



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #059
Jesus’ Great Galilean Ministry

Jesus’ First Tour of Galilee
The First Tour Ends With a Question About Fasting
MK 2.18-22 (Parallel Texts: MT 9.14-17; LK 5.33-39)

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18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were making a practice of fasting. Some of ^{MT}John's disciples ^Mcame and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples ^Loften fast and pray, ^Mand the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not? ^LThey go on eating and drinking."

19 ^MJesus answered, "*How can ^Lyou make ^Mthe guests of the bridegroom fast ^{MT}and mourn ^Mwhile he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and ^Lin those days, ^Mthey will fast.*"

21 "*No one ^Ltears a patch from a new garment ^Mand sews the patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse, ^Land he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.*"

22 ^M"*And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the ^Lnew ^Mwine will burst the skins, ^{MT}the wine will run out, ^Mand both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they ^Lmust ^Mpour new wine into new wineskins, ^{MT}and both are preserved. ^LFurthermore, after drinking the old wine, no one wants the new, for he says, 'the old is better.'*"

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus.*

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Capernaum
Time	During the 1 st Tour of Galilee; Sept. To February (Months 9 to 13)
Stage of Jesus’ Life	Stage IV: His Great Galilean Ministry
SAGA Chapter I	The First Tour of Galilee
Section #058	The First Tour Ends With a Question About Fasting

Today's reading appears to have occurred at the end of the 1st tour of Galilee, after Jesus returned to Capernaum to complete the campaign. It addresses a two-fold transition. The first transition involved growing controversy and conflict with the Pharisees and other leadership.

The first 14 months of Jesus ministry had been characterized by relative obscurity in Judea, and then an explosion of popularity and visibility in the the first tour of Galilee. In the second year his popularity would continue to grow, peak, and then begin to decrease. At the same time, controversy and opposition from the Pharisees and the rest of the Jewish leadership would continue to grow throughout the year. This question about fasting gives us a hint of the intense controversy regarding observance of the Sabbath that would shortly blow with bitter, cold force into Jesus' face.

The second aspect of transition was on the big-picture level. Jesus came to bring in the Kingdom of God as a complete new beginning for individuals, and the community of disciples who followed him. The new covenant would inaugurate a new spiritual life and fellowship that was as distinct from the old covenant as new and old wine; new and old wineskins; and new and old pieces of cloth.

Jesus' images of wine, wineskins, and cloth were simple, yet puzzling at the same time. What do they mean? None of the new/old combinations the Lord mentioned were designed to function together. New wine belongs in new wineskins, as surely as new garments require new fabric to patch them. Attempts to mix the "old" and "new" items together were doomed to fail, and destroy both the new and old along the way.

Jesus came to fulfill the old Covenant Law with his own perfect obedience. All of his teachings were based upon the Old Testament, and consistent with them. He did not come to destroy the old wineskins, or tear up old cloth. He did, however, implement a new method for fulfilling the Law. This will be the central theme of his upcoming "Teaching on the Mount."

Jesus faced a complicating factor in explaining the relationship between law and grace. Over the centuries since the Law had been given to Moses, an entire system of interpretation of them, and secondary man-made rules intended to apply the Laws in daily life had developed among the Rabbis. These "traditions" were at the heart of the problem of interpreting the Law, and God's will.

The practice of fasting was an excellent case in point. Both John the Immerser's disciples and the Pharisees followed the "traditions" regarding fasting, and considered it a mandatory obligation before God. Jesus saw it as an excellent option for spiritual devotion, assumed his disciples would practice it after his ascension, but did not consider fasting to be mandatory.

The man-made interpretations ("traditions") had become synonymous with the Law itself in people's minds. There were aspects of the "traditions" that violated both the spirit and the letter of the Law. Jesus saw this conflict clearly, and was constantly pointing it out to the Pharisees, who were the guardians of those traditions. The incendiary issues of Sabbath observance, like fasting, were rooted in the role of the "traditions" in God-pleasing faith and spirituality.

In addition to disagreement about the role and validity of the traditions, Jesus set out to fulfill the Law by a totally different approach than former attempts to set up and enforce a complex system of man-made rules. That approach will always fail, because the rule-makers and enforcers are all sinful to begin with. Rules will never change the human heart, out of which our attitudes and behavior flow. Jesus came to inaugurate a radical, new beginning in his disciples.

Jesus had made this point before. During the early Judean period his conversation with Nicodemus was based upon the same assumption (John 3.1-21). Jesus told Nicodemus, the quintessential Jew, that without a new beginning so radical that it could best be described as "being born again from above," it is impossible to "see," or "enter" the kingdom of God.

New wine in new wineskins; new material to repair new clothes; being “born from above” vs. being “born of the flesh”—these were all speaking of the incompatibility of mixing Jesus' new covenant, grace-based way of salvation and discipleship with a system built upon man-made rules. These illustrations emphasize the need for a complete, total new beginning.

Having concluded his first tour of Galilee, Jesus would next travel down to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover—the 2nd of his ministry (JN Ch. 5). The miracle he will perform there will ignite a series of controversies with the Pharisees over another, highly emotional issue: the role of “the traditions” regarding Sabbath observance. Questions about fasting turned out to be nothing compared to the heat of conflict over how to observe the Sabbath!

APPLICATION:

We can only change our behavior by starting with the underlying attitudes and beliefs from which our actions flow. More rules will never change our nature. Jesus had a dynamic, new approach—the Holy Spirit living in our hearts and empowering our relationships with God's love. That is the only way the Christian life has been designed to function.

What is the most recent way in which the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart to create a new attitude, or behavior pattern, that is like Jesus?

Did that happen because you followed the right rules, or because you trusted the power of the Spirit to work in you?

What kind of change are you trusting in the power of the Spirit to work in you today?