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THE HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN (MARK 7:31- 37), WITH APPLICATION TO THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Introduction

Mark's account of the miraculous healing of the deaf and dumb man occurs in the first half of his gospel, where Jesus' mighty deeds and words identify Him to His followers as "the Messiah" (1:14- 8:30). Within this larger section three cycles can be identified, each recounting Jesus' miracles and preaching, with the first two cycles ending in rejection and the last climaxing in the disciples' confession of Jesus as Messiah.[1] It is this last cycle which is the setting for the healing of the deaf mute.

The miracle is found only in Mark's gospel. This alone would constitute a striking feature for the New Testament student who knows that almost all of Mark's material is found in Matthew and/or Luke. The details of the healing are also certainly unusual. Some of the details are found in other miracle stories as well, but it is the cumulative effect of them all coming together in this one story which produces one of the most fascinating and stimulating accounts of all the miracles of our Lord. Although we will mention other details as the discussion progresses, our attention is immediately drawn to Jesus' use of his saliva and to the Aramaic expression associated with the healing. Others have pointed out the similarity between Jesus' healing technique and magical practices current in the ancient world. How should we understand the unusual features of this miracle? And how may these features contribute to the miracle's distinctive application in an African context?

We will bypass the usual introductory problems dealing with the history and development of the story in the gospel tradition. Most scholars agree on its "primitive" character.[2] Cranfield remarks that its "claim to be regarded as reliable is very strong, its details being of a sort more likely to be dropped then invented in the course of the development of the tradition."[3]

Source Critical Concerns: The Uniqueness of the Markan Account

We begin by investigating the uniqueness of the miracle in the gospel records. Assuming the Markan Hypothesis for the moment (i.e., that Matthew and Luke used the gospel of Mark as one of their sources in composing their own gospels), this uniqueness in the gospel tradition is particularly noteworthy.[4]

The reason for Luke's omission of the miracle is bound up with his treatment of that section of Mark's gospel in which the miracle occurs. This section (Mark 6:45-8:26) is known as Luke's "Great Omission" and is his most lengthy omission of Markan material. Although following Mark's outline before and after, Luke skips directly from the Feeding of the Five Thousand (9:10-17) to Peter's Confession (9:18-21). Several reasons have been offered for Luke's omission, but none have thus far gained widespread support.[5] A suggestion that deserves further study is that Luke has omitted this material because it emphasises Jesus' ministry in Gentile areas. Although Luke was interested in the salvation of the Gentiles, he was also interested in a geographical presentation that located Jesus' ministry exclusively in Judea and Galilee (Acts 10:37-39), whereas that of the apostles in Acts progressed from Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism, to Rome, the centre of the Gentile world. Thus the healing of the deaf mute, occurring as it does in the region of Decapolis (Mk. 7:31), falls outside of the geographical boundaries Luke has set for himself and is therefore omitted.

The omission of the miracle by Matthew is likewise significant. Matthew follows Mark's order pericope by pericope from the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mt. 14:13-21 = Mk. 6:32-44) to the Feeding of the Four Thousand (Mt. 15:32-39 = Mk. 8:1-10). However, when Matthew comes to the point in his gospel where this miracle would occur following this order, he begins with a geographical note that has several verbal parallells to Mark (Mt. 15:29 = Mk. 7:31), but then continues with a substitution. Instead of Jesus' healing of one deaf and dumb man, we find a summary statement of Jesus' healings of many people with various ailments, dumbness (but not deafness) being only one of the many mentioned (Mt. 15:29-31).

What could have prompted this kind of omission and substitution on the part of Matthew? Schweizer suggests that the omission is possibly because Matthew has already recorded a similar incident in 9:31f.[6] But a comparison of the two accounts reveals little similarity. There are certainly greater differences between the two than between the two miraculous feedings that Matthew puts almost side by side. The reason for the omission is more than likely to be found in noting another similar omission by Matthew. It is well known that Matthew incorporates almost all of Mark's material. Barclay observes that the substance of only 55 out of Mark's 661 verses is missing from Matthew. Significantly, 11 of these 55 missing verses contain two miracles: this healing of the deaf mute, and the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26.[7] These two

miracles are alike in that spittle is used in both healings. Spittle is used in no other miracle in the synoptic tradition.[8] Therefore, the most obvious explanation for the omission of these parallel miracles would be that for some reason Matthew was uncomfortable with Jesus using spittle in a miraculous healing (or, if he was not, that he suspected his readers would be). It may be that he associated the use of spittle in healing with magical practices, or perhaps with just conventional healing methods, associations which Matthew wished to avoid in his presentation of Jesus as the Messiah.[9]

Besides the use of physical means associated with the cure, there are other features in Mark's account which may have entered into Matthew's decision to omit it. Allen notes the following characteristics, any or all of which may have played a role in Matthew's omission.[10] The healing occurs in private.[11] If not magic, the sigh of Jesus might seem to indicate emotion or effort on the part of Jesus. Matthew elsewhere omits statements concerning the disobedience of the people to commands of Jesus.[12] There is the tendency in Matthew to describe miracles as taking place with a simple word or command. The conclusion, then, is that Matthew omitted the healing of the deaf mute for reasons that likely had to do with features within the story itself which he wished to avoid, the use of spittle being one of them.

As we will discuss below, some of the very features that apparently gave reason to Matthew to omit the passage are the ones that speak most deeply in the African context. At least with regard to this miracle, the African finds himself more in harmony with the affections of Mark than of Matthew. We can be glad that Mark did not feel the same embarrassment or demonstrate the same caution which Matthew apparently did in regard to the details of this miracle.

The Interpretation of the Miracle

The account of the miracle begins with a geographical note: Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre (where he had healed the Syro-Phoenician woman) and journeys by way of the region of Sidon to the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee where Decapolis was located. A look at a map of Palestine will reveal the circuitous nature of this route. To go from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee would require heading in a southeasterly direction; instead Jesus heads north to Sidon. The difficulty of these geographical references has not gone unnoticed. Schweizer in fact refers to the "impossibility" of this route[13] Even the early copyists tried to remove the difficulty by substituting "He came from the borders of Tyre and Sidon" for what is no doubt the original: "He came from the borders of Tyre through Sidon."[14] We find Cranfield's assessment of the problem judicious: the route "is certainly roundabout, but there is no particular reason why Jesus should not have made it."[15]

Neither are we told why Jesus would have gone this way. Some have suggested that He was avoiding the direct route which would have taken Him into

Galilee. In skirting Galilee He would have avoided possible conflict with Herod Antipas (6:14-16)[16] and the Pharisees (3:6). Another suggestion is that this itinerary would have provided Him the privacy necessary for the training of the Twelve.[17] But as Taylor points out, none of these reasons is supported by the text itself.[18] The question of Jesus' motives in His route must remain unanswered.

We can be somewhat more definite as to why Mark bothers to record the geographical references. His purpose apparently is to locate this episode in a predominantly Gentile area such as Decapolis was.[19] Thus Mark gives another example of a healing in Gentile territory, which also serves to connect it to the previous story.

The miracle itself, if examined form critically, incorporates the following elements:

Request for healing

Healing action by Jesus

Healing immediately accomplished

Command for silence

News of Jesus spreads

Response of the crowd

In form the miracle is very similar to that of the man healed with leprosy (Mk. 1:40-45).

After the geographical reference, Mark tells how the deaf and dumb man is brought to Jesus, and Jesus is asked to lay His hand upon him. We can surmise a few of the details concerning the malady of the man. Mark's description suggests that the man is completely unable to hear. However, the word used to describe dumbness, while possibly meaning "mute, dumb," more likely means that he had some sort of speech impediment. He could not speak clearly but he could make some vocalisations.[20] This is supported by 7:35, which says that after the healing he began to speak "clearly" or "properly." We do not know how long the man had been in this condition. He had probably spoken before, since he knew how to speak upon being healed. Possibly the speech impediment was only the sort caused by deafness. The gospel writers, however, in other places seem to distinguish between the two ailments.[21]

The word Mark uses to describe the speech impediment, *mogilalos*, has more significance for Mark than simply as a description of the man's condition. The word is quite rare, occurring in the Greek Bible only here and in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 35:6. The Isaianic passage is in the context of a poetic account of what will take place in the Messianic Age. The rarity of this word

in the biblical vocabulary, and the other verbal and conceptual similarities between the Isaianic passage in this story (cf. Isa. 35:5f and Mk. 7:37), make it clear that Mark has this Old Testament passage in mind. The allusion to Isaiah suggest that for Mark this miracle was evidence that in Jesus the Messianic salvation of the new age had dawned (and here in a Gentile area).

The request for Jesus to lay His hand on the man should be taken to imply that those who brought the man were requesting Jesus to heal him, being familiar either with Jesus' methods of healing in particular, or perhaps only with healing practices in general. Lane offers the suggestion that the Jewish practice connected with blessing is what was in their minds, and their astonishment in verse 37 shows that "they had not expected healing, but had brought the man to Jesus for blessing."[22] Form critical observations, however, argue against this understanding. Normally a request for healing precedes the healing action by Jesus.

Instead of laying His hand upon the man, Jesus' method of healing this time is much more unusual. Mark describes Jesus' action with seven verbal forms. Linguistically, they occur in three pairs (each with a participle followed by a finite verb), leading to the final unaccompanied finite verb (in a different tense then the others) which climatically completes the action. In an effort to demonstrate this pattern, the Greek could be laid out thus:

> Taking the man away from the crowd, He placed His fingers into the man's ears;
>
> spitting, He touched the man's tongue;
>
> looking up to heaven, He sighed;
>
> he speaks to him.

The observation is often made that the actions of Jesus were common to magicians or wonder-workers in the ancient world.[23] There was the use of touch and saliva, the look up to heaven, and the uttering of a sigh and a foreign word. Although these parallells are unfamiliar to most contemporary Westerners, Africans can easily see the affinities to traditional healing practices. Parallells to each of these actions done by Jesus can be found in ancient texts dealing with magic.[24]

But Jesus was no magician. His power came from His own person and not from magic. And in this miracle, although the affinities to magic are demonstrable, the actions of Jesus are due to the nature of the victim's condition and not to the practice of magic on the part of Jesus. Since the man was deaf, Jesus had to communicate through the use of signs. The gestures done by Jesus were not means to convey the healing but signs to show the deaf man how the healing would come. Essentially, they were symbols intended to encourage and inform the faith of the afflicted.[25]

Each of the actions can now be examined individually. The first mentioned is Jesus taking the man away from the crowd.[26] This does not necessarily mean that no one else was present or saw the miracle actually happen, but simply implies some degree of privacy and separation from the multitudes. It has been suggested that Jesus took this action to call as little attention to the miracle as possible during this period of retirement in His ministry.[27] Perhaps we should also see here a concern by Jesus to establish a personal relationship with the man. Away from the crowd Jesus could focus His attention on this one individual. Likewise, the man would not be distracted by the movements of the crowd and would thus be able to pay attention to the signs Jesus was about to make. For Mark this act of Jesus reinforces his secrecy motif which becomes prominent in verse 36.

The two gestures of placing his fingers in the man's ears and of touching the man's tongue were signs to the man that it was these two areas that Jesus intended to heal. His ears would be opened and his tongue would be loosed. Although Jesus heals with a touch in other miracles, here the healing comes not through touch but through a word of liberation.

The use of saliva has been mentioned as one of the more unusual features of the miracle. The text is not specific as to where Jesus expectorated. It is possible that he simply spat on the ground and that the touching of the tongue was an unrelated action. If this be the case, the act of spitting could symbolise the exorcism of a demon.[28] Lenski believes Jesus simply spit on the ground, and with the touching of the tongue tells the man "that Jesus wants to centre his attention on his mouth and on his tongue."[29]

The text, however, seems to relate the two actions of the spitting and the touching together, so that Jesus is seen to be spitting directly on the man's tongue or, more likely, on his own hand which he then touched to the man's tongue.[30] It is unlikely that Jesus intended the saliva to be actually therapeutic in value. It was certainly not used by Jesus as an instrument of magic, even if it was so used by others. And if the saliva had a medicinal value as a natural remedy,[31] this was no doubt the quickest and surest natural cure which saliva ever effected![32] Taylor's suggestion that the therapeutic value of the spittle was of a psycho-therapy nature has convinced few others.[33]

Instead of therapy, Jesus meant the spittle as a sign. The saliva was not an instrument of healing but symbolised the healing power that would come upon this man's tongue from Jesus himself.[34] Of course, the reason saliva could represent healing power was because it was commonly used as a healing agent in natural remedies and in magic. The effectiveness of the symbolic use of the spittle would depend on both Jesus and the afflicted man having this knowledge.

The glance upward by Jesus was also a sign to the man. Heaven was representative of the abode of God. It was normally conceived as being "up." The

point, of course, was that the transcendent God was the ultimate source of the healing.[35]

The significance of Jesus' sigh is debatable. Part of the reason is that the Greek word occurs only here in the gospels and only a few other times in the New Testament. And the context in this miracle is not determinative. Although other suggestions are possible,[36] we should probably see here, along with Taylor,[37] a sign of the compassion of Jesus for the man (comparable to his emotions at the tomb of Lazarus [Jn. 11:33, 35]).[38]

The climactic action of Jesus is the utterance of the word *ephphatha*, a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word which Mark translates as "Be opened."[39] Again, the use of this word is taken as a parallel to ancient magic practice. However, magical formulae were composed of foreign (left untranslated) or unintelligible words, names of gods, and the like. But here the word is in the mother tongue and common language of Jesus and was likely understood by many of the people in His audience. "It is not meaningless magical formula like abracadabra but an intelligible performative utterance."[40] Although Jesus could have healed through any of His actions, in this miracle it is solely and simply the word of Jesus which effects the cure. The command could be understood to be addressed only to the organs of hearing, but was probably directed by Jesus to the healing of the whole person.

The result of the healing was dramatic and instantaneous.[41] The man's ears were opened (described by using a Greek word similar to the one used in the command), "the bond of his tongue was released," and he began to speak properly. There is no question as to the results of the miracle. The man's faculties of hearing and speech were completely restored. There is some question, however, as to whether the miracle included release from demonic activity.

Based upon his study of ancient magic formulae in papyri, Deissmann concluded that the phrase "the bond of the tongue was released" was a technical expression referring to the release from the bondage of demonic activity which caused the dumbness.[42] There is some support for Deissmann's view. A very similar phrase is used in Luke 13:16 to refer to the crippled woman whom Jesus released from the bond of Satan. Several elements within our pericope could be interpreted in such a way as to point to demonic activity. The spitting could symbolise the demon coming out of the man. The sigh could be an expression of the strong emotion of Jesus as He wages war against the power of Satan.[43] And the command *ephphatha* can be understood as "the command that shatters the fetters by which Satan has held his victim bound."[44] However, the significance attributed to these terms seems overly subtle. If Mark had intended the ailment to be understood as having demonic origin, he could have made this clear (as he does by referring to the deaf and dumb spirit in 9:25). It is better to understand the release from the bond of the tongue simply to be

a figurative expression for the cure of the speech impediment, with no demonic activity implied.[45]

The miracle accomplished, Jesus issues the command for silence. Those who have seen the healing should not tell anyone about it. Similar commands are found throughout Mark's gospel.[46] It was commands such as these that led William Wrede in 1901 to his famous theory known as the "Messianic secret." According to this theory Jesus did not claim to be Messiah during His ministry. And yet after the cross his disciples came to believe that he was indeed the Messiah. How could it be that people did not recognise Jesus as Messiah during his earthly ministry? To answer this question the early church read back their post-Easter faith into the life of Jesus by inventing the "Messianic secret." Jesus knew he was Messiah, and he revealed it to his disciples (who were spiritually blinded until after the Resurrection), but he commanded silence about it. This theory is now widely discredited in the form in which Wrede proposed it, but his work is still important in that it brought the secrecy motif in Mark under investigation.[47]

Although the reason for the command for silence may be slightly different in each occurrence, the main motivation seems to be that Jesus did not want people to understand him as a wonder-working Messiah. Jesus' messiahship was that of the suffering Son of man, and discipleship meant following Jesus along this way. This could not be fully comprehended until after the resurrection. The messianic secret was not so much a secret as a misunderstanding. Its origins are not to be found in the theological imagination of the early church but in the very nature of the life and ministry of the historical Jesus.[48]

Despite the command the crowd cannot keep the healing quiet. The more Jesus urged silence the more the crowd kept talking. There is not only a *secrecy* motif in Mark, but there is also a balancing *publicity* motif.[49] The authority of Jesus is such that it cannot be hidden.

Mark describes the crowd's response to the healing as one of overwhelming amazement. In fact, the effect the author wished to convey was so extraordinary that he had to coin a Greek word to express it. They were *exceedingly* amazed. The word occurs no other place in all of Greek literature. Alexander calls the word a "superlative superlative, formed by prefixing a particle expressive of excess. . .to an adverb expressive of the same idea."[50]

The cry of the crowd is "Jesus has done all things well. He makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." We have already noted with the word *mogilalos* the clear echo of Isaiah 35:5-6, as Mark sees in the healing miracle evidence that the kingdom of God has drawn hear. Here the allusion is continued with the same effect. The crowds identify Jesus as the One who brings the salvation of the Messianic age.

The assessment of the crowd that Jesus has done all things well is a fitting summary of the miracles which Jesus had done up to that point in the region of Decapolis, including the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). If Jesus had done other miracles on this occasion, as Matthew records, then the "all things" would refer to them as well.

The Application of the Miracle in the African Context

Matthew, we earlier noted, probably omitted this miracle from his gospel out of a concern that his audience might misunderstand those details which bore similarities to common magical or healing techniques of the day. The Western reader of the twentieth century likewise feels uncomfortable in reading Mark's account, but perhaps for reasons other than those which we have attributed to Matthew. The Westerner finds in the use of saliva something unhygienic and repugnant. Especially repulsive to the Western reader is the picture of the saliva of one man being intentionally conveyed to the mouth of another.

However, whereas saliva in Western culture is consistently associated with negative connotations, in the African culture saliva can also be associated with positive values. In traditional African society saliva is used by healers to symbolise the idea of authority and power. The healer mixes his saliva with other medicine before it is given to the victim to ingest. In a form of "African injection" the spittle of the healer is applied to a therapeutic cut on the body of the sick man with the idea that it will mix with his blood and thereby effect a cure. After an incantation the healer commonly expectorates, the seal of authority on the healing process much like the pronouncement of an "amen." One's own saliva can be applied medicinally to a small wound. If a farmer scratches himself with his hoe, he can mix his saliva with the dirt from its edge and apply it to his wound. Besides its therapeutic use, saliva can also be a sign of blessing. In Yoruba traditional culture, before a newly married daughter leaves the house of her father for the last time, the father will expectorate lightly on the hands of his daughter who then rubs her moistened hands on her face to receive her father's prayer blessing. The procedure is repeated three times.[51]

These positive values attributed to saliva in the African culture provide a more appropriate setting for the understanding and application of this miracle than the values of the Westerner. The Westerner, unfamiliar with the positive use of saliva, finds the miracle enigmatic and disconcerting. Therefore the African more easily discovers the Jesus that Mark meant to portray in this story: the compassionate Messiah who, while using familiar healing techniques to communicate according to the special needs of the afflicted, heals with uncommon effect.

There is another important application of this miracle story. We have previously noted the similarity between this miracle and the other in Mark in which

spittle is used, the healing of the blind man in 9:22-26.[52] Through the parallel nature of these miracles, Mark is pointing out something about how the disciples come to understand who Jesus is. It is a message that continues to have relevance for those today who wish to follow Jesus. By juxtaposing the second of the pair of miracles immediately before the confession of Peter, Mark wishes to compare the restoration of sight for the blind man with Peter's recognition of who Jesus is (though still incomplete at this point). This interpretation is confirmed by Jesus' rebuke of the disciples, which is sandwiched between the two healing miracles: "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (8:17f). The spiritual blindness and deafness of the disciples is pictured by those who had the same disabilities in the physical realm in the two miracles. Cranfield notes that

> . . . at last he had opened their ears – by a miracle which had been costly and gradual. They had been blind, but he had opened their eyes, so that they recognised him as the Christ. They had been dumb, but he had loosed their tongues so that they were enabled at last to confess him.[53]

Those who wish to follow Jesus in Africa, along with all those of all times and of all places, must allow Him to work the same miracle on their eyes, on their ears, and on their tongues. And then, perhaps, the world will say, "He does all things well," and will even enter into the same path of discipleship.

ENDNOTES

[1]Cycle one: 1:14-3:6; cycle two: 3:7-6:6a; cycle three: 6:6b-8:30.

[2]So H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) p. 192.

[3]C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1966) p. 150. V. Taylor agrees (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* 2nd ed., reprint [Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.] p. 352).

[4]I have written previously in favour of Matthew's priority to both Mark and Luke, but I must admit that the omission by Matthew and Luke of this miracle is easier to explain than an addition by Mark (see Scott Cunningham, "The Synoptic Problem: A Summary of the Leading Theories," *African Journal of Biblical Studies* [1986] pp.48-58).

[5]B. H. Streeter, the populariser of the Four Document Hypothesis (i.e., that in composing their gospels, Matthew and Luke each used Mark, the sayings source Q, and their own special materials, respectively M and L), suggested that this section was missing from Luke's copy of Mark. Most scholars today find the theory incredible.

[6]E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) p. 331.

[7]W. Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) pp. 92f.

[8]We do find spittle used in the miraculous healing of the blind man in John 9:6.

[9]The healing of the blind man has the additional difficult feature of being a two-stage miracle (the first stage appearing ineffective?).

[10]W.C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* 3d. ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) p. 170.

[11]Compare Mt. 9:25 with Mk. 5:37.

[12]Compare Mt. 8:4 with Mk. 1:44f.

[13]E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (London: SPCK, 1971) p. 154.

[14]Cf. B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck GmbH, 1975) pp. 95f.

[15]Cranfield, p. 250.

[16]This is a common suggestion by the commentators. Cf. H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1920) p. 159.

[17]So A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) p. 190; and Swete, p. 159.

[18]Taylor, p. 352.

[19]Decapolis means "Ten Towns." It was the name given by the Romans to a region southeast of the Sea of Galilee which had special privileges under the Romans. The population was mixed, Jew and Gentile. It is likely the crowd in the story was also mixed. It is difficult to know the racial background of the afflicted man. It is likely that all the inhabitants of the area were bilingual (Greek and Aramaic), so that Jesus' use of Aramaic is not determinative. Mark's positioning of the miracle along with the geographical notices suggests that he believed the man was a Gentile.

[20]This understanding is favoured by the standard lexicon BAGD (2nd ed. 1979) p. 525. We will continue to refer to him as "mute" or "dumb," however, for the sake of convenience.

[21]Cf. Mt. 9:33; 11:5.

[22]W. L. Lane, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) p. 266. The practice of blessing through the laying on of hands is certainly known by Mark (cf. 10:16).

[23]Cf. Anderson, p. 192.

[24]On the topic of the relation of Jesus to magic a standard work is J. M. Hull's *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1974). For a brief sober assessment of Jesus and magic with extensive bibliography, see C. Brown, "Magic," NIDNTT (1981) vol. 2, pp. 560f.

[25]"Here the man could not find in the pitying tones of the voice of the Healer that on which his faith could fasten, and the acts came in to fill up the void" (E. H. Plumptre, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957] p. 103). So also R. Earle, *Mark: The Gospel of Action* (Chicago: Moody, 1970) p. 68; A. F. Hort, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1907) p. 114.

[26]Cf. 5:37 and 8:23 for similar actions.

[27]E. P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896) pp. 137f.

[28]Whether in fact Mark portrays this man's affliction as being caused by demonic activity will be considered below.

[29]R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Columbus OH: Wartburg, 1946) p. 310.

[30]This is supported by the parallel miracle in 9:23, where the saliva is applied to the afflicted part.

[31]Vespasian is said to have cured a man with saliva (Tacitus, *Histories*, IV. 8).

[32]Cranfield admits the possibility that Jesus may have intended some "natural effect of the spittle" (p. 251).

[33]Taylor, p. 354.

[34]So R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949) p. 221.

[35]Anderson, p. 193. Plummer sees in the upward look a prayer for help from God (p. 191).

[36]BAGD understands the sigh as probably "an expression of power ready to act" (*stenazo*, p. 766). Rejecting the connection of the sigh with magic in the acts of Jesus, Schneider says it "is preparatory in Jesus. It establishes the inner relation with God and represents explicit prayer for the power of healing" (J. Schneider, "stenazo," TDNT [1971] vol. 7, p. 603). For Lenski the sigh is a sign

to the man that "heavenly help . . . should be sought with the sigh of earnest longing" (pp. 310f).

[37]Taylor appears quite confident in his opinion: "Although sighing and groaning belong to the technique of mystical magic . . . , only a love for the bizarre rather than sober exegesis will find in the groaning of Jesus anything other than a sign of His deep feeling and compassion for the sufferer" (p. 355).

[38]The comparison is made by Plumptre, p. 103.

[39]Although the word *ephphatha* has traditionally been understood as Aramaic, recently scholars have entered into debate over whether or not the word is Hebrew. For literature on the questions see Lane, pp. 264f.

[40]C. H. Peisker and C. Brown, "Open, close, key," NIDNTT (1981) vol. 2, p. 729.

[41]The textual evidences for omitting the Greek word translated "immediately" are strong. But even if we follow them here, the idea of immediacy is certainly implied by the story. Cf. Metzger, p. 96.

[42]A. Deissmann calls this "the clearest example of the use of technical expressions taken from magic" (*Light from the Ancient East*, reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) p. 304. He is followed by J. Behm ("Glossa," TDNT [1964] vol. 1, p. 721) and Cranfield (p. 252).

[43]Cranfield, p. 252.

[44]Cranfield, p. 252. Similarly Anderson takes it to imply that Jesus is acting here as an exorcist (p. 193).

[45]So Lane, p. 267; Plummer, p. 191; Taylor, p 355; Trench, p. 219; D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963) p. 204. It is possible that, although Mark did not consciously see demonic involvement in the ailment, in his description of the cure he used language that would have been appropriate for the release from demonic activity. In so doing he would have been unconsciously reflecting a world-view that saw most, if not all, sickness as having a supernatural cause. That world-view would not differ considerably from traditional Africa.

[46]Mk. 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 8:30; 9:9.

[47]For an excellent survey of contemporary study on the Messianic secret, see C. Tuckett, ed. *The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). The book contains significant articles written in the past thirty years on the topic.

[48]So Taylor, pp. 122f.

[49]Cf. 1:28, 45; 3:20; 5:19f; 6:2f, 14ff, 31; 7:24; 8:28.

[50]J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Mark*, reprint (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [n.d.]) p. 204.

[51]The examples given above come from conversations with those within the Yoruba culture. The positive use of saliva in other African cultures could provide a similar context for the miracle's interpretation and application. On the religious beliefs surrounding saliva among various ethnic peoples, including its protective, therapeutic and magical powers, see W. Crooke, "saliva" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) vol. 11, pp. 100-104.

[52]Other similarities between the two miracles include the request for healing by those who bring the afflicted; the private nature of the healing; the prolonged method of healing; the allusion to Isaiah 35:5f; the command for secrecy; and the position of each of the miracles soon after a feeding miracle.

[53]Cranfield, p. 254.