

2:18

The disciples of John John the Baptist. We have a third party of hostile questioners after the scribes (verse 3) and the Pharisees (verse 11).

“Maybe they’re just inquisitive?”

We might go that they were neutral, but reading the other gospels can keep us from making wrong assumptions. And one of those assumptions would be, “Ah, this is just an emotionally neutral party of people that were wondering some things about Jesus and His disciples.” In John’s Gospel, chapter 3, the disciples of John were upset because people were no longer coming to them to be baptized. They’re going to Jesus. And they said, “Master,” talking to John the Baptist, “All men go to Him.” And John the Baptist used language like this; he said, “I’m the best man. Do you think I’m going to get upset when people are going to the bridegroom?” So, his people are already frustrated.

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?” Oh, the Pharisees love questions. In 2:16, they’re asking questions with a different party. We don’t know how they know how often the disciples of Jesus fasted. The text doesn’t say. Let’s talk about the Pharisees and their fasting. You’ve heard Luke 18

And He spake this parable, Jesus did, unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus [Here’s what I do: I fast twice in the week.]

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And Jesus said to them, “Can the ⁵friends of the bridegroom fast Now the question is, why is Jesus making a connection between the fasting that the disciples are not doing and the mourning that they’re not doing? Seems like they were mourning. So why were the disciples of John the Baptist mourning? We have a clue: 1:14 shows how the arrest of John the Baptist seemed to steer Jesus’ ministry in going to Galilee after His baptism and temptation in the wilderness.

And then in 6:14, we find out that Herod believes Jesus is somehow John the Baptist risen from the dead. Well in order for him to be rising from the dead he must have already died. So, in prison in 1:14 and dead by 6:14. John, then, is at least incarcerated and possibly dead by the time of this episode in 2:17-22. So why are they fasting? They are mourning. Why are they mourning? Their leader is at least in prison and possibly dead.

while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. For the 2nd time in this chapter, Jesus basically claims to be God. In the episode of the paralytic He forgives sins after reading thoughts. So He is omniscient like God in knowing thoughts, omnipotent like God in forgiving sin, and now He seems to be alluding to a promise of Jehovah from a prophet some 750 years before Him. Two points about that: This is the 2nd time we have seen a connection with this prophet named Hosea in this chapter: He has relations with harlots as Jehovah does in Hosea 1, and now he claims to be a bridegroom for this people of God as Jehovah does in Hosea chapter 2.¹

2:20

But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. Has the bridegroom left us? Is He in heaven today? Well, it’s expected then.²

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⁵Lit. *sons of the bridechamber*; interaction with this rendering is found in the author’s commentary on Matthew (14-17).

¹See appendix on Hosea for both these references.

²Of course here He’s probably speaking more specifically of His death.

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. The hole reappears because the new cloth hasn't shrunk yet. The new cloth shrinks and the hole that you are trying to patch, is worsened.

2:22

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.” Well, if you take an old skin that is already expanded and you put new wine into it that hasn't expanded, once it expands the bottle breaks because the skin is not going to stretch anymore.

Jesus is saying, “Your old system is like an old garment with a new patch. It's like an old bottle with new wine. It's just not going to fit.” What is the old system pictured by **old wineskins**? Moses' Old Covenant, holy and righteous and Heaven-wrought...yet exaggerated, reinterpreted, and abused. By itself, if I could use base English, the Old Covenant brings mourning. Jesus isn't interested in new religion smashed into the old one. He came to replace, not revamp.