

**Mark 2:23-3:6, Sabbath Challenges**  
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**Overview**

Follow Mourlon Beernaert's analysis

1. Five sections with two matching transitions

	Sin	Sabbath
a) Healing	2:1-12	3:1-6
b) (Son of Man's Authority)	(2:10-12)	(2:27-28)
c) Eating, Disciples	2:13-17	2:23-28
d) Bridegroom's Authority	2:18-22	

2. Lessons:

- a) Shows the complete blossoming of opposition, and sets the stage for the crucifixion, already at the beginning of ch. 3!
- b) Caps the *demonstration* of the Lord's authority in ch. 1 with three *assertions* of it.

3. As 2:1-7 gave two episodes emphasizing the Lord's authority over sin (summed up in 2:10), these two paragraphs both deal with the Lord's authority over the Sabbath (summed up in 2:27-28).

- a) 2:23-28, The disciples pick grain on the Sabbath
- b) 3:1-6, The Lord heals on the Sabbath

**A. 23-28, Picking Grain on the Sabbath**

1. 23, The Event:

- a) a sabbath-day stroll through the fields; model of restful activity for the Lord's Day.
- b) munching on the raw grains of barley (probably), as permitted in Deut. 23:25, first rubbing them between their hands to remove the husks.

2. 24, The Challenge.

- a) The Decalog decreed, "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work." See Exod 31:13-17 for the importance: the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant of Sinai, just as circumcision was of the covenant of Abraham, or the rainbow of the covenant of Noah. To violate it was a capital offense, Ex 31:15.
- b) To avoid breaking the law, the Pharisees erected a hedge of regulations about it.
  - 1) Clearly reaping was wrong, and plucking a head of grain might be considered reaping, so it was forbidden.
  - 2) Clearly threshing was wrong, and rubbing the husks off might be considered threshing, so it was wrong.
  - 3) Here as in their attitude toward the publicans, their

highest notion of holiness was in what they did not do and the defilement that they avoided, not in their positive service to the Lord.

c) The Pharisees here issue a legal warning. "Keep your disciples in line on the Sabbath." There's no question in their mind that the Lord is breaking the sabbath. They're putting him on notice that it will not be tolerated.

3. 25-28, The Defense:

The Lord offers two defenses of his disciples' actions, summarized in 28.

a) 25-26, David's "violation" of levitical laws in 1 Sam. 21:1-6 shows the authority of the divine king over the levitical laws.

1) Lev. 24:5-9 indicated that the shewbread was for the priests. The Pharisees should have been scandalized at David's actions.

2) The priest at Nob nevertheless shared it with David and his men. Why?

a> David presented himself (deceitfully) as in the King's service.

b> Ahimelech ("brother or friend of the divine King") was a member of the royal court (14:3, where he is called "Ahijah," "brother or friend of YHWH"). Note his subservience to Saul in 14:18,19; where he appears to be ready to repeat the disastrous action of bringing the ark into battle, as in 4:4!

c> After ascertaining the ritual cleanliness of David and his men, he is willing to give them the bread; cf. his defense in 22:14.

d> Point: if even Saul's authority was sufficient to authorize violation of the ceremonial law, how much more is Jesus' authority, as the Messianic King?

e> Note: What about the difference between "Ahimelech" in 1 Sam. 21 and "Abiathar" in Mark 2:26?

1> Abiathar, Ahimelech's son, escaped the massacre of the priests of Nob under Saul in ch. 22, and later is paired with Zadok as priest under David.

2> Note that the Lord's comment is concerned with timing, the narrative in 1 Sam. with agency. A curious reference, but no overt contradiction.

3> May have been high priest at this point, his father

having formally entered retirement, but have not been present at the tabernacle. Other explanations have been offered; we don't know enough to resolve for sure.

- b) 27, The order of creation shows the proper relation of man and the sabbath.
  - 1) This teaching is in accordance with Jewish tradition, and would not in itself have been challenged by the Pharisees.
  - 2) Compare the wording and logic of 1 Cor. 11:9. Woman was formed after man, to provide for his needs. So the sabbath was ordained on the seventh day of creation, after man and woman were created on the sixth, thus it is to serve them. (The same logic does not apply to the animals, because man is expressly placed over them.)
  - 3) The point is that the sabbath is a gracious gift of God to man, a time of rest and worship, not yet another legal hurdle to overcome.
- c) 28, Integrating summary. The force lies in two senses of the crucial title, "son of man."
  - 1) Intrinsically, means "human." As a man, Jesus does not serve the sabbath; it serves him, according to the principle in v.27.
  - 2) According to its usage in Dan. 7:13, it is the title of the coming messianic king, the king greater than David. If David in the supposed service of carnal Saul could supersede the ceremonial regulations, how much more could Jesus as the true Messiah?

## **B. 3:1-6, Healing the Withered Hand**

### 1. 1, The Setting

- a) "The synagogue" recalls the former episode in the synagogue in Capernaum (1:21); "again" makes it explicit. This episode is to remind us of that one.
- b) "there was a man there" recalls 1:23.
- c) The previous episode established the enthusiasm of the Jews for him, 1:27. This one, by contrast, confirms the hatred and opposition of the Jewish leaders.

### 2. 2, The Challenge.

- a) "Watch" implies hostile intent. Recall the warning that the Pharisees gave in 2:24. Now they (named in v.6) are laying in wait to see whether he will offend again.

- b) "heal ... on the sabbath day." Under Jewish tradition, only life-threatening illnesses could be treated on the sabbath. Other medical treatment would have to wait until the first day of the week.
- c) "That they might accuse him." Recall the force of Ex 31:13-17. Sabbath violation is a capital offense.

### 3. 3-4, The Counterchallenge

- a) Sets the man forth as an exhibit.
- b) Presents his question. The main force is not to ask their permission to heal, but to contrast what he is about to do on the Sabbath with what they are about to do. He sees through their scheming.
  - 1) How can they condemn doing good (healing) when they themselves are about to band together with the ungodly Herodians to do evil on the Sabbath?
  - 2) How can they condemn saving life when they themselves are about to plot his death on the Sabbath?
- c) "They held their peace," unable to deny their malice and having no answer to his accusation.

### 4. 5, The Healing

- a) The Lord's Attitude. Instead of the bland "love of God" so widely devalued in evangelicalism today, note the complexity of the Lord's attitude toward the Pharisees:
  - 1) Anger. In the gospels, this word *orgh* is used only for God's wrath against sinners (though the verb *orgizw* is used only of men, 2x of ordinary folk, and 3x of a king or master in a parable in the place of God). Cf. Ps 5:4-6; the Lord here manifests the wrath of God against "the bloody and deceitful man."
  - 2) Grieved. For himself and what he will suffer? Probably not. Only here in NT; in LXX only Ps 69:20 "take pity," Isa 51:19 "be sorry for thee." Thus the sense is to be grieved for someone else. As a perfect man he is overwhelmed with grief for the destruction that will come upon them as a just result of the hardness of their hearts.
  - 3) Contrast the verbal tenses: "Having looked round at them with anger" is aorist, suggesting a momentary thing, while "grieving at the hardness of their hearts" is present, indicating an ongoing activity. Cf. Psa 30:5, "For his anger [endureth but] a moment; in his favour [is] life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy [cometh] in the

morning."

- 4) *Application*: Like the apostles, we do not preach the "love of God" to unbelievers. Rather, moved with compassion for the fate that awaits them, we warn them of God's impending judgment.
    - b) The Lord's Action: Heals the man without doing anything! Simply telling him to stretch out his hand does not violate any sabbath command, even in the Pharisees' book!
5. 6, The Plotting
- a) Objective: Christ's death.
  - b) Partners: Herodians, those Jews who supported the essentially pagan rule of the family of Herod (Idumeans, from Esau, not Israelites from Jacob; puppet kings under Rome).
  - c) Thus their real motive is not the Sabbath violation, which though capital (Ex 31:15) would be of no concern to the secular Herodians. Rather, what the two have in common is the threat that Jesus posed to the status quo and the privileged position they occupied in it, the Pharisees as the religious elite, the Herodians as the party in civil power. Cf. the opposition of the temple and the palace to Jeremiah.

*Application*: Whether 600 BC, AD 30, or today, government and organized religion are the two greatest foes of the things of Christ, and we should be wary of those who think that gaining political power is any way to promote truly spiritual motives.

### C. Summary of 2:1-3:6

1. Declares what ch.1 had demonstrated, that Jesus is the Danielic Son of Man with authority both to forgive sins (2:10) and to supersede the Jewish law (2:28); that he is in fact the heavenly bridegroom, YHWH (2:18-22). --> Encourages us to recognize his authority, yield to it, and worship him.
2. Shows how rapidly the religious leaders of the Jews, investigating the claims of the healed leper from ch.1, solidify their opposition against him and resolve on his death. --> Warns us of the dangers of elaborate religious organizations and the need to maintain a humble, repentant attitude in our direct personal relationship with the Lord.