

Mark 2

This chapter records Jesus' healing of the paralyzed man at which point He states that He has power on earth to forgive sins (2:1-12) and His call of Matthew (Levi) to be an apostle (2:13-17), in whose house Jesus states that He came to call sinners to repentance. Then Jesus is challenged relative to fasting (2:18-22), at which point He states that His covenant is not going to be like the first covenant. Finally, Jesus is challenged relative to observing the Sabbath when He states that He is Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-28).

TRANSLATION - 2:1-12:

1 And after entering again into Capernaum after the day, it became known that in a house He is. **2** And many gathered together so that no longer [there was room] to hold [them] neither at the door, and He was speaking to them the word. **3** And they are coming¹, bearing to Him a paralytic, carried by four. **4** And not being able to bring to Him on account the crowd, they broke open the roof where He was being, and after digging through, they lower the mat where the paralytic was laying down. **5** And Jesus, after seeing their faith, says to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven."

6 And some of the Pharisees were being there sitting and pondering in their hearts, **7** "Who [is] this One thus speaking? He blasphemes. Who is able to forgive sins except alone God?"

8 And immediately after knowing, Jesus in His spirit, that thus they are pondering among themselves, He says to them, "What [are] these things you are pondering in your hearts? **9** Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Arise and take your mat and walk?' **10** But in order that you might be convinced that authority the Son of Man has to forgive sins on the earth" - He says to the paralytic, **11** "To you I say, 'Arise. Take your mat and go into your house.'"

12 And he arose and immediately after taking the mat went out before all, so that all were amazed and glorified God saying that "Thus never we have seen!"

GREEK WORDS:

"Word" (ver. 2; *logos*) is used 330 times in the NT; it was first used in 1:45. In that passage, the word referred to the "news" of Jesus' miracles. Here, it is a synonym for "gospel," a denotation which it hold frequently in the NT (Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:14-20; Acts 4:29, 31; 6:4; 8:25; Luke 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:18; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 1:14; 2:16; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 6:3; Heb. 13:7). The word is found 24 times in Mark. "Paralytic" (ver. 3) is used 10 times in the NT, half of which are in this context in Mark. It is not found elsewhere in Mark. "To bring" (ver. 4) is used 47 times, three times in Mark: 1:44; 2:4; 10:13. "To break open" has as its root word "roof." This is its only use; it literally means "to unroof." Its related noun, roof, is used three times in the NT: Matt. 8:8; Mark 2:4; Luke 7:6. "To dig through" is used only twice: Mark 2:4; Gal. 4:15. "To lower" is used 7 times, only here in Mark. "Mat" or "cot" is used 11 times, only in this context (2:4, 9, 11-12) and 6:55 in Mark. "To lay down" is used 12 times, first in Mark at 1:30.

This is the first use of "faith" (ver. 5) in Mark; it is used 243 times in the NT, five times in Mark: 2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 10:52; 11:22. "Child" is a term of endearment here; it is used 99 times, nine times in Mark. "To forgive" or "to release" or "to let go" was used earlier at 1:18, 20. It is used 34 times in Mark. "Sins" denotes the idea of missing expectations. It is used 173 times in the NT, six times in Mark, first at 1:4-5. This context is the last time the word is used in Mark: 2:5, 7, 9-10. "To reason" or "to ponder" (ver. 6) is used 16 times in the NT, seven times in Mark: 2:6, 8; 8:16-17; 9:33; 11:31. "Heart" is used 156 times, 11 in Mark. "To blaspheme" (ver. 7) is

¹ Here is another of Mark's historical presents, which is the verb in the present tense, although the context shows that it refers to the past. Mark uses this construction to add vividness to his account of the life of Jesus.

used 34 times, four times in Mark: 2:7; 3:28-29; 15:29. "Immediately" (ver. 8) was seen first at 1:3. "Spirit" was used first at 1:8. The word is not often used to refer to Jesus' spirit.

"Easier" (ver. 9) is used 7 times in the NT, twice in Mark: 2:9; 10:25. "To know" (ver. 10) is used 318 times in the NT, 21 in Mark. "Authority" is used first at 1:22. "Son of Man" is used 88 times in the NT, first in Mark here. Mark uses the phrase 14 times, only in this chapter (2:10, 28) does it occur prior to Peter's confession (8:27-30). "Earth" is used 250 times in the NT, 19 times in Mark. It can refer to "land" or "ground." Here, Jesus means the planet earth. "To be amazed" or to be "astounded" (ver. 12) is used 17 times in the NT, four times in Mark: 2:12; 3:21; 5:42; 6:51. "To glorify" is used 61 times in the NT, only here in Mark.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verb "to know" in verse 10 translates a verb in the perfect tense, which denotes settled knowledge. Thus we have translated it "to be convinced."

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The expression "Son of Man" (ver. 10) denotes a human being, someone with the characteristics of being a "man" (the significance of the Hebrew phrase "son of"). The phrase is used in Ezekiel with this significance many times - 93 times in 48 chapters. However, the theological background of the phrase is the prophecy from Daniel 7:13-14 that the Messiah or "Son of Man" would establish a kingdom which would never end. Forgiveness comes from God: Exodus 34:6-7 (the primary text for such a teaching); 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 103:3; 147:3; Isaiah 19:22; 33:23-24; 38:17; 43:25; 57:18-19; Micah 7:18.

Only God can know hearts (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Psalm 7:9; Jer. 11:20; Acts 1:24; 15:8; Luke 16:15). To say that Jesus knows hearts is to set Jesus in the category of "divinity."

Blasphemy under the Law of Moses was punishable by death: Lev. 24:10-16. It will be this accusation which will lead to the death of Jesus: Mark 14:64.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

On "Capernaum" (ver. 1), see "Archeology" under 1:21. Homes in those days were usually built with flat roofs with wooden beams across. They were thatched with straw or palm branches and mud. Stairs on the outside provided access to the roof where residents would also sit or even pray (see Acts 10:9). The longest dimension of a home in Capernaum which has been excavated so far has been 18' (5,5 m). Such a home might reasonably hold perhaps 50 people.

The "mat" might have simply been a mattress filled with straw.

The origin of the Pharisees is somewhat obscured. They arose during the period in-between the two testaments, likely during the time when Greece ruled over Palestine. They are associated with the Maccabees. It appears that they began as a movement to remain pure from the influence of Greek culture and religion. They are first mentioned during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-104 B. C.). Josephus says they numbered around 6,000 during the first century (*Antiquities* 17.42). They held a high view of the Scriptures but they did create traditions which they held to be as authoritative as God's word; in that, they were in grave error, which Jesus rebukes in Mark 7:1-23. Notably, they differed from the Sadducees in that the Pharisees believed in life after death and the spirit world (angels and demons); see Acts 23:8. The Pharisees will antagonize Jesus regularly: Mark 2:23-27; 3:1-5; 7:1-15. They are mentioned by Mark twelve times. Other than these three texts, they are also found at: 8:11, 15; 10:2; 12:13.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This event is found also in Matthew 9:1-8 and Luke 5:17-26.

COMMENTS:

Capernaum will be the center of Jesus' ministry while He is in Galilee. He has been teaching and healing outside of Capernaum (1:39), but now He returns to Capernaum. The "home" where He is was the home of Peter and his wife (1:29). The house was crowded with people listening to Jesus speak, so much so that there was not even room around the door for people to stand and listen. He spoke to them "the word" (ver. 2), which will become a shorthand way to refer to the Gospel message.

Galileans, four specifically, brought to Jesus a paralyzed man (ver. 3). Because the man was paralyzed, he was likely a beggar and was at the mercy of friends and family to provide transportation, food, and other necessities for him. The friends could not get close enough to Jesus, through the door, to draw His attention (ver. 4), so they undid part of the roof, making a hole, and lowered the man on his pallet into the crowd where Jesus was teaching. Mark refers to the "crowd" 29 times before chapter 11, before Jesus moves toward Jerusalem for the crucifixion. "Crowd" is mentioned nine times beginning in 11:18. It is possible that removing some of the roof dropped pieces on the floor below and drew the attention of Jesus and others.

When Jesus saw the faith of the friends (ver. 5), and likely the paralyzed man's faith as well, Jesus spoke the words that every thoughtful human being wants to hear from God: "Your sins are forgiven." There is absolutely no reason to believe that the man's paralysis was connected to some sin. It is possible but the text does not make the connection. Jews in the first century often connected suffering with sin (see John 9:2), but the Bible teaches - especially through Job - that the connection is not correct. Jesus simply pronounced the most important gift He could possibly give the paralyzed man: forgiveness of sins. He could enter the kingdom with paralysis, but he could not enter the kingdom without forgiveness of sins (1:4). It was also the one truth that would be presented and affirmed here, as He then performs a miracle of healing.

The scribes, who knew the Law, speak up that the OT taught only God could forgive sins (ver. 6). It is true that only God can forgive sins (ver. 7). What they needed was the humility to accept the message of the man who is about to perform this miracle in their presence! Jesus knew what man's thoughts were (John 2:24-25), illustrating to the reader that Jesus is God, and Jesus responded to their secret thoughts (ver. 8): "Why are you pondering these things in your heart?"

Then He challenges their understanding: "Which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say 'Take up your pallet and go home'?" (ver. 9). Of course, when the power is in the word of God, then neither is easier or more difficult than the other. Taking one's pallet and leaving would, from one perspective, be more difficult since there isn't required any behavior (in this incident) for one to have his sins forgiven. But then Jesus states a broad truth: The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins (ver. 10). The fact that Jesus affirmed His authority insinuates that Jesus acknowledged that He was the "Son of Man" who would be given authority to establish God's kingdom (see Daniel 7:14). And to verify that statement, He turns His attention to the paralyzed man in verse 11 and commands him: "Take up your pallet and go home."

Immediately the man's weakness was healed, his muscles which had atrophied, and his nerves which had not been in use for years were all healed. He arose, picked up his pallet, and walked away in the presence of everyone in the house (ver. 12). The crowd had been amazed at Jesus' teaching in 1:22, but now they are amazed at His miracles. Yet, they give the glory to God, because they had never seen such a behavior as this! When the crowd saw the man healed and walking, it let them know that the announcement of the man's forgiveness was also real!

APPLICATION:

The fundamental point about Jesus' coming to earth is for Him to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Man will not trust Jesus and obey Him until man has a reason to believe and obey Jesus (John 3:36). This miracle puts the forgiveness of sins by Jesus in the context of a miracle to verify that His message is true (John 20:30-31). Incidentally, Protestants who argue

that baptism is not necessary to be saved (against the plain teaching of Scripture: Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38), argue that the thief on the cross was not baptized, yet was saved (Luke 23:43). Jesus shows here in our text that He had power on earth to forgive the thief on the cross. But that incident does not negate the fact that Jesus also commanded baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

TRANSLATION - 2:13-17:

13 And He went out again by the sea; and all the crowd were coming to Him and He was teaching them. **14** And passing by He saw Levi the [son of] Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and He says to him, "Follow Me." And after rising, he followed Him. **15** And it happened when He reclined at a meal in his house, that many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and His disciples; for they were many and they followed Him. **16** And the scribes of the Pharisees after seeing that He eats with the sinners and tax collectors were saying to His disciples, that "With the tax collectors and sinners He eats?" **17** And after hearing Jesus says to them [that] "Not a need those strong have of a doctor but those having illness; I did not come to call righteous ones but sinners."

GREEK WORDS:

"To teach" (ver. 13) was used earlier at 1:21. "Levi" (ver. 14) is mentioned 8 times in the NT, only here in Mark. He is mostly mentioned in Luke (3:24, 29; 5:27, 29). The tribe of Levi is mentioned in Hebrews (7:5, 9) and Revelation 7:7. Alphaeus is mentioned five times: Matthew 10:3; Mark 2:14; 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13. "Tax booth" is mentioned in Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27. "To follow" is used earlier at 1:18. "To recline at a meal" (ver. 15) is all one word in Greek; it is used 12 times in the NT, first at Mark 1:30. "Tax collector" is used 21 times in the NT, in Mark only at 2:15-16. "Sinner" is used 47 times in the NT, in Mark six times, mostly in this context: 2:15-17; 8:38; 14:41.

"Disciples" (ver. 16) is used 261 times, 46 in Mark. "To be healthy" or "to be strong" (ver. 17) is used 28 times, 4 times in Mark: 2:17; 5:4; 9:18; 14:37. "Doctor" or "physician" is used 7 times in the NT, twice in Mark: 2:17; 5:26. "Illness" is the word for "bad;" here it denotes illness. The word is used earlier at 1:32, 34. "To call" is used earlier at 1:20. "Righteous" is plural here; it is used 79 times, twice in Mark: 2:17; 6:20.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Jehovah God affirmed to Israel in Exodus 15:26 that He would heal them. For Jesus to imply here that He was the "great doctor" shows that Jesus equated Himself with Jehovah God.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The road through Capernaum was a common, well-used road and would have been an ideal place for a tax booth. Levi would have been a tax collector for Herod Antipas. The tax collectors were allowed to collect more taxes than what the government needed so that the collectors lived on the extra amounts. In this way, tax collectors were normally wealthy and despised.

COMMENTS:

Verse 13 reports that Jesus left Capernaum to walk, again, by the seashore. He is probably on the *Via Maris* road. While He was walking, another crowd came to Him and He taught them. Jesus continued on His path and came across a man named Levi, "son of Alphaeus" (ver. 14). This man was a tax collector. We have no evidence that Levi himself was covetous or greedy even if tax collectors in general were. Jesus called him to "follow Me" just as he had earlier called Peter and Andrew (1:17) and James and John (1:20). Among the list of the "Twelve" (apostles; 3:16-19), there is "Matthew," rather than Levi. Apparently he went by

both names. The list of apostles also includes a “James” who was a son of Alphaeus (3:18). If Matthew/Levi and James were brothers, the NT gives no indication.

This Matthew gave a dinner in his home to which he invited Jesus (ver. 15). Among the guests were other tax collectors and “sinners.” We do not know how Mark was defining these “sinners.” Were they sinners in the eyes of God? Or were they sinners in the eyes of the Pharisees (having broken traditions as opposed to the laws of God)? We do not know, but the point is that religious people would disdain Jesus for spending time with them. However, in the same verse, Mark writes that there were many and “they were following Him.” So, these individuals were already in the process of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

The scribes who belonged to the Pharisees, who supposedly knew the Law well since they hand copied the Law, complained to His disciples that He was eating with “tax collectors and sinners” (ver. 16). Apparently this was not appropriate for men of God (compare Acts 10:28). Jesus overheard the conversation so He takes the opportunity to correct their misunderstanding of God’s nature and the nature of the Gospel: “It is not those healthy who need a doctor. Those who are sick need the doctor.” Then He concluded by pointing out that He did not come to call the righteous. They are already in a relationship with God. He came to call the sinners, who needed to be in a right relationship with God.

One cannot be saved *while* he persistently lives in sin. “Repentance” is required (Mark 1:15). But one does not have to be saved before he or she hears God’s gospel call to repent!

APPLICATION:

While it is appropriate for a Christian to spend time with non-Christians in order to teach them the gospel message, one also needs to be wise relative to *where* one associates with the non-Christians. A Christian who is not thinking clearly about his or her own influence could lose or weaken that influence because of indiscriminately associating with the lost in a places where the Christian should not be. Consider Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11. Jesus was not in a tavern when He associated with these “sinners.” He was in a house, eating a meal.

This event does not, in our view, really have anything to do with the so-called Messianic banquet which is coming. There is no eschatological theology behind this encounter. However, God did choose to use a meal or banquet to picture the relationship and fellowship that the Messiah would have with His followers once the relationship is brought to its fulfillment in heaven: Revelation 19:7-9.

TRANSLATION - 2:18-22:

18 And the disciples of John and the Pharisees are fasting. And they are coming and they say to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples are not fasting?”

19 And Jesus said to them, “Not able the sons of the wedding party while the bridegroom with them He is able to fast; as long as they have the bridegroom with them they are not able to fast. **20** But the days will come whenever the bridegroom will be snatched away from them and at that time they will fast in those days.

21 No one a patch of unshrunk cloth he sews onto the old garment; otherwise, it pulls away the patch of the new garment from the old and a worse tear happens. **22** And no one pours new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine bursts the wineskins and the wine is destroyed and the wineskins. But new wine [is poured] into new wineskins.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Disciples” (ver. 18) was used first at 2:15-16. “To fast” is used 20 times in the NT, six times in Mark, only here: 2:18-20. Its last use in the NT is in Acts 13:2-3, which shows that it is not found in any letter written to Christians. “John” was found earlier at 1:4. “Bridal party” (ver. 19) is used at Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34. “Bridegroom” is used 16 times in the NT, in Mark at 2:19-20. “To take away” or “to snatch away” (ver. 20) is used at Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35. “Patch” (ver. 21) is used four times: Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36.

“Cloth” is used only at Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21. “Unshrunk” or “new” is used only at Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21. “To sew” is used only here in the NT. “Garment” is used first here in Mark, out of 60 times in the NT. Mark uses the word 12 times. “Old” is used 19 times in the NT, only in this context in Mark. “Patch” is used 17 times in the NT, in Mark at 2:21; 6:43; 8:20. “Tear” comes from the Greek word which gives us *schism*; it is used eight times in the NT, only here in Mark. Otherwise, it is found at: Matthew 9:16; John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:18; 12:25. “Wine” (ver. 22) is used 34 times in the NT, five times in Mark: 2:22; 15:23. “New” is found 24 times, only here in Mark. “Wineskin” or “leather bottle” is found 12 times, four times in Mark, all in this verse. “To burst” is used six times in the NT, twice in Mark: 2:22; 9:18. The last word for “new” is different than the earlier word, but they are synonyms. This word is found 42 times, five in Mark: 1:27; 2:21-22; 14:25; 16:17.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The OT consistently pictures Israel as the “wife” of Jehovah God (in a special relationship that creates jealousy in God when that relationship is not exclusive to God): Isaiah 54:5; 61:10; 62:4-5; Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea’s entire message (2:14-20). For Jesus, now, to be pictured as the “bridegroom” of God’s people shows that Jesus operates with the same nature as Jehovah God. It is one among many metaphors that show the divine nature of Jesus.

It is usually commented that the Law of Moses only prescribed one fast, in the Day of Atonement. However, the Hebrew word “to fast,” or to go without food, is not used until Judges 20:26. That passage is not a command from God but a historical reference to Israel fasting. The Hebrew verb is used 21 times in the OT. In Zechariah 7:5, God asks Israel if, when they fasted, they were fasting for *Him* as opposed to selfish or self-interested reasons (see also Zechariah 8:19). The fast during Purim was begun in the time of Esther (9:31). Jews, and modern scholars who take their lead, apparently *did* interpret Leviticus 16:29, 31 to require fasting. However, the concept, interpreting the verb more literally, simply means to “humble” one’s soul before God. This verb is used 79 times in the OT. It is translated variously to “oppress,” “treat harshly,” “submit,” “mistreat,” “force,” “afflict,” “violate” (in the sense to rape). Ezra 8:21, 23, Psalm 35:13, and Isaiah 58:3-6 use both words, showing that the *fasting* was to *promote humility*. Moses fasted while he was on Mount Sinai to receive the Law, although neither the noun “fasting” nor the verb “to fast” are used (Deut. 9:9). In our opinion, Israel, out of sincere motives at the beginning, substituted the physical act of fasting for the spiritual discipline of humility. In Jesus’ day the Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Cloth that was not cleaned and whitened would likely shrink when it was washed. Wineskins were made of leather, probably goat skin, and pliable. When wine ferments, it gives off gas. If the wineskin has been used sufficiently enough, it would have expanded as much as it could. If new wine were put into such wineskins then, the skins would have burst.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This text has its parallel at Matthew 9:14-17; Luke 5:33-39.

COMMENTS:

A new incident presents itself in the next paragraph. Mark is not concerned about presenting an exact chronology of the days of Jesus so we should not concern ourselves too much with the chronology. He is more interested in presenting what Jesus “began to do and to teach” (Acts 10:38). In this event, Mark comments that John’s disciples were fasting and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting, but Jesus’ disciples were not fasting (ver. 18). This gives Jesus an opportunity to explain the difference between His covenant and the old covenant. John’s disciples may have been fasting because of his imprisonment; they might

have been fasting as part of their “repentance” in preparation for the kingdom; they might have been fasting on general principle in prayer to God.

In verse 19, Jesus addresses Himself directly to the question of fasting. The wedding party does not fast while they have the bridegroom with them. Indeed, that is a time for joy and celebration. It is unnatural to fast during a time of happiness and fun. But the day would come (ver. 20) when the bridegroom, Jesus (cf. John 3:29), would be taken from the wedding party (His disciples) and then they will fast. It seems clear that Jesus is making His first reference to His death and the impact that death would have on His disciples. Yet, once He rises from the dead, He would be with His disciples forever (Matt. 28:20) and there would be few occasions when His followers would fast.

APPLICATION:

As noted above, the verb “to fast” is only found after the Life of Christ (Matthew-John) in Acts 13:2-3. That specific text is referring to Christians who fasted when they sent their first missionaries. The noun “fasting” is used in Luke 2:37; Acts 14:23 (related to appointing elders); 27:9; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27. The Acts 27:9 passage refers to a Jewish fast. The passages from 2 Corinthians both refer to the apostle Paul’s past life in the Jewish faith. This shows the Bible student that fasting was not required of Christ’s followers after Christianity was established. It is not appropriate, of course, for the church to set specific times to fast, since fasting is a personal discipline to be undertaken without others knowing about it (Matt. 6:16-18). Also, since Christ is with His followers at all times (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6), there will be few times when a Christian needs to fast. In other words, the Groom is *always* with His bride. He never leaves her side (see Eph. 5:25-33).

TRANSLATION - 2:23-28:

23 And it happened on the Sabbath for Him to pass through the grain field, and His disciples began on the way to do, plucking the heads of grain. **24** And the Pharisees were saying to Him, “Behold! Why are they doing on the Sabbath what is not authorized?” **25** And He says to them, “Never have you read what David did when a need he had and he hungered and those with him, **26** how he entered into the house of God under Abiathar, the high priest and the bread of the presence he ate, which is not authorized to eat except the priest, and he gave also to those being with him?” **27** And He said to them, “The Sabbath on account of man happened and not man on account of the Sabbath. **28** So that the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Sabbath” (ver. 23) was seen earlier at 2:23. “To pass through” is used five times in the NT, all but one (Matt. 27:39) are in Mark (2:23; 9:30; 11:20; 15:29). “Grain field” is used three times: Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1. “To pluck” or “to pick” is used three times: Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1. “Heads of grain” is one word in Greek; it is used five times in the NT, three times in Mark: 2:23; 4:28. “Behold” (ver. 24) is used 29 times in the NT, nine times in Mark. “To be authorized” is used 31 times, six times in Mark: 2:24, 26; 3:4; 6:18; 10:2; 12:14. “To read” (ver. 25) is used 32 times in the NT, four times in Mark: 2:25; 12:10, 26; 13:14. “David” is used 59 times, 7 times in Mark: 2:25; 10:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37. “To be hungry” or “to hunger” is used 23 times, only twice in Mark: 2:25; 11:12. The phrase “house of God” (ver. 26) is used 81 times throughout the Bible, to denote the temple of God. It is found in the NT five times: Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4; 11:51; Hebrews 10:21. This is the only place where “Abiathar” is found in the NT. “High priest” is found 122 times in the NT, 22 times in Mark. The related word “priest” was used earlier at 1:44. “Bread” is found 97 times in the NT. Mark uses the word 21 time. Bread was a basic food in Bible times. “Presentation” or “presence” is used 12 times in the NT, only here in Mark. “Lord” (ver. 28) is used 717 times in the NT, 18 in Mark, first at 1:3. The word translates “Jehovah” in the Hebrew OT. In many NT contexts, such as this one, the writer or Jesus Himself, is identifying Jesus with Jehovah God of the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Reaping grain was explicitly forbidden on the Sabbath (Exo. 34:21); one could hardly consider what these disciples were doing as “reaping!” The Jews would later delineate 39 actions which were forbidden on the Sabbath. Needless to say, the list comes from man, not from God. The Sabbath is mentioned in Exodus 16 times, its first use in the OT: 16:23, 25-26, 29; 20:8-11; 31:13-16; 35:2-3. The death penalty was implemented for those who violated the Sabbath: Exo. 31:14-15; Num. 15:32-36. The Law on the Sabbath is also found in Deut. 5:12-15. The Sabbath was dedicated to Jehovah God: Exodus 16:25; 20:10; 31:13; Lev. 19:3, 30; Deut. 5:14; Ezekiel 20:12-13. For Jesus to state that *He* is Lord of the Sabbath shows that He considered Himself to be equal with Jehovah God.

The grain was either wheat or barley. Wheat ripened around late May. Barley ripened earlier, in April or May. The Law required land owners to leave grain in their field for the poor to pluck and eat (Deut. 23:25; see also Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22).

The event to which Jesus refers (ver. 26) is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. In that context, Ahimelech is the high priest as opposed to Abiathar. It is possible that both father and son have the same name, which is not uncommon (see 1 Chron. 18:16; 24:6; 1 Sam. 22:30; 2 Sam. 8:17). It is also possible that Jesus is referring to the *text* that includes the time frame of Abiathar, the high priest. He could not cite chapter and verse because the Bible had not been divided as such before the days of Jesus (this text and Mark 12:26 use the Greek preposition *e*pi and then the specific event to which He refers). A third possibility to reconcile the texts is that Jesus refers to the *time frame* of (but not necessarily including) the high priesthood of Abiathar, even though the actual event involved Ahimelech. Yet another possibility is that Abiathar may have been the *acting* high priest as opposed to Ahimelech who was high priest mainly in title only. After the event recorded in 1 Samuel 21, in which King Saul pursues David to kill him and slaughters the priest in Nob for helping David, Abiathar escaped (22:20-23) and becomes David’s high priest.

For the Law on the “bread of the Presence,” see Exodus 25:30; Leviticus 24:5-9.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

This event is recorded also in Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5.

COMMENTS:

The “Sabbath” is mentioned by Mark 11 times. The most recent reference was at 1:21 where Jesus healed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees did not believe one should heal illness on the Sabbath. The word is found four times in this paragraph. It will serve a role in chapter 3 (3:2, 4) and at 6:2. Afterward, it will not be mentioned again until 15:42 and 16:1.

On this specific Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples are walking through the grain field on the Sabbath day when His disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears of grain and to eat (ver. 23). In the mind of the Pharisee, this action was “reaping” and therefore forbidden on the Sabbath day (ver. 24). It is a serious business to declare something is “not lawful” in the eyes of God. In fact, the only way man knows what *is* and *is not* lawful in the eyes of God is for Him to tell us in His word. But for the Pharisees, the need to delineate what could and could not be done to keep from violating the Sabbath law was enough to create traditions around the law which they elevated to the level of God’s laws.

In response to the Pharisees’ accusation, Jesus asked them if they had not read (see also 12:10, 26) what King David did when he was hungry along with his companions (ver. 25). As stated above, this account is found in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus often challenged His audience to return to the Scriptures and read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves. To summarize, Jesus said David entered the “house of God” in connection with Abiathar the high priest (see above under “Old Testament references” for possible explanations of the perceived discrepancy relative to the high priest) and ate the “bread of the presence” which was not

lawful for anyone to eat except the priests. King David also gave the bread to His followers to eat (ver. 26). Observe here that Jesus acknowledged that what David did was “not lawful.”

It is easy for us to justify David’s actions because He was hungry and the bread was to be thrown away anyway. God, in the biblical text, does not condemn David’s actions. However, God does not explicitly condemn every single sin the OT either. Certainly the Pharisees would not have condemned David’s actions because he was the “great” king!

Yet, what Jesus’ disciples did was not unlawful. It was lawful to eat on the Sabbath! And it was lawful to pluck heads of grain in the field to meet an immediate need of hunger! In verse 27, Jesus summarized His position by pointing out that the Sabbath law was not intended to be an albatross around the neck of God’s people. It was not intended to be a yoke of burden but a motivation for rest and refreshment. The Sabbath was designed for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Jesus concludes this chapter by pointing out another theological truth (ver. 28). The “Son of Man” - which refers to the Messiah in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14 who was to establish His eternal kingdom - was Lord even of the Sabbath. He knew what was in God’s mind when He wrote it and He knew how to apply it!

APPLICATION:

It is interesting that when Jesus was on trial, the Jews did not accuse Him at any point of violating the Sabbath law. That illustrates the point that Jesus did not, in fact, break the Sabbath law but only man’s traditions relative to the Sabbath law. This passage cannot be used to justify what is called “situation ethics.” This philosophy argues that man can set aside God’s laws on some occasions, when the situation demands it. The problem for sinful man is that he can always find a way to justify his own behavior and set aside God’s laws whenever he desires. Instead, the proper Christian response to God’s laws is to apply them first to himself or herself and then apply them to others also, being gracious to others as the Christian would want others to be gracious to him (Matt. 7:12). God never told us that some commandments could be set aside when we find them challenging!