count of the parallels in Luke is only 6,779!) (See those indispensable word statistical charts in Robert Morgenthaler's *Statistische Synopse* [Zurich: Gotthelf, 1971], pp. 66-68, and in his *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* [Zurich: Gotthelf, 1958], pp. 67-157.) The Jerusalem school proposes to present a COMPREHENSIVE SYNTHESIS of the work of the modern Markan priorists (by upholding the dependence of our Matthew on Mark) and the work of the older (and modern) Markan conflationists (in their insistence on Markan dependence on Luke).