

**Program:** SS Panel 2024 3 Q

**Quarterly title:** The Book of Mark

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**Lesson Title:** #3 Controversies

**Section title:** Monday - Calling Levi and the Question of Fasting

**Note:** This color and font = quarterly text

**Note:** This color and font = John Dinzey notes

J Dinzey 2024 Q3 L3 Calling Levi & t Question of Fasting

## Controversies

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Mark 2:1–3:6, Micah 6:6–8, 1 Sam. 21:1–6, Mark 3:20–35, Luke 12:53, Luke 14:26.*

**Memory Text:** “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

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**MONDAY**

*July 15*

### Calling Levi and the Question of Fasting

**Read Mark 2:13–22.** Who was Levi, the son of Alphaeus, and why would there be an objection to him becoming a disciple of Jesus?

**Mark 2:13–22** 13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.

14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him.

### Levi = Matthew

**Matthew 9:9** 9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him.

>> It was not uncommon for a Jewish person to have to names

**Luke 5:27 NKJV 27** After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.”

>> Tax collector = publican

**Luk 5:27 KJV** And after these things he went forth, and saw **a publican**, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, **Follow me.**

### \*\*\*READ\*\*\*

Tax collectors in Jesus’ day were civil servants under the local or Roman government. They were unpopular among the Jewish population in Judea **because they often exacted more than required and became rich off their countrymen.** A Jewish commentary on religious law, the *Mishnah* tractate Tohoroth, says, “If taxgatherers entered a house [all that is within it] becomes unclean. . . .”

Thus, it is not surprising that the scribes inquire disapprovingly, “Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

### \*\*\*READ\*\*\*

#### **F. C. Gilbert - The Pharisees and the Publicans**

The Pharisees on the other hand, not only refused to associate with them, but anathematized (cursed, condemned) every one who had *any* dealings with them. They went so far as to teach that it was impossible for a publican to be saved, or to have any share in the world to come. They would not even give him a Jewish burial, in order to keep him from defiling Jewish soil. This naturally in the estimation of the pious Jew, would exclude him from a resurrection, as only those Jews would be revived in the last day who were laid in sacred soil. *F. C. Gilbert, practical lessons from the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today, p. 65-66*

### \*\*\*READ\*\*\*

Of the Roman officials in Palestine, none were more hated than the publicans. The fact that the taxes were imposed by a foreign power was a continual irritation to the Jews, being a reminder that their independence had departed. And the taxgatherers were not merely the instruments of Roman oppression; they were extortioners on their own account, enriching themselves at the expense of the people. A Jew who accepted this office at the hands of the Romans was looked upon as betraying the honor of his nation. He was despised as an apostate, and was classed with the vilest of society. DA 272.1

Jesus said, “Follow Me”

Luke 5:28 28 So he left all, **rose up, and followed Him.**

>>> There was no promise of pay or doing better financially than he already was doing...

**REF:>>** So it was with the disciples previously called. When Jesus bade Peter and his companions follow Him, immediately they left their boats and nets. Some of these disciples had friends dependent on them for support; but when they received the Saviour's invitation, **they did not hesitate, and inquire, How shall I live, and sustain my family?** They were obedient to the call; and when afterward Jesus asked them, “**When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything?**” they could answer, “**Nothing.**” Luke 22:35 DA 273.3

**Jesus eats at Levi's (Matthew's house) with other tax collectors**

**Mark 2:15** Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that **many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples;** for there were many, and they followed Him.

**16** And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”

**Mark 2:17** When Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

>> **notice the scene here — it is marvelous.** Levi had obviously called his friends, they were also tax collectors, and sinners to his house to meet Jesus. Here

is an example of one, that is Levi, was so blessed by the words of Jesus that he wanted his friends to also meet him. Have you invited your friends to your house, there are sinners to meet Jesus?

>> Levi had not invited his friends to talk about sports, to talk about how much extra they had taken from people, if he had done this in the past he's not doing it now. Now he is helping his friends to come to the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ!

**Question:** Why did Jesus choose Levi (Matthew) to be his disciple?

**Answer:** Jesus could've gone to the best rabbinical school to pick the best scholars, but He didn't. Now wouldn't that have been so impressive that He has all of the best collars asked his disciples? No! but to take as his disciples rough, untrained fishermen, individuals that are looked down upon by society and to work with them and transform them, that takes a miracle and demonstrates the power of God. And give hope to you and me!....

**Those associated with Jesus and opened their hearts were transformed**

**Matthew 26:71-74** 71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *girl* saw him and said to those *who were* there, “**This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.**”

72 But again he denied with an oath, “I do not know the Man!”

73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, “**Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.**”

74 Then he began to curse and swear, *saying*, “I do not know the Man!”  
Immediately a rooster crowed.

**Act 4:13** Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled;** and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

**Act 1:13** And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James.

**How does Jesus answer the question of the scribes and Pharisees?**

**Mark 2:16** And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, **they said to His disciples**, “How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?”

>> Notice who they we're asking the question to.

> what we have here is potentially an effort by the scribes and Pharisees to alienate the disciples from Jesus. What are they inferring? Are you sure you want to be one of his disciples? look who he is hanging around with, sinners people that are despised in society...

**Jhn 6:37** All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and **him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.**

## **FASTING**

### **Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting**

**Mark 2:18** The disciples of John and of the Pharisees **were fasting**. Then they came and said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”

**REF: >>** The disciples of John had not a clear understanding of Christ's work; they thought there might be some foundation for the charges of the Pharisees. They observed many of the rules prescribed by the rabbis, and even hoped to be justified by the works of the law. **Fasting was practiced by the Jews as an act of merit, and the most rigid among them fasted two days in every week.** The Pharisees and John's disciples were fasting when the latter came to Jesus with the inquiry, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not?” DA 276.4

### **\*\*\*READ\*\*\***

Very tenderly Jesus answered them. He did not try to correct their erroneous conception of fasting, but only to set them right in regard to His own mission. And He did this by employing the same figure that the Baptist himself had used in his testimony to Jesus. John had said, “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.” John 3:29. The disciples of John could not fail to recall these words of their teacher, as, taking up the illustration, Jesus said, “Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?” DA 276.5

**Can the friends of the bridegroom fast...?**

**Mark 2:19** And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

**20** But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and **then they will fast in those days.**

>> Notice that Jesus did not condemn fasting...

Ref:>> **Mat 6:16** Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

**Mat 6:17** But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

**Mat 6:18** That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

**Mark 2:21** No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.

**22** And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”

REF:>> **Mrk 2:21** No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

How did Jesus respond to their question? He doesn't reject it. Instead, He turns it on its head, indicating that people who are sick, not who are healthy, need a doctor. He thereby claims the moniker of spiritual doctor, the one who can heal the sin-sick soul. And should not a doctor go where the sick are?

Mark 2:18–22 picks up a new theme. It is the central story of these five stories dealing with controversy. Where the previous section included a feast provided by Levi, this next story revolves around the question of fasting. It consists of a query as to why Jesus' disciples do not fast when John the Baptist's and the Pharisees' do. Jesus responds with an illustration or parable in which He compares His presence to a wedding feast. It would be an extremely odd wedding if the guests all fasted. But Jesus does predict a day when the bridegroom will be taken away, an allusion to the cross. There will be plenty of time for fasting then.

Jesus continues with two illustrations that highlight the contrast between His teaching and that of the religious leaders—unshrunk cloth on an old garment, and new

wine in old wineskins. What an interesting way to contrast the teaching of Christ and the religious leaders. It shows just how corrupted the ways of the teachers had become. Even true religion can be turned into darkness if people are not careful.

**Who are those who today might be looked upon as the tax collectors were in Jesus' day? How do we adjust our thinking regarding them?**



### **Additional notes to consider**

#### **Jesus, Levi Matthew and the publicans**

The calling of Matthew to be one of Christ's disciples excited great indignation. For a religious teacher to choose a publican as one of his immediate attendants was an offense against the religious, social, and national customs. By appealing to the prejudices of the people the Pharisees hoped to turn the current of popular feeling against Jesus. DA 273.6

Among the publicans a widespread interest was created. Their hearts were drawn toward the divine Teacher. In the joy of his new discipleship, Matthew longed to bring his former associates to Jesus. Accordingly he made a feast at his own house, and called together his relatives and friends. Not only were publicans included, but many others who were of doubtful reputation, and were proscribed by their more scrupulous neighbors. DA 273.7

The entertainment was given in honor of Jesus, and He did not hesitate to accept the courtesy. He well knew that this would give offense to the Pharisaic party, and would also compromise Him in the eyes of the people. But no question of policy could influence His movements. With Him external distinctions weighed nothing. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the water of life. DA 274.1

Jesus sat as an honored guest at the table of the publicans, by His sympathy and social kindness showing that He recognized the dignity of humanity; and men longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty hearts His words fell with blessed, life-giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society. DA 274.2

At such gatherings as this, not a few were impressed by the Saviour's teaching who did not acknowledge Him until after His ascension. When the Holy Spirit was poured out, and three thousand were converted in a day, there were among them many who

first heard the truth at the table of the publicans, and some of these became messengers of the gospel. To Matthew himself the example of Jesus at the feast was a constant lesson. The despised publican became one of the most devoted evangelists, in his own ministry following closely in his Master's steps. DA 274.3

When the rabbis learned of the presence of Jesus at Matthew's feast, they seized the opportunity of accusing Him. But they chose to work through the disciples. By arousing their prejudices they hoped to alienate them from their Master. It was their policy to accuse Christ to the disciples, and the disciples to Christ, aiming their arrows where they would be most likely to wound. This is the way in which Satan has worked ever since the disaffection in heaven; and all who try to cause discord and alienation are actuated by his spirit. DA 275.1

#### HOW THE PHARISEES REGARDED THE PUBLICANS - F.C. Gilbert

Being ostracized by their fellow countrymen, they were naturally led to form a social order among them- selves. In this social familiarity they were very strong, and were highly esteemed by one another. This is no doubt why the Lord made the mention He did in the following text:

" And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"

We find, however, that these people were strongly drawn toward John the Baptist and toward Jesus. Not having the social comforts of the Jewish religion; not having permission to attend any of the religious services; not even being privileged to attend the temple service, or to contribute toward the support of the wor- ship of God; not being allowed any of the society of the Jews with their families,—it can be readily seen why they would welcome the teachings of the Baptizer and of Jesus. The Pharisees on the other hand, not only refused to associate with them, but anathematized every one who had *any* dealings with them. They went so far as to teach that it was impossible for a publican to be saved, or to have any share in the world to come. They would not even give him a Jewish burial, in order to keep him from defiling Jewish soil. This naturally in the estimation of the pious Jew, would exclude him from a resurrection, as only those Jews would be revived in the last day who were laid in sacred soil.(d) They were susceptible to religious truth. They realized that they were sinners ; and if they could secure any other occupation, many were ready to accept it.” F. C. Gilbert, *practical lessons from the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today*, p. 65-66



**Fasting: from SDA Bible Commentary**

An ancient Jewish treatise on fasting from the 1st century A.D., Megillath Ta'anith, mentions **Jews who at that time regularly fasted on the second and fifth days of the week, that is, Monday and Thursday** (see Luke 18:12). Although Jewish tradition attributes this custom to the story that Moses began his 40-day fast on Mt. Sinai (see Ex. 34:28) on a Thursday and terminated it on a Monday, it seems probable that the observance of these two days as fasts actually arose from the desire to keep them as far as possible from the Sabbath, and at the same time not to have them too close together. See Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 241-243. Strack and Billerbeck, leading authorities on ancient Judaism, indicate that the exact motives behind these biweekly fasts are not entirely clear, but it seems probable that they arose through a desire on the part of particularly earnest people to seek to atone for the worldliness of the nation, which they felt was fast bringing on its destruction. In general among the ancient Jews fasting was undertaken by individuals in order to make good a misdeed or to ensure the favorable answer to a prayer or fulfillment of a wish. Indeed, many seem to have fasted because they believed such an act earned special merit for them before God.

These uses of fasting rested, of course, upon a misconception of the character of God and of the nature of righteousness. Too often fasting degenerated into a means of righteousness by works through which men hoped to appease an austere God and earn His favor, regardless of the state of their hearts. Centuries before the time of Jesus the prophets had denounced such ideas, declaring that God had come to abhor Israel's fasts and other religious observances (Isa. 58:3-5; Zech. 7:5, 6). *SDA BC on Mark 2*

**New cloth, new wine**

Continuing His answer to the disciples of John, Jesus spoke a parable, saying, "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old." The message of John the Baptist was not to be interwoven with tradition and superstition. An attempt to blend the pretense of the Pharisees with the devotion of John would only make more evident the breach between them. DA 278.3

Nor could the principles of Christ's teaching be united with the forms of Pharisaism. Christ was not to close up the breach that had been made by the teachings of John. He would make more distinct the separation between the old and the new. Jesus further illustrated this fact, saying, "No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish." The skin bottles which were used as vessels to contain the new wine, after a time became dry and brittle, and were then worthless to serve the same purpose again. In this familiar illustration Jesus presented the condition of the Jewish leaders. Priests and scribes and rulers were fixed in a rut of ceremonies and traditions. Their hearts had become contracted, like the dried-up

wine skins to which He had compared them. While they remained satisfied with a legal religion, it was impossible for them to become the depositaries of the living truth of heaven. They thought their own righteousness all-sufficient, and did not desire that a new element should be brought into their religion. The good will of God to men they did not accept as something apart from themselves. They connected it with their own merit because of their good works. The faith that works by love and purifies the soul could find no place for union with the religion of the Pharisees, made up of ceremonies and the injunctions of men. The effort to unite the teachings of Jesus with the established religion would be vain. The vital truth of God, like fermenting wine, would burst the old, decaying bottles of the Pharisaical tradition. DA 278.4