

A DOUBLE PORTION: AN INTERTEXTUAL READING OF HANNAH (1 SAMUEL 1–2) AND MARK’S GREEK WOMAN (MARK 7:24–30)

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The Gospel of Mark repeatedly echoes the Hebrew Bible: from the extensive thematic and verbal parallels between Jesus’ calming of the sea and the story of Jonah¹ to the quotation of a single line from a psalm serving as Jesus’ last words while he suffers on the cross,² intertextual allusions are frequently recognized by modern interpreters of Mark.³

1. See Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 333.

2. Compare Mark 15:34 with Psalm 22:1.

3. See, e.g., Mary Ann Beavis, “The Resurrection Of Jephthah’s Daughter: Judges XI, 34–40 and Mark V, 21–24, 35–42,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2010): 46–62. Beavis discusses various criteria for determining whether an intertextual reading is legitimate. As is the case with her paper, most of the criteria for intertextual readings are met in this paper, but I agree with Beavis’s conclusion (following Brodie) that, ultimately, “the detection of intertextuality is an art, not a science.” Criteria for valid intertexts met in this paper include: (1) multiple shared plot points (in order), (2) the author’s awareness of the potential source text (Mark references 1 Samuel 21:1–6 in Mark 2:25–26), and (3) similar application of the source text in other contemporaneous writings. (Josephus emphasizes Samuel’s role as a future prophet in a way not explicit in the LXX [see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 5.10.3]; similarly, in Psuedo-Philo (Bib. Ant. 51.2), Eli emphasizes that Samuel was prayed for by not only Hannah but also the nation. In both of these expansions on the story of Hannah, Samuel’s

This paper considers a reverberation which has, to my knowledge, received no previous exploration:⁴ I will show how Mark's story of the Greek woman echoes the interactions between Hannah and Eli in 1 Samuel 1. Hannah, in distress over her infertility, prays in the house of the Lord. But Eli, the high priest, believes that she is inebriated due to the fact that Hannah prays silently instead of vocally. Hannah then corrects Eli, who tells her to go in peace and that her petition will be granted by God. In Mark, a Greek woman approaches Jesus and asks him to exorcise her daughter. Jesus refuses via a parable: it is not right to throw the children's bread to dogs. The woman adopts and adapts his parable: the dogs can eat the children's crumbs under the table. Jesus tells her that, because of her saying, her daughter has been freed from the demon. Both stories feature a woman who struggles under the weight of a problem that threatens her progeny. Each pleads for help, is rebuffed by a male religious leader, defends herself, and is finally rewarded with what she desired. Additionally, each story functions as a turning point in its larger narrative context. This article will closely consider these similarities, highlighting the many ways in which the intertextual echo contributes to the narrative meaning of Mark's text.

Both Hannah and the Greek woman are presented as inhabiting an undesirable social location, especially in comparison with the male character in each story. Both are, obviously, female. Hannah lives away from the tabernacle and is barren and bereft. In Mark's text, the foreignness of

role as a figure of national importance is emphasized, as it is in the intertext proposed in this paper.)

4. There have been other efforts to establish intertextual echoes with this story, including a comparison with 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 8:7–15. See J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Syro-Phoenician Woman and the Centurion of Capernaum," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (July 1973): 167f. See also Dale Miller and Patricia J. Miller, *The Gospel of Mark As Midrash on Earlier Jewish and New Testament Literature* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 196. See also Wolfgang Rolf, *The Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 44–45.

the Greek woman is emphasized through not only one but three references to her nationality.⁵ The implication is clearly unsavory. In neither story would the audience anticipate that the woman's actions would be significant, let alone that they would change the trajectory of the entire narrative. But, as we will see later on, this is precisely what happens.

Both women face similar problems: Hannah is infertile and the Greek woman's daughter is possessed by a demon. In both cases, problems with their progeny cause great distress. Each woman seeks intervention from a male religious leader whose status is significantly higher than her own. Both stories are atypical for, respectively, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, not just because they focus on a mother but also because she is proactive in intervening for her child by seeking divine assistance. Hannah approaches the house of the Lord and prays. The Greek woman seeks aid by entering the house in which Jesus is staying and pleading with him to exorcise her daughter. Like Hannah, the Greek woman approaches the house of the Lord—the same two words for “house” and “Lord” are used in both texts.⁶ Yet Jesus is not, of course, in the temple in Jerusalem, but rather in an anonymous house in the region of Tyre. Thus one theological implication of this intertextual reverberation is that Mark is hinting that the functions of the house of the Lord are not solely fulfilled by the temple but rather by any home where Jesus is present. At this point in the narrative, this is simply a suggestion rather than a fully developed claim, although it is a theme that Mark will develop more fully later on.⁷

5. She is in the region around Tyre, she is Greek, and she is a Syrophenician. The fact that Mark introduces Mark 7:26 with a “but,” which positions her identity in contrast to the faith and humility evidenced in the previous verse, further suggests her foreign nature.

6. Both Mark 7:24 and LXX 1 Samuel 1:7 reference the “house,” and both Mark 7:28 and LXX 1 Samuel 1:7 mention the “Lord.” Significantly, it is the Greek woman's words—by referring to Jesus as “Lord”—that make the connection; in a metaphorical sense, her words make this locale into the house of the Lord.

7. Jesus' temple action—narratively surrounded by and thus interpreted by—the withering of the fig tree, prophetically pre-enacts the destruction of the

But even at this juncture, the point is made through the intertext that an anonymous home in Gentile lands has the potential to fulfill the same function as the house of the Lord.

Next, both women are rebuked by a male authority figure. Eli⁸ accuses Hannah of drunkenness; Jesus replies to the Greek woman by saying that it is not right to hurl the children's food to the dogs. Each reproach stems from the man's misunderstanding of the woman's situation. Because, as the narrator takes great pains to note, Hannah's lips are moving but she is praying silently, Eli thinks, incorrectly, that she is drunk. Her innovative behavior led to this accusation: because she is praying silently, Eli cannot hear her prayer but rather observes behavior for which the only explanation he finds is that she is intoxicated. He literally cannot hear her. Jesus is also unable to, metaphorically speaking, hear the Greek woman's plea because her Gentile identity crowds out her humble request, as his response to her indicates. Jesus' response is not obviously incorrect in the same way that Eli's response is clearly factually wrong; nevertheless, the Greek woman will later explain that she is not a scavenging dog outside of the house but rather a household dog under the table—and thus clearly inside the house.

So Eli's statement that Hannah is intoxicated parallels Jesus' statement that the Greek woman is an outsider; neither is correct. It is

temple and thus indicates that the functions previously limited to the temple will require a new locale. Jesus makes this clearer in Mark 13. The fact that Jesus is anointed in a leper's home instead of in the temple furthers the point. Finally, the rending of the temple veil immediately after Jesus' death suggests that access to the divine presence previously restricted to the temple will now extend beyond it.

8. In some versions of the LXX, it is actually a servant of Eli—not Eli himself—who pronounces the rebuke (see LXX 1 Samuel 1:14). However, since it is Eli who first notices Hannah (LXX 1 Samuel 1:12) and Eli who responds to Hannah's statement (LXX 1 Samuel 1:17), it is apparent that the rebuke (which perhaps was placed on the lips of a servant instead of Eli to soften the harsh portrayal of Eli) represents Eli's will and will be treated as such in this article.

perhaps surprising enough that Eli, as a high priest, would be portrayed so negatively in 1 Samuel, but it is even more difficult to understand why Mark would want to show Jesus as possessing a limited understanding of the role of Gentiles. The intertextual allusion suggests a solution to this question. Note that in Hannah's story, she prays, she speaks to Eli, and then Eli announces that the God of Israel will grant her request. Hannah is thus interacting with two characters in the narrative: Eli and, implicitly, God. By contrast, the roles of God and Eli are collapsed in the Greek woman's story: she does not pray to God but rather makes a request of Jesus, assuming a prayerful posture toward him. And it is Jesus who announces on his own authority—not, as Eli does, with reference to what the God of Israel will do—that her request has been granted. Jesus thus occupies the roles of both Eli and God. By collapsing both roles into one, the text suggests that Jesus is, in effect, both God and man in Mark's story. This move is not unique to this intertext but rather forms part of a larger pattern in Mark's Gospel, where intertextual allusions feature Jesus playing not one but two roles from the Hebrew Bible: in the stilling of the storm, he is both Jonah and God; in the touching of the bleeding woman, he is both Adam and God; in the feeding of the five thousand, he is both Moses and God. Note that one of the roles into which Mark places Jesus in these intertexts always aligns him with the God of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, these intertexts contribute—subtly if repetitively—to Mark's christological portrait of Jesus. And that christology features a balance between Jesus as a limited mortal (in the Eli role) and as someone exercising divine power (in the role of the God who answered Hannah's prayer).⁹ Mark wants his audience to appreciate and balance both aspects of Jesus' identity: he is

9. In other instances, Mark advances this balanced christology: Peter's statement that Jesus is the anointed one is not denied by Jesus, but Jesus does insist in the strongest possible terms that Peter not deny the reality of Jesus' impending suffering either. Similarly, Jesus' remarkable statement that his anointing story should be told wherever the gospel is preached suggests that the anointing—which integrated an enacted identity of Jesus that both acknowledges his coming death as well as his royal, chosen status—teaches who he is.

to be understood as both son of man and son of God. So while the idea of aligning Jesus with the much-mistaken Eli¹⁰ might strike the reader as oddly inappropriate, it is a crucial component of Mark's presentation of Jesus, who is both the human bound by mortal limitations as well as the possessor of divine power.

The core of the intertextual allusion occurs with each woman's reply to the rebuff. Their statements feature some verbal parallels: when the women react to the initial rejection, both texts use the same verb and include a second verb as well. Both women's responses to the men's statements are quite similar, featuring the woman calling her conversation partner "Lord."¹¹ In this instance, the intertextual allusion can be helpful in interpreting Mark's text: it is debated whether the woman was referring to Jesus with simple respect or whether her christological understanding ran deeper, but the parallel with Hannah's usage of the word—in a situation where Hannah certainly would not have regarded Eli as divine—implies that the Greek woman's usage is more mundane and thus probably better understood as "sir" rather than "Lord."¹²

Hannah explains that, contrary to Eli's belief that she is drunk, she is in fact praying. Similarly, the Greek woman explains that the dogs can eat the crumbs under the table. In both cases, the woman adopts the man's language but tweaks it: Hannah inverts language about *taking in* drink, transforming it into a metaphor about *pouring out* spirit. The specific language of this inversion resonates with Mark's text, since Mark's previous story featured Jesus teaching that it is not what one takes in but

10. That Eli's name might be construed to mean "my God" might add a layer of irony to the way that Mark places Jesus into Eli's role.

11. Hannah says "no" before Lord; the Greek woman leads with "sir/Lord."

12. This does not preclude the possibility that Mark's audience regards "Lord" as signifying something far more significant about Jesus' identity. This, then, might be another example of Mark's penchant for irony: the woman's word choice is mundane but Mark's audience understands that it suggests Jesus' exalted status.

rather what one pours out which determines whether she is defiled. The intertextual connection is strengthened since the same words for “lips” and “heart” appear in the line from Isaiah quoted by Jesus (see Mark 7:6) as well as in the narrator’s note that Hannah’s lips moved but her voice was not heard because she spoke only in her heart (see 1 Samuel 1:13). Thus, the member of Mark’s audience who is conscious of the intertext will see Hannah as precisely the opposite of the person criticized by Isaiah and by Jesus: there is no risk that Hannah’s lips would honor God while her heart was far away. This intertextual connection guides the interpretation of Mark’s story by suggesting that the discussion of defilement and the Greek woman’s story are not two completely separate incidents, but rather that her story should be read in the light of Jesus’ teachings about defilement: the first story sets the stage for an interpretation of purity laws which will permit a Gentile woman to, metaphorically, eat bread with the children of Israel. As the Greek woman’s words will show, it is not her presumed ritual defilement which should drive Jesus’ response to her, but rather the words which come out of her that show that she is not defiled or beyond the reach of his powers.

Just as Hannah modified a metaphor, so does the Greek woman. Jesus’ words envision her as a dog—a word used in some Jewish literature to insult Gentiles.¹³ This dog is, in Jesus’ formulation, outside of the house and living as a scavenger. But the Greek woman re-imagines this dog as a member of the household under the family table who might with propriety eat the crumbs dropped by the children. This perceptual shift relies on a Gentile worldview, where dogs might be inside a home as pets or guard dogs,¹⁴ instead of a Jewish worldview where dogs are unclean

13. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 367.

14. See Liliane Bodson, “Motivations for Pet-Keeping In Ancient Greece and Rome: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships between People and Pets*, edited by Anthony L. Podberscek, Elizabeth S. Paul, and James A. Serpell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 27–41.

and therefore outside. She invites Jesus to see the world through her eyes—just as Hannah invited Eli to do the same. In a narrative where Jesus' disciples are frequently chastised for their inability to understand or even to contemplate his parables,¹⁵ the woman's ability to harness an insulting parable and redirect it in her favor is most remarkable.

In both stories, then, the women take up the language of the male speaker through a process of inversion: Hannah does not take in but she pours out, and the Greek woman is not asking that the bread be cast out but is content with what is dropped under the table. In both cases, the male religious leader has assumed that the woman's request lies outside accepted cultural boundaries due to their assessment of the social space they believe her to occupy (either the drunk or the dog), but the woman's polite but firm response reframes his assumption and inscribes her within the boundaries of social propriety. Thus repositioned, her petition merits renewed attention.

The Greek woman acts in a prophetic role: her words envision a day when Jesus' "bread" will extend beyond the house of Israel. There may be an intertextual connection between her prophetic words and Hannah's song, which prophesies a future day of reversals (see 1 Samuel 2:1–10), particularly if Mark or his audience understood Hannah's reference to the raising up of an anointed one to refer to Jesus. Hannah's song creates a parallel between the hungry person who is no longer in need and the barren woman who has children (see 1 Samuel 2:5), thus referencing the precise reversals that come to her and to the Greek woman via divine intervention. Hannah's prophesied inversion might be read to correspond to the Greek woman's story in another manner as well, since the Greek woman, despite her foreign background, teaches Jesus—the protagonist of Mark's Gospel—more about the parameters of his own mission, in a most surprising inversion.¹⁶

15. See Mark 4:13, 6:51–52, 7:18, and 8:18–21.

16. There may be another surprising inversion as well: in 1 Samuel 2:36, Eli is told that if he does not intervene to stop the poor behavior of his own children, the day will come when everyone in his house will beg the Lord's chosen servant

Each woman's words imply a theological innovation. Eli assumes that Hannah is drunk, but instead she is innovating, as is made clear by the text, through her silent prayer. Hannah thus must explain to Eli what he does not yet understand. Similarly, in Jesus' metaphor, the only way to provide exorcism to Gentiles—who are, like scavenging dogs, outside of the house—is to deny bread to the children of the house. But the Greek woman points out that the “dogs,” like herself, are not outsiders to the house but rather pets under the table; this is her innovation: a new way to view Gentiles as insiders.¹⁷ Given that Mark presents the house as a location for disciples¹⁸ who are, most literally, insiders, it is significant that the Greek woman claims that Gentiles should be understood as being inside the house. Her nuanced reading of the parable metaphorically re-enacts what literally happened at the beginning of her story, when Jesus wanted to be alone in the house, but the woman subverted his plan. Now, with the discussion over bread and dogs, she does the same thing again by showing the propriety with which dogs might be fed within the house. Further, her retort teaches that one need not deprive the children of bread in order to feed the dogs—the dogs will be content with what the children drop. She boldly adapts Jesus' parable while at the same time balancing this provocative claim with a measure of humility by expressing satisfaction with a position under the table, eating the children's crumbs, just as Hannah evinces humility through

(whom the audience expects to be Samuel, but Eli apparently does not know this) for a small task to do in exchange for bread. This action is similar to the Greek woman's approach as an outsider who begs for “bread.”

17. This new perspective may be the key to explaining a conundrum in Mark's text: why does Jesus initially refuse the woman's request when he has previously exorcised a Gentile (see Mark 5:1–20)? The answer may lie in the location of the exorcism: Jesus treated the man possessed by a legion as an outsider—there is no house in that narrative. Additionally, when the exorcised man asked to follow Jesus, Jesus did not permit him to do so. Hence, Jesus' power was accessible to the possessed Gentile, but only as long as the man remained an outsider.

18. See, e.g., Mark 1:29, 2:15, 7:17, 9:33, and 10:10.

her kind response to Eli—even referring to him as “sir”—despite his obvious error.

In each story, the woman’s relationship to food is central to the text and becomes representative of her access to divine power. When barren, Hannah was so stricken with grief that she could not eat. But later, after receiving Eli’s promise, she returns home and eats and drinks. While actual eating is not present in the Greek woman’s story, it becomes metaphorically present via Jesus’ parable, which equates the power to exorcise with food. In both cases, the woman’s crisis is represented by the inability to eat, while the relief of her need accompanies eating. Given the overarching role that food and eating play in this section of Mark,¹⁹ this connection is perhaps no surprise.

Jesus and Eli also respond to the women’s corrections of their words in similar terms: Jesus says, “because of this saying, go” and Eli says, “go in peace.”²⁰ Eli says that God will grant Hannah’s request; Jesus says that the demon has left the woman’s daughter. So at this moment in the story when a reader alert to the allusion would expect Jesus to refer to the God of Israel, he announces on his own authority that the woman’s request has been granted. Through this action, Jesus is thus narratively aligned with the God of Israel. It is highly unusual that in both stories a woman disputes the ruling of a religious leader, directly contradicts him, and is not censured but rather manages to bring him around to her perspective.

As the stories conclude, each woman returns to her home. Because both leave the presence of the religious authority with a promise but no firm evidence that her request will actually be granted, each woman

19. This section of Mark, delimited by the two feeding miracles in Mark 6:30–44 and 8:1–10, contains a high concentration of food/eating-related miracles. Nearly every story within this section concerns food and eating on either a literal or a metaphorical level.

20. Note that while the same sentiment is expressed, Eli and Jesus use different Greek words for “go.”

serves as an example of faithful trust as she leaves. The fact that the promised blessing comes not in the presence of Jesus or Eli but in each woman's own home—a home far from the locus of power and divine presence in each story—emphasizes that it is the woman (and not the male leader) whose actions are decisive in the deliverance of the blessing. Perhaps one function of the intertextual echo is to make clear this very point: just as no reader of Hannah's tale thinks that Eli is the one who makes it possible for her to have a child, the allusion to Hannah's story in the text of the Greek woman intimates that, somewhat surprisingly, it is not Jesus who exorcises the daughter but rather the woman herself. There are several other hints in the text that it is actually the woman, not Jesus, who exorcises the girl: Jesus himself attributes the exorcism not to his own power but to the woman's saying, and a chiasmic structure to the text emphasizes the point by making the woman's words central to the story. When read chiasmically, the focal point of the text is the woman's words:

- A. Jesus goes to Tyre
- B. the woman comes to Jesus
- C. the woman asks Jesus
- D. Jesus responds
- E. the woman's saying
- D.' Jesus responds again
- C.' the woman's request is granted
- B.' the woman returns home
- A.' Jesus leaves Tyre²¹

Because the past tense is employed when Jesus says that the demon has “gone out” of the girl, he indicates that the exorcism has already happened even before he spoke about it. This indication provides additional evidence for the argument that the woman's saying—and

21. Adapted from Christopher E. Alt, “The Dynamic of Humility and Wisdom: The Syrophoenician Woman and Jesus in Mark 7:24–31a,” *Lumen et Vita* 2, no. 1 (2012): 3.

not Jesus' words—caused the exorcism. The ability to cast out demons is not exclusive to Jesus in Mark: it is previously given to the disciples (although they will have trouble using it and criticize others who do). Further, this is the only case in Mark where Jesus does not speak a command to cause a miracle or does not see the person who is healed. Reading the Greek woman within this context, it is possible to interpret her words as not only potent enough to change Jesus' mind but also to cause a demon to flee. This woman is able to exercise this power on the basis of her insight into Jesus' mission. It is probably an example of Mark's penchant for irony that while the woman's words caused Jesus to change his mind about the appropriateness of his power being used to exorcise Gentiles, Jesus himself does not actually perform the exorcism in this story; rather, the words of the woman herself effect the exorcism.²² Much as Eli's statement to Hannah indicates that, despite his own lack of understanding of Hannah, the God of Israel has understood and will grant her request, Jesus' reply to the Greek woman indicates that her request has, similarly, been granted based on the woman's saying.

The reverberations of Hannah's and the Greek woman's stories extend far beyond their own personal situations: each text is a turning point in its respective narrative. Hannah's plea for a child does not reflect mere maternal desire; rather, she wants a child whom she can dedicate to the service of God for his entire life. And, indeed, Samuel's tenure changes the course of the nation's path: the entrance of Samuel onto the scene means that, instead of a lack of prophetic voice (see 1 Samuel 3:1), there is once again someone who can convey the word of the Lord to the people (see 1 Samuel 4:1). And, of course, Samuel will be the one who anoints David king and thus ushers in the peak of Israel's political kingdom. It is rather surprising that the story of David's reign begins not with David and his family but rather with Hannah and hers. It is an unexpected move by the writer, who positions the rise of the

22. Compare Mark 5:25–34, where the woman's touch is the proximate cause of the healing.

Davidic dynasty as stemming ultimately not from the story of David or his family but rather from those of Hannah and her child. Her crucial role is emphasized by the fact that her hymn and David's hymn bookend the corpus of First and Second Samuel.

Similarly, in Mark, the desire of one woman for the welfare of her progeny is not an end in itself in the narrative. Rather, the Greek woman's story serves as a turning point in Jesus' ministry. For example, immediately after his encounter with the Greek woman, he heals a deaf and mute Gentile.²³ Next, he feeds the four thousand in a story best interpreted in light of the previous feeding of the five thousand: close analysis of vocabulary and the thematic elements of the story suggest that the first feeding miracle was specifically Jewish while the second is distinctly Gentile. It is no coincidence, then, that in between these two feeding miracles, the Greek woman taught Jesus how he might share his bread with Gentiles without neglecting the children of Israel. Just as Hannah is a lynchpin in Israel's history, her desire for a child, resulting in a change of trajectory from the depravity of the era of the judges to that of open prophetic vision in Israel, a similar desire of the Greek woman for the welfare of her own child also provides a momentous impact on the narrative, namely, a shift in the trajectory of Jesus' ministry itself to include Gentiles. In both cases, the word of God is extended to people who previously did not have it. At the same time, there is an ironic inversion: Hannah's wish leads to a nationalistic political dynasty, but the Greek woman's intervention leads to the full inclusion of those outside the house of Israel. Additionally, the fact that Hannah has a son while the Greek woman intervenes for her daughter suggests that it is not only sons upon whom history might hinge; rather, a daughter might also fulfill this role.²⁴ This intertext aligns Hannah's child, the prophet

23. In the Hebrew Bible, the deaf are sometimes associated with Gentiles since they cannot "hear" God. See Isaiah 42:17–19, 43:8–9, and Micah 7:16.

24. While this is quite speculative, it is also possible that, just as Hannah's son was the one who anointed David to be the king, the Greek woman's daughter

Samuel who will anoint Israel's first king, with an anonymous Gentile daughter. In both cases, it is made clear to the audience that the women's stories are not just simple domestic tales with happy endings concerning the private struggles of one woman, but rather that the initiative of bold women can alter the trajectory of history.

is the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14:3–9. This reading is based on a thin wisp of a thematic hint, to be sure, but is encouraged by the fact that the anointing woman was obviously a woman of means and the Greek woman, as a Tyrian, is one of only a few characters in Mark's Gospel who has any likelihood of being wealthy.