The Consumed Body
(Mark 7:24–30)

Mark 7:24–30 is a story in which a Greek/Gentile (Ἑλλήνις) woman, a Syrophoenician by race/nationality (τῷ γένει), suddenly comes to Jesus, who is hiding in a house in the region of Tyre, and implores him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus’s remarks, in which he refers to this woman as a “dog,” sound harsh. Readers have understood his attitude as marked by Jewish prejudice against Gentiles, especially a Gentile woman, or as testing her faith. Due to this foreign woman’s prowess and prudence, however, Jesus is seen as breaking the boundary between Jews and Gentiles. This interpretation frequently adds that the story implies the Gentiles’ incorporation into Christianity.

However, my reading highlights that the encounter of the woman and Jesus occurs at the border of Tyre and Galilee, territories under the rule of the Roman Empire. It is a story of how the two subjects engage and negotiate with each other in a border situation. Although the term “understanding,” which is considered to be significant in terms of Markan discipleship, does not appear in this story, it turns out that the woman is one of the few in the whole Gospel narrative who “perceives” or “understands.” She perceives the brokenness and movement of Jesus’s body and utilizes embodied tactics in order to allow her daughter to share his body. Furthermore, she discerns that this singular event is part of the Jesus event for other displaced people. This kind of knowing is what I call phronesis, in contrast to rational knowledge of Jesus’s identity. Through this encounter, Jesus, who has revealed a Jewish perspective on the Gentile
woman, moves across the border and reaches the other. This reading will show what is going on with those who lack a proper place, especially at the borders—both in antiquity and today—and relate this finding to the theme of Markan discipleship.

**Traditional Views of *Hellenis***

An examination of how interpreters have discussed the notion of *Hellenis* (Ἑλληνις), which identifies the Syrophoenician woman, shows the complex relationship between identity construction and geopolitics. As the rendering of the word as “Gentile” in many English translations shows, *Hellenis* traditionally refers to a non-Jew, rather than denoting Greek ethnicity. 1 Jesus’s assertion of “first the children and then the dogs” fits with Mark’s narrative, which develops the order of Jesus’s ministry as occurring first in Jewish territory and then in Gentile territory.

This position assumes that the generic binary classification of Jews versus non-Jews reflects on the theological debate of the early Christians—particularly observed in the Pauline theology of “first Jews and second Gentiles”—or the table fellowship with Gentiles in early Christianity. 2 The woman who represents the Gentile perspective transforms Jesus’s perspective on the non-Jews and opens the way finally for Jesus’s mission beyond the Jewish community. 3

Likewise, the story is most often interpreted from an ecclesiastical or missiological perspective as affirming the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God. 4 However, it is argued that designating the Syrophoenician woman a “Gentile” is to retroject a later dichotomy between Jew and Gentile as essentialist identity markers on the text. 5

The second dominant view is to relate the term *Hellenis* to Greek culture and language rather than to racial or ethnic origin. 6 This view is followed by the assumption that the woman is of a higher social status than the poor people in Jewish rural areas whom Jesus might represent. Thus, the identification of the woman as a Greek indicates her bilingual ability and hellenized culture, which denotes a member of the upper class. 7 This “Greek lady” crosses over the social barrier between the itinerant preacher and the landed property owner class. 8 Considering