

Matthew's and Mark's Pharisees

By Martin Pickup

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark are recognized as key sources of information on the Pharisees, yet any analysis of their data is fraught with difficulty. We are dealing with highly tendentious documents whose interest in the Pharisees lies solely in the fact that, as key opponents of Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees serve to set forth Jesus and his teaching in vivid relief. Scholarly debate on the historicity of the material in Matthew and Mark continues, both in regard to what they relate generally about Jesus and his ministry, and in regard to what they relate specifically about the Pharisees. Are we to regard the accounts of encounters between the Pharisees and Jesus as faithful remembrances of actual events, or are we reading idealized material that reflects the issues confronting Christians at the time of the Gospels' composition?

The dates assigned to these documents play a significant role in this historicity debate. If Mark was written ca. 65 – 70 CE (the common view), it becomes a valuable source of information on the Pharisees prior to 70, even if its specific claims about the Pharisees' encounters with Jesus are considered “idealized.” The case is more dubious for Matthew, a gospel which is commonly dated in the 80s or 90s at a time when the Pharisees appear to have risen in prominence and power (though to what extent remains debatable), and a time when the relationship between Jews and Jewish Christians collapsed. That late first-century setting provides a possible *Sitz im Leben* for Matthew's gospel, which suggests to many scholars that, rather than providing historical information about the Pharisees of Second Temple Judaism, Matthew's portrayal of the Pharisees is really a representation of the Jewish leadership toward the end of the first century.

Complicating the matter is the lack of scholarly certainty about the compositional history of Mark and Matthew. The vast majority of scholars agree that some kind of literary interdependence exists between the synoptic Gospels, but how so? Was Mark the earliest Gospel and did Matthew and Luke use it as a source? Did they also use a collection of Jesus' sayings (Q)? Or did Luke use Matthew, and Mark condense them both? (Most scholars would affirm the former position, but the latter has its defenders.) Also, what part might other Christian traditions, in written or oral form, have played in each evangelist's final product? Uncertainty about these matters impedes any historical inquiry about the Pharisees.

What then shall we do? In this essay I will focus attention on the picture of the Pharisees that each Gospel offers. In deference to the fact that the majority of scholars affirm Matthean dependence on Mark, my methodology will be to analyze Mark's portrait of the Pharisees first and, when analyzing Matthew, to take note of how Matthew's portrait of the Pharisees compares and contrasts with Mark's. Nevertheless, the emphasis here will not be on redactional debates. Instead, I will analyze each pericope where Pharisees appear so that readers may have ready access to the data. I will draw conclusions about what each document presents about the Pharisees' role in Palestinian society and their level of interaction and influence among the Jewish populace. I will highlight data about the Pharisees' religious views and practices that emerge from the accounts of their confrontations with Jesus. The ultimate purpose of this study is to reveal the portraits of the Pharisees that Mark and Matthew have produced so that these portrayals may be compared and contrasted more effectively with those of other ancient sources.

I. The Pharisees in Mark

a. *Survey of the Data*

Four successive pericopes in Mark (2:15 – 3:6) introduce the Pharisees as opponents of Jesus during his ministry in Galilee.¹ Their antipathy toward Jesus increases with each encounter. In 2:15-17 “the scribes of the Pharisees” question Jesus’ disciples about the fact that their master dines with tax collectors and sinners. Upon hearing of the matter, Jesus replies, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” In 2:18-22 Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast like the disciples of John the Baptist and the (disciples of the) Pharisees.² Jesus responds by comparing himself to a bridegroom whose companions naturally rejoice when in his presence; their time of fasting will come when the bridegroom is taken from them (a foreshadowing of the fate that awaits Jesus at the end of the Gospel). Comparing his teaching to new cloth and new wine, Jesus further contrasts himself with John and the Pharisees: his teaching is new, whereas their instruction is no longer relevant for the current times, the dawning of the kingdom of God.

In the last two pericopes of this fourfold grouping, the Pharisees confront Jesus personally over alleged Sabbath violations. In 2:23-28 they criticize him for allowing his disciples to pluck grain as they pass through fields on the Sabbath day. Jesus defends his disciples’ action by appealing to the precedent of David and his men being allowed to eat the priest’s showbread (1 Sam. 21:1-6). “The sabbath was made for humankind,” Jesus says, “and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath” (vv. 27-28). Then in 3:1-6 Jesus initiates a debate in the synagogue over the issue of healing on the Sabbath day.³ “Is it lawful,” Jesus asks the Pharisees, “to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or

¹ These pericopes may be seen as part of a larger unit of material, Mark 2:1 – 3:6, consisting of five controversy stories. See J. Dewey, “The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1 – 3:6,” in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. W. Telford (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 141-151.

² In Mark the identity of the questioners is left vague, with no expressed subject for the words καὶ ἔρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ. Matthew (9:14) specifies John’s disciples as the questioners.

³ The Pharisees of the previous pericope must be the understood subject of the verb παρετήρουν (“they watched”) in 3:2. These last two pericopes of the grouping, both of which address a dispute over Sabbath observance, go together. The point is confirmed by the specific reference to the Pharisees again in 3:6.

to kill?” (v. 4). The section concludes with the notation that the Pharisees “went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him” (v. 6).

The authorial intention of these four pericopes is to present the Pharisees as major opponents of Jesus, and to explain why, from this point on in Jesus’ ministry, they tirelessly confront him. C. S. Mann is correct when he says, “We have reached a climax in the ministry [of Jesus]. From this point in the narrative the threat of death is never far away.”⁴

Pharisees confront Jesus again in 7:1-22, the Gospel’s longest pericope involving the Pharisees. In the region of Gennesaret, as Jesus’ popularity with the crowds is growing, “the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem”⁵ ask Jesus why his disciples eat without first washing their hands. An editorial insertion in vv. 3-4 explains to Mark’s Gentile audience that the question stemmed from the Pharisees’ dedication to “the tradition of the elders” which mandated the ceremonial washing of hands before eating. Mark says that this tradition ($\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\delta\sigma\tau\zeta$) was practiced by “the Pharisees, and all the Jews,” and he explains that whenever they return from the marketplace they are careful to wash their food as well as various food containers. The narrative continues with Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for being “hypocrites,” having committed the error of Isaiah 29:13: their commitment to human traditions supersedes obedience to the commandment of God.

Mark records three more confrontations between the Pharisees and Jesus, each initiated by the Pharisees in order “to test him.” In Mark 8:9-12 the Pharisees seek out Jesus while he is in the region of Dalmanutha, and they ask him to show them a sign from heaven. Jesus says that “no sign will be given to this generation,” and he subsequently warns his disciples to “beware of

⁴ C. S. Mann, *Mark* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 243.

⁵ The Greek could be understood as saying that only the scribes came from Jerusalem, implying that the Pharisees were in Galilee to begin with. Matthew’s version of the pericope (15:1) clearly portrays both groups as coming from Jerusalem.

the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod” (vv. 14-15). In Mark 10:2-12, when Jesus is teaching in “the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan,” Pharisees come and ask him about the lawfulness of divorce, citing the case law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.⁶ Jesus counters by saying that God’s original intention for marriage was that it be a permanent union, so a couple joined by God should not be separated; putting away one’s wife and marrying another amounts to adultery against one’s wife. Mark’s final reference to the Pharisees comes in 12:13-17 as Jesus is teaching in the Temple during the final week of his ministry: “Then they [apparently the chief priests, scribes, and elders of 11:27, mp] sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him” by asking whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.⁷ The question addresses a Jewish religious issue with highly political ramifications, and one surmises that the Herodians’ presence is intended to represent the latter concern, the Pharisees’ the former. Jesus’ response amazes all: “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

b. Analysis: *The Pharisees in Jewish Society*

From the above survey we can see that Mark portrays the Pharisees as major opponents of Jesus. Their opposition centers upon various issues relating to the Law—most notably, table fellowship with reputed sinners, the proper keeping of the Sabbath commandment, and ritual purity. Of special significance to the Pharisees is the keeping of “the traditions of the elders.”⁸ The fact that Mark connects (some) scribes with the Pharisees fits in with the Pharisaic stress on legal issues. Each time Mark associates scribes with Pharisees, it is an occasion of disputation with Jesus or his disciples over alleged violations of the Torah. The later confrontations between

⁶ The controversy between rabbis Hillel and Shammai over the proper interpretation of the case law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (*m: Gittin* 9:10) provides a plausible background for why Pharisees might test Jesus with this question, particularly since Mark’s Pharisees allude to the Deuteronomy passage in v. 4. But Mark does not bring out any particulars of the rabbinic debate.

⁷ The ambiguous “they” who send the Pharisees and Herodians would seem to be “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders” of 11:27. These appear to be the ones in 12:12 who want to have Jesus arrested but cannot do so at that moment for fear of the crowds.

⁸ Cf. Josephus’ reference to Pharisaic tradition in *Ant.* 13.10.6; 18.1.3-4.

the Pharisees and Jesus—those pertaining to heavenly signs, the legality of divorce, and Roman taxation—are not presented in the text as feuds over doctrines fundamental to Pharisaic thinking, but as issues broached merely because of their potential to mire Jesus in controversy and minimize his growing popularity with the Jewish people.

Mark's Pharisees are located primarily in Galilee, but they are willing to seek Jesus out in other regions in order to confront him. The text is not completely clear as to whether the Pharisees who confront Jesus are permanent residents of Galilee or whether they are sent there from Jerusalem. The scribes who act in conjunction with the Pharisees do come from Jerusalem (7:1; cf. 3:22).

Mark does not present the Pharisees as a group possessing political authority or holding religious office. They must conspire with the Herodians (the aristocratic supporters of Herod Antipas) to try to bring about Jesus' demise (3:6; 8:15).⁹ Mark's Pharisees never send any other group to confront Jesus; rather they themselves are the ones who are sent (along with the Herodians) at the behest of the chief priests, scribes and elders to interrogate Jesus (12:13). Particularly striking is the fact that the Pharisees have no direct involvement in Jesus' arrest and trial. The chief priests, scribes and elders carry out that function (15:1), which implies that this triad wields the political power and not the Pharisees. Nor do we see anything in Mark to indicate that the Pharisees have control of the synagogues. The evangelist mentions synagogue officials (*ἀρχισυνάγωγοι*), but not in connection with the Pharisees (5:22-38). In the synagogue the Pharisees' opinions on the Law are weighty and freely offered (3:2-4), but scribes are the ones whom Mark places in "the best seats in the synagogues" (12:38). It is clear, then, that the Pharisees in Mark are not political or religious officials.

⁹ On the identity of the Herodians, see R. Guelich, *Mark 1 - 8:26* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 138-9. The Herodians are not presented as opponents of Jesus on religious grounds. Rather, they are political figures whose assistance the Pharisees need if they are to put an end to Jesus' teaching ministry.

Nevertheless, Mark's Pharisees do have a tangential connection to those who are in power. Mark presents the Pharisees as a highly respected and influential group, not only among the general populace, but especially with governing officials and religious leaders.¹⁰ The Pharisees are able to initiate discussions with those in power over matters that concern them, and they are willing to function as unofficial ancillaries of the Jewish leadership.

Mark's Gospel mentions the Pharisees in conjunction with several other groups: scribes, Herodians, and (by way of comparison) the disciples of John. Yet, it is the scribes whom Mark associates with the Pharisees in a special way. To appreciate the relationship between the scribes and the Pharisees in Mark's Gospel—and to understand the subsequent use that Matthew makes of this Markan material—we need to survey and analyze Mark's data about the scribes.

c. Scribes and Pharisees

Mark presents the scribes (not the Pharisees) as the formal teachers of Scripture to the Jewish people. Early on, the Gospel contrasts the instruction of Jesus with that of the scribes: the multitudes are astounded, for Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (1:22).¹¹ Furthermore, it is the scribes who have taught the people what the Scriptures say about the advent of Elijah (9:11-13) and the nature of the Messiah (12:35-36).

Mark presents the scribes as the ones who first object to Jesus as he ministers in Galilee. When Jesus pronounces a paralytic's sins forgiven, the scribes say to themselves, "Why does this

¹⁰ A. Saldarini, in his sociological analysis of the Pharisees, classifies them as part of the "retainer" class in Palestine; see *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988). This particular classification has been criticized; see S. Mason, "Revisiting Josephus' Pharisees," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 3, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 33-37. Still, recent researchers agree that, overall, the Pharisees' role in society was not inherently political, but tangential to those power bases and possessing the ability to exert strong influence on them. (Some sources do place individual Pharisees on the Sanhedrin [e.g., Acts 5:34], and the data in the Gospel of John regarding the Pharisees' connection with the Sanhedrin needs to be accounted for.)

¹¹ The contrast may center on the fact that Jesus appealed to his own authority rather than just the teaching of Scripture (Mark 2:28), or it may (also) allude to Jesus' rejection of the "tradition of the elders" to which the scribes adhered (Mark 7:5). M. Powell suggests that the point of the contrast is not that of teaching style as observed by the crowds (i.e., Jesus teaches authoritatively and the scribes do not), but rather that, from the point of view of the narrator, Jesus *has* authority and the scribes do not; see "Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 3 (1995): 422.

fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy!” (2:6-7). The first time that Mark mentions the Pharisees, it is in association with scribes; the text speaks of “the scribes of the Pharisees” (2:16). In 3:22-30 scribes from Jerusalem publicly accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus denies the charge and warns them about committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In 7:1-23 scribes again come from Jerusalem and join the Pharisees in condemning Jesus for allowing his disciples to violate the tradition regarding hand-washing. Scribes dispute with Jesus’ disciples when a father brings his demon-possessed son for healing (9:14-29; cf. 3:22).

In 11:27-33, when Jesus is in the Temple during the final week of his ministry, “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders” ask Jesus by what authority he acts. Jesus declines to answer their question because they refuse to commit themselves publicly on the matter of whether John the Baptist acted with divine authority. These appear to be the same persons who subsequently become provoked by Jesus’ parable of the wicked tenants (12:1-12): “When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd” (v. 12). Mark’s Jesus recognizes these individuals as the leaders of the Jews when he uses the words of Psalm 118:22-23 to designate them as “the builders” who reject God’s cornerstone.

In 12:28-34 we read of an unusually irenic discussion between Jesus and a scribe as Jesus teaches in the Temple at the end of his ministry. When the scribe asks about the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus replies that the love of God and the love of neighbor are the two greatest commandments. Agreeing with Jesus’ analysis, the scribe says that obeying these two precepts “is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” He receives Jesus’ commendation: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Following this conversation,

however, Jesus publicly questions the understanding of the scribes regarding the Messiah's Davidic sonship (12:35-37). He then issues a warning to the crowd in the Temple:

Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation. (12:38-40)

Mark consistently lays direct responsibility for Jesus' arrest and execution upon the heads of "the chief priests and the scribes" or "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1). The Pharisees, as we noted earlier, are not involved. Mark's final reference to the scribes comes in 15:31, where the chief priests and scribes mock Jesus while he is on the cross.

Our survey reveals that Mark's Gospel gives even greater attention to the scribes' opposition to Jesus than it does the Pharisees' opposition. Mark portrays the Pharisees either in contrast or in conflict with Jesus on nine occasions. He portrays the scribes in contrast or in conflict with Jesus on eighteen occasions. Scribes in Galilee are the ones whom Mark first presents as objecting to Jesus (2:6-7). As Mark relates the Galilean ministry of Jesus, both Pharisees and scribes confront him, and they sometimes do so together. For the most part, these scribes come from Jerusalem. When Jesus goes to Jerusalem at the end of the Gospel, the Pharisees recede from view and we read of scribes—along with chief priests and elders—bringing about his arrest and execution.

The precise relationship between the scribes and the Pharisees in Mark's Gospel is difficult to unravel. Mark does not regard "the scribes" and "the Pharisees" as two completely

separate groups with common interests, but rather as two groups that to some extent have an overlapping of members. The term “scribes” is best understood as the designation of a professional class, and the term “Pharisees” as the designation of a religious party. The first time the Pharisees are mentioned (2:16), Mark speaks of “the scribes of the Pharisees” (*οἱ γραμματεῖς τῶν Φαρισαίων*).¹² This construction must refer to certain scribes who were regularly associated with, or were members of, the Pharisaic party. The phrase serves to prepare a reader for the potential overlap of those persons whom the author will subsequently designate as “scribes” or as “Pharisees.” Semantically, the evangelist distinguishes the scribes from the Pharisees (e.g., “the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem,” 7:1), but he clearly sees the two groups of people designated by these terms as having a strong integration. His initial reference to “the scribes of the Pharisees” indicates that some scribes could be further classified as Pharisees.¹³ It is also evident that there were other scribes who were not Pharisees, so we cannot think of the scribes in Mark’s Gospel as a monolithic group in terms of party affiliation.

But questions remain. What of those pericopes where Mark speaks only of “scribes” (sans “Pharisees”) opposing Jesus? Are these scribes to be understood as *Pharisaic* scribes? Perhaps, but the text is not clear about this matter. Also, since the scribes associated with Pharisees are said to come from Jerusalem (7:1), is a reader to understand that these Pharisaic scribes are included among “the scribes” connected with the chief priests and the elders in Jerusalem (e.g., 8:31, 10:33, 11:18)? Again, this is quite possible, though the evangelist never

¹² This phraseology is found only here in Mark’s Gospel. Cf. that of Luke 5:30, “the Pharisees and their scribes” (*οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν*), and that of Acts 23:9, “certain scribes of the Pharisees’ group” (*τινὲς τῶν γραμματέων τοῦ μέρους τῶν Φαρισαίων*).

¹³ E. Rivkin argues that *scribes* and *Pharisees* are basically synonymous; see “Who Were the Pharisees?” in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 3, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 2, 14. But the data in Mark do not yield this conclusion.

explicitly makes the point, nor does he ever connect the Pharisees per se with the triad of leadership at Jerusalem.¹⁴

d. Pharisaic Disputes with Jesus: Analysis of Individual Pericopes

As noted earlier, Mark’s conflict stories in which Pharisees bring a charge against Jesus provide the best potential data on the doctrines and issues that the Pharisees deemed important. In addition, some of these texts yield information about the extent of the Pharisees’ interaction with the Jewish populace and religious influence over them. A close analysis of these pericopes is therefore required. Mark’s focus, of course, is always on Jesus’ responses to the Pharisees’ charges; the text never includes any Pharisaic rejoinder. But a clear understanding of Jesus’ responses to the Pharisees provides us with insight into the religious thinking of the Pharisees, as the author of Mark portrays it.

Mark 2:16-17, Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners

¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Mark informs us that the Pharisees objected to Jesus’ willingness to eat with tax collectors and sinners. *Tax collectors* ($\tau\epsilon\lambda\omega\nu\alpha\iota$) were generally regarded as having forsaken their Judaic heritage in that they sided with the Romans over against their Jewish countrymen, collected pagan coinage, and often did so unscrupulously.¹⁵ The term *sinners* ($\acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\omega\lambda\o\i$), seeing that it is consistently coupled with *tax collectors* in this pericope, must be intended in a

¹⁴ R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1426-28.

¹⁵ C. Mann, *Mark*, 229-230.

technical, rather than generic, sense.¹⁶ The word has often been explained as a designation for the ‘*ammē ha-’arets*, the “common people” among the Jews who did not follow the special regulations that the Pharisees observed.¹⁷ But that understanding cannot be sustained; the term is equivalent to *resha ‘im* (“the wicked”), and in this context it is best understood as a reference to Jews who had abandoned the moral and religious lifestyle of the Mosaic Law.¹⁸

The objection that Mark’s Pharisees make to Jesus’ choice of table companions could lie on two (not mutually exclusive) levels: (1) Jesus’ apparent acceptance of people who practiced a rebellious, immoral lifestyle. In this case, the act of eating per se is not so much the issue for the Pharisees, but rather what it seemed to imply—namely, an endorsement of lawless behavior.¹⁹ (2) Jesus’ lack of regard for Jewish traditions of ritual purity, since the houses and tables of such rebellious Jews would undoubtedly be rife with ceremonial uncleanness.²⁰ In favor of the latter view is the fact that, according to Mark 7:3-4, traditions of ritual purity with regard to food were of great importance to the Pharisees. On the other hand, the present passage does not explicitly mention the matter of ritual purity; it is not until Chapter 7 that such issues are introduced to the reader. That fact suggests that our author did not perceive the Pharisees’ objection to eating with tax collectors and sinners to be (primarily) related to table impurity. (Of course, it is also true that Pharisees themselves might weigh matters differently than does the evangelist.)

¹⁶ The same coupling of terms appears also in Matthew and Luke, not only in the parallel passages, but in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34; 15:1.

¹⁷ R. Guelich, *Mark*, 102.

¹⁸ See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 177-182. The word ἀμαρτωλός was sometimes used as a virtual synonym for ἔθνη (Gentile).

¹⁹ See Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism*, 187). There is no warrant in Mark, however, for Sanders’ arbitrary contention (*Jesus and Judaism*, 206-211) that Jesus may not have required repentance from the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus’ statement about these people being “sick” and in need of a “physician” implies that Jesus’ goal was that of correcting their aberrant behavior (cf. Mark 1:15; 6:12).

²⁰ W. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 103-104; R. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 128; C. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 296.

It seems best to view the data broadly and to see the issue for Mark's Pharisees as one fundamentally about Jesus' fellowship with rebellious Jews, with his lack of concern for purity traditions making his actions even more objectionable. Jesus' statement about the sick needing a physician could apply to both of these matters, since Scripture applied sickness and healing metaphors to moral as well as ritual issues (e.g., Psa. 41:4; 2 Chron. 30:18-20; 2 Kings 2:21). Interestingly, Jesus' statement is both a compliment and a criticism of the Pharisaic scribes: they are correct in their evaluation of his dinner companions' unrighteous condition, but they themselves show no desire to help these persons overcome their spiritual disease.

From this pericope we learn that Mark's Pharisees never practice table fellowship with perceived rebels against the Law, and they have no reservations about confronting anyone who would do so. It must be noted, however, that this pericope cannot be used to support the idea that the Pharisees were such a highly exclusive sect that they had little or no interaction with common (non-Pharisaic) Jews.²¹ Tax collectors and sinners were not common Jews; they were Jews who no longer observed the Mosaic lifestyle. The refusal of Mark's Pharisees to eat or associate with such persons tells us nothing about how much interaction Pharisees may or may not have had with observant Jews who were not Pharisees.

Mark 2:23-28, Plucking Grain on the Sabbath

²³ One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions

²¹ Some scholars have understood Jacob Neusner's description of the Pharisees as "a table-fellowship sect" (e.g., *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* [New York: KTAV, 1979], 80) to imply a degree of exclusivity in terms of societal interaction that Neusner perhaps did not intend. See Neusner's response to the criticisms of E. P. Sanders along this line in *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 270-272.

were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” ²⁷

Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

The reason for this criticism of Jesus’ disciples appears to be that the Pharisees viewed the act of plucking grain as equivalent to harvesting a crop and, thus, a violation of the Sabbath commandment. Such thinking was not limited to Mark’s Pharisees; Philo explained the Sabbath day of rest as a time when “it is not permitted to cut any shoot or branch, or even a leaf, or to pluck any fruit whatsoever” (*Vit. Mos.* 2:22). Of course the Law of Moses permitted poor people in Israel, or aliens, to glean crops in a landowner’s field since needy individuals like these did not have fields of their own to grow food (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22). One could pluck by hand the grain in a neighbor’s field or the grapes on his vines, though harvesting with a sickle or basket, as if one owned the property, was not permitted (23:24-25; cf. 4Q 159). The latter restrictions prevented a person from storing up food for the following day(s), yet the Law’s overall purpose was that of benevolence—namely, to guarantee that a needy person had a means of obtaining sustenance each day.

But was this opportunity to be suspended on the Sabbath day? According to Mark, the Pharisees had concluded that it was. Though the disciples’ act of plucking grain while walking through a field would have been their right to do on any other day of the week, in the opinion of the Pharisees this right had to cease on the Sabbath day.

In the view of some interpreters, the point of this pericope is to demonstrate Jesus' authority as the Son of God to annul Torah statutes; the "lord of the Sabbath" statement is understood as an explicit affirmation of this point.²² But that interpretation fails to do justice to Jesus' appeal to Scripture in support of his disciples' actions. Jesus' response to the Pharisees is best understood as a challenge to Pharisaic halakha.²³ Specifically, he presents the case of David's eating of the showbread (1 Sam. 21:1-6) in order to illustrate a legal principle regarding the implementation of God's laws.

The Law of Moses commanded that the showbread be removed from the sanctuary each Sabbath and given to the priests to eat (Lev. 24:5-9; Ex. 40:23). But in the Samuel narrative, when David comes to the sanctuary as a fugitive from Saul, the priest allows David and his men to eat this bread since it was the only food available.²⁴ The only condition was that the men had to be ritually clean, not having had recent sexual relations. I understand Mark's Jesus to be making the following argument. Ordinarily, it would be a violation of Torah for a nonpriest to eat the holy bread. But the high priest's decision indicated that David's partaking of the bread was justified in this case because "he and his companions were hungry and in need of food" (2:25). Thus, the point here is an issue of how the Law should be applied in such a case. For Jesus, the teaching of the Law regarding ritual holiness and Sabbath-keeping is the same: these statutes were not to be interpreted in such a way that their implementation brought harm to a person, for to do so would be a misuse of the Torah. The prohibition against plucking a neighbor's grain with basket in hand effectively prevented a needy person from preparing in

²² R. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 113-123; E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 276-279.

²³ I do not mean that Jesus was emulating the kind of formal halakhic methodology that we find in rabbinic literature. In that corpus an aggadic incident (such as the incident with David and the showbread) could never carry halakhic weight. One should be careful about critiquing or analyzing the Gospels' argumentation by the standards of the (later) rabbis.

²⁴ 1 Samuel 21:1 identifies the priest as Ahimelech, but Mark 2:26 calls him Abiathar.

advance for the Sabbath day. Hence, the Pharisaic interpretation of the Sabbath commandment meant that, in effect, a poor person who on other days could receive benevolence from his neighbor would have to go hungry on the Sabbath. For Mark's Jesus, this was an unthinkable interpretation of the Law.²⁵

The principle of interpreting a Torah statute always under the canopy of humanitarian obligation appears to be the underlying point of Jesus' maxim, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath" (2:27). The following statement, "the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath," could reinforce the same point if the phrase "the Son of Man" (*ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*) is understood as a general reference to a human being. Or, if *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* is an oblique reference to Jesus himself (as is more likely in view of how the expression is used elsewhere in Mark), the point would be that Jesus is the authoritative expicator of the Law (cf. Mark 1:22).²⁶

It is noteworthy that, according to 1 Samuel 21:4, the priest stipulated that David and his men had to be in a state of ritual cleanliness to eat the holy bread. That stipulation would have been seen as an enforcement of Leviticus 22:3, which declared that any Israelite who came in contact with a holy item while in a state of uncleanness was to suffer *karet* (death by divine agency).²⁷ The fact that the priest bound this stipulation upon David and his men would indicate

²⁵ W. Davies and D. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 2:304-305. Thus, C. Mann (along with many commentators) misses the point when he says, "The difficulty in all this is that in the case of David the Law is acknowledged, but special circumstances are pleaded as a reason for setting the Law aside. But in the narrative before us there are apparently no special circumstances: hunger could not be pleaded as a reason for setting aside the rule. Perhaps there was no emergency of any kind at all, and Jesus' disciples were simply being lax in observance. Something far more was involved, but the compressed style of the narrative hardly allows us to do more than guess" (*Mark*, 239-40).

²⁶ The scholarly discussion on these two aphorisms in vv. 27-28 is vast. Opinions as to their meaning will vary based on whether or not the sayings are considered to have originated independently of the present narrative context, and then how that narrative context is itself understood. For overviews of various positions, see Guelich, *Mark*, 123-130; Lane, *Mark*, 117-120.

²⁷ The Leviticus passage ("P" material) is classified by many Pentateuchal scholars as a late text, written long after the Deuteronomistic history (though the traditional order of these documents has recently been reversed; see R. E. Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003], 4-5). But this matter has

that he was not ignoring the Torah, but only applying it to an exceptional circumstance. Thus, the case of David and the showbread had halakhic import.

Another factor may also explain why Mark's Jesus appeals to the showbread incident: Jews may have understood David's eating of the showbread to have occurred on a Sabbath day.²⁸ The Law said that the showbread in the sanctuary was to be replaced every Sabbath, and the replaced bread given to the priests (Lev. 24:8; 1 Chron. 9:32). So the words of 1 Samuel 21:6—"So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which was removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away"—could suggest that the incident with David occurred on a Sabbath day. Jews of the Rabbinic period understood the passage in this way (*b: Menah.* 95b). Such an understanding would give the passage greater pertinence to the current issue between Jesus and the Pharisees. For Mark's Jesus, it was a fundamental misunderstanding of the significance and purpose of the Sabbath to think that the divine command to rest would prevent persons in need from obtaining the very food that the Law provided for them.²⁹ That this is how the author of Mark sees the issue is suggested by the subsequent pericope where Jesus heals on the Sabbath because he understands it to be fundamentally "lawful to do good" on the Sabbath (3:4-5).

It is important to recognize that Mark's Gospel never portrays Jesus as rejecting Sabbath observance per se, but only a very particular application of Sabbath observance that came from the Pharisees. Mark's account of Jesus' debates with the Pharisees over Sabbath halakha shows that a strict observance of the Sabbath day is a paramount concern of Mark's Pharisees, and so emphatic are they about resting from labor on the Sabbath that they even view it as a necessity

no bearing on my point here, since there is no question that first-century Jews would have believed in the Mosaic origin of the Leviticus passage.

²⁸ See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:308-309.

²⁹ The Sabbath law not only commemorated God's rest; it stressed an ethical concept, for not only men, but also women, servants, and animals were allowed to rest on the Sabbath day.

for legally mandated provisions of benevolence to cease on the Sabbath. Moreover, they strongly seek to enforce their views on other Jews.

Mark's Gospel gives information only about Jesus' side of the dispute. But Mark suggests to us that the key halakhic philosophy that guided the Pharisees' thinking in this matter was the issue of dedication to God versus service to man. Mark's Pharisees view Jesus' philosophy of Torah observance as something that minimizes dedication to God. For them service to God is paramount and the fulfillment of human needs has to be sublimated to the necessities of divine service or else God is insufficiently honored. Mark's Jesus, on the other hand, sees the failure to fulfill human needs as a violation of service to God. In other words, one cannot really fulfill the greatest commandment if it means nullifying the second greatest (Mark 12:28-34). Mark's Pharisees, however, believe that one cannot nullify the greatest commandment in order to fulfill the second greatest. The halakhic difference between the Pharisees and Jesus comes down to the issue of how love of God and love of one's fellow man are to be integrated. This, at least, is what Mark's (one-sided) presentation of the debate suggests. In the eyes of both disputants, the consequences of these two differing philosophies of Torah observance are crucial, for the kingdom of God is at stake (12:24).³⁰

Mark 7:1-23, Eating With Unwashed Hands

1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. 3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat

³⁰ Mark's Gospel presents the very opposite picture of what E. P. Sanders contends when he says that Jesus' actual disputes with the Pharisees were relatively mild debates on trivial matters and that "there was no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees with regard to Sabbath, food, and purity laws" (*Jesus and Judaism*, 265).

anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)⁵

So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”⁶ He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

⁹ Then he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’¹¹ But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban’ (that is, an offering to God)—¹² then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother,¹³ thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.”¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand:¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

¹⁷ When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable.¹⁸ He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile,¹⁹ since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out

into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)²⁰ And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles.²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

In this pericope the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus over oral tradition comes to the forefront—in particular, the tradition of cleansing one's hands of ritual defilement before eating. The evangelist inserts into his source material several editorial comments for the benefit of his Gentile audience: an explanation of Pharisaic traditions (vv. 3-4), an explanation of the Aramaic term “Corban” (v. 11), and an explanation of Jesus' statement about the nondefiling nature of foods (v. 19). In addition, redaction criticism has yielded several competing suggestions as to what verses may have existed originally as independent units of material before being joined together in this Markan format.³¹ Verses 9-13 (the matter of Corban) are usually viewed as having an origin independent from the stratum containing the Pharisaic criticism on hand-washing (vv. 1-2, 5). Jesus' comments on defilement (vv. 15-23) are usually separated as well, on the grounds that a discussion of what enters a person and defiles him has nothing to do with the purification of hands. (But see the discussion below.)

In the pericope as it stands before us, Pharisees and scribes reproach Jesus for his disciples' breach of oral tradition. In verse 3 only the Pharisees are mentioned. This, and the fact that the evangelist places the Pharisees first in order, indicates that he saw the Pharisees as more prominent in such discussions of oral tradition. Or, it may be an indication that he envisioned these particular scribes as Pharisees themselves (cf. 2:16). Little is said here about the oral traditions in general; they are designated simply as “the tradition of the elders” without further

³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2: 518.

explanation. Nothing is said about these traditions originating at Sinai (as the rabbinic myth of the dual Torah would later maintain),³² yet it is clear from what Mark says that the Pharisees view these traditions as authoritative and they are dedicated to observing all of them.

Verses 3-4 are an editorial insertion that explains the tradition of hand-washing before meals as a practice of “the Pharisees and all the Jews” (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι), and then lists other purification traditions pertaining to food and food vessels.³³ Mark may intend to attribute to “all the Jews” only the practice of hand-washing, for if the understood subject of ἐσθίουσιν in verse 4 is simply “the Pharisees”—the author’s mind having refocused on them as the real protagonists of the pericope—then the intention may be to assign the additional cleansing rituals of verse 4 only to the Pharisees. The key point, in any case, is that the evangelist wants his Gentile readers to understand the basis of the Pharisees’ criticism. Since the Pharisees regarded the traditions of the elders as authoritative and since ritual hand-washing was a tradition that even non-Pharisees were willing to observe, the failure of Jesus’ disciples to wash their hands before eating opened them up to the charge of committing presumptuous sin.

This is the situation as Mark presents it. But did *all* Jews really practice ritual hand-washing? Even the most conservative of scholars would admit that the evangelist’s statement is somewhat exaggerated. But can we even accept it as a fair generalization? E. P. Sanders rejects Mark’s assertion as inaccurate and claims that we cannot imagine that most Jews would have practiced rituals of table purity, for such concerns were the defining feature of a specific segment

³² A. Baumgarten’s contrary assessment of this matter may be somewhat anachronistic. See “Pharisees,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:659. Cf. J. Neusner, “Mr. Maccoby’s Red Cow, Mr. Sanders’s Pharisees—and Mine,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 23, 1 (June 1992): 91-92.

³³ The initial phrase in v. 4 (καὶ ἀπ’ ἀγορᾶς ἔλαν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν) could be rendered, “and they do not eat [anything] from the market unless they wash [it],” as in the NRSV quoted above. But βαπτίσωνται is in the middle voice, which would suggest a reflexive sense, and this could give the meaning, “And when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves,” as in the RSV et al. Reflecting the latter sense, some witnesses read ἀγορᾶς δύται ἐλθωσιν. For a further discussion of this issue and other textual critical matters associated with this verse, see Gundry, *Mark*, 360.

of Jews—those known in rabbinic literature as the *haberim*.³⁴ So, against Mark, Sanders asserts that only a small number of Palestinian Jews would have practiced such rituals. He proposes that the evangelist was misled by the practice of Diaspora Jews who washed before engaging in prayer and Torah study.³⁵ Yet, Mark never mentions washing before prayer or Torah study; the text is talking about washing before eating (vv. 2-5). It seems unduly incredulous to think that the author of this Gospel, a Jew in the opinion of most scholars, would have made so glaring a mistake.³⁶ Moreover, John 2:6 says that at the wedding ceremony at Cana there were on hand “six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.” So the author of Mark is not alone in his claim about the widespread nature of this Jewish ritual practice. As noted above, the evangelist sees it as a crucial part of his explanation of the Pharisees’ criticism of Jesus’ disciples. Otherwise, the criticism amounts to nothing more than the rather inane complaint that Jesus’ disciples do not follow Pharisaic praxis—that is, that they are not Pharisees. Mark presents the incident as a more substantive controversy than that.

Sanders even rejects the idea that most Pharisees practiced ritual hand-washing, or that it was a particularly vital matter. Pharisees, he says, may have washed their hands after handling Scripture, or to maintain the cultic purity of a heave offering. But washing before eating ordinary food was practiced by only a few Pharisees and then only for Sabbath or festival meals.³⁷ Mark, of course, says nothing about this incident occurring on a Sabbath or festival day, nor does he limit the purification traditions to such

³⁴ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 186. There may be some kind of connection between the *haberim* and the Pharisees, but we cannot completely equate the two groups. See J. Neusner, “The Fellowship (*חַדְשָׁה*) in the Second Jewish Commonwealth,” *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960): 125-142.

³⁵ *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*, 39-40, 261-62. Cf. the washing rituals indicated in *Judith* 12:7; *Sib. Or.* 3:591-592; 4:165-166; *Ep. Arist.* 305-306; *Luke* 11:38; *m: Yad.* 1:1-2:4; *m: Hag.* 2:5-6.

³⁶ See H. Harrington, “Did the Pharisees Eat Ordinary Food in a State of Ritual Purity?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 26 (1995): 53; Gundry, *Mark*, 358-59.

³⁷ Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 63 B.C. — CE 66 (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 437-38; *Jewish Law*, 39-40.

occasions. Mark's record of Jewish cultural practice—early testimony that it is—merits more weight than Sanders is willing to give it.³⁸

What was the purpose of Pharisaic cleansing rituals? John Poirier suggests that we can find the answer by looking at the custom of Diaspora Jews who washed their hands as a preparation for prayer or Torah study; perhaps this was the thinking in Palestine too.³⁹ Strong evidence for this suggestion is lacking, however. It seems to me that the text of Mark, while not addressing the question explicitly, is nevertheless quite clear about the matter. The reason for washing one's hands before meals was so that one would not risk ingesting impurity.⁴⁰ Verse 4 states that, after coming from the marketplace, Pharisees do not eat anything unless they first wash it (*καὶ ἀπ' ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν*).⁴¹ It is not hard to imagine how scrupulous Jews in Roman-controlled Palestine might develop a concern over contracting ritual impurity from food that, although meeting all the Torah requirements of *kashrut*, was liable to have come into contact with impurity at the marketplace or similar public venues. Mark implies that the ritual cleansing of one's hands was another safeguard along the same line of concern. Before one touched his food to eat it, potential impurity on the hands needed to be cleansed.⁴²

³⁸ Sanders would also have to deal with Matthew 23:25, where Jesus speaks of the Pharisees washing the outside of cups and plates while neglecting the problem of inward, moral purity. Jesus' contrast between outward and inward purity makes no sense unless the washing of these eating vessels was a real practice. Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3:298) argue that Jesus' language in 23:25 has nothing to do with ritual cleansing of cups, but only ordinary cleaning of dirty vessels. But it is hard to think of Jesus' language in anything but a ritual sense in view of the close parallel that exists between the wording of v. 26 and Mark 7:15-23 (= Matt. 15:10-20). Cf. also Luke 11:39-41.

³⁹ See J. Poirier, "Why Did the Pharisees Wash Their Hands?", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (Autumn 1996), 226-227. He argues properly that hand-washing was done so that uncleanness on one's hands did not defile one's food. Poirier's further claim that the ultimate purpose was to prepare one for prayer and Torah study seems, if mildly plausible, at least unnecessary.

⁴⁰ This idea seems to me to be in harmony with Jacob Neusner's theory regarding the ultimate purpose of Pharisaic ablutions. Neusner argues that the Pharisees stressed ritual purity with regard to meals because they were trying to live in holiness as if they were priests, thus fulfilling the principle of Exodus 19 that stated that Israel was to be a kingdom of priests. See Neusner, *From Politics to Piety*, 83.

⁴¹ See note 33.

⁴² Sanders believes that Pharisees would not have been motivated by a concern over contracting uncleanness from defiled food (*Jesus and Judaism*, 265-67). Sanders is motivated by his rejection of Neusner's theory that the Pharisees were trying to live in a state of holiness as if they were priests.

This is how the author of Mark conceives of the matter. Only the concept of hand-washing to avoid ingesting impurity would explain why he includes verses 14-23 in the pericope.

⁴³ In these verses Jesus addresses the crowd with a rebuttal to Pharisaic thought, saying, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile” (vv. 14-15).⁴⁴ The pertinence of this statement as a response to the Pharisees’ initial charge is obvious. The reason why some scholars want to separate these verses from the initial verses of the pericope seems to be due, in part, to a reticence to accept the portrait that Mark presents of Pharisaic ritual concerns. But according to the information that Mark presents, Pharisaic cleansing rituals such as hand-washing before meals and the cleansing of food and food vessels were all intended to prevent ingesting ceremonial impurity.⁴⁵ Moreover, Mark indicates that the Pharisees’ thinking along this line had become pervasive among the Jewish populace, at least to the degree that the Pharisees had influenced the spread of ritual hand-washing among the people. The entire pericope serves to highlight Jesus’ attempt to dissuade the crowds from focusing on matters of ritual cleansing as the Pharisees do.

What is the point of Jesus’ teaching on defilement? When he says that “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile,” does this mean that Jesus is annulling the Mosaic laws on food uncleanness? Many commentators

⁴³ If that is not the case, then one is forced to regard the record of Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ criticism in vv. 14-23 as a hopelessly misplaced section of material.

⁴⁴ Those who say that Jesus’ discussion about what defiles the inner part of the body (vv. 14-23) has no connection to vv. 1-5 fail to see any connection between Jesus’ response about eating food and the initial issue of hand-washing.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that the earlier charge against Jesus’ disciples in Mark 2:23-24 only had to do with an alleged Sabbath violation due to plucking grain while walking through a field on the Sabbath. Nothing was said about the need to wash one’s hands on such an occasion.

think so.⁴⁶ They believe that this was the understanding of the author of Mark, as indicated by vv. 18-23 which provide Jesus' private explanation of his aphorism to the disciples:

18 “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, ¹⁹ since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. ²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The editorial insertion in verse 19, “Thus he declared all foods clean” (*καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα*), has seemed to many commentators to be a clear abrogation of the Mosaic precepts of *kashrut*, and Jesus' words themselves are understood accordingly. More recent scholars stress the need to interpret Jesus' words within their Jewish cultural setting. From that perspective it becomes more plausible to understand Jesus to be emphasizing the point that moral purity is of greater importance to God than ritual purity—without trying to nullify the latter.⁴⁷ Jesus is saying that since ritual impurities enter the body from outside and are eliminated, they cannot defile a person in his heart. Instead, moral evils are what originate from within a man's heart and thus are able to defile the heart.

The point of Jesus' teaching, therefore, is not to reject what the Torah says about ritual cleanliness and uncleanness, but to correct a misplaced Pharisaic emphasis on ritual cleanliness to the neglect of the more serious matter of moral cleanliness. Support for this view comes from the

⁴⁶ See, e.g., C. Carlston, “The Things That Defile (Mark VII.14) and the Law in Matthew and Mark,” *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968-69): 92-94.

⁴⁷ See S. Westerholm, “Pharisees,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 609-14; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:529-31; J. Donahue and D. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002), 228-229.

fact that when we consider the early church's struggle with the issues of Gentile inclusion and food laws (e.g., Gal. 1-2; Rom. 14:1-23; Acts 10-11, 15), we find no evidence that this teaching of Jesus was ever brought to bear on the issue. "The logion was simply not thought to imply a cancellation of the Levitical ordinances. It was rather construed as an exhortation (cf. the list of vices). The Jesus tradition did not determine the purity issue precisely because it was silent on the subject."⁴⁸

Even commentators who acknowledge the above interpretation as Jesus' actual meaning will often affirm, in view of the editorial insertion of verse 19, that the author of Mark failed to perceive Jesus' point accurately and, altering the sense of Jesus' words, affirmed to his Gentile audience that Jesus had annulled the Mosaic food laws. This seems to me to be a strange and unnecessary position to take in view of the evangelist's use of the Jesus-tradition throughout the Gospel. Moreover, if Jesus' words in this unit of material are indeed indicating that cleanliness/uncleanliness distinctions regarding foods were not inherent, absolute states and that only moral matters fell into that category, then the rules of *kashrut* addressed relative states of purity that were set up by the Mosaic Law only for those who were under it. Thus, it is quite plausible that the author of Mark concluded from Jesus' teaching that the Gentile Christians to whom he wrote would not themselves be bound in their diet by Jewish food classifications. This may be all that is intended by the editorial comment of verse 19.⁴⁹

If Jesus' teaching in this pericope is understood as described above, then his dispute with the Pharisees on this occasion perfectly conforms to their earlier halakhic dispute over Sabbath observance. Jesus' difference with the Pharisees regarding hand-washing before meals was not a matter of whether the Mosaic holiness legislation should be practiced by Jews, but a matter of

⁴⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:531.

⁴⁹ If so, the evangelist parallels the teaching of Paul in Romans 14:1-4, 17-21. See N. T. Wright, *Romans*, New Interpreter's Bible 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 730-43.

how that legislation should be applied. For Mark's Jesus, it was an egregious error to elevate ritual holiness to such a level of importance that human tradition surrounding it attained a binding, authoritative status. Such actions not only treated human traditions as if they were the word of God, but in this particular case, the end result was a flip-flopping of the hierarchic categories of holiness. Moral holiness—that which was inherently absolute and essential—was superseded in priority by ritual holiness—that which was inherently relative and nonessential. The difference between Jesus' approach to Torah observance and the Pharisees' approach could not have been more substantial.

The controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees in this pericope is quite dense, because the issue over ritual hand-washing is made to highlight a larger dispute over oral tradition in general. For Mark's Jesus, part of the issue is that dedication to oral tradition frequently causes one to violate moral injunctions of Scripture. Citing Isaiah 29:13 against the Pharisees, Jesus says, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." Jesus sees this as a form of hypocrisy (vv. 6-8). The hypocrisy charge against the Pharisees is found twice in Mark's Gospel: in this passage and in 12:15. Current interpretation commonly understands it as a charge that the Pharisees are duplicitous and do not live in accordance with their own teachings—that is, that they purposely do not bother to "practice what they preach." But the pericope's subsequent discussion and illustration of the hypocrisy charge does not fit that mold. Mark's Jesus says that the Pharisees give the impression of Torah observance by diligently keeping their traditions, but they are "hypocrites" (*ὑπόκριται*) in that the keeping of their traditions causes them, in effect, to violate the Torah (v. 8).⁵⁰

The subsequent section of material, verses 9-13, provides an example of the problem: the way that the Pharisaic tradition mandated the application of vows. Jesus says that, despite the

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Jesus' "hypocrisy" charge, see Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says," 423.

injunctions of the Torah that obliged the financial support of one's aged parents (Exod. 20:12; 21:17), the Pharisees' tradition sometimes causes one to disobey that injunction: "But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)—then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition." The Mishnah contains numerous halakhic discussions on vows, and some of these address circumstances where one could be released from a vow.⁵¹ Jesus, however, is complaining about a case where Pharisaic tradition enforced a vow too strictly, such that one's parental obligations were effectively negated.

It may be that the text is talking about a person intentionally declaring funds or property Corban so that he might spitefully prevent his parents from receiving the use of them.⁵² *M. Nedarim* contains examples of vows that prevented others from sharing in one's wealth (see 5.6; 8.7; 9.1). Or, Jesus could be talking about a case where a person had declared as Corban the future proceeds of a business venture, but later was faced with aging parents who needed that assistance.⁵³ If so, Jesus would be criticizing the Pharisees for enforcing a voluntary act of religious service to God to the point where one could not adequately fulfill explicit Torah commands to care for one's parents. Both of these views of the Corban matter fit with what Mark already has presented as the chief issue between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the proper approach to the Law—that which was illustrated by the earlier Sabbath controversies: one cannot bind a precept of the Torah in a way that causes one to neglect humanitarian or (in this case) familial responsibility.⁵⁴ Jesus regards it as invalid to think that God is pleased with an act of

⁵¹ See *m: Nedarim* (esp.) 4.7-8; 9.1; cf. *m: Hagigah* 1:8.

⁵² Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 56-57.

⁵³ A parallel exists in *m. Nedarim* 9.1 where the sages were willing to release one from a vow in a matter between him and his father or mother because of the honor due to his father and mother. Cf. Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22.

⁵⁴ This religious concept is seen throughout Mark's presentation of Jesus' teaching, but it perhaps reaches a climax in 12:28-34 when Jesus has a discussion with a scribe in the Temple about the two greatest commandments.

religious service that causes harm to another human being, whereas the Pharisees affirm that their tradition demonstrates a proper prioritizing of piety toward God.

f. *Pharisaic Disputes with Jesus: Conclusions*

Our analysis of Mark’s presentation of the major disputes between the Pharisees and Jesus, though one-sided accounts, causes a picture of the religious philosophy of the Pharisees to take shape. Mark’s Pharisees are experts in the Law of Moses and they are very concerned about the proper fulfillment of Mosaic statutes. They show a special concern with the strict fulfillment of the Sabbath commandment, the maintenance of ritual purity, and the enforcement of Corban—all of which pertain to matters of piety toward God. It is here that Mark’s Pharisees place their religious emphasis.

The strictness with which the Pharisees implement their understanding of the Law is seen in several areas. They view plucking grain by hand while walking through a field as the virtual equivalent of harvesting crops, and therefore they classify such an action on the Sabbath as “work” the Law prohibits. So strong is the Pharisaic dedication to Sabbath observance that Sabbath-keeping may even suspend the benevolence aims of Torah statutes. Honoring God on the Sabbath day is what is important, which is why in the Pharisees’ concept of Torah observance, needy persons on the Sabbath may not exercise their normal right to pluck grain in a neighbor’s field, and healing someone on the Sabbath day is an impious offense against God. For similar reasons, Mark’s Pharisees strictly enforce Corban vows even to the point where the keeping of the vow supersedes humanitarian and familial obligations.

Mark’s Pharisees are also strong proponents of the “tradition of the elders,” which they see as necessary if one is to fulfill the Law properly. Of particular importance to Pharisees are purity traditions regarding food. The Pharisees wash their hands before eating, and after coming

from the marketplace they perform other washing rituals lest by chance they ingest foods that have contracted ceremonial defilement. Such concerns over ritual purity suggest an extreme dedication to the concept of holiness before God, perhaps in imitation of priestly levels of holiness, and these practices comport with the dedication to piety that we observe in Mark's Pharisees in other matters. It is here that the Pharisees and scribes come into major conflict with Jesus. He criticizes the Pharisaic traditions because they are of human origin and do not rise to the level of the word of God. Dedication to the Pharisaic traditions causes a person to pay less attention to the moral principles that form the very foundation of the Torah.

The attitude of Mark's Gospel toward the Pharisees is indicated by the things that Jesus says about the Pharisees' character. They manifest a "hardness of heart" in their acceptance of divorce (10:5) and in their opposition to healing on the Sabbath day (3:5). They are "hypocrites" in that they violate God's moral principles while they practice religious traditions that outwardly make them appear pious toward God (7:6).⁵⁵ Their pervasive influence on the Jewish people is corrupting, and one needs to "beware of the yeast of the Pharisees" (8:15).

It is clear that Mark's Pharisees have a significant amount of influence over the Jews of Palestine. This is due in large part to the fact that certain of the scribes—the formal teachers of the Law who enjoy being "greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets"—are affiliated with the Pharisaic party (12:38-39; 2:16). The Pharisees are therefore able to influence the Jewish populace to observe some of their traditions, particularly those relating to ritual cleansing. They are also quite ready to charge someone with a breach of the Torah (as they would apply it), particularly a teacher like Jesus who was having an influence of his own upon the Jewish people.

⁵⁵ See Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says," 423.

There is nothing in Mark to suggest Pharisaic exclusivity in a sectarian (i.e., soteriological) sense. If we use E. P. Sanders' definitions, Mark's Pharisees would seem to be a "party" rather than a "sect."⁵⁶ They do not associate—particularly in table fellowship—with nonobservant Jews whose lifestyles indicated an abandonment of the Mosaic covenant. But there is nothing in Mark to suggest that the Pharisees were an exclusive table-fellowship sect, if what is meant by that idea is that they refused to associate or eat with non-Pharisees. All that Mark suggests is that the Pharisees would have been sticklers for the maintenance of table purity among those with whom they dined. As long as non-Pharisees were observant Jews and ritually pure at table, nothing in Mark's Gospel suggests that Pharisees would have declined to eat with them. Mark's Pharisees "possessed a character which was elitist," but "not soteriologically exclusivistic."⁵⁷

II. The Pharisees in Matthew

Turning now to the Pharisees in Matthew's Gospel, I first will survey Matthew's use of material that is found in Mark, observing similarities and differences. Then I will analyze Matthew's non-Markan material on the Pharisees, noting that which is found also in Luke (a relatively small amount of material), and that which is unique to Matthew. Our purpose is to ascertain the portrait of the Pharisees that Matthew produces and to compare it with that of Mark. Does the author of Matthew alter, in any substantive way, what Mark presents about the Pharisees? Does he embellish what Mark says? Does he subvert it?

a. *Markan Material on the Pharisees*

⁵⁶ In accordance with Sanders' distinction of these terms (*Jewish Law*, 240-242). But see Neusner's response in "Sanders' Pharisees and Mine," *Judaic Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 270-271.

⁵⁷ M. Hengel and R. Deines, "E. P. Sanders' 'Common Judaism,' Jesus, and the Pharisees," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 46, 1 (April 1995): 44.

Matthew uses all of the Markan pericopes relating to the Pharisees, in the same order, yet with several notable variations. Matthew 9:11-13 presents the pericope where Jesus is criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners (= Mark 2:16-17). Rather than using Mark's phrase "the scribes of the Pharisees," Matthew simply says that "the Pharisees" raise the objection. Matthew includes Jesus' response about the sick requiring a physician, but with an additional statement: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (v. 13). The quotation is from Hosea 6:6 and it is crucial for Matthew's Gospel; on two occasions Matthew's Jesus cites the passage. It is a text of Scripture that encapsulates what Mark presented as Jesus' fundamental philosophical difference with the Pharisees regarding the Torah: for Jesus, showing mercy to sinners and implementing other moral principles is more important to God than even the Temple cult and similar aspects of the Mosaic system.

Matthew 9:14-17 recounts the query about the disciples' failure to fast (= Mark 2:18-22). The only formal difference with Mark's account is that Matthew portrays the question as coming from John's disciples themselves.

In Matthew 12:1-8 we read of the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus' disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath (= Mark 2:23-28). Matthew's Jesus makes the familiar argument regarding David and the showbread, but he adds two additional arguments:

⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the Temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the Temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless.

The first argument makes the point that the Sabbath restriction cannot be understood to mean that every kind of work is prohibited on that day, for it was obvious that God did not intend the

suspension of priestly sacrificial duties on the Sabbath. The quotation (again) of Hosea 6:6 complements the prior argument, for if sacrifice is not forbidden on the Sabbath, and yet mercy ($\epsilon\lambda\epsilono\varsigma$) is more important to God than sacrifice, then deeds of mercy on the Sabbath could not be forbidden.⁵⁸ This type of *qal v'homer* argumentation fully comports with the thrust of Jesus' halakhic argumentation in Mark. Curiously, Matthew omits (as does Luke) the Markan phrase, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath," but he does include the climactic aphorism, "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."

Like Mark, Matthew (12:9-14) immediately follows the above pericope with the incident of Jesus healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath (= Mark 3:1-6). Matthew specifies that the Pharisees are the ones closely watching Jesus in order to accuse him, something that was only implicit in Mark. But in Matthew the Pharisees actually voice the question, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?"—to which Jesus responds with the following argument:

¹¹ Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.

Jesus' words presume a knowledge of Pharisaic practice—specifically, that they would have granted an exception to the Sabbath restriction in the case of a trapped animal.⁵⁹ Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of inconsistency in their application of Torah. More than that, he sees it as an inconsistency that fails to give proper place to the humanitarian requirements of the Law. At the end of the pericope Matthew includes the Markan statement about the Pharisees conspiring to

⁵⁸ U. Luz presents an intriguing interpretation of Jesus' statement, "Something greater than the Temple is here." He suggests that the statement sets up the subsequent quotation of Hosea 6:6 and that an act of "mercy" is what was greater than the Temple. See U. Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 181-82.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, the Essenes would not have made this exception, according to *CD* 11.13-14, 16-17.

destroy Jesus, but Matthew omits the reference to the Herodians, saying merely that “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him” (v. 14).⁶⁰

Matthew 15:1-20 recounts the Pharisees and scribes’ criticism of Jesus’ disciples for not washing their hands before eating (= Mark 7:1-23). Whereas Mark leaves the Pharisees’ provenance vague, Matthew indicates that they and the scribes both come from Jerusalem. Matthew’s version of the incident corresponds fairly well with Mark’s, the most notable departure being that Matthew omits Mark’s explanatory insertions regarding Jewish purification rituals and the cleanness of all foods (Mark 7:3-4, 19). The omissions reflect the Jewish background of Matthew’s audience.⁶¹ Matthew does add, however, a discussion between Jesus and the disciples about the impact of his teaching on the Pharisees, and this discussion prompts Jesus to issue a harsh rebuke of the Pharisees:

12 Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” 13 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.”

At the conclusion of the pericope, Jesus states that moral evils originating within one’s heart “are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile” (v. 20). These words tie the

⁶⁰ In contrast to Mark, Matthew appears to have no significant interest in the Herodians and their combined efforts with the Pharisees to combat Jesus. The author of Matthew is much more concerned about the Sadducees and their efforts, along with the Pharisees, to oppose Jesus.

⁶¹ The significance of the omission of these words by Matthew depends on how they are interpreted and how the words of Mark 7:15 (= Matt. 15:11) are interpreted. Those who understand Mark’s insertion to be an effectual annulment of Mosaic food laws regard Matthew’s omission as an indication of the author’s opposition to Mark’s interpretation of Jesus’ teaching on impurity. On the other hand, if, as suggested earlier, Jesus’ maxim was not abrogating Mosaic food laws per se, but only relativizing them, and if Mark inserted this statement for the benefit of a Gentile audience who needed to know that Jewish purity rituals were not binding on Gentiles, then the insertion would have been superfluous for Matthew’s Jewish audience.

entire pericope together by focusing attention back on the Pharisees and scribes' initial complaint regarding ritual hand-washing.

Matthew 16:1-4 records the occasion where Jesus is asked to perform a miraculous sign (= Mark 8:11-13).⁶² Whereas Mark portrays the request as coming from the Pharisees, Matthew says that "the Pharisees and Sadducees" (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι) are the ones who ask for a sign. This coupling of the Pharisees and Sadducees is a characteristic feature of Matthew's Gospel.⁶³ Matthew also adds a rebuke from Jesus concerning his questioners' inability to discern the signs of the times: "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (v. 4). The "sign of Jonah" is an allusion to Jesus' third-day resurrection from the dead (cf. Matt. 12:38-40).

Matthew 16:5-12 contains Jesus' warning about "the yeast of the Pharisees" (= Mark 8:14-21). In Mark's account Jesus warns about "the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod," but Matthew omits the reference to Herod and once again connects the Sadducees with the Pharisees: "[Jesus said,] 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that he had not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (vv. 11-12).

⁶² Matthew 12:38-42, a pericope unique to Matthew but quite similar in content to Matthew 16:1-4 (= Mark 8:11-13), records an occasion where "some of the scribes and Pharisees" ask Jesus to perform a sign.

⁶³ Some scholars have suggested that Matthew's grammatical coupling of the Pharisees and Sadducees (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι), with one article governing both nouns, indicates (particularly in 16:11-12) that the author was ignorant of the distinctions between these two Jewish groups; see, e.g., J. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 20-23. It seems more reasonable to think that the author was speaking about the similar false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, particularly in regard to their mutual opposition to Jesus (see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:32). Matthew's phraseology might be intended to indicate the solidarity of these two Jewish parties when it came to the matter of opposing Jesus. That idea is thought by many to be historically problematic, given the hostility that is known to have existed between the two parties (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6; Acts 23:7-9). Yet, history is replete with examples of oppositional parties who unite to defeat a common enemy. (A similar issue arises with respect to Mark's portrayal of the Pharisees and Herodians in 3:6.)

Matthew 19:3-12 records Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees about divorce (= Mark 10:2-12). The account corresponds in substance, though not in precise detail, with Mark.⁶⁴ Matthew includes two significant additions. First, an exception clause is inserted into Jesus' statement about the adulterous nature of divorce and remarriage: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, *except for unchastity* [μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ], and marries another commits adultery" (v. 9).⁶⁵ Matthew also includes a question by Jesus' disciples as to whether one should marry at all, to which Jesus responds by saying that some men may choose to forgo marriage and make themselves "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (vv. 10-12). Like Mark, Matthew gives no information concerning Pharisaic views on divorce other than that they permitted the issuing of a bill of divorcement on the basis of the case law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Despite the addition of an exception clause, Matthew follows Mark in treating Deuteronomy's case law on divorce as nothing more than a legal toleration of the act of wronging one's spouse. Jesus rejects the Pharisaic practice of using this case law as if it were a model of morality.⁶⁶

Matthew 22:15-22 presents the incident where Jesus is questioned about paying taxes to Caesar (= Mark 12:13-17). Matthew accords with Mark throughout, even including the Markan data about the Herodians joining with the Pharisees in an attempt to entrap Jesus. This is curious, because earlier Matthew omitted two of Mark's references to the Herodians.⁶⁷

b. Markan Material on the Scribes

⁶⁴ Matthew's account only considers the scenario of a man divorcing his wife. But Mark 10:11 considers the additional scenario of a woman divorcing her husband.

⁶⁵ Cf. Matthew 5:32, where the same exception clause is included.

⁶⁶ The strictness of Jesus' prohibition of divorce comports with what Mark and Matthew present concerning Jesus' fundamental halakhic principle that the proper treatment of a fellow human being takes precedence over legal formalities.

⁶⁷ Matthew 12:14 does not include Mark's reference (3:6) to the Herodians joining forces with the Pharisees against Jesus. Also, Jesus' warning in Mark about "the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (8:15) is presented in Matthew as a warning about "the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees," or "the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:6, 11-12).

Just as Matthew uses all of the Markan pericopes relating to Pharisees, he also uses all of the Markan pericopes relating to scribes.⁶⁸ Of special significance, however, is that on several occasions where Mark refers to scribes, Matthew designates them as Pharisees. Mark's reference to "the scribes of the Pharisees" (2:16) is simply "the Pharisees" in Matthew 9:11. The "scribes" of Mark 3:22 (who "came down from Jerusalem" and claimed that Jesus exorcized demons by the power of Beelzebul) are called "Pharisees" in Matthew 12:24.⁶⁹ Though Matthew 15:1 agrees with Mark in naming both Pharisees and scribes as the ones who criticize the disciples' neglect of hand-washing (Mark 7:1, 5), the critics are subsequently designated simply as "Pharisees" (v. 12).⁷⁰ The "chief priests, the scribes, and the elders" who (based on Mark 11:27, 12:1-12) become provoked by Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants and seek a means of arresting him are identified in Matthew 21:45 as "the chief priests and the Pharisees." The individual scribe of Mark 12:28-34 (who discusses with Jesus the greatest commandment) is identified in Matthew 22:34-40 as a Pharisee and (in many manuscripts) as a lawyer (*νομικός*).⁷¹ Matthew's version contains none of Mark's positive portrayal of this individual.⁷² Jesus' question about the Messiah that in Mark 12:35-37 is posed to the Temple crowd (which included scribes) is presented in Matthew 22:41-46 as a question addressed specifically to Pharisees. Finally, whereas Mark

⁶⁸ Where Mark refers to the Jerusalem leadership—the chief priests, elders, and scribes—Matthew sometimes omits scribes from the list.

⁶⁹ Matthew 9:34, a text unique to Matthew, records a similar incident and also attributes the accusation to Pharisees. I see no basis for G. Twelftree's conclusion regarding Matthew 12:24 that the attribution of the accusation to "Pharisees" rather than retaining Mark's original "scribes" indicates a Matthean "desire to rehabilitate [the scribes]," that is, to portray them in a more positive light than did Mark (see "Scribes," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 1088). That conclusion does not square with the fact that, later, Matthew 22:34-40 alters the form of Mark 12:28-34, a pericope in which Mark presents a scribe in a positive light. I agree with Twelftree that Matthew saw the scribes associated with the Pharisees, rather than scribes in general, as the problem. But that idea is not absent in Mark.

⁷⁰ Cf. Mark 7:3.

⁷¹ The word *νομικός* is used nowhere else in Matthew, and its manuscript support is questionable. It is a common Lukan term, however, and it may be that copyists introduced the term into Matthew 22:34 because of influence from Lukan usage.

⁷² In Mark this scribe does not come across as antagonistic, and he even receives a compliment from Jesus. Matthew's version is quite matter-of-fact, contains no positive statements about the man, and even says that he approached Jesus "to test him" (*πειράζων αὐτόν*).

12:38-40 records Jesus' stern rebuke of "the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets" (12:38-40), Matthew 23 gives an expanded version of the rebuke wherein Jesus adds a list of woes against the "scribes and (the) Pharisees" (23:2 et passim).

It is not the case, however, that Matthew designates every Markan scribe as a Pharisee. In Matthew's use of pericopes where Mark speaks of scribes associated with the chief priests and elders, Matthew normally either retains Mark's designation "scribes" (16:21; 20:18; 26:57; 27:41), or omits the Markan reference to scribes altogether (21:23; 26:3, 47). Matthew also retains Mark's designation "scribes" whenever they are mentioned simply in their capacity as formal teachers of the Law, rather than in confrontation with Jesus over alleged breaches of the Law (7:29; 17:10). The Markan scribes whom Matthew designates as Pharisees are always scribes who question or confront Jesus about matters of the Law. In four out of five such instances, Matthew identifies Mark's scribes as Pharisees; the single exception is in Matthew 9:3 where the scribes of Mark 2:6-7 (who charge Jesus with blasphemy for claiming to forgive sins) are still referred to as "scribes."

Several points emerge from this survey of the data. First of all, it is quite apparent that Matthew gives more emphasis to the Pharisees as opponents of Jesus than he does to scribes. This Matthean trait stands in contrast to Mark's Gospel, in which the scribes' opposition to Jesus receives more attention. The Markan scribes who oppose Jesus' approach to the Torah are almost always identified in Matthew as Pharisees. Never does the reverse occur—that is, never is a Markan reference to Pharisees presented in Matthew as a reference to scribes. Clearly, the author of Matthew believed that while not every Pharisee was a scribe, certain scribes in Mark's Gospel were in fact Pharisees and these Pharisaeic scribes tended to be the ones who objected to Jesus as

a teacher of the Law. This idea may have been part of the Christian tradition at the evangelist's disposal, but it may also have been a deduction derived from Mark's Gospel itself. As we have seen, Mark's early reference to "the scribes of the Pharisees" opposing Jesus (2:16) suggests to a reader that subsequent references to scribes who oppose Jesus might also denote Pharisaic scribes. While Mark's text does not make that point absolutely clear, the author of Matthew may have drawn that inference. It perhaps is significant that the one Markan pericope where "scribes" oppose Jesus on a matter of Law and Matthew does not change the designation to "Pharisees" is the pericope of Mark 2:6 (= Matt. 9:3), which comes prior to the reference to "the scribes of the Pharisees" in 2:16. Perhaps the author of Matthew could not be certain whether the scribes of Mark 2:6 were also Pharisees and so, when using this pericope, he retained Mark's original "scribes."⁷³

At any rate, it appears that the author of Matthew tried to identify Jesus' opponents as Pharisees every opportunity that he could. Nevertheless, the textual data do not indicate that he did so capriciously; there was a reason to think that most of the Markan scribes who confronted Jesus and his teaching were Pharisees. The emphasis that Matthew's Gospel gives to the Pharisees, therefore, seems intended to show that the halakhic approach to the Torah that conflicted so seriously with the teaching of Jesus was that of the Pharisees.⁷⁴ Did the author of Matthew presume that all of the Markan scribes who acted in concert with the Pharisees were Pharisees themselves? It would seem so. He recognized (as did the author of Mark) that a

⁷³ Note, however, that Luke 5:21 (which parallels the pericope of Mark 2:6-7) identifies Jesus' opponents on this occasion as "the scribes and the Pharisees."

⁷⁴ The Griesbach theory of Gospel composition (i.e., that Mark summarized Matthew and Luke) is not supported by the above data. One can see a clear purpose underlying the Matthean material on the Pharisees if indeed Matthew is dependent on Mark: in order to highlight the Pharisaic opposition to Christianity, the author of Matthew changed Mark's "scribes" to "Pharisees" whenever there was reason to believe that the scribes in a given Markan pericope were Pharisaic scribes. But no satisfactory explanation exists for why the author of Mark's Gospel would do the reverse and change Matthew's "Pharisees" into "scribes" (as, e.g., in Mark 3:22 [= Matt. 12:24]). Clearly, the author of Mark did not believe that all Pharisees were scribes.

number of the scribes from Jerusalem were affiliated with the Pharisaic party, and he presumed that the scribes who acted in concert with the Pharisees in opposing Jesus' halakha were Pharisaic scribes.

It is possible (but not certain) that the author of Matthew believed that some of the scribes whom Mark identified with the Jerusalem political leadership were Pharisees. This possibility is suggested by the reference in Matthew 21:45 to "the chief priests and the Pharisees" as the ones who become offended by the parable of the wicked tenants. In Mark's account, the identity of the offended parties is somewhat ambiguous, but they would appear to be "the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders" of 11:27. As noted earlier, on two occasions Mark's Gospel identifies the scribes associated with the Pharisees as "scribes who came down from Jerusalem" (3:22; 7:1). This suggests the idea that some Pharisaic scribes may have belonged to the group of scribes who were a part of the Jerusalem political leadership.

We turn our attention next to Matthew's non-Markan material that relates to the Pharisees, which consists of (1) pericopes that are also found in Luke, and so would be classified by most scholars as belonging to Q, and (2) material that is unique to Matthew's Gospel. There is very little of the former (and what there is we shall note as we proceed in our survey), but there is quite a bit of the latter, and both appear in *narratives* and *discourses*. As we shall see, Matthew's non-Markan narratives offer a relatively small amount of data relating to the Pharisees, but in Matthew's discourses the scribes and Pharisees often take center stage.

c. Non-Markan Material: Narratives

Matthew's first mention of the Pharisees is in 3:7-10, a non-Markan addition to the narrative on John the Baptist wherein John condemns the impenitence of persons seeking baptism.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9 Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

This material is also found in Luke 3:7-9, and so it is usually assigned to Q. In Luke's version the Baptist directs his words to “the crowds,” but in Matthew he specifically addresses “many Pharisees and Sadducees” (*πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων*).⁷⁵ It is normally thought that Luke preserves the original form of the tradition.

In Luke, John's speech is addressed “to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him” (*τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ*), implying that the persons addressed intended to submit to John's baptism. Matthew's alternate wording—’Ιδὼν δὲ πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ—may indicate the same thing with regard to the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the idea that these two groups would have been willing to submit to John's baptism seems problematic due to what this Gospel, and the other Gospels, indicate about the antipathy of the Pharisees and Sadducees toward John and Jesus.⁷⁶ Luke 7:30 specifically states that the Pharisees and lawyers rejected John's baptism. Since Matthew never says that the Pharisees and Sadducees are actually baptized, perhaps the reader is

⁷⁵ As we have seen, Matthew often joins these two Jewish parties together.

⁷⁶ If Matthew is indicating that the Pharisees and Sadducees come to John for the purpose of submitting to baptism, this suggests that the evangelist does not regard the Pharisees or the Sadducees to have been as inherently opposed to John the Baptist's ministry as they were the ministry of Jesus. We already have seen that, unlike Jesus' disciples, John's disciples fasted regularly, as did the Pharisees (Mark 2:18; Matt. 9:14). The synoptic Gospels indicate a degree of similarity between the Pharisees and John's disciples. Jesus likens both to an “old garment” and “old wineskins,” incompatible with Jesus' new ministry of the kingdom (Mark 2:18-22; Matt. 9:14-17).

to understand that John's insistence on repentance and acknowledgment of one's sins is what causes the Pharisees and Sadducees to change their minds about submitting to John's baptism and thereafter turn away from him. Some interpreters seek to resolve the problem in another way. They regard the Matthean words ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ to be indicating only that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to the site of John's baptismal activities, as critical observers.⁷⁷ This understanding of the phrase, however, seems discordant with the nature of John's speech, since the speech appears to presume that the ones addressed are seeking baptism.⁷⁸

Matthew 12:38-42 relates an occasion where "some of the scribes and Pharisees" ask Jesus to perform a sign. Though this pericope is unique to Matthew, it is quite similar in content to Matthew 16:1-4 (= Mark 8:11-13). The phraseology "the scribes and Pharisees," with scribes placed first in order, is not found in Mark, but (as we will observe shortly) it is used consistently in the unique material of Matthew's Gospel (cf. 5:20; 12:38; 23:2, 13 et passim).

Matthew's non-Markan narratives do contain a couple of references to scribes apart from any Pharisees. In 2:4 "the chief priests and scribes of the people" are summoned to provide scriptural information concerning where the Messiah will be born. This passage presents the scribes as the nation's formal teachers of the Law, just as we see in the Markan material. In Matthew 8:19-20 (= Luke 9:57-58) a scribe affirms his desire to become a disciple of Jesus.

19 A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

⁷⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:304.

⁷⁸ But perhaps we are to understand John's speech as a formulaic homily delivered to anyone and everyone who would come to John's baptismal site.

Luke's account does not identify the individual as a scribe; it merely says that "someone [τις] said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" Matthew's presentation of a scribe who views Jesus favorably and actually wants to follow him is striking, though it can be argued that Jesus' response to the scribe is something of a mild criticism; the scribe does not appreciate the demands of discipleship (cf. vv. 21-22). Still, Matthew's real concern is with Pharisees and the scribes associated with them. This particular scribe is not of that classification. Therefore, this pericope further evidences what we already have observed as the Matthean agenda: portraying the Pharisees and their approach to the Torah as the real threat to Jesus' teaching and influence among the people.⁷⁹

d. Non-Markan Material: Discourses

The unique material in Matthew's Gospel consists primarily of Jesus' instructional discourses, and it is here that we see further evidence of Matthew's great interest in portraying the Pharisees as Jesus' opponents. Once the evangelist begins narrating the ministry of Jesus, he intersperses the narrative sections with five major discourses of Jesus, each one ending with the transitional phrase, "when Jesus had finished [these words]." Thus, these discourses have a structural connection with one another. The first discourse (5:1 – 7:29), commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, is directed to the disciples while the crowds listen in, and it presents beatitudes and other instruction regarding kingdom righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees provide the negative example that is not to be followed. The fifth discourse (23:1-39) is a stern warning to the crowds and the disciples about the poor example of the scribes and Pharisees, and

⁷⁹ In Matthew 13:52 Jesus speaks of his disciples as scribes: "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Jesus probably uses this terminology because, like the Jewish scribes of Palestine, his disciples will be teachers of the Law, but the Law as Jesus unfolds it for the kingdom (cf. Matt. 23:34).

the discourse culminates with a list of seven woes pronounced against them. These woes seem to provide a counterpoint to the beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:17-48 (Sermon on the Mount), “You Have Heard”

Turning first to the Sermon on the Mount, we see that in Matthew 5 Jesus intentionally juxtaposes his own teaching about the Torah with that of the scribes and Pharisees.

¹⁷ Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on

the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.”

²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” ³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.” ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

³⁸ You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes

you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ **and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;** ⁴¹ **and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.** ⁴² **Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.**

⁴³ You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” ⁴⁴ **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** ⁴⁵ **so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.** ⁴⁶ **For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?** ⁴⁷ **And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?** ⁴⁸ **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

In this discourse, Matthew's Jesus vehemently denies the charge that the aim of his teaching is to nullify (*καταλύω*) the Torah (v. 17). He affirms that the Law must be followed in every way, but he says that the scribes and Pharisees are poor teachers of the kind of righteous behavior the Law advocates: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 20). Jesus then cites six cases where the commonly heard teaching on the Law fails to receive proper application (5:21-48). He employs a paradigmatic introduction, "You have heard ... But I say to you" ('*Ηκούσατε ... ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν*). But what is the nature of the contrast?

Some scholars have understood Matthew's Jesus to be contrasting the Mosaic Law with the new-covenant system of Christianity.⁸⁰ But this view ignores the immediate context of the discourse in that it interprets Matthew's Jesus to be doing the very thing he explicitly says he is not doing: abrogating the Mosaic Law (vv. 17-20). To the contrary, Matthew is not portraying Jesus as a teacher outside of the Mosaic system, but rather as an insider who has strong disagreement with what the most influential teachers, the scribes and Pharisees, are indicating about the Law.⁸¹ Therefore, we should understand the six examples Jesus gives as six cases of Torah instruction from the scribes and Pharisees—all of which are applied in ways that result in an inadequate level of righteousness (v. 20).

In each example, the issue for Jesus is that the Pharisaic application of the Law fails to go far enough.⁸² The people hear from the scribes and Pharisees that the Law condemns murder, but bitterness and estrangement are tolerated (vv. 21-26). They hear that adultery is forbidden, but the problem of lust after another man's wife is ignored (vv. 27-30). They hear that a bill of divorce must be provided to legally divorce one's wife, but what is not evaluated is whether the divorce itself is a truly moral act (vv. 31-32). They hear that the Law commands a person to keep his vows, but integrity in what one says is deemed necessary only on occasions where a formally worded vow is uttered (vv. 33-37). They hear about the judicial principle of *lex talionis*, but its use in personal vengeance is permitted (vv. 38-42). Finally, they hear about the obligation to love one's neighbor, but the principle is not extended to one's enemies so as to emulate the righteous behavior of God (vv. 43-48).

⁸⁰ R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 75-76, 89-90; M. Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 69.

⁸¹ Matthew's portrayal of Jesus is one thing; whether the full break between the church and Judaism had or had not occurred by the time of the writing of Matthew is another matter.

⁸² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:481-82; K Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," in D. Bauer and M. Powell, eds., *Treasures New and Old* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 120-123.

Several of the above cases concern issues of Pharisaic legal praxis that, as we have seen, find critique elsewhere in Matthew: for example, the Pharisees' acceptance of divorce as long as it conformed to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (cf. Mark 10:2-12; Matt. 19:3-12); their enforcement of Corban vows (cf. Mark 7:9-13; Matt. 15:5-7); their failure to extend love as broadly as they should (cf. Mark 2:16-17, 23-28; 3:1-6; Matt. 9:9-13; Matt. 12:1-8, 9-14). It is important to note that in none of the six cases does Jesus say that the scribes and Pharisees' explicit teaching of Scripture is wrong. The Law did indeed condemn murder, adultery, and unfulfilled vows, and it did speak of a bill of divorcement, the principles of *lex talionis* and love of neighbor. The problem is that the scribes and Pharisees put these precepts of Scripture into practice as if the precept expressed the limit of moral consideration rather than its starting point.

Several of the things Jesus says in this discourse clearly go beyond what the Law enforced for Israelite society.⁸³ For example, the Law did not actually state that a person should be brought before magistrates and punished for angrily calling his neighbor a bad name, or for harboring adulterous thoughts in his heart, or for refusing to lend to someone in need. Yet, Matthew's Jesus condemns all these behaviors as, in some sense, contrary to the Law (5:22, 28, 42). What he is saying is that the express regulations of the Mosaic Law pointed to underlying moral principles that were incumbent on a person if he would truly be like God (5:48). Yet, the scribes and Pharisees failed to demonstrate this. For Matthew's Jesus, the "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees is not an adequate example for the Jewish people to follow (v. 20).⁸⁴

Matthew 23:1-33, "Woe to You, Scribes and Pharisees"

⁸³ See F. Kermode, "Matthew," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 388-94.

⁸⁴ Jesus' subsequent examples of outward religiosity that fail to please God (6:1-6) may be intended as a specific reference to the ostentation of the scribes and Pharisees. Note the similar criticisms in 23:5-12.

Structurally, Matthew 23 consists of three sections: a warning about the scribes and Pharisees being inadequate teachers (vv. 1-12); woes pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 13-33); and a lament over Jerusalem because it must receive God's judgment (vv. 34-39). The responsibility for that judgment, says Jesus, lies largely with the scribes and Pharisees who provide poor religious role models. The underlying problem, of course, is that they reject Jesus and his messianic status. But the discourse presents the matter as something more than the "Pauline" question of whether one believes in Jesus. It is, rather, a halakhic issue. As we have seen throughout Matthew, the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees consistently center around the matter of whose explication of the Torah is correct. The thrust of Matthew's Gospel is this: Jesus properly teaches and exemplifies the Torah, while the scribes and Pharisees do not.

It is important to note to whom the discourse is addressed. Matthew says, "Then Jesus said *to the crowds and to his disciples*" (v. 1). The order is significant. Beginning with the Sermon on the Mount and then throughout Matthew's Gospel, the scenario we see is that of Jesus teaching his disciples, with the crowds listening in. Here in Matthew 23 the reverse is true, and Jesus' primary audience is the Temple crowds, with the disciples secondary. Throughout Matthew the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus has been the practical matter of whose concept of the Law will have greater influence over the people. Now the issue comes to a head, and Matthew's Jesus attacks his rivals in public and with polemical vehemence.

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.⁵ They

do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ **They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues,** ⁷ **and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi.** ⁸ **But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.** ⁹ **And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father-the one in heaven.** ¹⁰ **Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.** ¹¹ **The greatest among you will be your servant.** ¹² **All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.**

These verses manifest a basic parallel with Mark 12:38-40 (cf. also Luke 11:43, 46; 20:46). The entire discourse of Matthew 23 appears to be a fuller, more developed version of the points expressed in Mark 12:38-40. A key difference is that the Markan text made no mention of the Pharisees; Mark's Jesus warned the Temple crowd solely about "the scribes." The fact that Matthew's Jesus addresses "the scribes and the Pharisees" corresponds to the Matthean tendency to give more attention to the Pharisees as Jesus' opponents than does Mark. Despite this emphasis on the Pharisees, however, Matthew still places the scribes first in order, so that throughout vv. 1-12 and the remainder of Matthew 23 we consistently read of "*the scribes and the Pharisees.*" This order is precisely what we saw in the Sermon on the Mount (5:20). It is also the order of Matthew 12:38, another unique Matthean pericope. In fact, whenever the evangelist records unique material having to do with both scribes and Pharisees, he always places the scribes first in order. The only time in Matthew when the order is reversed is when the author records Markan material where Mark placed the Pharisees before the scribes (cf. Matthew 15:1 = Mark 7:1).

Given the evangelist's clear intention of seeking to highlight the Pharisees as Jesus' chief opponents, this equally clear pattern of placing the scribes before the Pharisees must be for a reason. It evidences the fact that, despite the evangelist's greater interest in the Pharisees per se, he still recognizes that the scribes, rather than the Pharisees, are the formal and primary teachers of the Law. As I noted earlier, when discussing the people's source of formal knowledge about the Law, Mark spoke of "the scribes" (alone) fulfilling that role. The author of Matthew follows suit; when using those particular Markan pericopes, he does not change Mark's scribes to "Pharisees" as he tends to do in pericopes where scribes confront Jesus over halakhic matters. Thus, the author of Matthew follows Mark in presenting the scribes as the formal, primary teachers of the Law, and he manifests this procedure again in his unique material by always listing scribes before Pharisees.

While recognizing this fact, we must still probe Matthew's purpose in inserting "the Pharisees" into an expansion of Mark 12:38-40, a Markan polemic against scribes. Contrary to what some scholars suggest, the reason is not because the author of Matthew was ignorant of the distinction between scribes and Pharisees. Nor is the reason likely to be that Matthew's Pharisees symbolize the Jewish opponents of the (late first-century) Matthean community, opponents whose leaders were known to be Pharisees.⁸⁵ (If that were the case, wouldn't the evangelist want to place the Pharisees first in order?) The Matthean phrase "the scribes and Pharisees" indicates that the author of Matthew recognized that the Pharisees served a highly influential, albeit secondary teaching role alongside the scribes. Underlying the phraseology is the evangelist's recognition of two factors: (1) the influence that the Pharisees had on the scribes, especially due to the fact that some scribes were members of the Pharisaic party. Thus, while scribes were the formal and primary teachers of the people, the Pharisees were an indirect source of halakhic

⁸⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:267-68.

instruction; (2) the respect with which the Jewish people viewed the Pharisees, and hence their informal influence on the people.

Looking now at verses 2-3 in detail, we are faced with a text that is key in any discussion of Matthew's Pharisees. Yet, the exegesis of these verses is laden with difficulty. Here Jesus affirms, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach." There are two exegetical questions here. (1) What is the meaning of the words "Moses' seat"? (2) How can Jesus say that the people should do whatever the scribes and Pharisees teach them?

Scholars have offered several suggestions as to the meaning of "Moses' seat" ($\tau\hat{\eta}\varsigma$ Μωϋσέως καθέδρας). Perhaps it refers to actual stone benches that may have been used in first-century synagogues as seats for those presiding over the assembly.⁸⁶ Perhaps it refers to the receptacle for the synagogue's Torah scroll.⁸⁷ Whether or not a literal item of furniture is intended, the phrase could be a statement of the religious authority—whether presumed or actual—that the scribes and Pharisees possessed. It is this latter idea that raises the possibility in the minds of many scholars that these verses reveal a late first-century *Sitz im Leben* for Matthew's Gospel where the Pharisees have gained formal religious control of the Jewish community.⁸⁸

Most scholars are agreed that the idea of sitting on Moses' seat at least indicates some kind of teaching role.⁸⁹ But is Jesus seriously suggesting that the people ought to follow the halakha of the scribes and Pharisees? Some scholars say, yes. Ellis Rivkin goes so far as to affirm that since Matthew presents the Pharisees as teachers of the oral traditions concerning the

⁸⁶ D. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2 vols. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993) 2:659.

⁸⁷ C. Roth, "The 'Chair of Moses' and Its Survivals," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 81 (1949), 100-01.

⁸⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:261.

⁸⁹ C. Keener, *Matthew*, 541.

Law, then that is precisely what sitting on Moses' seat must mean. Therefore, Matthew's Jesus is affirming the authority of the Pharisees and their halakha.⁹⁰ But that idea is completely discordant with the thrust of Matthew's Gospel as a whole.

One cannot derive any kind of coherent picture from Matthew's Gospel by saying that in this text Jesus acknowledges the Pharisaic halakha, when that is the very thing Jesus has repeatedly challenged and condemned throughout the Gospel. Nor can the difficulty be mitigated by appealing to the fact that in verse 3 Jesus charges the scribes and Pharisees with hypocrisy. Though "they do not practice what they teach," Jesus still says for the people to "do whatever they teach you and follow it." Nor does it work to think that Jesus is merely saying to follow the halakha of the scribes and Pharisees *in principle*, just not in every detail.⁹¹ Again, the text specifically says to "do whatever they teach you" ($\pi\acute{a}\nu\tau\alpha\ o\bar{\nu}\nu\ \ddot{o}\sigma\alpha\ \dot{\epsilon}\grave{\alpha}\nu\ \epsilon\bar{i}\pi\omega\sigma\nu\ \dot{\nu}\mu\bar{\nu}\nu$).

Some interpreters suggest, therefore, that Jesus' words should be understood sarcastically; perhaps he is mocking the presumptuousness of the scribes and Pharisees for assuming such a teaching role.⁹² One could even understand the reference to Moses' seat as an acknowledgment of the scribes and Pharisees' position as authoritative teachers, without actually endorsing it.⁹³ Mark Powell has suggested that the idea of sitting on Moses' seat indicates not so much a teaching role for the scribes and Pharisees, but rather that they are the ones in Jewish society who control access to the Scriptures and so the Jewish populace relies on them for a knowledge of the biblical text.⁹⁴ The difficulty with this suggestion is that Matthew's Jesus specifically refers in these verses to the *teaching* of the scribes and Pharisees. A strong indication

⁹⁰ E. Rivkin, "Who Were the Pharisees?" 14.

⁹¹ N. Rabbinowitz, "Matthew 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He Endorse Their Halakha?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 3 (Sept, 2003), 434-35.

⁹² D. A. Carson, *Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 473.

⁹³ A. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 47-48.

⁹⁴ M. Powell, "Do and Keep What Moses Says," 431-435.

of the consternation this passage causes interpreters is the further suggestion that verses 2-3 are a piece of pre-Matthean tradition that cannot be harmonized with Matthew's overall portrait of Jesus.⁹⁵

Is it possible to understand Jesus to be saying that the people should follow the scribes and Pharisees' teaching of the Scriptures, but just not their behavior or the halakha of their oral traditions? I believe that it is, since this is exactly what we have seen throughout our analysis of Matthew's Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' objection to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees was not that their teaching of Scripture per se was wrong, but that their application of it failed to adequately fulfill the principles of the Law.⁹⁶ Their level of righteousness (i.e., righteous behavior) was what was inadequate (5:20), not what the people heard from them regarding what Scripture said. Jesus objected to the actions of the scribes and Pharisees. Angry epithets, lustful looks at women, bills of divorce, vows made in vain, acts of personal vengeance, and unloving behavior all failed to measure up to the moral principles of Scripture that the scribes and Pharisees themselves taught. Thus, Matthew's Jesus says in the present discourse, ". . . do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach" (v. 3).

In the Markan material on the Pharisees—all of which Matthew utilizes—Jesus likewise criticized the actions of the Pharisees as they applied their halakhic traditions. In reality, their traditions regarding Sabbath-keeping, hand-washing, and Corban enforcement resulted in violations of the Torah's precepts rather than the fulfillment of them.⁹⁷ Matthew's Jesus gives

⁹⁵ F. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1981), 447-448; S. Mason, "Pharisees," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 782-787.

⁹⁶ D. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:659.

⁹⁷ D. Hagner, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 55-56. N. Rabbinowitz ("Matthew 23:2-4," 435), arguing against this view, asks whether such a bifurcation between Scripture and halakha is possible: "Can exegesis be so neatly

great emphasis to the false appearance of righteousness that the scribes and Pharisees displayed (e.g., 6:1-6, 16-18; 7:15-23; 23:5-7). The chief way in which the people learned the oral tradition of the scribes and Pharisees was by observing them and seeing how they applied the Torah. And though they gave every appearance of righteousness, their observable application of the Torah was precisely what Jesus did not want the Jewish people to emulate.

Loosely paralleling Mark 12:38-39, Matthew's Jesus says of the scribes and Pharisees, "They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi" (vv. 5-7). The wearing of phylacteries and fringes on one's garments was intended to remind one to obey the statutes of the Law. The text may be indicating that the phylacteries and fringes of the scribes and Pharisees were particularly prominent. But in their case these items of adornment failed to serve their scriptural function, because while they gave the scribes and Pharisees an outward appearance of righteousness, violation of the Torah still persisted.

The hypocrisy charge that Matthew's Jesus levels against the scribes and Pharisees is precisely of this nature, and it conforms to the hypocrisy charge that we observed in Mark's Gospel. It is not that the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites in the sense of being duplicitous frauds, saying one thing while intending to do another. Rather, Jesus' charge of hypocrisy—vehement and harsh, to be sure—pertained to the problem of appearing to be righteous while in reality failing to fulfill God's statutes.

The seven woes in the next section of the discourse (23:13-33) tie in perfectly with this explication of vv. 1-12. Matthew's Jesus castigates the scribes and Pharisees for failing in their

separated from application and practice?" Yes, it can, and that is exactly what Matthew's Jesus has been doing in his confrontations with the Pharisees throughout the Gospel.

public life to offer an adequate example of how to live so as to fulfill the Torah. For our purposes here, there is no need to address the intricacies of each of the woes and their highly polemical language. But a few points should be noted. The woe condemning Pharisaic oaths (vv. 16-22) corresponds to the similar discussion in the Sermon on the Mount (5:33-37). The issue is that of swearing oaths that, due to technical form of expression, are not regarded as binding. The two woes of vv. 23-26 are significant because of the information they provide and because they are paralleled in Luke 11.

²³ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.

²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

²⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

The woe of vv. 23-24 parallels Luke 11:42, and the woe of vv. 25-26 parallels Luke 11:39. Most scholars therefore regard this material as derived from Q and treat it as early testimony of a Pharisaic emphasis upon strict tithing and ritual purification.⁹⁸ The issue of tithing is never mentioned in Mark, but the issue of ritual purification is what receives such prominence in Mark 7 (= Matthew 15). In particular, the latter woe offers corroboration of the editorial insertion of

⁹⁸ G. Stemberger, *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 23-24.

Mark 7:3-4 regarding the Pharisaic purification of food vessels. It also ties in with Mark 7:15-23 where Jesus makes a distinction between inner and outer purification.⁹⁹

e. *Conclusions and Final Observations*

As I bring this essay to a close, let me summarize my conclusions about Matthew's portrait of the Pharisees and then make some observations about the use of Matthew and Mark in historical research on the Pharisees.

Our analysis of Matthew's Gospel shows that the author presents a picture of the Pharisees that highly resembles what we observe in Mark. Matthew follows Mark closely, using all of the Markan pericopes on the Pharisees and the scribes. He does add some new data to these Markan pericopes, and there are some notable alterations. Matthew sometimes changes Mark's references to Jewish leaders who interact with the Pharisees. He shows little of Mark's interest in the Herodians, and substitutes instead references to Sadducees. Matthew's most significant alteration of Mark is that of designating as Pharisees the Markan scribes who oppose Jesus on matters of the Torah. This tendency reveals a key Matthean goal: to present the Pharisees and their approach to the Torah as the major obstacle to Jesus and his teaching.

But despite these alterations of Markan material, the author of Matthew never subverts the Markan picture of the Pharisees, their role in society, or their teaching. Matthew's portrait of the Pharisees is a thoroughly coherent picture that is substantially just what we observe in Mark. The Pharisees have a prominent presence in Galilee. They are not political or religious officials, but they do have an ancillary relationship to those groups who are in power. Pharisaic scribes might belong to the group of scribes who function alongside the chief priests and elders, but the text does not explicitly indicate this. Though scribes are the nation's formal teachers of the Law, the Pharisees are experts in the Law, they have opinions that carry weight in the synagogue, and

⁹⁹ Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3:298); see note 38.

they are confident in their piety and their traditions. They are especially concerned with following “the tradition of the elders.” Honoring God is a paramount concern of the Pharisees—so much so that, on occasion, it may even supplant humanitarian obligations. Chief among their halakhic concerns are the proper observance of Sabbath, ritual purity, and Corban. Matthew adds only one religious trait that Mark doesn’t present: Pharisees are scrupulous in their tithing.

Like the Pharisees in Mark, Matthew’s Pharisees do not have table fellowship with nonobservant Jews. But this does not seem to mean that they would be opposed to associating with non-Pharisees as long as ritual purity at table was maintained. Particularly notable is the strong influence that the Pharisees have upon the Jewish people in matters of Torah observance. Matthew’s non-Markan material does not present anything about the Pharisees that substantively alters the picture derived from the Markan material, but it does vividly highlight how influential the Pharisees are with the common people and why they pose such an impediment to the people’s acceptance of Jesus and his teaching.

Having now analyzed the pictures of the Pharisees that we find in Mark and Matthew, we must ask: Do these documents provide us with accurate historical information about the Pharisees? To what degree are the recorded encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees relating historical events? Are they merely “ideal scenes” that reflect the situation of the church at the time when Mark and Matthew are written? If so, to what extent might these “ideal scenes” still offer valid information about the Pharisees’ role in Palestinian society and their religious beliefs and practices? These are the kinds of questions that arise. Obviously, these questions intersect with the broader issue of the historical reliability of the Gospels in general, a matter that is beyond the scope of this essay. But my concern here is how the Gospels of Matthew and Mark

are to be used by modern scholars who seek information about the historical Pharisees. Let me make a few observations that I believe should be kept in mind as we engage this pursuit.

First, any data drawn from a Gospel document for purposes of performing historical reconstruction on the Pharisees must be interpreted with regard for the entire picture of the Pharisees that the document presents. If a Gospel's data, viewed as a whole, do yield a coherent and consistent picture of the Pharisees, then a historian must be careful not to place an interpretation on a particular text that would be contrary to what that text would signify when viewed with respect to the Gospel as a whole. I have argued in this essay that Mark and Matthew each offer a coherent and consistent portrait of the Pharisees. Therefore, their data must be interpreted accordingly. One cannot pluck out an item here or an item there and give it a construction that, while "supporting" one's own theory of the Pharisees, subverts the meaning it would yield when viewed within its documentary context as a whole. When this happens, statements like "Mark shows ..." or "Matthew indicates ..." become meaningless. We need to move beyond these methodological pitfalls. Perhaps readers will want to criticize the picture of the Pharisees that I have observed in my reading of Mark or Matthew, or disagree with me that a coherent and consistent picture is presented at all. But the point is that this must be the starting point of our inquiry and our debate.

Second, scholars must carefully examine whether the evidence supports the common speculation that Matthew's Pharisees are to be understood as symbols of the Jewish leadership of the late first century who were dominated by Pharisees. The evidence for this view of Matthew's Pharisees rests largely on two factors: the prominence that Matthew gives to the Pharisees (over

against Mark) as the major opponents of Jesus; and the statement in Matthew 23:2 about the Pharisees sitting on “Moses’ seat.”¹⁰⁰

It certainly appears that the evangelist alters his source material so as to highlight the Pharisees as Jesus’ chief opponents. But he does not substantially alter the role of the Pharisees from that which Mark presents. In the evangelist’s use of Markan material, Q material, and unique material, the Pharisees are differentiated from the scribes, and scribes (rather than the Pharisees) are consistently presented as the formal teachers of the nation and as the ones who are directly connected to the nation’s leadership. Matthew does not put the Pharisees in that position. Furthermore, I must question whether there is sufficient reason to construe the statement about the scribes and Pharisees sitting on “Moses’ seat” to be a depiction of Pharisaic authority and dominance that emerged in the post-70 period. That construction of the passage disconnects the Pharisees of this one verse from the overall portrait of the Pharisees that we see throughout the rest of Matthew. The verse can best be understood as a statement about the scribes and Pharisees that comports with the picture we observe throughout Matthew and throughout Mark: they simply are the teachers of the Jewish people—the scribes in a formal capacity, and the Pharisees in an informal and secondary capacity.

Third, we must question the view that the encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew and Mark are best understood as unhistorical “ideal scenes.” It is easy to assert, as does E. P. Sanders, that the pericopes reporting Pharisaic accusations of Sabbath violations (viz., plucking of grain and healing) and a failure to observe ritual hand-washing have virtually no historical basis and were contrived in order to address the church’s current issues.¹⁰¹ An assumption like this allows Sanders to disregard any of the Gospels’ data that conflict with his

¹⁰⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:261.

¹⁰¹ Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 1-42.

position about the Pharisees and “Common Judaism.” But the matter cannot be dismissed so easily.

The material in Mark, which Matthew re-presents in a way that is substantially compatible, is normally dated to the general time period of 70 CE, and so most scholars concede that the Markan material gives us at least some reliable information about the historical Pharisees prior to 70. If Matthew 23:25 is regarded as coming from Q, we seem to have a measure of corroboration for the Markan explanation of Pharisaic cleansing rituals and Jesus’ opposing view on inward defilement. Early corroboration for another item of the Markan material—namely, Jesus’ teaching on divorce—comes from Paul’s discussion of the matter in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

But more importantly, our analysis of the Gospels’ presentation of the debates between Jesus and the Pharisees reveals how particular were the halakhic issues under dispute, and these do not adequately correspond to the issues that we know of in the early church. There is no evidence to suggest that the early church had controversies over healing on the Sabbath, or plucking grain on the Sabbath, or hand-washing before meals, or matters pertaining to Corban. Nor can these halakhic disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees be treated as literary concoctions to depict the church’s freedom from the Law. Matthew’s and Mark’s Jesus does not annul Mosaic food laws or abrogate Sabbath observance. The halakhic disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees are not addressing whether the Torah is binding, but how the Torah is to be applied. The evangelists’ accounts of disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees could, of course, be used hortatively within the church; applications to current problems could be extrapolated. But it makes little sense to assert that these encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees were

concocted out of whole cloth to address contemporary church issues, when in so many instances Jesus' disputes and the church's disputes do not coincide.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Hengel and Deines, “Sanders’ ‘Common Judaism,’” 4-7. Furthermore, issues that we know were problems within the mid-first century church (e.g., circumcision, eating idol meat) clearly have no connection to anything we find in the Gospels.

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