

**Jesus Meets Moses:**  
**A New Take on the Man with the**  
**Withered Hand in Mark 3:1-6**

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### **Vexing Problems and Questions in Mark 3:1-6**

At first glance, the plot-line in Mark 3:1-6, the healing of the man with a withered hand, looks like a familiar one. It's another of those passages where Jesus heals somebody on the Sabbath and creates a big stir. The Pharisees get angry and want to kill him; we know that kind of thing happens a lot in the Gospels. We might puzzle briefly over what it means to have a "withered hand," but beyond that, we are likely to breeze on by, without being overly enlightened or overly vexed. However, a closer look reveals that, buried in this familiar story, lie many threads of stories familiar to Jesus' audience, but usually missed by us.

I want to analyze this passage in terms of Richard Hays's influential concept of an "echo," developed in his *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. Hays defines an echo as...

Kurt Queller, in a detailed forthcoming study,<sup>1</sup> has applied this notion of *metalepsis* to the withered hand passage, with intriguing results, uncovering two different clusters of echoes, linking the healing both to the Exodus narrative and to the Deuteronomic Sabbath-year laws. Queller's main theses, I believe, are well-supported and shed much light on the text. But they also leave some questions unanswered and raise further questions, and it is my goal to tackle some of these in this essay. Specifically, I want to suggest that not only is the Exodus narrative being evoked here (as it is frequently in the Gospels and especially in Mark), but, surprisingly, it is not Jesus who plays the role of Moses. Rather, at least on a number of levels, the man with the withered hand is cast as Moses, which leaves Jesus in the role of Yahweh. I hope to demonstrate

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<sup>1</sup> Kurt Queller, *Stretch Out Your Hand: Intertextual Echoes and Metaleptic Signification in Mark's Sabbath Healing Controversy Narrative*....

this thoroughly in due course, but for any strange new interpretation of a passage to deserve a hearing, it must show that it can solve problems in the text which otherwise remain opaque.

If the passage made perfect sense without my suggestion, it would hardly be worth my while writing this article, and certainly not worth your while reading it. So first let us take time to explore some of the questions and ambiguities that have dogged previous readings of this passage.

### **Stubborn Questions**

At the outset of his study, Queller helpfully lays out a list of the odd features of this passage and the questions they provoke, and I will summarize these briefly:

1. What is this “withered hand”? This is not an ailment we frequently encounter in the NT; in fact, this is the only place we encounter it. We don’t really have much idea what it is, from a medical standpoint. There is, however, one other place where this term shows up, and that is 1 Kings, where the same Greek word is used (in the LXX, of course) to describe Jeroboam’s withered hand, which he receives as a curse from the man of God, and then is restored.
2. Why does Jesus confront the man? There’s no indication in this passage that the man particularly wants to be healed by Jesus. Of course, this desire is not always indicated in healing stories (though it usually is). However, the man here almost appears to be timid, for, before Jesus can heal him, he has to order him to “Rise up into the midst.” The impression we receive here is that the man is sitting amidst the congregants in the synagogue, or standing with a group of onlookers. Or, it might

even appear that the Pharisees have planted him there just to see what Jesus will do (if he were complicit in their scheme, it is especially shocking that Jesus should heal him!), for it says, “And he went in again into the synagogue and there was a man who had a withered hand. And they were watching him whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse him.”

3. Why the grammatically odd command, “Rise up into the midst”? This is a bit awkward even in English, and as Queller notes, it is at least as odd in Greek, so that most translators opt for a less literal rendering, such as “stand forth” (KJV).
4. Why such an intentionally provocative action? If Jesus knew they were waiting to accuse him, why didn’t he just wait till later to heal the man?
5. Why, for that matter, is it provocative at all? This doesn’t seem like it should be a Sabbath violation at all. While the strict Pharisaical Sabbath code would have condemned it as “work” if Jesus had taken action to heal the man (as in Luke 13 or John 9), or had commanded the man to do some action (as in John 5), it could not condemn mere speech. In Luke 14, it is ambiguous, saying simply, “he took him and healed him,” (v. 4). Here, though, it is clear. Jesus merely speaks a word, and the man simply stands there. This shouldn’t be considered a Sabbath violation, so why would the Pharisees want to accuse him? Is Mark distorting the narrative here?
6. As already mentioned, it is very odd that the Pharisees should respond so strongly: “And the Pharisees, coming thence, immediately were making plot with the Herodians concerning him, how they might kill him.” So what if he healed a man on the Sabbath? Nowhere else in the Gospels is that cause for wanting to kill him. John

- 5, which might appear to provide an exception, is actually careful to state that it is not simply on this basis that the Jews want to kill him: “This was why the Jews were seeking the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:18)
- This problem is particularly pressing in light of the point just made above—that this does not even seem to be a genuine Sabbath violation.
7. Why does Christ raise the seemingly hyperbolic question about saving life vs. killing? Surely this is not a life-and-death issue? It concerns merely a hand. And there doesn’t seem to be any killing in the picture at all, at least until the Pharisees bring it in (this is of course a lovely example of Markan irony, which might at least partly account for problem 6, though not, I think, completely).
  8. Why are the adversaries silent? Certainly one would expect, given the dubiousness of Jesus’ actions and words here, that the Pharisees would attempt to challenge him verbally.
  9. Why are we told that Jesus is filled with “wrath and grief”? Well, “why not?” we might be prone to object. But such remarks about Jesus’ internal state of mind are unique in the synoptic controversy stories.
  10. Why are we told that Jesus is “co-aggrieved” (συλλυπουμενος) at their hardness of heart, an odd and unusual adjective to say the least. If we take the prepositional prefix at face value, it sounds as if Jesus is grieved together with, or alongside, the Pharisees, but this seems quite odd.

Queller lays out each of these problems (with some further details), and goes on to outline a bold new interpretation that seeks to make sense of the passage, resolving (or at least largely accounting for) almost all of these questions. I will sketch his interpretation briefly before moving on to my proposed additions to it.

Queller sees two major Old Testament contexts being evoked in this brief passage. The healing part of the passage echoes the Exodus narrative. Clues for this are given by the echoic phrases εισηλθεν, “he went in,” (used of Moses going in to Pharaoh—LXX Ex. 5:1; 7:10, 23; 10:3), εις το μεσον, “into the midst,” (“they went into the midst of the sea”—LXX Ex. 14:16, 22, 23), εχτεινον την χειρα σου, “stretch out your hand” (command repeatedly given to Moses—LXX Ex. 7:19, 9:22, 10:21, 14:16, 26 are exact echoes; Ex. 4:4; 8:1-2, 12-13; 10:12 are near echoes ) command repeatedly given to Moses), the Pharisees’ “hardness of heart” (πωρωσει της καρδιας; different word used in Exodus for Pharaoh, but same idea), the hand being απεκατεσταθη, “restored,” (same word used of the Red Sea as it falls upon Pharaoh—LXX Ex. 14:27). If this is indeed the case, then what we have here is something like the following: Jesus comes into the synagogue, which now represents Egypt, to demand that his people (the sick and the needy) be set free from their oppressors (the Pharisees). The Pharisees harden their hearts, so Jesus passes judgment on them by “restoring” the withered hand as God restored the Red Sea, thus symbolically destroying them (and intensifying the irony that they then plot to destroy him).

The second context, which we see in the controversy part of the passage, is the Deuteronomic Sabbath laws. Queller skillfully demonstrates that ποιησαι η κακοποιησαι, “to do good or to do evil,” and certain other phrases are an echo of Deuteronomy 15, which passage then sheds light on the rest of what is going on in this passage, including problems 7-10 listed

above. The gist here is that Jesus appeals to the purpose of the Sabbath (particularly with the Sabbath year in mind) as that which gives rest, life, and freedom against the Pharisees, who do not want it so used for this sick man. The Pharisees are cast, by the allusions, in the role of those who do not want to lend to their needy brothers as they see the Sabbath year approaching, and thus distort the purpose of Sabbath and invite divine wrath. Jesus, then, is appealing beyond their petty Sabbath regulations to dispute with the Pharisees about what the purpose of Sabbath in the law is, and to indict them for their ethical failings.

This interpretation of the passage is rich and fruitful in many ways, and, as mentioned, makes sense of most of the questions posed above. It explains the syntactical oddities of problem 3 and problem 10 as intentional echoes; it explains Jesus' intention in the action, thus solving 4 and 5 (and possibly 2); 7-9 all fit in to various parts of the Deuteronomic context, according to Queller's reconstruction. Problem #6 certainly appears less vexing; if the Pharisees are being cast as "Pharaohsees" and as violators of the Deuteronomic law, it is no wonder that they are upset and plot to kill Jesus. Or is it? I shall come back to this question in due time. Problem #1 unfortunately remains unanswered, and Problem #2, I deem, remains a bit ambiguous. Is there any significance to the man's being called out of the crowd other than Jesus' wish to use him as an object lesson? Perhaps not. Yet, perhaps more can be said on this point as well.

Allow me to summarize, then, the remaining (and new) questions about the passage, which shall guide the rest of the discussion.

First, we must continue to ask, "What is the significance of this so-called withered hand?" As mentioned above, the term appears in only one other place in the Bible; that is to say,

with Jeroboam. It seems impossible not to suppose some kind of link here. Yet does such a link make sense? Moreover, given the obvious Exodus motif here, we are reminded of Moses' hand being made leprous and then restored. The word "leprous" is not the same as "withered," in English or Greek, yet it is hard not to imagine some link, for the healing of a hand, whatever the ailment, is not common in Scripture (indeed, Moses, Jeroboam, and this man comprise, I believe, the entire catalogue of such episodes).<sup>2</sup> I shall suggest that such a link is clearly present, and is potentially illuminating.

Second, we must continue to ask whether or not there is any special significance in Jesus' taking the initiative to summon the man forth to be healed, an action unique among the healing stories in Mark and without a real parallel in other Synoptic healing stories (except in the Lukan version of this healing; though not the Matthaean). Every other healing incident in the Synoptics appears to be initiated by the sick person or their friends. Of course, the answer to this question relies heavily on the answer to the immediately preceding question.

Third, we again ask why the Pharisees react so strongly. Jesus makes them look stupid and preaches against them in many places; he overturns their taboos and uses the law against

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Horne notes the links with both Moses and Jeroboam, though for him the only significance of these links is to compare their reception of the signs with the Pharisees' unbelief (*The Victory According to Mark* [Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003], 72-4).

them in many places. Yet nowhere else in the Synoptics, before the Passion Week, are we told of such a response—plotting to kill him.<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, if Mark is indeed invoking other Scriptural narratives into the picture, to retell them with application to the Pharisees, what exactly does the *dramatis personae* of this drama look like? We might well assume, simply enough, that, for the Exodus story, Jesus represents Moses, the Pharisees represent Pharaoh, and the man with the withered hand represents the oppressed children of Israel. This is no doubt so; however, there are a number of indications that the man, somehow, is Moses. Are we being misled by an overly-strict application of the allusions, or is this identification an important part of the Exodus narrative that is being told?

This fourth question shall occupy most of my attention, and in the process of answering it, I hope to offer plausible considerations for making sense of questions 1-3 just listed as well.

### **Identifying Moses**

So, what exactly is the shape of this Exodus narrative in verses 1-6? First, there is no doubt that part of the picture is of Jesus as a new Moses, in which case the synagogue represents Egypt, the Pharisees represent Pharaoh, and the man with the withered hand represents destitute, oppressed Israel.<sup>4</sup> It is not hard to see this as a meaningful and coherent picture, and certain

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<sup>3</sup> This observation certainly seems rather surprising, but the plots to kill Jesus with which we are all so familiar are located in John, as shall be discussed more later. In Matthew, such plotting does not appear until 26:4, well into Passion Week. Mark puts it in 11:18, right after the cleansing of the temple, as does Luke, in 19:47. The only possible exception to this lack of intent on Jesus' life appears in Luke 4, when the crowd at the synagogue is filled with wrath at his proclamation and they seek to cast him off a cliff. This, however, is not a real parallel to the situation in Mark 3, since it is a spontaneous action by the crowd, rather than a plot by the leaders.

<sup>4</sup> Reference other places in the gospels or sources where this is seen.

considerations within the passage strengthen this view. Most prominently, the echo εισηλθεν πάλιν, “he went in again,” is a phrase that appears throughout the plague narrative, describing Moses, or Moses and Aaron, as they go in again to Pharaoh to ask him to let their people go. The repetition implied by the “again” suggests that we should view all of Christ’s ministry here in the early chapters of Mark as a series of confronting the Pharisees as Pharaoh, working signs against them, and setting free his people. Christ-as-Moses also makes sense because he is the miracle-worker, as Moses was, and he speaks directly to the Pharisees, as Moses and Aaron did to Pharaoh. (Notice that the Pharisees’ silence takes on significance as an image of Pharaoh’s non-responsiveness; he speaks, indeed, but only to later recant whatever he has just said.)

As we widen our viewpoint to look at the entire chapter, the scene comes even more into focus. All of Mark chapter 3 appears to be structured as an Exodus-reenactment of sorts. Jesus begins by going into the synagogue, which symbolizes the house of Egypt. He works wonders there, but is met by hardness of heart, and he frees an Israelite from illness. He goes from thence down to the seaside, where he again works wonders and delivers people, reminding us of the Red Sea episode (vv. 7-12). Then he goes up onto a mountain and commissions a new Israel of 12 disciples, thus reenacting Sinai (vv. 13-20). Then he speaks of entering Satan’s divided house and plundering it (21-28), which can easily be seen as a new conquest of the land motif. The chapter ends with him sitting in another house (the Promised Land?), having at the beginning, gone out of the synagogue, the house of Egypt. (The contrasting house-motif recurs throughout the early chapters of Mark.) Notice that this wider-view Exodus motif is not meant to necessarily subsume the motif in vv. 1-6 (since we have a hint of the Red Sea episode there as well in vs. 7-12), but is more of a complementary layer. In any case, though, it strengthens our

general tendency to see Jesus portrayed as a new Moses in vv. 1-6. I do not wish to challenge that this portrayal is real, but if this is the whole picture, then we have some oddities to grapple with.

The most straightforward problem is that one of the echoes that most clearly connects this healing with the Exodus doesn't fit this picture. Jesus says to the man "stretch out your hand." This phrase, *εχτεινον την χειρα σου* in Greek, is the same phrase that is used in Exodus whenever God commands Moses to stretch out his hand to work a miracle. And here Jesus gives the same command to the man with the withered hand. But wait a moment...in Exodus, it is Moses who receives the command; in Mark, it is Jesus who gives it. This suggests not an identification of Moses with Jesus, but with the man with the withered hand. We might counter that this is making too much of the echo; the echo is meant merely to evoke context, not to suggest one-to-one correspondences. After all, when Jesus tells the man to "rise up into the midst," is he casting the man as the Israelites, walking into the midst of the sea which will fall upon their pursuers? An intriguing notion, perhaps, but does it square with the hand being "restored" just as the sea is "restored," implying that the man, or his hand, symbolizes the sea in some way? Surely not. Perhaps then we should not make anything too specific of the object of the "stretch out your hand" command.

However, I don't think we should be quite so quick to give up this line of investigation.

First of all, we have the connection between the man's withered hand and Moses' leprous hand, which implies some kind of identification between the two. This connection is not unarguable, because a "leprous hand" and a "withered hand" are potentially quite different things; moreover, while the man in Mark 3 is to stretch out his hand for it to be "restored,"

Moses is to put it into his cloak for it to be “restored”. Nonetheless, it is not often in Scripture that individual diseased hands receive attention or are healed, so, from the unusualness of the occurrence, we can legitimately assume that some connection exists between the two, especially when the passage has already evoked Moses and the Exodus context so thoroughly.

What is certain is that the withered hand evokes the memory of the withered hand of Jeroboam (the only other withered hand in the Bible) so we would do well to take a bit of time to pay attention to his story. The context of Jeroboam’s withered hand, of course, is his idolatrous worship at Bethel. The man of God confronts him, Jeroboam “stretches out his hand” to order the man of God’s arrest, and the hand is withered. Jeroboam entreats mercy, and the hand is restored. Now, in this passage, the focus is undoubtedly on the punishment, not on the healing, though there is a healing and restoration. In Mark 3, it is all about the healing, so it is difficult to draw very helpful parallels between the two; certainly we are given no reason to assume any sinister history behind why the man in Mark 3 had been punished with a withered hand. However, it is certainly possible to draw parallels between Jeroboam and Moses. Jeroboam is chosen by the Lord to lead Israel. The king (Solomon) attempts to kill him, and he flees into (rather than out of) Egypt. The people of Israel are oppressed with hard burdens, and Jeroboam returns to them to lead them out from oppression. Having become the leader of Israel, he introduces new worship. However, at this point, he fails in his task and becomes Aaron rather than Moses, by being unfaithful to the Lord and making a Golden Calf. So, ironically, at the point when his hand is withered, reminding us so much of Moses, he has ceased to be like Moses. No doubt there are many fascinating things to explore here, but let it suffice for our purposes to suggest that, as the man’s ailment so clearly links him up with Jeroboam, who is so

clearly a new Moses figure, we may infer that the man in Mark 3 is also a sort of new Moses figure, and perhaps, that his withered hand has similar significance (we will explore this further later).

This line of reasoning is strengthened when we consider the odd command to *εγειρε εις το μεσον*, “rise up into the midst,” and more generally, the fact that Jesus appears to confront the man and summon him into the public spotlight. This quite closely corresponds to the life of Moses. Moses does not seek out the role of deliverer; indeed, he is quite opposed to it when God calls him to it. God has to call him *out of Egypt, out of Pharaoh’s house*, and force him to rise up and stand in the midst to face down the Egyptians and the skeptical Jews. The man with the withered hand, too, has to be called out of the general crowd and made to stand in the midst as a witness against the “Pharaoh-sees,” and as an object, no doubt, of their wrath and opposition. Therefore, when we see Jesus summoning the man out from the crowd, we are to see a glimpse of Moses’ being summoned out to bear witness to the people of Israel.

Then, of course, as already mentioned, we have the recurring “stretch out your hand” command in Exodus. Moses, having been commissioned to bear witness to hard-hearted Pharaoh, and to the Israelites, and to pass judgment against those who resist God’s will, is commanded to stretch out his hand so that God can through it work wonders and signs.<sup>5</sup> The first use of the phrase, significantly, comes only two verses before the leprous hand episode, in

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<sup>5</sup> We should note that sometimes in Exodus, Moses is commanded to tell Aaron to stretch out his hand. This complicates some of the typology in interesting ways, especially in light of the clear correspondences between Jeroboam and Aaron mentioned before. We might suggest echoes of a typology in which Jesus is Moses, summoning the man, as Aaron, to join him in confronting the “Pharaohsees,” by stretching out his hand as a sign against them. Such a reading need not contradict the reading offered in this essay, but could be complementary, since we have already recognized that the typology in this passage is multi-layered.

Exodus 4:4. Here Moses is told to stretch out his hand to take up his rod which has turned into a serpent. Subsequently, the “stretch out your hand” command appears in conjunction with the first (7:19), second (8:1 LXX), third (8:12 LXX), eighth (10:12), and ninth (10:21) plagues. Finally, of course, it appears with the climactic scene of the crossing of the Red Sea (14:16, 26), when Moses stretches out his hand first to part the sea, so that the Israelites and the Egyptians may go “into the midst” of the sea, then he stretches out his hand again so that the sea may be “restored,” destroying the Egyptians. The command to “stretch out your hand” is closely connected with Exodus; indeed, the only other place it appears in the Old Testament is Joshua 8:18, an obvious echo of the Exodus passage. So it hard not to reach the conclusion that the man here is being commanded, as a new Moses, to stretch out his hand in the sight of the hard-hearted “Pharaohsees,” as a sign that healing for the oppressed in the land is simultaneously judgment against them.

Notice that, if my reading here is correct, that three of the four echoes that Queller identified, linking this passage with Exodus, suggest an identification of the man with the withered hand as Moses: the “stretch out your hand” command, the “rise up into the midst” command, and hand’s being “restored.” Only the “he went in again” echo fits with the Jesus-as-Moses identification. Moreover, the simple fact of the hand-ailment, reminding us of Moses’ hand (particularly through the link of Jeroboam), seems compelling.

### **What Do We Make of This?**

If all this is true, and the man with the withered hand does in some way symbolize Moses, what are we to make of this? Certainly he doesn’t seem much like Moses. Moses takes

center stage in his chapter in the history of redemption; this man disappears from the story almost as quickly as he appears. He doesn't lead Israel; he doesn't even speak at all to the "Pharaohsees," as Moses (or Aaron) did to Pharaoh. Of course, we should not ask too much of a typological connection; it is rare that a typological connection extends beyond a particular context or field of significance; the purpose of the typology may be simply to shed light on a couple important features of the passage, rather than providing a consistent framework for making sense of every detail. Nonetheless, it is fair to ask whether this supposed typology can make *any* sense of how we are to understand the role of the man with the withered hand, as well as Christ's role.

I believe it can. First, let us focus on what the withered hand, and its healing, may mean in this Markan context. We must remember that miracles are not simply given, as we sometimes tend to think, for their "oh wow" value. God does not usually send miracles simply so that people will say, "Well, that's pretty amazing. I guess we really should listen to God." Obviously that is part of it, but usually the symbolism is more specific. This is the case, I think, in the three signs that God gives to Moses in Exodus 4. They are not simply to make the Egyptians say, "Wow, Yahweh can do that? I guess we'd better listen," but they tell us something about what Yahweh is going to do. I would tentatively suggest something like the following readings. The rod being turned into a serpent is a promise to the Israelites that this rod that Moses is carrying will be turned into a sinister means of destruction against Egypt (for it is by stretching out this rod that most of the plagues are enacted); or else it is, as James Jordan suggested, a warning that the Egyptians, who are a "serpent," will be brought into submission to Moses, Yahweh's

messenger.<sup>6</sup> When Moses' hand is made leprous and then restored, I believe it symbolizes that Israel, having been made "leprous" in her weakness and oppression, will be restored. The Nile's water being turned into blood signifies first what will happen in the first plague, and more symbolically, what will happen in the last plague—the river of Egypt's being turned into blood serves as an apt metonymy for the entire land of Egypt being turned into death and destruction. This is all the more apt because the killing of the firstborn is a visiting upon Egypt of the killing of the firstborn Hebrews, who were cast into the Nile.

The second sign, then, taken into the Markan context, identifies the man with a withered hand as a representative of Israel; Israel has been "withered," "dried up," in her current oppression, yet the man's hand is restored, as Moses', for a sign that Yahweh is coming to restore and deliver her. This leads to a second consideration about Moses' hand, which becomes clearer in comparing him to Jeroboam. In both cases, though the details differ, the purpose of the sign is to confirm Yahweh's presence. When Jeroboam's hand is withered, the question of the moment is "Who is Yahweh, and how do we know that it is He who has sent the prophet from Judah?" Jeroboam's hand is withered as a sign of judgment against him and a sign that Yahweh is the God who is speaking through the man of God, not the God who is in Jeroboam's calf. When Moses' hand is made leprous, again the question is "Who is Yahweh, and how do we know that he has sent Moses?" When God makes Moses' hand leprous and then restores it, it is a sign that God has sent him. If we may draw this into the Markan context, it looks something like this: In the immediately preceding passage, Jesus' authority has been challenged and he has responded by claiming to be at least equal with David, and claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath. The Jews are

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<sup>6</sup> James Jordan, "Studies in Exodus," Lecture #9 (1992). Jordan also offers the interpretations of the leprous hand and the water turning to blood that are given here.

in essence asking the questions of Exodus 3 and 4, “Who is Yahweh, and how we know he has sent you to deliver Israel?” When the man with the withered hand is summoned forth and healed, it is, as with Moses, a sign that God himself is present and is acting to deliver Israel. In other words, though in one sense Jesus is Moses, coming to deliver Israel, we also see that he is Yahweh, for it is Yahweh who restores the hand of Moses, representative of Israel, as a sign of His deliverance of Israel, and it is Jesus who restores the hand of the man in Mark 3, representative of withered Israel, as a sign of His deliverance.

The picture becomes clearer as we explore more of the parallels. Why does Jesus summon the man out of the crowd to stand in the midst? Well, this is what God did with Moses. We often forget just what an unworthy and unwilling instrument Moses was. Moses was chosen not because he was necessarily any more righteous and faithful than other Israelites. In fact, Moses was an Egyptian! He was part of the apparatus of oppression. God brings Moses out of Egypt and into the wilderness, and there confronts him and all but forces him to be his servant. Moses is no longer an Egyptian but is, in a sense, the first faithful Israelite (Moses is already established as a representative of Israel for having had to flee Egypt into the wilderness and there meeting Yahweh on Mt. Horeb). Moses goes back to Egypt to witness as a faithful Israelite against the Egyptian oppressors and to the rest of the Israelites who are to join him in being Yahweh’s people. Let us apply this to the Markan context. The man with the withered hand is sitting in the synagogue, among the crowds there, presumably. He is in Egypt, the house of bondage, and needs to be called out from among the crowd if he is to be a faithful Israelite. Thus Jesus summons him forward into the midst, separating him from them. By healing him, Jesus marks him out as a representative of all of Israel, which has been withered and must accept

Christ's call to step forward, be healed, and stand with him as witnesses against the "Pharaohsees" of Yahweh's redemption. It is not uncommon in the Gospels that those whom Christ heals function as prototypical disciples, exemplifying the faith and the receptiveness to Christ's work that all of Israel needs to imitate. Understood this way, then, it makes sense that Jesus in Mark 3 is not Moses, but is Yahweh calling forth a Moses as a prototype of faithful, restored Israel, which will stretch out its hands against the Pharaohsees.

Finally, this leads us to something of an understanding of why the man should be cast as the one stretching out his hand as a sign of judgment, as Moses did. It would seem that Jesus should be Moses—he is the one working wonders against the "Pharaohsees"; he is the one confronting them and provoking them; it should be Jesus who stretches out his hand to destroy them. But we should remember that it was not Moses himself who did any of these things; Moses was simply a human agent, called to be an instrument of Yahweh's power. Moses did not part the Red Sea by stretching out his hand; Yahweh parted the Red Sea by telling Moses to stretch out his hand. God calls Moses to visibly stretch out his hand as an occasion for Him to show forth His power. Understood this way, the man with the withered hand's role in "stretching out his hand" begins to make more sense. The man is not himself working a sign against the "Pharaohsees"; rather, he, as a new Moses, a prototypical faithful Israelite, stretches forth his hand as an occasion for Jesus, who stands in the place of Yahweh, to show forth his power.

We have thus given some account of the typology which the passage seems to suggest, in which, though Jesus undoubtedly stands as a Moses-figure, the man with the withered hand is also clearly cast as Moses. This, provocatively, suggests that Jesus, as the man calling forth

“Moses,” healing his hand, enacting liberation and judgment through him, is in fact Yahweh, coming to an Israel that has become Egypt in order to judge it and call out His chosen from them.

This account of the passage, surprising as it is, certainly has the virtue of explaining the remaining ambiguities admirably, and answering at least the first three of the four questions I posed above. We now can understand what the significance of the “withered hand” is—though it might be clearer if it had been a “leprous hand,” I believe the ailment establishes a clear Moses-connection, especially in light of the Jeroboam-connection. We can understand why Jesus confronts the man and summons him forward into the midst. We can understand how, in this retelling of the Exodus story, each character is being cast. Can we understand, then, that final nagging question: why does Mark attribute to the Pharisees such an unwarranted, murderous response? This account of things certainly suggests a clear answer, though admittedly it is speculative, depending upon the supposition that we can read themes from later Gospels into earlier Gospels, where there could not have been any actual historical textual dependence.

For, when we examine this theme of the Pharisees plotting Jesus’ death, or attempting to kill him, we find, as mentioned earlier, almost no occurrence of this in the Synoptics, prior to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and provocative actions there. The only exceptions are this passage and its Matthaean and Lukan parallels, as well as (in some respects), the attempt of the people to kill Jesus in Luke 4.<sup>7</sup> Every other case is to be found in John and there is a clear logic to it. The first instance is in John 5, and the reason given is clear: “This was why the Jews were

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<sup>7</sup> There is no space to deal with this here, but this potential exception perhaps further confirms my reading. For in Luke 4, the cause of their desire to kill him is his claim to be in himself the new Exodus promised by Isaiah; his ministry is to be a new Sabbath year, a “year of the Lord’s favor” in which captives shall be freed. On my application of Queller’s insights, this claim to be the bringer of the Sabbath year, against which the Pharisees are stingily holding out, is also part of what is going on in Mark 3:1-6.

seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn. 5:18). The next mention of the Jews wanting to kill him comes in John 7:1. Right before this, Jesus has spoken again about his close identity with the Father and the commission he has from Him, so we may suppose a similar connection. In John 7:30 we are told that they are seeking to arrest him, because he has just said, “You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me” (Jn. 7:28-9). So again, their anger is over the same thing—Christ has just said that he intimately knows Yahweh and comes directly from him. The next place this occurs is John 8:59, right after Jesus has said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am,” (8:58), a clear identification of himself with Yahweh. Finally, in 10:31 and 10:39 they seek to stone him and then to arrest him, because he has just said “I and the Father are one.” The pattern is clear: Jesus says and does many provocative things, but the only times that these suffice to make the Jews want to kill him is when he makes himself equal with God. If this is true, and this is the only circumstance (at least pre-Passion Week) in which the Jews are said to desire to kill Jesus, then, on our reading, Mark 3 (and its parallels) fit neatly into the puzzle. For here, Jesus has symbolically reenacted the Exodus in such a way as to cast himself as Yahweh, not merely as a prophet of Yahweh. Having portrayed the episode this way, Mark naturally depicts the Pharisees as responding with a plot to destroy this blasphemer.

## Final Questions

This entire reconstruction, while it has the virtue of answering all the questions that the passage posed to us, certainly raises new unanswered questions. Not, of course, that this is a negative; no interpretation would be worthwhile if it didn't suggest further lines of inquiry. Before wrapping this paper up, then, let me take note of some of these.

The most problematic question for my interpretation concerns my last conclusion. Could Mark really have intended, by telling us that the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus, to thereby suggest that they understood Christ to be claiming divinity in the healing episode? It is hard at least for us to imagine the Pharisees drawing that conclusion for themselves on the spot (even if we suppose that they perceived the Exodus context that Christ was evoking against them). But even if this thought process did not inform the actual reaction of the Pharisees in the actual episode, it is nevertheless possible for Mark to have intended it for his own literary reasons. That is to say, Mark may accurately record the Pharisees' desire to kill Jesus, for which they may have had their own reasons, and may supply an implicit rationale for their actions which fits with the motifs he is trying to sketch. But even here, we are rightly dubious. For is such a rationale—"the Pharisees want to kill Jesus because he is God"—really the sort of thing we would expect from Mark, with his characteristic "Christology from below"? I do not think it is inconsistent, for, while Mark is of course far less explicit about his Christology than John, this is not because the same points are not made about Christ, but because they are made subtly and indirectly. But the problem remains that, to infer this rationale for the Pharisees' actions, we need to appeal to a rationale that is only explicit in another Gospel, and a later Gospel at that. So if I wish to claim any kind of authorial intent for this rationale, and not merely that it is an interesting coincidence,

I may have to appeal beyond Mark to the authorial intent of the Holy Spirit, an appeal that few are likely to follow. But I, for one, have great faith in the ingenuity of that most thorough of authors, so I will maintain hope that there is some real grounding for this most intriguing connection.

Another question concerns the relation of the Markan account to the other Gospels. For the sake of focus, I have (following Queller) confined my attention to the Markan account alone. While an equally thorough study of the Matthaean and Lukan accounts would no doubt yield many fascinating observations about those passages as well, it appears that the Exodus motif is not as centrally in view there. In each, only one of the four Exodus echoes appears. However, though they seem to lack Mark's explanatory key, both of those accounts still contain many of the puzzling details that we find in Mark. This phenomenon might seem to suggest that, building their accounts off of Mark but failing to notice the Exodus motif that made sense of the whole passage, they kept some of the odd features of Mark's account but, by some seemingly insignificant modifications of phrasing, lost the features that helped make sense of the oddities. An account like this would appear to be evidence for Markan priority, but obviously, we would be rash to put much stock in this line of argument based on these cursory considerations alone.

Finally, my reading of this passage, with its odd and provocative casting of the man with the withered hand as Moses, suggests that we might wish to seek for similar phenomena in other healing accounts. That is to say, when looking at typology in the Gospels, we tend to focus on what types Jesus is being attached to; he is the hero who is a new Moses, a new David, etc. This is of course quite true, but if my interpretation here is anything like correct, we might do well to search more carefully for the typological roles of those to whom Christ ministers. Perhaps we

will find more Moseses, and Joshuas, Sauls, Davids, and all the rest, as Jesus gradually raises up the humble and builds them into a new Israel around himself.