



# The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



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## Part 5

### Mark 2:13-22

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# REVIEW of Mark 1:1-2:12

Through Mark 2:12, we have begun to see two primary themes emerging:

- 1) Signs of the Kingdom of God – healings, exorcisms, the forgiveness of sins
- 2) Developing controversy and conflict over these signs

These themes continue throughout the Gospel

# Mark 2:13 (NIV)

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.



“out beside the lake”

Jesus has been in a house in Capernaum ... but returns now to the ‘lake’ – the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

“crowds” ... “teach”

We already saw Jesus attracting a crowd and teaching in 1:21 and 2:2.

This is already what we expect from an appearance of Jesus!

## Mark 2:14 (NIV)

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

"Levi son of Alphaeus"

The name "Levi" for a disciple only occurs here and in Luke's parallel account of this story in Luke 5:27.

The parallel account in Matthew has this scene, but with the name "Matthew" (Matthew 9:9) instead of "Levi".

The lists of the twelve disciples in both Mark and Luke do NOT say "Levi", but "Matthew".

All this leads to the assumption that both names refer to the same person.

It would be unusual, but not unheard of, for a Jew to have two Hebrew names, as here – it was more common to have one Hebrew name and a different Greek name, though.

Looking ahead to Mark 3:18, there IS a disciple known as "James, son of Alphaeus" ... although Levi/Matthew and James being brothers is never explicitly stated.

If they are, the 12 disciples consisted of three sets of brothers – Peter and Andrew, James and John, Matthew and James (sons of Alphaeus)

Or, were Mark and Luke referring to a different person in this story who did NOT become one of the 12? Why would Matthew change the name in the story from Mark and Luke? Did Levi's BROTHER become a disciple, but not Levi? Is James actually another name for Levi, rather than Matthew? All unknown!

## Mark 2:14 (NIV)

As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

### "tax collector's booth"

Tax collecting was a hated and despised profession.

They were usually Jews in service to the Romans.

There were many types of taxes in this day – head taxes, land taxes, sales taxes, transport taxes, road taxes (tolls) ... and collectors could charge whatever they wanted, paying the government its fee and keeping the rest. Their pay was not defined by Rome – they set their own "salary" by what they charged.

From the reference to the "booth" here, many scholars believe Levi might have been akin to today's toll booth operator, although he may also have kept up a kiosk to which taxes were brought.

Amazingly, Jesus calls one of these despised men to be one of his followers!

### "follow me"

This is the very same invitation we saw in 1:17 to Simon and Andrew, just without the fishing context.

Levi responds as did the earlier four – Simon, Andrew, James, and John.

This tax collector's call sets the stage for the next scene.

## Mark 2:15 (NIV)

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

"having dinner"

Scholars say that typical dinners were held seated at tables – the reclining or laying back at tables we hear about seems to have been reserved for celebrations and banquets.

The word for "dining" here is the language typically used for reclining at the table, suggesting that Levi may have arranged a banquet to celebrate his decision to follow Jesus.

"sinners"

This was the common designation for anyone who lived an immoral lifestyle by the laws of Judaism.

This included murderers, robbers, adulterers, those we would consider "criminals".

But it ALSO included any who were just morally dubious, disinterested in moral law, or who just plain ignored moral and religious matters, as well as those who had jobs that easily made them defiled or unclean by Jewish purity laws.

Ultimately, it meant anyone who failed to live up to the Pharisaic interpretation of obedience to the ritual law. We will see more about the Pharisees later.

## Mark 2:15 (NIV)

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

"his disciples"

This is the first use of the word "disciples" in Mark!

There is no indication here of who is meant, or how many there were at this time.

"many who followed him"

The "many" does not just mean "many" tax collectors and sinners, but people in general.

This scene demonstrates something very important: Jesus ate with and established fellowship with people BEFORE repentance.

It is not simply that he "accepted them the way they were", nor that he refused to associate with them until they repented, but that he embraced them before they repented!

Embrace does not mean approval of behavior!

It does mean reaching out in tenderness, longing for them to return to God.

## Mark 2:16 (NIV)

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

“teachers of the law who were Pharisees”

We have seen the ‘teachers of the law’ before, in 1:22 and 2:6.

But THESE teachers of the law (or “scribes”) are also PHARISEES.

This was one of the three leading religious parties, along with Sadducees and Essenes.

Pharisees were people from all walks of life who emphasized ritual purity and the teaching of the law of Moses and the oral interpretation of it, which was considered equally valid.

They were often separatists who wanted to avoid Hellenization (incorporation of Greek values and way of life into the Jewish way of life)

They strongly believed this would be destructive to the Jewish way of life.

## Mark 2:16 (NIV)

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

“they asked ...”

Remember – the earlier conflict with these teachers in 2:6 was unvoiced. Jesus had seen into their hearts.

Now, they speak their concern – but not to Jesus directly, to his disciples!

This is the second step in an increasing aggression on the part of Jesus’ opponents.

From THEIR perspective, Jesus was ignoring or disregarding laws for table fellowship that led to defilement – both the ritual contamination that would make one unclean, but also the fear of moral contamination resulting from associating with “bad company”.

This is the reason for the question, “Why does he do that?”

The scene highlights Jesus’ practice of embracing those seen as unacceptable.

## Mark 2:17 (NIV)

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

“who need a doctor”

Jesus employs the metaphor of medical illness.

Healing the sick, exorcising demons, forgiving sinners, offering table fellowship to tax collectors and “sinners”: all of these, for Jesus, are part of “healing” people.

His concern is that EVERYONE would be healthy.

But some people who THINK they are healthy are, in fact, sick.

“the righteous”

This term refers to those whose conduct and lifestyle reflect a right relationship with God.

Jesus says he comes for those who are NOT righteous – but this does not imply that he is not in favor of those who ARE.

His point here is that those who really ARE “healthy” (righteous), who are going in the right direction, will be OK while he goes after the “sick” (unrighteous).

## Mark 2:18 (NIV)

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

"fasting"

This is a highly valued tradition throughout the Bible.

Nehemiah 9:1 – "On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads."

Esther 4:16 – "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day."

Matthew 4:2 – "After fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry."

Acts 13:2-3 – "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.'"

Whereas today tradition is sometimes devalued in our culture, in Jesus' day it was HIGHLY regarded and respected.

Sometimes, fasting was an expression of mourning or loss.

More often it was a sign of contrition or repentance accompanied by symbols of mourning (symbolizing mourning over the loss of relationship with God due to sin).

It was accompanied by prayer and submission to God's will.

There were three national fasts, but personal fasts of once or twice per week were common.

## Mark 2:18 (NIV)

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

"asked Jesus"

Notice that now, people are approaching Jesus directly.

"John's disciples"

Interesting to note that even now, John the Baptist still had disciples.

"and the disciples of the Pharisees"

ALL of these people shared in the practice of fasting!

"yours are not"

But Jesus' disciples did NOT!

All of this makes it a legitimate question, even if it were only asked out of curiosity, and not out as an attack.

However, the context suggests an attack on Jesus and his practices.

## Mark 2:19 (NIV)

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.”

“Jesus answered ...”

Rabbinical style would often answer a question with a counter-question.

“bridegroom”

Jesus uses a wedding analogy – the wedding feast was a symbol of the anticipated final day of salvation.

Jesus is the groom, the disciples are the wedding guests or groomsmen.

The analogy suggests that Jesus’ presence is a time of joyous celebration and feasting, not a time of sadness and fasting.

John’s disciples ARE fasting – but remember, John was still preparing people for a new era, the era of Jesus.

“as long as they have him with them”

This anticipates that a time will come when he is absent.

This is the first hint in Mark’s Gospel of Jesus’ departure – a sort of mini passion prediction.

For Jesus, the issue is not over fasting per se, but over appropriate TIMES for fasting.

## Mark 2:20 (NIV)

“ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.”

“taken from them, and on that day they will fast”

Jesus speaks of a return to the practice of fasting.

Some scholars see here a basis for the early church, and later Roman Catholic, practice of fasting on Fridays.

Jesus was “taken from them” (died) on Good Friday, therefore, on THAT day, specifically, “they (followers of Jesus) will fast”.

Others see this simply referring to the appropriateness of fasting when Jesus is no longer physically present, after the Crucifixion.

Still others see fasting here as a metaphor for the mourning that WILL occur on the day Jesus is taken from them, and not a literal fast.

# Mark 2:21-22

(NIV)

“No one sews patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.”

“old ... new”

Here we have two parallel sayings contrasting an old and a new order.

Note that there is no real value judgment between the old and the new, simply an acknowledgement that the two don't mix.

The contrast here is between the behavior of John's disciples and the Pharisees, versus the behavior of Jesus' disciples, and the reasons for the difference.

The two attitudes are incompatible – forcing the new values of the Kingdom into the old way has destructive consequences.

The structures of traditional Judaism cannot contain the Kingdom Jesus brings.

Note that in the second analogy, both the wine AND the wineskins are ruined.

This points to Jesus' death due to incompatibility with established Judaism (Jesus equals the wine), and the break of Christianity from Judaism (Judaism equals the old wineskin).

This contrast between the old and the new is an important concept to see throughout Mark's Gospel – see next slide!

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(NIV)

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Their worldview:

The current age is dominated by defeat, disaster, disease, and death.

This age will be destroyed and replaced by a New Age, dominated by peace, abundance, and life (a restored Eden):



For Jesus, in reality there is an overlap – the new age begins before the current one ends.



Jesus breaks into the Old Age, bringing the OPPORTUNITY for life, but the kingdom of Satan/death remains. It is a mixed time of both life and death – the “already/not yet” characteristic of the Kingdom. We can KNOW the indwelling life of God, yet we are still caught in the grip of death.

At the Second Coming, the Old Age will actually terminate, the overlap will end, and the fullness of the New Age will arrive.



↑  
First Coming

↑  
Second Coming

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(NIV)

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In Romans 8:18-25, Paul writes about the Creation groaning for the full arrival of the New Age:

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager anticipation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (NIV)



## Bibliography

The following materials have been used as sources for this Bible study:

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