

3. Jesus Demonstrates Power and Contends with the Pharisees

In Mark 2, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, questioned Jesus' actions and impugned his motives. During Mark 3, they become even more contentious and belligerent. In Mark 2:6-7, teachers of the law accused Jesus of blaspheming because he had claimed the power to forgive sins: "6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"

Toward the end of the chapter, they questioned Jesus' about his disciples picking heads of grain. Mark 3:23 reads:

23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

Finally, in Mark 3, the Jews start plotting to kill Jesus.

Jesus Tests the Sabbath and the Jews Plot to Kill Him

Mark 3:1-12

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

The use of *the synagogue* shows this to be same synagogue previously visited. *Some of them* are no doubt the teachers of the law and Pharisees of chapter two. They were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus; one might say that they were out to get him. Jesus once again foils them by presenting two rhetorical questions, neither of which they could answer from their stand on Jewish traditions. If they said that it was lawful to do good, it would be approved to heal. If they answered to save a life, then one could heal diseases.

Mark 3:5-

5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Perhaps the Pharisees could see their position on keeping traditions eroding from the force of Jesus teaching. Whatever the case, their ire was such that they joined with the Herodians to plot how they might kill Jesus. Jesus will explain what was wrong with their teaching in Mark 7:5-6:

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men."

In Mark 7:13, Jesus concluded his teaching: "13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." As Mark's gospel story develops, the Pharisees and the Herodians continue to conspire against the Lord. They will test him again in Mark 12:13-17:

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

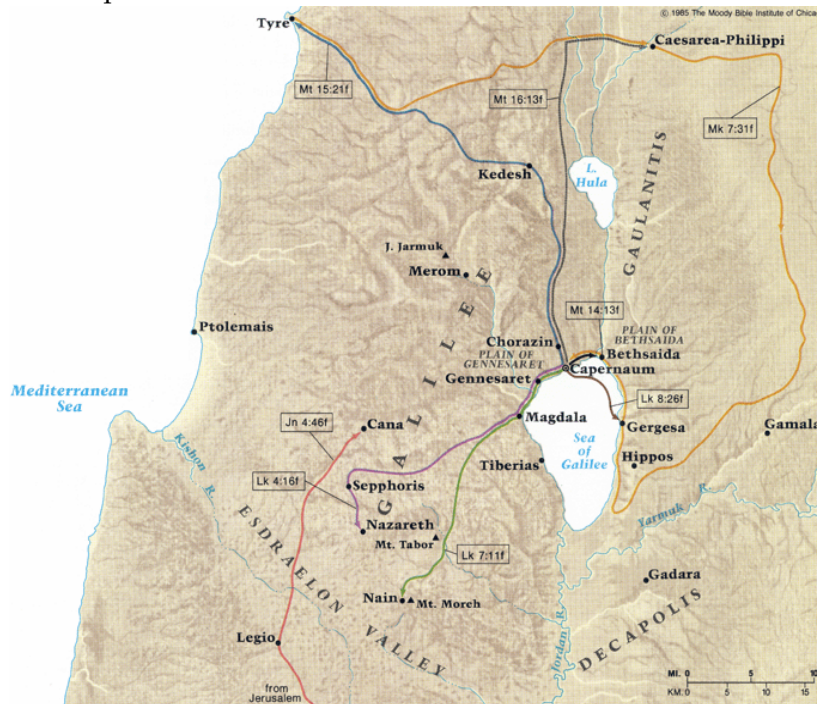
Neither the Bible nor recorded history tells any more about the Herodians. Some think they were followers of Herod the great; others think they were a sect of the Pharisees, and that Paul, before his conversion was one of them. This latter view, scantily held, arises from Paul's statement about a relative in Rom 16:11: "11 Greet Herodion, my relative."

Power over Disease and Evil Spirits

Mark 3:7-12

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. 9 Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. 10 For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. 11 Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.

As Jesus continued to heal the sick and cast out demons, the crowds keep following him. They came from regions far away by the travel requirements of the day: Jerusalem to the South and



Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

- Jesus' headquarters
 - ▲ mountain peak
 - Jesus preaches in synagogue at Nazareth
 - Jesus heals in Lower Galilee
 - Jesus returns from Jerusalem and heals in Cana of Galilee
 - Jesus preaches in district of Caesarea-Philippi
 - Jesus crosses over Sea of Galilee to country of Gergesenes
 - Jesus journeys into district of Tyre and Sidon
 - Jesus preaches in Decapolis
 - Jesus performs wonders near Bethsaida
- (from The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands. Copyright © 1985 by the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

Tyre and Sidon to the West and from the lands across the Jordan River. To keep the people from crowding him, they boarded a small boat.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this episode is how the evil spirits continue to recognize and fear Jesus, falling down and worshiping him saying that he was the Son of God as if to say that they knew the time of their end had come. In fact, in Mark 1:23-24, a demon had asked Jesus if he had come to destroy them:

23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!"

There are only 22 mentions of evil spirits in the New Testament and many are repetitive. Two citations are instructive as the fate of these beings: The Lord in Luke 11:24-26 tells what happens when they are thrown out:

24 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first."

Rev 18:2-3 speaks of the end of demons:

2 With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

She has become a home for demons

and a haunt for every evil spirit,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird."

Later on in the chapter (Mark 3:23-29), Jesus will speak of tying up the strong man in an analogy that can only be applied to him and the Satan, forecasting the overpowering evil spirits and the domain of the devil.

Jesus Designates Those to Be His Apostles

Mark 3:13-19

13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Within what constitutes a naming of the 12 apostles, Mark imbeds important information about their mission and power. The Lord appoints them apostles and so they will remain until the last one dies—John in 96AD. Many today claim apostleship, but they were not with the Lord from the beginning. The conditions for apostleship are spelled out in Acts 1:21-22:

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

Their powers continued with them while with the Lord and after he departed. This account by Mark parallels Matt 10:5-9—sometimes referred to as the limited commission: Matt 10:5-9

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Marks account of the great commission shows these powers continuing with the apostles after the Lord ascended in Mark 16:15-18:

15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

Mark 16:19-20 follows to show that the apostles obey the Lord in preaching the Lord's words, and the signs confirmed his words:

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

In summary, the apostles were appointed by the Lord, preached the Lord's word, and confirmed his words with signs.

The Pharisees Accuse Jesus of Being of Beelzebub

Mark 3:20-21

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

This passage begins one of the more personal stories about Jesus, making it one that had to come to Mark from one of the Lord's family, perhaps James, his brother. When the family heard about what Jesus was doing, they gave a response that one might expect from a family: "He is out of his mind?" In verse 31, they will come, undoubtedly, to take charge of him.

Mark 3:22

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

At this point, teachers of the law from Jerusalem accuse him of being possessed by Beelzebub. Matthew, Mark, and Luke call Beelzebub (who is mentioned only 7 times), prince of demons. Beelzebub appeared in the Old Testament only in 2 Kings 1:2-13 when Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice and injured himself: "So he sent messengers, saying to them, 'Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury.' In 2 Kings 1:3-4, the angel of the Lord appeared to Elijah and said:

"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? 4 Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'"

Two sets of fifty soldiers were killed trying to take the message, with the third set returned to issue the warning, where upon Ahaziah died. Although this is the only mention of Baal-Zebub in the Old Testament, he is the namesake Baal, who appears 90 times, leading the children of Israel away from Jehovah on many, many occasions.

In the New Testament, the name, Beelzebub, appears in this same context 7 times in Matthew, Mark and John; they each label him, prince of demons. In context, these passage help explain the sin against the Holy Spirit, the discussion of which follows.

Jesus Foretells of the Binding of Satan

Mark 3:23-27

23 So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

Christ gives the truth of this parable at the beginning: neither kingdom nor house divided against itself can stand. Abraham Lincoln seized upon this eternal principle and quoted in his speech by the same title. Lincoln quoted the passage since it was familiar to his audience and illustrated national unity at a time of great discord. However, Christ made the statement to illustrate that he could not be of Satan or the prince of demons, Beelzebub. That truly would be a kingdom against itself. Christ then took the principle a step further illustrating that to go in the house of a strong man (Satan in this case) and take his possessions without tying him up would be impossible. Rev 20:1-2 confirms that Christ bound Satan:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

Mark 3:28-30

28 I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

The Lord then pronounces another principle eternal: ". . . all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. 29 But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." Jesus gives us the exact meaning of this statement: ". . . 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit." What did they do? They said the work of the Spirit of God was the work of Beelzebub saying Jesus had an evil spirit. The application for today is clear: anyone who says that the work or word of God is the work of Satan sins against the Holy Spirit.

Mark 3:31-35

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Mark 3 closes with Jesus mother and brothers sending to get him. Remember they supposed that he was out of his mind. Again, Jesus seizes on the situation to teach another spiritual lesson. The true family is the family of God, and our relationships, like the Lord's are spiritual. The principle is certain: Whoever does God's will is the brother, the sister, or the mother of the Lord.