

Mark 2:23-28

²³Καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς σάββασιν παραπορεύεσθαι διὰ τῶν σπορίμων, καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἤρξαντο ὁδὸν ποιεῖν τίλλοντες τοὺς στάχους. ²⁴καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι ἔλεγον αὐτῷ· Ἴδε τί ποιοῦσιν τοῖς σάββασιν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν; ²⁵καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε τί ἐποίησεν Δαυὶδ ὅτε χρεῖαν ἔσχεν καὶ ἐπέπεισεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ, ²⁶πῶς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθάρ ἀρχιερέως καὶ τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως ἔφαγεν, οὐς οὐκ ἔξεστιν φαγεῖν εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἱερεῖς, καὶ ἔδωκεν καὶ τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ οὖσιν; ²⁷καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγένετο καὶ οὐχ ὁ ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὸ σάββατον. ²⁸ὥστε κύριός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου.¹

Part I: Translation and Notes on Mark 2:23-28

(23) And he happened² on the Sabbath³ to be passing through⁴ the grainfields, and his disciples began to⁵ make a way⁶, plucking⁴ the ears. (24) And⁷ the Pharisees asked⁸

¹ Nestle-Aland²⁷

² As the formula in historical narrative (like Hebrew...וְהָיָה), καὶ ἐγένετο usually denotes “and it happened” (cf. 1:9; 4:4, 39). Cf. BDAG, s.v. καί, 1.b.β. But the translation changed due to the reason explained below.

³ ἐν τοῖς σάββασιν denotes a single Sabbath day, though its form is plural. Cf. BDAG, s.v. σάββατον, 1.b.β.

⁴ There are some variant readings of παραπορεύεσθαι. The reading διαπορεύεσθαι “to go through” is read by parallel passages in the uncials B (Codex Vaticanus), C (with a transposition), D (Codex Bezae Cantabrigensis), minuscule 2427 and many Old Latin manuscripts. Another reading παραπορευόμενον is read by 565, another alternate reading πορεύεσθαι is read by W and minuscule family *f*¹³ (with a transposition). The text reading is widely attested by P⁸⁸ (Papyrus 88), uncials Ξ (Codex Sinaiticus), Θ (Codex Coridethianus), and minuscules 700 892 1 2211; by A [Codex Alexandrinus] L [Codex Regius], *f*¹ 33 and the manuscripts of the Majority text (all with a transposition). Its external support is strong. Regarding the subject is an accusative “αὐτὸν”, the 2nd variant reading (ptc. instead of inf.) seems improbable. The 1st and 3rd alternative readings can be easily explained as a change to the more accurate expression or as assimilation to Luke and Matt. respectively, while there is no reason why παραπορεύεσθαι should be replaced by them. Thus the text reading is preferred. Cf. V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), 215 and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 114. Grammatically, when ἐγένετο is followed by an infinitive (here παραπορεύεσθαι), the actual occurrence of the action denoted by the verb is emphasized. Thus the translation would be “he happened to be passing.” Cf. BDAG, s.v. γίνομαι, 4.e.

⁵ The aorist middle ἤρξαντο denotes here what the disciples began to do, with a present infinitive (cf. 1:45; 4:1; 5:17, 20). See BDAG, s.v. ἀρχω, 2.a.α.

⁶ ὁδὸν ποιεῖν, literally means “to make a way”, is used in the sense of classical Greek ὁδὸν ποιέσθαι, “to journey or to travel” (Lat. *iter facere*) as in Judg. 17:8 LXX. The expression can be claim as a Latinism. Contrary to the opinions of Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 114 and R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC 34_A; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 119. As to the disciples’ behavior in the grainfield, ὁδοποιεῖν τίλλοντες is read by B^f

him, “Look!⁹ why¹⁰ do they do what is not permitted on the Sabbath?”² (25) And⁵ he said¹¹ to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him?¹² (26) How¹³ he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest,¹⁴ and ate the bread of the Presence¹⁵ which is not permitted to eat except

892 2427 and others; however, this reading might be arised from the copyist’s abbreviation. (cf. James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 2d ed. [St. Louis: CPH, 1995], 29). Another reading ὄδοιποροῦντες τίλλοντες is only read by f³ 565^{mg} with a few others. Participles after ἤρξαντο never occurred in Mark (cf. 5:17; 6:55; 8:11; 10:41; 14:19; 14:65; 15:18). And τίλλειν is read by uncials D, W (Codex Freerianus) and many Old Latin manuscripts. Copyists would have tended to replace Mark’s text with simple one as Matt. The text reading ὄδον ποιεῖν τίλλοντες is supported by early and widely diversified witnesses as (1) Alexandrian: Ⲛ C (Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus) 33 579 ; (2) Caesarean: Θ 700; (3) Byzantine: A M U (Codex Nanius) Δ (Codex Sangallensis) Π^c (the 3rd corrector of Codex Petropolitanus) 2 28 157 579. Cf. Swanson, *Mark*, 33. Mark’s grammar seems to emphasizes the disciples’ “ὄδον ποιεῖν”, not on the “τίλλοντες” (ptc. in predicate position), but the latter is the focus of the question of the Pharisees. Cf. J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 239. Matt. 12:1 and Luke 6:1 smooth out this construction (Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 119). From its strong support and more difficult grammatical structure, the text reading is to be preferred.

⁷ καί may well be used to introduce a result that comes from what precedes. The conjunction translated as “and” expresses a consecutive denotation. Cf. BDF, §442, (2) and BDAG, s.v. καί, 1.b.ζ.

⁸ The imp. ἔλεγον is used as an aorist indicative, to indicate simple past (cf. e.g., Mark 2:27; 4:21, 26, 6:10; 7:9; 12:38). See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 542. In view of their hostility, “he asked” might be better than “he said.”

⁹ ἴδε serves to point something to which the speaker wishes to draw attention, denoting “look! see!” (Cf. 3:34; 11:21; 13:1) See BDAG, s.v. ἴδε, 1.

¹⁰ τί marks an interrogative expression of reason for, denoting “why?”. Every controversy in Ch. 2 starts with such hostile query. Cf. 2:7, 16 [ὅτι=τί see BDF, §300 (2)], 18.

¹¹ This is the 6th of nine occurrences of historical present λέγει in this series of five conflicts story (2:1-3:6). The other eight are (2:5, 8, 10, 14, 17; 3:3, 4, 5). Seeing that the reason for the use of it is to portray vividness or dramatic narration, the Evangelist tries to lead the readers to relive the experience through Jesus’ action and word (cf. Wallace, *Grammar*, 526-7 and n. 32). In v. 25 αὐτός is added before ἔλεγεν by A f^d and the Majority text, before λέγει by 28 1241 1424 and a few witnesses. A variant reading ἀποκρίθεις εἶπεν is read by D (Θ) [with minor differences] a. Another reading ἔλεγεν is read by P⁸⁸ B 565 2427 (l 2211) and by bo^{pt} (part of the Bohairic tradition). However, the text is attested by Ⲛ C L W, f³, 33 (700) 892 and a few others. Copyists might add αὐτός or replace original verb with ἀποκρίθεις εἶπεν for clarity, and adopt ἔλεγεν due to assimilation (imperfect in vv.24, 27). If any of these longer texts were original, there seems no reason why the best representatives of the earliest text-types should have omitted it.

¹² According to its grammar, the subject of the sentence in Jesus’ response is David, the phrase αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ “he and those who with him” is added due to theological reason. For related discussion, see Part II.

¹³ πῶς “how” is omitted by B D 2427 with individual Old Latin manuscript r¹ t, but attested by the rest witnesses. The former witnesses are too few to claim its preference. Besides, entering into a further part of his counter-question, Jesus begins with πῶς is reasonable (cf. 4:13; 9:12).

¹⁴ The words ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθάρ ἀρχιερέως are omitted by the parallel passage in D W with a few witnesses, and by many Old Latin manuscripts with Sinaitic Syriac (sy^c). But they are strongly supported by uncials Ⲛ B L K (Codex Cyprius) M (Codex Campianus) U (Codex Nanius), minuscules 118 2 157 1424 and the Majority text. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2001), 68. Some witnesses, inserted τοῦ before ἀρχιερέως (A C Θ f^d f³ 28 565 579 700) or ἐιρέως (Δ) (See Swanson, 34), in order to permit the interpretation that the event happened in the

the priests,¹⁶ and also gave to those who were with him?” (27) And he said⁶ to them, “The Sabbath was established¹⁷ for man,¹⁸ and not man for the Sabbath; (28) so that¹⁹ the Son of man is the Lord even²⁰ of the Sabbath.”²¹

Part II: Limits, Structure and Interpretation of Mark 2:23-28

Jesus’ authority not only differs from that of religious leaders in regard to Jesus’ teaching (1:22,27), but in regard to his and his disciples’ way of acting (2:1-3:6). This difference leads to a series of conflicts between himself and the Jewish “authorities.”²¹

time of Abiathar the high priest. The text should be regarded as original, particularly because it also appears to be the more difficult reading in its historical conflict with 1 Sam. 21:1-8. ἐπί with genitive could imply a temporal association. Cf. BDAG, s.v. ἐπί, 18.a.

¹⁵ Another common translation of τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως is shewbread (Francis. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark* [Peabody: Hendricken, 2002], 69) or show-bread (see W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 114). τῆς προθέσεως is a “Hebrew genitive” i.e. having the force of an adj., its expression “the Presence” is taken from LXX 1 Sam. 21:7. Cf. Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis*, 107.

¹⁶ Three sets of readings are involved τοὺς ἱερεῖς. The reading τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν is read by A C D (L, Θ) W^f and the Majority text. The reading τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν μόνοις is derived from the parallel passage of Δ 33 with a few witnesses, and of sa^{mss} (the Sahidic tradition manuscripts) bo; and f⁴³, many Old Latin manuscripts, vg^{mss} [the Vulgata manuscripts] (all with a transposition). The reading τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσιν is read by (Φ) (Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, with some minor variations) 28 579 1241 and a few witnesses. The text is attested by S B 892 2427 sa^{mss} bo^{mss}. In the former three readings, copyists might think that verbs of commanding prefer the dative of the person addressed with the infinitive. However, the accusative is also possible (cf. Luke 6:4; 20:22). See BDF, §409 (3) and BDAG, s.v. ἕξειστί, 1.c. Moreover, the text reading is supported by the best representatives of the Alexandrian texts, is clearly to be preferred.

¹⁷ The aorist ἐγένετο denotes “...was made, or created”, when pointing to come into existence of institution, “was established” could be a better translation. Cf. BDAG, s.v. γίνομαι, 2.a.

¹⁸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος stands as a generic term for human beings as a whole, see Wallace, 227. Lane (*Mark*, 124) comments on its application: “But it could hardly have the universalizing force of ‘humanity’ here which would imply the extension of the Sabbath law from Israel who saw herself as one specially gifted by God with the Sabbath to all humanity” For more analysis, see Part II.

¹⁹ V.27 and the first word of v. 28 are abbreviated and changed to λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν by D and many Latin manuscripts (with some slight variation). Other witnesses, W and (sy^s) (Sinaitic Syriac, with a slight contextual adaption), reluctant to go so far as to delete v.27, modified them into λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐκτίσθη ὥστε. The scribe may have omitted material of v.27 that was deemed to be contrary to pious life or incompatible to context. Neither Matthew nor Luke carries the verse in their parallels. Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 13* and Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 123. Nevertheless, the overwhelming weight of manuscript evidence supports the text reading: B A C^c K M Π with the Majority text, and f⁴³ 2 157 565 579 1424. Cf. Swanson, 35. According to Makariou train of thought, v.27 is the theological prerequisite to make a statement of v.28, and “therefore” will be a suitable translation of ὥστε. Cf. BDAG, s.v. ὥστε, 1.a.

²⁰ As a marker to indicate an intensive addition or point of focus, κεί denotes even, functioning as an adverb. Cf. Wallace, 670 and BDAG, s.v. κεί, 2.b.

²¹ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 130.

Jesus' mighty words and works have a kind of "shock value" upon the Jewish people. The response on the part of the crowds and disciples is religious fear, wonderment and amazement (e.g. 2:12; 4:41); but the response of the authorities is suspicion, challenge and murderous hatred (e.g. 2:6; 3:6).²²

At the beginning stage of his missionary, Jesus proclaims the gospel (1:14) through teaching (1:21) and preaching (1:38), healing and exorcising (1:32). There is mighty power and authority behind his words and deeds, which is supposed to witness that he is the Christ and Son of God (1:1), and that he leads his people to repentance and faith, thus salvation.

Jesus actually reveals the graceful will of God, no matter how the audience responded. Man can be freed from the power of law, sin and death through Jesus alone. In the controversy regarding why his disciples were doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath, Jesus at last proclaims his lordship over the Sabbath (2:28). His response and proclamation testify again he is the Lord who brings God's grace, freedom and salvation. This study of Mark 2:23-28 provides a more detailed and comprehensive analysis to confirm this significance.

2:23-28 is both a part, and a concrete unit, of the series of five conflict stories that constitute Mark 2:1-3:6. The narration in 2:23-28 is circumscribed by both its beginning and its end. The repeated noun τὸ σαββάτον in v. 23 and v. 28, forming an *inclusio*, makes this clear. Besides, v. 23 provides a new temporal setting καὶ ἐγένετο ("and it happened that") and a change of scenery (διὰ τῶν σπορίμων: "through the grainfields"), implying the beginning of a new section. The section ends with an inferential ὥστε: "Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord (κύριος) also over the Sabbath," introducing a statement as a

²² Augustine Stock, OSB, *Call to Discipleship* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 85.

inductive conclusion.

The topic and contents in this passage are obviously different from its context. In vv. 21-22 occurs the statement about the new cloth/wine and old garment/wineskins, and in 3:1-6, the healing of the man with a withered hand (also on the Sabbath). The verbal controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees due to the disciples' deed is a related but independent incident. Above all, τὸ σαββάτον occurs five times (2:23, 24, 27*2, 28) in this short passage, demonstrating that the proper understanding of the Sabbath is the focus of the conflict. All these temporal, spatial and theological evidences manifest internal unity.

Before entering into the detailed discussion of 2:23-28, a brief study on its position in 2:1-3:6 might be necessary in order to know better Mark's train of thought. Each of the five controversies is related to the one that follows or precedes it.²³ It is unlikely that these five disputes happened consecutively or even at the same period in Jesus' mission.²⁴ They are put together to show how the authority of Jesus is rejected by the Jewish authorities.

Noteworthy is its theme of conflict and plot development. It is arranged as a linear and climatic progression, as well as a symmetrical pattern of miracle-eating-fast-eating-miracle.²⁵ The conflict between them is hostile and apparent. The opposition to Jesus and his new teaching escalates until it reaches the fifth conflict, culminating with a scheme to destroy him (3:6). Focusing on the most important law for the Jews,²⁶ the fourth episode displayed in 2:23-28 sparks off their face-to face conflict

²³ E. LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel according to Mark*, 2 vols. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 1:77.

²⁴ For extended discussion see Lane, *Mark*, 91; M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendricken, 1991), 83 and J. Dewey, *Markan Public Debate* (SBL Dissertation Series 48; Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1980), 41-55, 181-97.

²⁵ Cf. Moloney, *Mark*, 46-47. For more analysis of the narrative pattern, see R. Parrot, "Conflict and Rhetoric in Mark 2:23-28," *Semeia* 64 (1993): 117-37 and Dewey, *Debate*, 109-40.

²⁶ Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 121.

first time.²⁷

In a very succinct way Mark describes how Jesus response to the Pharisees' challenge. A concise analysis of its text structure as follows may help us to find the accurate appraisal of the Evangelist's interests and outline the flow of his narrative arrangement.²⁸

If we analyze its sentence structure and syntactical relationships, putting emphasis on the verbs used by the characters in the left margin and underlining them,²⁹ the text could be separated into three major parts according to plot development as follows.

²⁷ Cf. Moloney, *Mark*, 47.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the method of Bible text structure analysis, see Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993), 65-80.

²⁹ The Greek text structure of Mark 2:23-28:

²³	Καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτὸν	↓	ἐν τοῖς σάββασιν
		↑	<u>παραπορεύεσθαι</u> διὰ τῶν σπορίμων,
	καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ		<u>ἤρξαντο</u> ὁδὸν ποιεῖν
			↑ <u>τίλλοντες</u> τοὺς στάχους.
²⁴	καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι	<u>ἔλεγον</u>	αὐτῷ·
		↓	
		↑	ἴδε τί ποιοῦσιν τοῖς σάββασιν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν;
²⁵	καὶ <u>λέγει</u>		αὐτοῖς·
		↑	οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε τί ἐποίησεν Δαυὶδ
		↑	ὅτε χρεῖαν ἔσχεν καὶ ἐπέλυσεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ,
		↑	²⁶ πῶς εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ
		↑	ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθάρ ἀρχιερέως
		↑	καὶ τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως ἔφαγεν,
		↑	οὐς οὐκ ἔξεστιν φαγεῖν εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἱερεῖς,
		↑	καὶ ἔδωκεν καὶ τοῖς σὺν αὐτῷ οὖσιν·
²⁷	καὶ <u>ἔλεγεν</u>		αὐτοῖς·
		↑	τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγένετο καὶ οὐχ ὁ ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὸ σάββατον·
		↑	²⁸ ὥστε κύριός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου.

- A. The behavior of disciples (2:23)
- B. The question posed by the Pharisees (2:24)
- C. The response by Jesus (2:25-28)
 - 1. Appealing to a historical event—David (2:25-26)
 - a. Recalling an event from biblical story of David (2:25)
 - b. Describing more details (2:26)
 - 2. Appealing to the theological basis—the purpose of establishing the Sabbath (2:27)
 - 3. A christological conclusion—Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath (2:28)

According to its structure analysis, part C seems to show a more important status. The controversy over picking grain, like the two preceding passages (2:13-17, 18-22), belongs to an action-objection-vindication rhetorical form.³⁰ In this instance, the conduct and question are followed by a three-step reply of Jesus. For defending his disciples, Jesus appeals to a historical and a theological ground, finally makes an authoritative statement as a conclusion.

Mark emphasizes the actual occurrence of Jesus' passing through the grainfields (v. 23a),³¹ which takes place on the Sabbath. It seems that Jesus does it on purpose, knowing in advance what would happen on his disciples with its influence. Now it indeed becomes a case against Jesus the Pharisees have again. The disciples are described as “they began to make a way,³² plucking the ears” (v. 23b), which is permitted in Deut. 23:25.

³⁰ Cf. Dewey, *Debate*, 94.

³¹ Cf. note #3.

³² Marcus mentions that the disciples' action would become a partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that cited in 1:3: they are preparing the way of the Lord as the Baptist's mission. He emphasizes that Mark's imagery may function on a more allusive lever than he allows. See Marcus, *Mark*, 239-40 and Hooker, *St. Mark*, 102. However, the context and the sentence structure of v.23 show Jesus is always leading the disciples (cf. 10:32, 52). The more likely interpretation of this verse is that they are simply through the grainfields. See note #5 and Moloney, *Mark*, 68.

The disciples' behavior comes under the Pharisees' critical scrutiny only because it happens on the Sabbath (v. 24). Their action of plucking ears is considered as reaping, an act of work in violation of the Sabbath rest.³³ The Pharisees pose their question directly to Jesus due to assuming that a teacher is responsible for the conduct of his students. The words οὐκ ἔξεστιν (not permitted) are perhaps addressed to indicate a warning (cf. 10:2; 12:14).³⁴

Jesus replies their protest first with an appeal to the Scripture, including an episode from David's life (vv. 25-26) and a theological interpretation of the Law (v. 27). Drawing their attention to the incident recorded in 1 Sam. 21:1-6, Jesus begins with a counter-question οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε which reflects the language of debate³⁵ and irony, and is appropriate to the context (cf. 12:10-11, 26).

Jesus makes a general description of the example of David in v. 25, then a more detailed exposition in v. 26. However, there are some problems raised by Jesus' method and allusion. The high priest in 1 Sam. 21:1-6 was actually Abimelech, the father of Abiathar; but since the latter was much better known, thus the mistake is a natural one.³⁶

Jesus emphasizes that David did something when he was in need and hungry (v. 25), he entered into the house of God, ate the shewbread and gave to those who with him (v. 26). These clauses show clearly Jesus' intention to make a comparison between him and David.³⁷ David's companions are included in both v. 25 and v. 26 due to the defendant

³³ Reaping on the Sabbath is formally forbidden by the Mosaic Law (e.g., Exod. 34:21) and of the 39 main categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath in the Mishnah, the 3rd is reaping. For a survey of this discussion, see Lane, *Mark*, 114-15 and n. 80.

³⁴ Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 115.

³⁵ Nineham suggests that it is characteristic of rabbinical arguments. Cf. D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), 107.

³⁶ Another reason might be that their names are sometimes called interchangeably (e.g., 1 Sam. 30:7; 2 Sam. 8:17). For a detailed discussion of the problems arisen from the difference, see Lane, *Mark*, 115-16. Regarding textual variations, cf. note #13.

³⁷ The main verbs in v.25 ἔσχευ, ἐπέινασεν and in v. 26 εἰσῆλθεν, ἔφαγεν, ἔδωκεν all are 3rd person singular,

position of the disciples.

In fact, the relationship between v. 23 and v. 25-26 is not obvious. David's story does not explicitly mention the Sabbath,³⁸ the disciples are not in desperate starvation, nor they are condemned for taking the shewbread or eating the grain, but for plucking it on the Sabbath. So, the first response of Jesus does not really answer the Pharisees' question, David's episode at the most becomes a similar example God does not blame. Real answer exists in v. 27.

However, the purpose of the argument in vv. 25-26 is to show the fact that the Scripture does not blame David for his action implies that the rigidity with which the Pharisees interpreted the ritual law is not in conformity with the Scripture, and so is not a proper understanding of the Law itself.³⁹ Moreover, the focus behind the recalling is upon the comparison between David and Jesus, which belongs to a christological issue. If such practices on a Sabbath were pardoned for David and his companions, how much more should actions done by the disciples on the Sabbath be absolved in light of the uniqueness of Jesus.⁴⁰

After Jesus responds his hostile interrogators by calling an episode from the life of David, he appeals to the theological basis behind the purpose of God's establishment of the Sabbath (v. 27). This aphoristic statement recorded by Mark without any explanation seems abrupt in an argument. Nevertheless, the opponent is the Pharisees who are

actually displaying David's action.

³⁸ The temporal setting of 1Sam. 21:1-6 is considered as a Sabbath might be due to David's words כִּי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (and how much more today, BHS v. 6), and the text לֶחֶם לֶחֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הִלְקִיחוּ (in order put hot bread on the day it is taken away, BHS v. 7). According to Lev. 24:5-9 the new twelve loaves of shewbread are placed before Yahweh every Sabbath, the old ones are then removed and given to the priests to eat. See Marcus, *Mark*, 242 and Hooker, *St. Mark*, 103-04. The word לֶחֶם הַיּוֹם implies the replacement of shewbread might took place not before long.

³⁹ Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 115.

⁴⁰ Moloney, *Mark*, 69.

supposed to know Scripture very well. The statement without explanation might function as the ironical counter-question of v. 25 “Have you never read...?”

There are at least three passages talking about the reason why God established the Sabbath. First, in Exod. 20:8-11 Jewish people are required to remember the day “...for in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.” (20:11)

Second, in Exod. 31:13-17 just before Moses coming down from the mountain upon where he first time receives the two tables of testimony from Yahweh, Yahweh reminds him to ask Israelites to keep the Sabbath. Another reason is assigned to the original one: “...for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, so you may know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies you.” (31:13) “So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.” (31:16)

Third, in Deut. 5:12-16 when Moses repeats the Fourth Commandment to Israelites before his death, an additional reason is found: “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.” (5:15)

Broadly speaking, the purpose assigned for keeping the holy Sabbath includes the humanitarian and the theological aspects.⁴¹ The children of Israel are forbidden to do any work on the Sabbath for remembering the day is a testimony to Yahweh the Creator, who rested after his six days of shaping our universe (cf. Gen. 2:2-3), a symbol of Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh, and a reminder of the deliverance of Egypt by

⁴¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Sabbath.”

Yahweh.⁴²

If they do observe Yahweh's command, the Sabbath will be a period of their physical rest and spiritual refreshment.⁴³ And his people will surely benefit by keeping it. That's why Jesus teaches that the Sabbath was established for man's benefit. If there should arise a conflict between man's needs and the letter of the Law, man's higher interests and needs must take precedence over the law of the Sabbath,⁴⁴ due to not man for the Sabbath.

Before their spiritual refreshment, physical satisfaction is necessary for the Sabbath is to be a delight and joy (Isa. 58:13). Therefore, David and his followers didn't desecrate the Sabbath when they ate the shewbread. Jesus' disciples pluck (and eat) the grain without profaning the Sabbath.

Now that the original purpose of God is fulfilled through Jesus, he is supposed to claim the authority upon the Sabbath established by God. As ὥστε makes it clear, v. 28 follows logically from the previous verse. It is also viewed as the conclusion of the whole section.⁴⁵ But if we narrow v. 28 to only the conclusion to v. 27, it might limit Mark's narrative redaction, and neglect the whole theological insight Mark wants to present.

According as the viewpoint expounded above, v. 27 is closely related to v. 25-26; the latter provides the historical evidence, the former demonstrates the theological insight; both significance come from the Scripture. Since the Son of Man⁴⁶ has authority permitting his disciples to do what is not permitted (by the religious authorities) on the

⁴² *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, s.v. "Rest."

⁴³ Lane, *Mark*, 119-20.

⁴⁴ Cf. the other conflicts regarding the Sabbath between Jesus and the authorities: Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6; John 5:1-18.

⁴⁵ See Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark*, trans. Donald H. Madsig (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), 71.

⁴⁶ Most commentators point out that the Son of Man in v. 28 is not the "man" in v. 27 (e.g., Cranfield, Hooker, Lane, Schweizer, Taylor). Mark does not mention it again until the 1st passion prediction in 8:31. For a detailed discussion of the development and meaning of the Son of Man, see Hooker, *St. Mark*, 88-93.

Sabbath; he interprets the Scripture according to the original purpose of God; he restored the original order of God's creation, thus his proclamation of his lordship even of the Sabbath (v. 28) is an authentic conclusion, reflecting a christological perception in the narration. Jesus extends his mission, illustrating his unconditional commitment to restore God's creative design. What Jesus proclaims gradually reveals who he is.⁴⁷

The fact that Jesus is the lord of the Sabbath signifies that he is the lord of the Law God established. Through his interpretation, proclamation and application of the Scripture the believer could experience the powerful presence of the kingdom of God, which brings God's grace, freedom and salvation.

Part III: The contribution of Mark 2:23-28 to the Markan story and theology

Jesus' pronouncement of his lordship of the Sabbath reminds us of his another similar authoritative announcement in 2:10: "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Most English translations do not manifest the emphasis as the Greek text does. The words ἐξουσίαν in 2:10 and κύριος in 2:28 are placed at the beginning of Jesus' declaration,⁴⁸ reflecting an enhancement of their importance.⁴⁹

As we have seen, 2:1-3:6 focuses strongly on the conflicts between Jesus and Jewish leaders. Actually, whenever they ask "why...?",⁵⁰ there will be a dispute. After two conflicts over the Sabbath, the union of Pharisees and Herodians (the representative leaders of Israel) plans to destroy Jesus. It indicates all Israel's response to Jesus'

⁴⁷ Moloney's detailed study shows how "Who is this man?" becomes the main theme through Mark 1:14-8:30. See Moloney, *Mark*, 16-19.

⁴⁸ The literal translation of this part of statement in 2:10 is "*Authority* has the Son of Man to forgive sins on earth," and in 2:28: "*Lord* is the Son of Man even of the Sabbath" (italics mine).

⁴⁹ In the linear structure of NT Greek, the first position is always reserved for the most important element. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2d ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 296 and BDF, §472, (2).

⁵⁰ Cf. Mark 2:7 (τί), 16b [ὅτι = τί, see BDF, §300, (2)], 18 (τί), 24 (τί).

authority.⁵¹

It is the authority/lordship, which is inseparable in Mark, in Jesus' work and word that becomes the main line continuing the initial proclamation of the gospel and connecting the whole ministry of Jesus.

When Jesus receives baptism from John the Baptist, the word from heaven authenticates the unique authority of the Son (1:11). Tempted by Satan in the wilderness, his lordship over the wild beasts and the angels is portrayed (1:13). From then on, what was in the beginning has been restored through Jesus' coming.⁵² After announcing the good news of the kingdom of God is near (1:14-15), Jesus in his authority calls/chooses/sends disciples (1:16-20; 3:13-19; 6:7-12), teaches people (e.g., 4:1f.), heals the sick (e.g., 3:1-6), proclaims the message (1:38), casts out demons (e.g., 1:34), overcomes natural power (e.g., 4:35-41), raises the dead (5:41-42) and cleans the temple (11:15-18).

Accordingly, what Mark is concerned with is the fact that Jesus' teaching is done with authority, and that is shown by paralleling it with Jesus' works of power and by the people's astonishment at his teaching.⁵³ His teaching challenges people with a choice between believing/following him and rejecting/taking offense at him (6:3). In Jesus, Mark's readers are encountered with the kingdom of God in powerful action, and they must decide for or against him.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, conflicts, oppositions and misunderstandings generated by Jesus'

⁵¹ Cf. Moloney, *Mark*, 45.

⁵² Cf. Moloney, *Mark*, 39.

⁵³ ἐκπλήσσω (amaze, astonish) occurs five times in Mark, four of them are used to express the reaction to Jesus' teaching (1:22; 6:2; 10:26; 11:18), the remained one to Jesus' miracle (1:27). Cf. E. Schweizer, "Mark's Theological Achievement," in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. William R. Telford, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 66-67.

⁵⁴ Hooker, *St. Mark*, 20.

word and work in authority run through the narration. Besides the incomprehension of the disciples and the rejection by Jesus' family, Mark emphasizes strongly the hostility of the religious authorities who reject Jesus' authority and destroy him at last.⁵⁵ Paradoxically, on the cross Jesus is revealed as the Son of God (15:39), the suffering and vindicated Son of Man, who is raised and will be coming again in authority and glory (8:39; 13:26).

Mark's story is dominated by the suffering and death of Jesus, who comes to serve rather than being served, and to give his life a ransom for many (10:45). Though he is heading for the way of crucifixion, Jesus always leads people to see that the reigning presence of God is lived and proclaimed by him.⁵⁶ Such a pivotal concept has been foreshadowing in 2:23-28 and its immediate context.

Being confronted with the question of the Pharisees, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man when he claims his authority over sin (2:10) and the Law (2:28).⁵⁷ The Sabbath is a holy day blessed by God in his creation, implying that the gift of rest is supposed to be enjoyed by human beings. Though immediately brings the cross into view (3:6),⁵⁸ overcoming the Law, which will open the Gospel to the Gentile—the focus of Jesus' ministry in Mark 7-8.

“Son of Man” is not mentioned again until Jesus' passion prediction (8:31f.). It appears fourteen times in Mark, most of them are found in the second half of the Book (8:31-16:8). A remarkable fact is that every occurrence of the phrase is found in the words of Jesus.⁵⁹ Two times the title is applied to Jesus regarding authority on earth

⁵⁵ Cf. 2:1-3:6; 3:20-30; 7:1-23; 8:11-13; 10:1-12; 11:15-33; 12; 14-15.

⁵⁶ Moloney, *Mark*, 50.

⁵⁷ Schweizer links Markan expression to the theological tradition of the post-Pauline Church. He posits that “Mark here comes close to Paul who likewise interpreters Jesus' victory over the powers as victory over sin and law (Gal. 4:3, 8-10).” See Schweizer, *Achievement*, 68, 70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁹ Hooker, *St. Mark*, 91.

(2:10, 28). Four times it is assigned to his sovereign authority in glory (8:38; 13:26, 29; 14:62). The other eight times focus on his suffering and death.⁶⁰ Mark connects it closely to the dominant line of his plot development. There is no explanation regarding the relationship between the phrase and Son of God in the early part of the Gospel. But its development in 8:31-16:8 leads us to see how the Son of Man could be Christ, the Son of God.

2:23-28 is framed by the conflicts of Jesus' been questioned over fasting (2:18-22) and a healing on the Sabbath (3:1-6). Both stories indicate the death of Jesus (2:20; 3:6). It features the way of the cross Son of Man has to go in proclaiming the gospel. The former controversy ends with two parables on the use of old and new cloth and old and new wineskins (2:21-22). But to say that the parables are only used to interpret fasting question is to fail to do justice to Mark's careful redaction of the conflict stories. Hooker sees rightly that the forms of Judaism, symbolized by the practice of fasting, cannot contain the new/eschatological factors introduced into the situation by the coming of Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom of the God.⁶¹ Accordingly, these two parables, placed near at the center of the five conflict stories, could be considered as the symbolism behind all the radical contradictions between Jesus and the religious authorities. The passage of 2:23-28 hence becomes a classic example following the parables.

⁶⁰ Mark 8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 10:45; 14:21, 41.

⁶¹ Hooker, *St. Mark*, 100.

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