

# The Pharisees in Mark: Comparing their Social-Historic Role and their Narrative Function

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## Abstract

*The main purpose of this paper is to compare the facts about the Pharisees that we learn from extra-biblical sources against the facts we learn from the narrative in Mk. 1:21-3:35, with the purpose of setting a historical foundation for Mark's account. In the first section we show the available historical accounts and we conclude it to be ambivalent, while in the second section we portray the developing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, which in turn sheds light on historical facts in line with the conclusion that Mark's description of the Pharisees is historically plausible, because of this Mark's Gospel can be used for its contribution to the historical discussion about the Pharisees.*

*The paper is divided into two sections. The first, historical, section deals with the attempt to reconstruct the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees based on historical data, and the second, exegetic section, uses narrative criticism to develop the history and the kerygma.*

Key words: Gospel of Mark, Pharisees, Jesus and the Pharisees, Mark 1:21-3:35

## Introduction

The quest for historical Jesus began long ago in 1774 through the publication of seven excerpts from Reimarus's work, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Vereher Gottes*, develops in three stages. Today, we view the historical Jesus primarily in the context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism (Theissen, Merz 2015, 28-35<sup>1</sup>), which implies comparing his teaching to the teachings of others in different Jewish movements, including the Pharisees; which is the focus of this paper. Most of the books which deal with the historical Jesus conclude that there are similarities between Jesus' teaching and that of the Pharisees (Theissen, Merz 2015, 162) while the New Testament accounts, especially in the Gospels, seem to contradict that. However, there are cases where the Pharisees are actually sympathetic towards Christians, and even part of the Church (e.g., Acts 15:5) or where they pleaded for less severe punishments for them (Acts 5:34-42). But according to the Gospel accounts, Jesus juxtaposes his teaching directly against that of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20-48).

So there's a question of the relationship between the Pharisees and Jesus. Have the Pharisees initially been sympathetic towards Jesus and the first Church, only to distance themselves from him later on? What happened to cause the first written Gospel, that of Mark, to present the Pharisees and their teaching in a negative light? Is there a way to prove the historicity of Mark's account of this clash, and what is it? This paper proposes that the historical sources, regardless of their seeming contradictions to the Gospels, do not really oppose the accounts from Mark's narrative. On the contrary, Mark uses the Pharisees and their historical stance as a parable for his account of Jesus, in which the readers are supposed to recognize themselves as the new "Pharisees." This means that Mark, regardless of the fact that it was not his purpose to primarily focus on Jesus' history, also adds a potentially crucial historical bit of data regarding the Pharisees.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first, historical, section deals with the attempt to reconstruct the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees based on historical data, and the second exegetical section, uses narrative criticism to develop the history and the *kerygma*.

1 Theissen, admittedly, does speak about "five" stages, but he includes historical steps, and not quests themselves, which leaves only three: the liberal one, which is encouraged by Reimarus's work (cca 1774); Schweitzer's paradigm shift in the research with the disappointing result that it's impossible to find the historical Jesus, and the shift in the search through "demythologisation" of the Gospels; and finally the so-called "third quest" (including Theissen himself, Merz 2015, 35) which has us searching for the historic Jesus in Judaism.

### ***The Author of Mark's Gospel***

According to Church tradition, the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, who is mentioned in several places in the New Testament, particularly as Barnabas' and Paul's traveling companion during their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25, 13:5-13). He is also the reason why Paul left for his second missionary journey without Barnabas (Acts 15:37). It seems that Mark had disappointed Paul when he quit on them during the first journey, but he still went on to become an important leader in the early Church (Col. 4:10-11). In his *Church History*, Eusebius gives an account about the writing of Mark's Gospel as given by another early Church author, Papius: "Mark was Peter's translator/interpreter, and he wrote precisely, though not in order, everything that Jesus had done or said. He neither heard nor followed the Lord but started (as he stated himself) to follow Peter later on, and he went on to adjust his messages to the needs (of the moment or the listeners), but not with the intent to prepare an accurate account of the Lord's sayings (*logia*) (according to Brown 2008, 155-156)." Brown notes that most interpreters reject this idea of Papius' as non-historical, but he himself believes that there is historical truth to it. What is questionable for him is John Mark's authorship, but he does leave some room for Peter's authority to be at least partially responsible for it, "... If we wish to grant at least some credence to Papius, we need to consider 'Peter' to be an archetypal character that is connected to the Jerusalem apostolic tradition and with the preaching which brought together Jesus teaching, works, and suffering" (Brown 2008, 158). However, in his claim Papius states two important facts which are accepted by contemporary exegetes as well: the writer of Mark's gospel was not personally present at the time of the events written in the Gospel; and he adapted historical facts to the needs of the community that he wrote for. This means that John Mark is a possible author of the Gospel, but this cannot be stated as a certainty, unless we consider tradition to be historically reliable.

### ***The Gospel of Mark as an Important Source of Information About the Historical Jesus***

It is generally held that Mark's Gospel is the oldest one and that it offers the most accurate account of the historical situation that Jesus was in. Thus, Theissen goes on to claim, The subject matter provided by Mark partly reaches far back and is an important source of reconstructing the life and teaching of Jesus (Theissen, Merz 2015, 54). Mark also brings innovation into Christian literature and theology because he is a "theologian who shapes his narrative by bringing together the subject matter under the all-encompassing Christological guiding thought and creating something new: a Gospel, which can be characterized as a story

of Jesus's suffering with an extensive and lively introduction" (Theissen, Merz 2015, 5). However, neither Jesus nor the disciples had the need to write events down, which makes us think that the second generation of Christians realized that the living witnesses from the first generation were dying, which is resulting in the disappearance of information crucial to the faith. They needed to collect everything available from written and oral tradition, and put it together into a story about Jesus. However, regardless of the biographical foundation of such an endeavor, the Gospel is not a biography, i.e., it's more than just writing down facts from Jesus' life.<sup>2</sup> So, the Gospels have some of the characteristics of a biography, but they are in fact an original literary genre. The purpose of the Gospel was to communicate a message and a lesson so the "Gospel writer only took the information which served his purpose, and the needs of the audience he was writing for influenced both the content and its presentation" (Brown 2008, 106). Brown also adds "that Mark was definitely not the first one to collect subject matter on Jesus for salvific purposes, even though today his text is the earliest completely preserved narrative material" (Brown 2008, 104).

Even though Mark never intended to write a biography of Jesus, the Gospel did manage to convey some of the historical situation as well, and the "majority of scholars are prone to believe that most sections in Mark's narrative correspond with facts." (Brown 2008, 104). Following this, it is also logical to see the portrayal of the Pharisees in the Gospels as historically plausible, and to assume that Mark's pericopes are at least partially historically accurate. Before we raise the issue of the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees, we need to also see what can we know about the Pharisees at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

## 1. Historical Context: the Pharisees and Jesus

### *The Pharisees' Origin and Sources*

There is very little reliable information about Pharisees from Jesus' day outside of Biblical sources. Even the origins of the movement is shrouded in mystery. Theissen notes that there are some doubts related to the traditional explanation of this sect, because the entire reconstruction is based off of three quotes from the Book of Maccabees (Theissen, Merz 2015, 155). According to tradition, both the Pharisees and the Essenes descended from the Hasids, who emerged as allies to the Maccabees in the war against the Seleucids, and for the freedom of Judah. The

2 "Mark's Gospel is particularly different from the biography model, which usually emphasizes the unusual birth and early life of the protagonist, his victory and, if he had been treated unjustly, his bravery and heroic acceptance of his misfortune" (Brown 2008, 103).

Hasids opposed the forceful Hellenization implemented by Antiochus IV Epiphanes so they joined forces with the Hasmoneans, as written by F. F. Bruce (1971, 70). According to the same source, the Pharisees first emerged at a time when a part of the Hasids broke their alliance with John Hyrcanus and became the opposition in the land. We have already mentioned that we can find some places in the New Testament where the Pharisees were not just antagonistic towards the early Church. In the Gospels there is a Pharisee who had been sympathetic toward Jesus (Nicodemus) but he also met with Jesus “at night” (Jn. 3:1-21; 19:38-42). Most interpreters believe that this was because he was not supposed to be seen with Jesus (e.g., Tenney 1985, 85), although there are also narratives and critical reasons for the symbolic interpretation of “the night” in John as Nicodemus’ disbelief (Brown 1966, 145). This picture of the unbelieving Pharisee was later on confirmed through the New Testament Pharisee archetype; the apostle Paul. Paul is portrayed as the persecutor of the Church (Acts 8;1-3, 9:1-2), which he personally confirmed in his epistles (Gal. 1:13-14, Phil. 3:6), adding that he had been a Pharisee before he became a Christian (Phil. 3:5). So we have a personal testimony from somebody who claims he had been a Pharisee and an enemy of the early Church.

We can confirm that the Pharisees had a good relationship with the Church in some non-canonical sources, as well. A significant one is the account of the death of the Lord’s brother, James. Brandon claims that “the death of James and of his comrades needs to be viewed as a stubborn act of the personal wickedness of the high priest Ananiah,” and that it “wasn’t a popular measure” supported by all Pharisees (Brandon 2006, 84). Theissen emphasizes that “Josiph Flavius mentions that the verdict was unjust, that the people who upheld the law (most likely the Pharisees) did not approve of it, and that it lead to the ultimate overturn of Ananiah” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 89). So he cannot claim with certainty that the “people who upheld the law” who objected to the executions were, indeed Pharisees. We should also add to the discussion that the Rabbinic literature considers it helpful to compare Jesus’ and Pharisees’ teachings (e.g., Ben-Chorin 1985, 41; Theissen, Merz 2015, 249). These three kinds of sources are useful for studying the Pharisees and their relationship with Jesus, in order to see if it is possible to use all of them and create a historical reconstruction of the Pharisees. Michael J. Cook noticed that the key problem in historical reconstruction of the Pharisees lies in the nature of the sources, which provide us with an ambivalent picture.<sup>3</sup>

However, this does not mean that we cannot try to make such a summary. According to Flavius, the Pharisees were a leading sect in Jesus’ day. They obvi-

3 ... our sources are at variance with each other. Josephus generally described the Pharisees as teachers of an exalted philosophy, friends of the common people and beloved of them, but the Gospels allege that the Pharisees were masters of hypocrisy“ (Cook 1978, 445).

ously must have been politically important, because they were involved in interpreting the Law, “The Pharisees are considered to be the most accurate keepers of the Law and they guard the position of the leading sect” (Barrett 158). Apart from being experts in the matters of the Law, Flavius speaks about their mutual kindness, “The Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community” (Barrett 159). It is a fact that, although the Gospels do portray the Pharisees in a negative light, they never deny Flavius’ position about their popularity in the city. On the contrary, the Gospels claim that due to Jesus’ emergence the people’s attention was turned away from the Pharisees towards him, which made them envious and which made them turn him over to the Romans. None of the materials from the Gospels opposes the fact that the Pharisees were a strong and popular sect. Also, there is no mention in the Gospels that the people considered them to be hypocrites. So the varying accounts essentially do not really negate each other.

Cook emphasizes that the problem that is bigger than the sources corresponding to each other is the fact that all of them were written over a long timespan:

The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD had dramatic consequences – theological, political, social, and economical – for the lives and prospects of the Jews. However, our three main sources regarding Pharisees – Flavius, the Gospels, and the Rabbinic literature – have all been redacted after this crucial date; therefore we cannot be certain that the Pharisaical movement, no matter how we described it from a later perspective, accurately corresponds to the earlier Pharisaical movement of Jesus’ time (Cook 1978, 446-447).

In regards to this, Cook gives the example of the Pharisees’ influence. If we assume that their portrayal in today’s account in Gospel of Mark has been faithfully communicated from before Mark, we can say that the Pharisees were influential. But, we can also imagine that power was anachronistically ascribed to them only after their influence had become proven, i.e., in the period after the fall of Jerusalem (Cook 1978, 449). Cook also discusses the Pharisees’ learnedness which is inferred in phrases such as, “the scribes of the Pharisees” (Mk. 2:16) which is only found in the New Testament. Here also the cause for polemics is in the sources which provide differing information:

Flavius’ use of the term further complicates the problem: he seldom speaks of the scribes, and when he does, it’s in a completely different sense. At the same time, when the Rabbinic literature does speak of the scribes (sopherim), it doesn’t seem to be talking about the Pharisees’ contemporaries, but rather their predecessors (Cook 1978, 448).

Cook therefore concludes that there can be no consensus regarding the issue of the relationship between the Pharisees and Jesus. He is also not convinced that the Rabbinic literature is very helpful, because it was redacted even later than the

Gospels, which probably influenced the way it portrays Jesus. We can even imagine that some of the Rabbinic teachings might have been influenced by the Gospel (Cook 1978, 456). It is, therefore, extremely difficult to define the historicity of the Pharisees, and it's even more difficult to define the Pharisees' attitude towards Jesus in history. In the end, the evaluations boil down to the author's preferred choice of the source. J. P. Meier concludes:

But in the current stage of research - which, unfortunately, means the current stage of our ignorance - each text, each case needs to be researched separately and in great detail in its own context. It's still too early for great theories which would explain it all (Meier 1999, 722).

### ***The Historical Jesus***

So if we can conclude so little about the Pharisees themselves, maybe the historical Jesus can shed some light on the debate, so that's a matter to be looked into, as well. Theissen and Merz conclude that, "looking from the outside," Jesus was just a "marginal occurrence." His movement is a part of Judaism which is at a turning point and which, in spite of some constants - faith in one God, dedication to the Torah, and the sanctity of the Temple - consisted of different directions and movements" (Theissen, Merz 2015, 147). From this perspective, some logical questions arise in regards to Jesus' behavior in the Gospels and his popularity among the people. Mark portrays Jesus as a Jewish man, but Jesus did not observe the Sabbath (Mk. 2:23-28; 3:1-6), paid no mind to ritual cleanness, (Mk. 7:1-13), claimed that food does not make a person unclean (Mk. 7:14-23), and justified paying taxes to the Emperor (Mk. 12:13-17). How could such a Jesus have any authority among people whose foundation and goal was the Torah? Ritual regulations such as these had the purpose of preserving the identity of the Jewish people, "The most important elements of such ritualistic symbolic language include: circumcision, observing the Sabbath, rules about food, and rules about purity. The purpose of this ritualistic symbolic language was to preserve monotheism" (Theissen, Merz 2015, 150). How is it possible that Jesus broke all these norms and still remained the favorite of the people?

One possibility is because Jesus was Galilean. Several notions are connected to this term. "A Galilean" could refer to a "Jew who was open to the world and Hellenic influences," which begs the question, "was Galilee, due to its proximity to pagan cities in the area, under a significantly greater Hellenic influence than Judea" and consequently less oriented towards the Torah (Theissen, Merz 2015, 184)? Theissen assumes there's an effect of stronger cultural connections in Galilee due to the proximity of pagan cities, which is why the fact that Jesus was raised near a Hellenistic city could have influenced His socialization (Theissen, Merz 2015, 184). We also must consider the differences between the Jewish and Helle-

nic cultures in poor Jewish villages and in rich Hellenic cities. However, Theissen and Merz eventually conclude that Jesus was probably not under great Hellenistic influence, because He came from a small town, and He also preached in small towns and not in big cities. And Galilee can be easier described as a province in which “the influence of the urban Hellenistic culture was endangering the Jewish identity” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 192). So even if they do think that Jesus preached in a rural context, Theissen and Merz emphasize that it was not an idyllic, conflict-free area, but a region that was known for incidents and uprisings.

On the other hand, the “Rabbinic literature... portrays the Galileans as religiously uneducated, as ignorant in the matters of ritual, and even as being disrespectful of the Torah” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 197), but not because they doubted the value of the Torah, but because there were disputes regarding how to apply it in everyday life. The Pharisaical halacha was not dominant in Jesus’ Galilee, and the Pharisaical movement had only begun to spread in those parts in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, with strong support from Jerusalem (Theissen, Merz 2015, 198). These bits of information are important for the image of Jesus in Mark as a man who does not care for rituals which are important for the Pharisees.

### *Jesus and the Pharisees*

Theissen and Merz emphasize, however, that Jesus’ teaching had a lot of similarities with that of the Pharisees, and they shared some “fundamental views: belief in the resurrection, in evil spirits, He promoted naive synergism between God and man” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 250). However, Jesus was different from the Pharisees in the exact things which were most important to them: in ritual laws and the stance towards tradition (Theissen, Merz 2015, 250).<sup>4</sup> When it comes to spreading Pharisaic teaching, “Jesus could have been a spokesperson for some local resistance to their program, even despite the irrefutable similarities between Him and the Pharisees” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 249), so when Jesus attacks the regulations about purity, he is hitting the very core of the Pharisaic movement and their attempt at preserving identity.

Regulations regarding purity represent strategies of social segregation.... The Pharisees, who are seen as an offensive, active political and religious group during the Hasmonean days, now choose a defensive strategy for preserving the Jewish identity despite the political and cultural domination of the foreigners (Theissen, Merz 2015, 249).

4 Same as N. H. Taylor (2000, 299-310), “Where the Pharisees clashed with Jesus and the first Christians, the issue of conflict was not the fundamental principles of Judaism, but precisely that both movements sought to apply these and make them accessible to the populace by different means.”

But Theissen and Merz do not see the claim that the Pharisees decided to kill Jesus over these disagreements as a historical imminence. On the contrary, Jesus' main opponents were the Sadducees, because he was speaking against godliness in the temple. Also, a distinction is made between the people of Galilee who shouted "Hosanna to the son of David" (Mt. 21:9) and the mob in Jerusalem which shouted "Crucify him!" (Mt. 27:22). They explain:

The relation between the Pharisees and Jesus' death sentence as stated in Mk 3:6 is only seen once the Church has connected Jesus' debates with the Pharisees of Galilee with the Passion account, so a connection was sought between those conflicts and Jesus' death. It's possible that Mark the Evangelist was the first one to tie this passage in with the Passion (Theissen, Merz 2015, 252).

Although the opinion that the Sadducees were responsible for Jesus' death is an interesting one, but this doesn't necessarily mean that the Pharisees failed to participate in getting their biggest critic and opponent convicted.

## **2. Jesus and the Pharisees in Mark's Account of Jesus**

In order to respond to the issue of the Pharisees' participation in Jesus' death, we need to turn to the exegesis of Mk. 1:21-3:35. We already see the issue of Jesus and His relationships with his environment and the groups within it noted and laid out in full in this narrative. We will primarily observe the passage from the standpoint of narrative criticism, including some elements of historical reconstruction and critique of Biblical text. Of course, Jesus' clash with the Pharisees is not fully told in this passage so we will be mentioning other passages from Mark, but the narration has already been set in a way that makes the birth of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, as well as its motives and outcome, fully clear in the introductory passage itself.

### **The Circumstances of Writing the Gospel of Mark**

So we can historically reconstruct the fact that the Pharisees only appeared on the Galilee scene, where the rural Jewish population was struggling with applying the Torah, but did not give up on it. This is why Jesus was able to agree with them theologically, while at the same time disagreeing with their interpretation and application of the Torah in daily life.

Vincent Taylor compiled all the passages from early Church authors who mentioned Mark's Gospel, and some even mention the Rome. *Against Marcion* claims that the Gospel was written after Peter's death in Italy, because Mark was Peter's translator so he wrote down this same Gospel in Italy after Peter died (Taylor 1952, 3). Clement of Alexandria places Mark directly in Rome (Taylor

1952, 6).<sup>5</sup> Brown states that a large number of scholars accept this thesis, but also adds that “there was a strong tradition claiming that Peter had been tortured in Rome, and this old claim could have been an imaginative conclusion stemming from Mark’s and Peter’s relationship, as emphasized by Papius” (Brown 2008, 159). He therefore argues from the Gospel passage which tie him to Rome, such as Latin phrases and the similarities with Paul’s letter to Romans (Brown 2008, 159). Still, Brown considers that it is not possible to place the Gospel in Rome with accuracy (Brown 2008, 160-161) and that there are other but, from his perspective, more problematic suggestions, such as Mark being written in Palestine (Marcus 1992, 441-446). Narrative criticism also urges the reader to see the Rome after Nero’s persecutions as a probable destination, as is well supported by Van Iersel as he was building on Radcliffe’s theory about the Gospel being written in Rome after the persecution (1996, 250-254).

### ***The Time of Writing of the Gospel of Mark***

Mark’s Gospel is usually dated to the time before the fall of Jerusalem because “Mark shows no knowledge of the details regarding the First Jewish Uprising against Romans in 66 – 70 AD, and he makes no mention of the fall of Jerusalem” (Brown 2008, 160). It is hard to imagine that the author would omit using such an event as an argument in his account. And yet, we need to notice that chapter 13, which was dubbed, The Small Apocalypse, “hints at a possibility of such a conflict. If we define this as a reference to the fall of Jerusalem, Brown notes that the year after which the Gospel couldn’t have been written was 75 AD, because Matthew and Luke have already been using it” (Brown 2008, 161).<sup>6</sup>

### ***Information About the Congregation that the Gospel was Intended For***

While external information about the author, the location of the congregation, and the date of writing would be helpful, when it comes to the issue of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees it is more important to see what sort of congregation was Mark’s Gospel intended for. Here, Brown concluded, “The partial or complete audience that the Gospel had in mind consisted of people who spoke Greek and weren’t familiar with Aramaic” (Brown 2008, 160), and R. H.

- 5 Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter was preaching publicly the gospel at Rome in the presence of certain Caesar’s knights and was putting forward many testimonies concerning Christ, being requested by them that they might be able to commit to memory the things which were being spoken, wrote from the things which were spoken by Peter the Gospel which is called according to Mark.“
- 6 J. S. Kloppenborg (2005) connects the verse in Mk. 13:2 with the common Roman war practice and he concludes that anyone who was familiar with the Roman invasion practices could have predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

Stein adds details,

They didn't speak Aramaic or Hebrew, and were unfamiliar with certain Jewish customs. There are at least eight instances in Mark where we find Aramaic or Hebrew phrases that are translated by the Evangelist into Greek (3:17; 5:41; 7:34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22,34) allowing his readers to understand them. It is, therefore, clear that they weren't familiar with these two Semitic languages" (Stein 2003, 65).

For the narrative approach to the passage, it is important to note that Gospel was written for public reading during the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century,

Finally,... I wish to emphasize that the readers that Mark was addressing weren't actually readers in the modern sense of the word. The readers which Mark had in mind and which he was addressing weren't readers at all. They were listeners (Stein 2003, 67).

Mark's audience probably was not Jewish, because they would have no need for explanations regarding Jewish customs. However, they were familiar with certain Jewish terms, which is explained by Stein by their former belonging to the Synagogue as the Proselytes, or the God-fearing ones (Stein 2003, 66). Clearly, Mark's listeners had known about Jesus even before they received this written testimony about Him, because there is a strong sense of awaiting the Parousia in the text (Brown 2008, 160). Because of this, Brown thinks that the listeners have experienced heavy persecution. Even the beginning of the Gospel bears witness to the readers who already know the story of Jesus, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Both the reader and the listeners know the identity of the main character of the story. For them, he is the Christ and the Son of God, and not somebody whom they are unfamiliar with so they need to get to know about Him through the Gospel. The purpose of the Gospel is to communicate the message and the lesson to somebody who believes it is implied that Jesus is the living, risen Christ, and who wants to follow his example. Just like any other story, Mark has a plot which culminates into a conflict and it becomes more and more tense as the end of the story approaches. It is a dramatic work, which is not just a regular collection of instructive stories. Contrary to the guesses of form critics from the beginning of the historic search for Jesus:

The author didn't just collect different traditions, organize them and tie them up and add summaries; the author in fact told a story, a dramatic story, with characters whose lives we follow to different places to which they travel and through different things that happen to them (Rhoads 1982, 413).

By using older sources, the author creates a story that is sensible and expertly woven, and whose climax is seen in the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

### ***Mark 1:21-3:35: From Curiosity to Death Penalty - the Conflict Between Jesus and the Pharisees***

In this passage we are primarily dealing with the development of Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees' from the narrative criticism standpoint. In these first three chapters, Mark has set the stage for the entire account of Jesus by directing his listeners, primarily it seems, towards the relationship between Jesus and Pharisees. Mark develops this relationship in six steps (1:21-28; 2:1-12; 2:15-17; 2:17-22; 2:23-28, and 3:1-6).

*Jesus is more powerful than the Pharisees (Mark 1:21-28).* At the very first mention of the scribes and Pharisees, Mark emphasizes their inferiority when compared to Jesus. He makes it very clear for his listeners that Jesus had more authority among the people than the scribes from the very beginning (Mk. 1:22). The scribes first appear in person in Mk. 2:1-12, but Mark hints at the necessity of their appearance in the Gospel narrative due to being challenged by Jesus' authority. In his commentary, E. P. Gould states that the disciples were astonished. "καὶ ἐξεπλήσσαντο" describes a sense of great surprise where the person is overcome with a strong sense of fear, wonder, and even joy (Gould 1887, 21). And while Gould goes on to talk about Jesus' impact on people, C. F. D. Moule provides a more detailed description of Jesus' authority over the scribes as authority that comes directly from God, "However, although ἐξουσία is definitely comparable with *reshut*, ... It's more likely that here, *reshut*, refers to the authority such as that of the prophets, i.e., the authority that comes directly from divine mission" (Moule 1966, 74). Unlike Jesus' authority, the authority of the scribes was indirect; i.e., they were just interpreting the words of the prophets. Jesus had "authority" directly from God, and even the people recognized this.

The exorcism which follows this pericope is a confirmation of Jesus' superiority. The listeners were entranced by the teaching and by the way Jesus preached, but the pericope does not end there, as a man possessed with an unclean spirit comes in during the sermon. The demon attacks Jesus with an interesting claim, "I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (1:24), but Jesus orders him, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" (1:25). Mark mentions this silencing and exorcism as Jesus' first miracle, which is no accident. Whenever Jesus deals with demons in Mark (with an exception in 5:7-14), He almost always silences the demons. The demons know who Jesus is (1:34) and they call him the Holy One of God (1:24), the Son of God (2:11), the Son of the Most High God (5:7).

The fact that Jesus did not allow demons to reveal his identity makes them very important characters in Mark's account about Jesus. By ordering them to be silent, Jesus is showing that he does not want his real identity to be discovered. However, this first miracle was also a confirmation of his authority: powerful preaching must be followed up by powerful actions. Jesus made an impact on the

people with his words and actions even though, as Lane interprets it, they did not know who he was nor what his presence meant.

... They can't escape the impression that they've been faced with a word which is supported by power that is incomparable with anything in their experience. They were faced with a teaching which was new in quality in terms of the authority through which it was winning people over. The people were astonished (Lane 1994, 76).

*The Conflict with the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mk. 2:1-12).* After traveling all over Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum. So the plot of the Gospel continues in the same town in which Jesus first drew the listeners' attention with his authoritative teaching and driving out the demon. As soon as the word of his return got out, a crowd gathered in front of the house he resided in. Four men brought a paralyzed man before Jesus, but because of the great crowd they had to lower him through a hole in the roof. Instead of just healing him, Jesus tells the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven. Mark does not explain why does Jesus forgive the man's sins, but he also does not fail to notice that there were some scribes there who started murmuring among themselves because Jesus was doing something only God is able to do. Lane suggest that Jesus was following the prophetic tradition by offering forgiveness, and that the scribes felt that this was a pretentious and arrogant impersonation of prophets (Lane 1974, 85). And more than that: the scribes felt that Jesus' behavior was tinged with blasphemy (Lane 1974, 95). The very fact that Mark states that the scribes thought that Jesus was blaspheming tells us that there was more to Jesus' actions than just a prophet's forgiveness.

So in the very beginning of chapter two we see the beginning of the conflict between the scribes, who had been the main authority until Jesus came to the scene, and Jesus, who introduces a new kind of authority and uses it to impact the people greatly. It is interesting how demons know who Jesus is, and the scribes are beginning to suspect it in a way, by asking, "who can forgive sins but God alone" (Mk. 2:7)? This will become an important subject by the end of the Gospel, and it will intensify in the parable of the "killer vine-dressers" (12:1-12). Those who know for sure that Jesus is the "son" whom the vineyard owner had sent think that they can take over the vineyard if they murder the owner's "son." Are they not aware that the owner himself will come over and "destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others" (12:9)? Besides, in the passage Jesus shows them another one of His divine characteristics by reading their minds (Mk. 2:8), and then goes on to confirm it all by healing the paralyzed man (Mk 2:11). By doing this, he makes it explicitly clear that he is no ordinary man.

*Feasting with Sinners in Mark 2:15-17.* At first in the Gospel, Mark mentions the "scribes" but not the Pharisees, who are the ones who come into conflict with Jesus (1:22; 2:6). They most likely are the Pharisees, but Theissen and Merz warn

that “not all Pharisees are scribes, and not all scribes are Pharisees” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 247). So it’s important to discuss this difference, if such a difference exists, and looking at the passage from the standpoint of redactor criticism can help us in that. The parallels for the pericope in 2:1-12 are in Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26. Matthew does not mention the Pharisees either; instead he says that “some of the scribes,” so not all of them, were talking among themselves, “This fellow blasphemes” (9:3). It is possible that there were some Pharisees in this group of reputable observers, but they are not mentioned as the ones who murmured. Luke, however, specifically mentions the Pharisees as part of the group, “and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem” (Lk. 5:17) gathered around Jesus. Mark also helps us to identify the scribes as Pharisees when he calls them the “the scribes of the Pharisees” in 2:15-17. So those from the previous pericope really do belong to the Pharisee group because the plot, e.g., conflict from Mk. 2:1-12 is continued. It is not wrong to conclude that the scribes from the previous pericope were also Pharisees. However, Cook warns that the phrase, “scribes of the Pharisees” can be used for differentiating between Pharisaic scribes from the Sadducee scribes, or it could have been used so that the Pharisees could differentiate among themselves, which here refers to an elite subgroup of Pharisees (Cook 1978, 449). It seems that Mark’s intent after all was to connect the Pharisees with the scribes from the previous pericope and, of course, with those who will appear later on in the account, which we shall see as the story progresses.

After Jesus took the tax collector as one of his disciples and spent time as a guest in his house - i.e., in the company of “tax collectors and sinners” (2:15) – the Pharisees started coming up to the disciples and asking them why does Jesus eat with the sinners. Jesus responds to them by saying that it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick, ending the pericope. This brief and, seemingly, innocent debate ends up significantly deepening the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. In the previous pericope, the scribes were furious and thought that Jesus was blaspheming (Mk. 2:6), but this is the first time that they speak up and try to belittle him before the disciples (Mk. 2:16), i.e., to plant some doubt and make the disciples question their trust in him. This question cannot be interpreted as a benign one. Gould confirms that the condemnation over feasting with tax collectors and sinners was set up to belittle Jesus’ right to the title of Rabbi, i.e., teacher (Gould 1987, 42). They find his behavior to be incomprehensible, and even loathsome, because neither the scribes nor their followers associated with the common people. Namely, emphasizes Gould, this always carried the danger of religious uncleanness. However, eating with this permanently religiously unclean type of tax collectors meant becoming especially unclean (Gould 1987, 43). Lane goes on to emphasize that it was this act by Jesus that was “more revo-

lutionary than they could have ever imagined” (Lane 1974, 106). Jesus’ powerful teaching “in power,” through healing and driving out demons, and reinforced by socializing with sinners further increases the difference between him and other teachers, especially the Pharisees. Jesus does not need to fear other people’s sins. Nothing can make him unclean, because he has the authority to forgive sins.

*The Issue of Fasting in Mark 2:17-22.* Mark goes on to describe the developing conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees in 2:17-22 with the issue of fasting. In this pericope, the Pharisees are not explicitly mentioned as the ones murmuring or attacking; instead, “they” (Mk. 2:18) mentions them as being the opposite of Jesus and his disciples. Luke’s account emphasizes that the issue of fasting is raised by the same perpetrators as in the first pericope, namely Pharisees, as a response to Jesus’ claim that it is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick (Lk. 5:31-33). Moule warns that the verb has not been defined by a subject, and the last mention of the subject, if indeed it is the Pharisees, is too far away (Moule 1966, 108). Matthew supports this line of thinking, because the disciples of John the Baptist have asked the same question (Mt. 9:14). And Jesus’ response, which alludes to John’s arrest, points to the fact that, at the end of the day, those who spoke with Jesus were in fact John’s disciples. Jesus’ response in Matthew does not involve the Pharisees, either, but is instead based on John’s disciples who, as Moule emphasizes, fast rightfully because their teacher was taken from them, but fasting would not have been appropriate for Jesus’ disciples, because he was still with them (Moule 1966, 109).

We must bear in mind that Matthew and Luke are revising Mark’s version from their own sources. It is possible that he is exaggerating the mention of the fasting Pharisees (which is found in all synoptic Gospels) in order to point out the narrative focus on the sharpening conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus. What seems like mere search for information in other Evangelists is filled with evil intent to discredit Jesus in Mark. Lane says “The request to know why weren’t Jesus’ disciples fasting is crucial in its intent; the unidentified questioners seek to portray Jesus’ disciples in a less than favorable light” (Lane 1974, 109). Even more so, since Mark uses this pericope to announce both the protagonist’s suffering and death in the future (Mk. 2:20): “But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them.”

*The Pharisees Look for a Reason to Accuse Jesus (2:23-28).* After condemning Jesus in their hearts (Mk. 2:6), the Pharisees also condemned him in front of his disciples (Mk. 2:16), and they finally make the decisive move and approach Jesus for the first time (Mk. 2:24) to warn him, because they hold him responsible for the irresponsible behavior of the disciples. Moule notes that, according to the rules of the Law, the transgressor first needs to be warned, “violating the Sabbath was punished by stoning ... only if the transgressor has been warned first. Oὐκ

ἐξεστίν is a possible warning like that” (Moule 1966, 115). So, the Pharisees were now warning Jesus of an oversight, i.e., breaking the rules. However, the way things progressed lead us to believe that they were not just concerned with warning him, but that they have got their eyes on him so they could convict him. Thus far, these instances could have been interpreted as well-intentioned tips and attempts to shape the Galilean teacher correctly. However, now the general impression is that of ill-intended actions. After being directly asked about clean hands, Jesus replies by saying that even David broke regulations (Mk. 2:25-26). This argumentation seems strange and begs the question: what was Jesus trying to accomplish by it? Moule claims that Jesus wanted to criticize the Pharisaic teaching as incorrect, because the Scripture never condemns David for his act. This then means that the Pharisaic interpretation is not in line with the Scriptures, i.e., that their interpretations are wrong (Moule 1966, 115). Lane is on the same track (1974, 117).

The second option is that Mark is comparing Jesus with David, and his disciples with David’s followers. Theissen and Merz like this interpretation, “Jesus demonstrates His authority, which is comparable with David’s authority” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 392). They also feel that this discussion is about “the right to break the rules, and not about whether the rules have been broken” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 392). We could say that the purpose of this pericope in Mark is to show the penultimate step by which the Pharisees were drawing further away from Jesus, and open conflict was getting closer. Up till that moment everything was done very diplomatically, but this was now a full-on attack. When comparing himself with David, Jesus is subtly hinting to the Pharisees that he is the Messiah, and at the same time he is providing an well supported rebuke for their erroneous approach to the Scriptures. So from a narrative standpoint, Mark uses the tradition, which he is adhering to faithfully, in order to put together an account which creates tension in the reader. This seemingly small and insignificant pericope was definitely meant to be a direct introduction to and the cause for the ultimate schism in Mk. 3:6.

*The Pharisees are Looking for Ways to Get Rid of Jesus (Mk. 3:1-6).* So in the first three chapters, Mark is carefully building up the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, which helps us conclude that the “scribes” were used as a synonym. Finally, we see the Pharisees going after Jesus to see if he’s going to perform a healing on a Sabbath (Mk. 3:1-2), with a clear intention to accuse him. Mark 3:2 is the first place where he openly speaks about the Pharisees evil intention, and this is where the listeners first learn that the Pharisees had ill intentions. Jesus, on the other hand, asks that the man with the withered arm would stand in front of everybody (Mk. 3:3). By doing this, he is showing them that he’s not concerned with them persecuting him or with their interpretation of the Law. Lane notices that this is not only about the Sabbath controversy, but that the Sabbath contro-

versy is “symptomatic of Jesus’ entire attitude towards oral tradition. Jesus refused to adhere to the rules of tradition” (Lane 1974, 124). Thus, Mark’s interpretation is not a reflection of a later development; instead, it shows definitively that Jesus did not agree with the oral traditions of the Pharisees. This can be seen in the emotions which overcome Jesus when they remain silent after he asked them if it is allowed to do good or evil on a Sabbath. At their silence, he looked at them “with anger” and was “grieved at the hardness of their heart” (Mk. 3:5). He then goes on to affirm His divine authority once again by performing a miraculous healing.

However, the Pharisees did not get their reason for accusations, because the arm was healed without Jesus ever touching it. It healed by itself before their own eyes, and they knew it was Jesus’ doing. Theissen and Merz, however, point to the fact that even healing through words can be construed as violating the Sabbath, “Words were, of course, allowed on the Sabbath. Eating and drinking was also allowed, but not when they served exclusively therapeutic purposes” (Theissen, Merz 2015, 392). So in this case Jesus intentionally violates the Sabbath, and even after such an obvious miracle the Pharisees did not stop and wonder “who is this man?” This healing through word was supposed to be a clear warning to the Pharisees that Jesus was not an ordinary teacher like them. Instead of such a confession, for the first time in Mark’s Gospel they come out of the synagogue intended to kill Jesus (Mk. 3:6). For this, they had to join forces with those who had the political power to do it: the Herodians. Mark combines the narratives of these five Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees into a whole in order to show the development of the conflict, which grows to the point of no return. However, Mark also wishes to show the huge difference in the way Jesus and the Pharisees approach the Scriptures, God, and man: Jesus is different than the Pharisees.

### **Evaluation: Clash of Authorities**

If the reader stops to look at the situation from the Pharisee perspective, it becomes clear that, for the Pharisees, Jesus was a dangerous provocateur. From pericope to pericope, he was becoming more and more dangerous, and when he refused to work according to their understanding of the Law, he crossed a line which they were not willing to cross. Lane interprets that two completely different authorities have clashed here. Jesus was not just another rabbi with his own opinion; instead, he refused to submit to them and their tradition (Lane 124). He socialized with tax collectors in a way like their stigma could not stick to him. His disciples did not fast and, what is even worse, neither he nor his disciples were interested in the oral traditions of the Pharisees. Everything that the Pharisees are, Jesus is not, and he was becoming more and more popular. And everything that Jesus is - the one who speaks the word with irrefutable authority and

supports it by extraordinary signs, and he forgives sins on top of that – everything that Pharisees aren't. All of these things are even forbidden by their law. Jesus' approach opens up completely new questions and a completely new approach for "common" people. The Pharisees knew that they had to pick a side, whether they were going to be for or against Jesus.

### ***Secondary Characters and Their Role in the Conflict with Pharisees***

While the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was going on, the other characters in the narrative have been put on hold, although they had, of course, been with Jesus since the beginning. So far, the disciples have been nothing more than extras, but in chapter three Jesus selects the Twelve, who are mentioned by name (Mk. 3:13-19) and he moves on with them. Then there is the huge multitude, which shows Jesus' growing popularity. They never let Jesus catch a break (Mk. 3:7-8; 3:20). Jesus' family also appears on the scene, because they have heard rumors about him being crazy (Mk. 3:21). Mark goes on to tell about how Jesus gives up on family ties, and even refuses to see his own mother (Mk. 3:31-35). It is very likely that it has to do with their fear of him going crazy and it ties in with the clan thinking of the day. Namely, the problematic members of the clan were always the clan's concern, because an individual's inappropriate behavior would bring disgrace to the entire clan.

Between the two accounts regarding Jesus' family, Mark gives away the reason why the family thinks that Jesus has "lost His senses" (3:21). Namely, some scribes from Jerusalem kept claiming that Jesus was driving out demons with the help of Satan (Mk. 3:22), and Jesus accused them of blasphemy for saying the Holy Spirit was Satan. It needs to be noted that, in this situation Matthew and Luke provide opposing accounts in terms of those who are saying those things. According to Matthew this was said by Pharisees (Mt. 12:14), but according to Luke it was the people (Lk. 11:15). Just like with Mark 2:6 and for the similar reason we need to be open to the possibility that Mark really feels that those people were the Pharisees, which is hinted at by the continuation of the conflict, that is becoming exacerbated with this insult. Mark places the Pharisees between two stories about blasphemy, thus wanting to show that they also participated in persecuting Jesus. The main theme in Mk. 2:1-12 is blasphemy, just like here in Mark 3:22-30, except that the accusers and the accused switched places.

We might conclude that all the other characters are just onlookers in the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus being the "new wine," and the old Pharisaic traditions being the "old wineskins" (Mk. 2:21-22). And for all of them it is this clash between Jesus and the Pharisees - the old way of worship and new - that will become a deciding point on Jesus' identity in the remainder of the Gospel.

## **Conclusion: Beware the Leaven of the Pharisees!**

If we follow the course of Mark's narrative, the Pharisees are crucial. Their primary role in the Gospel is that of advocates and proponents of oral tradition. As such, they are juxtaposed against Jesus, representing the example that the disciples should not follow. Of course, the Pharisees are the bearers of the final conflict with Jesus and they are the first ones who begin to verbally express their intention to have Jesus removed. This gives them the key position in preparing for the Gospel's climax, which is the crucifixion of Jesus. The intention from Mark 3:6 is accomplished in Mark 15:37, just as the unspoken accusation against Jesus in Mark 2:7 is uttered in Mark 14:64. The main cause of the conflict is pride and envy, because at the trial even Pilate knew that Jesus was turned in out of envy (Mk. 15:10).

Unlike the Pharisees and the people that Jesus did not want to disclose his identity to publicly (Mk. 4:11-12; 8:11; 11:28), the disciples were inseparable from Jesus in Mark's Gospel, being present for every one of his miracles. Jesus interprets the parables specifically for them (Mk. 4:33-34), and even tells them what will happen in the future (Mk. 13). Beginning with Mark 8, Jesus tells them multiple times that he will die and be raised from the dead, and he also goes through transfiguration before them (9:7). It is like Jesus is additionally revealing himself to those whom he had chosen in order to make their decision about the travel easier, and yet Mark's Gospel ends ingloriously with the disciples running away from the place of resurrection.

When all is said and done, we conclude that the Pharisees play two important roles in Mark's narrative: to give Jesus a strong push towards the cross but also to shock the readers with the discovery that they are no worse than Jesus' runaway disciples. The disciples also refused to leave the Pharisaic traditions behind and are led by the same lust and desire for honor, and they can never get enough of evidence for his divinity to be able to side with him in trust (Countryman 1985, 653-654). Here we find the interesting pericope about the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Mk. 8:14-21). Even after Jesus miraculously fed the multitude twice, they did not recognize Jesus as God, nor did they "understand" the essence of his message. They interpreted his exhortation to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mk. 8:15) as criticism of their failure to bring bread for the road. They fail to recognize who is before them and are, thus, already very much infected with the yeast of the Pharisees, i.e., with self-absorption, their own beliefs, and disbelief.

If we consider the fact that Mark's Gospel was intended for the church in Rome, the pride and envy of the Pharisees, and consequently the pride and envy of Jesus' followers in this church, becomes a strong lesson. "The Christian community has already experienced large-scale persecutions prior to 70 AD, i.e.,

during the time of Nero. While writing about this persecution, Climent's First Epistle 5:2-7 talks about Christians being envious of each other, while Tacitus (Annala 15:44) points out "their tattling." This indicates the failure of Christians and their mutual betrayal (Brown 2008, 159). And when we consider the fact that, "theologically speaking, the recipients had an emphasized expectation of immediate parousia ... probably due to the persecutions they were exposed to," (Brown 2008, 160), the account of Pharisees insisting on a sign and Jesus refusing to give them one becomes even clearer. The Pharisees were already looking at the Savior, who revealed Himself to them through word and deed. To seek another sign from him was blasphemy and provoking God.

From that perspective, when it comes to Jesus' life in history and not just in Mark's account about it, the Pharisees had to have been a contrast to Jesus. And their teaching, just like their behavior towards others, was completely opposite of that of Jesus'. The conflict which Mark portrays through his narrative had to possess historically accurate roots in order to become a lesson to the disciples.

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Translated by Davor Edelinski

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### **Farizeji u Markovu evanđelju: usporedba društveno-povijesne uloge i narativne funkcije**

Sažetak

Glavni je cilj ovoga rada usporediti što se o farizejima može doznati iz izvanbiblijskih izvora, s onime što se može doznati iz naracije u Mk 1,21-3,35, s ciljem da se postavi povijesni temelj za Markov izvještaj. Prvi dio prikazuje povijesno dostupnu građu sa zaključkom da je ambivalentna, dok se u drugom dijelu prikazuje razvoj konflikta između Isusa i farizeja, koji na kraju osvjetljuje povijesne činjenice prema zaključku da je Markov opis farizeja povijesno plauzibilan te time Markovo evanđelje može doprinijeti povijesnoj diskusiji o farizejima.

Rad je stoga podijeljen na dva glavna dijela. Prvi, povijesni dio, bavi se pokušajem rekonstrukcije odnosa Isusa i farizeja na temelju povijesti, a drugi, egzegetski, na temelju naracijske kritike razgrađuje povijest i kerigmu.