

# The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath

## Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5

**DIG:** What are the Pharisees angry about? How does David's story apply to Jesus' situation in First Samuel 21:1-6? About the priests in Numbers 28:9-10? How had the Pharisees neglected the meaning of: **I desire mercy, not sacrifice?** How does Messiah clarify **the Sabbath** issue in Matthew 12:8 and Luke 6:5?

**REFLECT:** When have you fallen into the trap of "offering sacrifice" but "neglecting mercy?" As you try to be obedient to the Lord, do you sense you are becoming freer to love others, or becoming more and more constrained by religious rules? Why? What causes that tension?

**Messiah** temporarily refuted the accusation of **the Pharisees** that **He** was guilty of blasphemy. But **they** were relentless. Now **His** opponents pressed the accusation that **He** was a **Sabbath** breaker. Soon **they** observed another incident that gave **them** another opportunity to openly accuse **Him**.

It was the end of April in Galilee, a time when shepherds and their flocks dot the hillsides and farmers conclude their barley harvest and turn their attention to the great fields of wheat. The Torah demanded that farmers leave some wheat on the edges of **their** fields for the poor and the needy to glean from. Moses wrote: **When you harvest the ripe crops produced in your land, don't harvest all the way to the corners of your field, and don't gather the ears of grain left by the harvesters (Leviticus 19:9 CJB).**

The Great Sanhedrin (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**) was still in **the second stage of interrogation**. Maybe you have heard of a job shadow, well, this was a ministry shadow. Everywhere that **Yeshua** went, **the Pharisees** were sure to follow. **They** would challenge **Jesus** on anything that they perceived was at odds with the Oral Law (see Ei - **The Oral Law**). **They** had actually gotten to the point where **they** elevated the Oral Law even a little higher than **the Torah**. **The rabbis had a saying: He who studies the Torah does a good thing; but he who studies the Oral Law does an even better thing.** Like Rabbi Sha'ul, had been at one time, **they** were **extremely zealous for the traditions of their fathers (Galatians 1:14).**

Needless to say, the most revered commandment within historical Judaism has been the observance of **Shabbat**. It is rather surprising that for all the weight given to **the Sabbath**, the Bible actually gives little definition. To this day, Jews light two candles on **Shabbat**

evening to illustrate the two-fold biblical commandment to remember and observe this most holy day. So the biblical commandment is to refrain from all work just as **God Himself** rested. It is unfortunate that many have misinterpreted the commandments of **the Sabbath** to become a burden or even bondage. While some, like the Puritans of old, made **Shabbat** a time of gloom and doom, the Jewish view emphasized the biblical perspective that **the seventh day** was in fact to be a joy and delight.<sup>463</sup>

**To the commandment: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy** (see my commentary on Exodus Dn - The Fourth Commandment: Keep the Sabbath Holy), **the Pharisees added about 1,500 additional rules and regulations. This is illustrated by the fact that an entire tractate of the Talmud is devoted to the consideration of what is allowed or forbidden on the Sabbath (Tractate Shabbat).** In this first verse, **the Pharisees said they broke four of them. One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as His apostles were hungry and as they walked along with Him, they began to pick some heads of grain left for the poor, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels (Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1).** When they took wheat off of the stalk **they were guilty of reaping on the Sabbath;** when they rubbed the wheat in their hands for the purpose of separating the wheat from the chaff **they were guilty of threshing on Shabbat;** when they blew the chaff away (implied), **they were guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath;** and then they ate the wheat **they were guilty of storing the wheat on the seventh day.**<sup>464</sup>

That is how extreme **the Pharisees** had become at that time. **The rabbis had a rule that you should not walk on grass on the Sabbath. If you were to ask a pharisaic rabbi, "What's wrong with walking on the grass on Shabbat?" He would say, "Nothing! But here's the problem. If there were one wild stalk of wheat growing out there, and if you accidentally stepped on it and separated it from its stalk, you might be guilty of reaping on the seventh day. And if you accidentally separated the wheat from the chaff you could be guilty of threshing. If you kept moving and the outer hem of your garment accidentally blew the chaff away you would be guilty of winnowing on the Sabbath. And if a bird would swoop down and eat the exposed grain, you would be guilty of storing on Shabbat.** That's how extreme building a fence around **the Torah** had become.<sup>465</sup>

On any ordinary day this would have been permitted, but on **the Sabbath** it was strictly forbidden. **When the Pharisees saw this, they said to Yeshua, "Look! Your talmidim are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:2; Mark 2:24 Luke 6:2).** The verb **said** is the Greek word *elegon*, in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous action. Had **Mark** wanted to say that **the Pharisees** were merely speaking to **Jesus**, he would have used the aorist tense. But he goes out of his way to emphasize that **the Pharisees** would not stop going at **Jesus**. When they were eating at **Mattityahu's** house they spoke to **His apostles**

(see Cp - [The Calling of Matthew](#)). But now they spoke directly to Him. They took issue with His talmidim breaking the Oral Law.<sup>466</sup> Jesus never once contradicted the Torah but was not afraid to oppose the Oral Law when it was necessary. Therefore, He responded by pointing out six reasons why He was Lord of the Sabbath:

First, He makes a historical appeal to king David. Knowing full well that the educated Pharisees knew the account, Yeshua prodded them to look deeper at the spiritual principles to be learned from the unusual encounter. He answered: **Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need (Matthew 12:3)?** This wording in the Greek expected a positive answer. In setting the context for His historical appeal concerning David, Jesus mentioned that it was **in the days of Abiathar, the high priest**. But was the Lord mistaken when He identified Abiathar as the high priest when the account in First Samuel 21:1-6 names Ahimelech? As First Samuel 21 records, David had his dealings at Nob with Abiathar's father, Ahimelech. But there are several reasons why it was not wrong or inaccurate to name Abiathar in connection with this incident.

First of all, shortly after David met with Ahimelech, King Saul had the priests at Nob slaughtered, including Ahimelech (First Samuel 22:18-19). Only Abiathar escaped! He fled to David and served as the high priest until David's death, even though he was not the high priest at the time of the slaughter at Nob.

Second, Messiah did not say that Abiathar was the high priest at the time but that it was literally **in the days of Abiathar**. He was alive when the incident took place and served as high priest after his father's death. The slaughter of the priests of Nob Jesus referred to took place **in the days of Abiathar**, although not during his tenure in office.<sup>467</sup>

Continuing the historical appeal concerning David, our Savior mentioned that **he entered the house of God and he and his companions ate the bread of the Presence** (see commentary on Exodus Fo - [The Bread of the Presence in the Sanctuary: Christ, the Bread of Life](#)) - **which is lawful only for priests to eat (Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:3-4)**. Christ pointed out that **David and his companions** also violated pharisaic law when **they ate the bread of the Presence (First Samuel 21:1-6)**. Moses never said that a Levite could not give the bread of the Presence to a non-Levite, but that was an Oral Law. The Pharisees could not claim that David lived before the Oral Law was formed because they themselves taught and believed that God had given Moses the Oral Law at Mount Sinai at the same time that he brought down the Ten Commandments. In other words, David broke pharisaic law but they never took him to task. So if David could break the Oral Law, so could his Greater Son, Yeshua ha-Meshiach.

Second, He pointed out that the Sabbath principal of rest did not apply in every situation. Or haven't you read in the Torah that the priests on Sabbath duty in the Temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent (Mattityahu 12:5)? For those in the Temple compound it was not a day of rest. In fact, those within the Temple compound had to work harder on the Sabbath than a normal day because while they had daily sacrifices and rituals, they were all doubled on Shabbat. There were also special Sabbath rituals not performed on any other day. Certain duties were allowed on Shabbat. Also let me point out that the Bible does not transfer the Sabbath regulations to Sunday.

Third, He tells the Pharisees that He is greater than the Temple. I tell you that something greater than the Temple is here (Matthew 12:6). Yeshua ha-Meshiach was greater than the Temple. He is the Lord of the Temple. So because work was allowed to be done on the Sabbath in the Temple, and He was greater than the Temple, He could also do work on Shabbat.

Fourth, He points out that in any circumstance certain works were always allowed on the Sabbath. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6), you would not have condemned the innocent (Mattityahu 12:7). He quotes Hosea 6:6, pointing out that in any circumstance certain works were always allowed on the Sabbath; such as works of necessity and works of mercy. Like David, eating was a work of necessity, like healing the invalid at the pool of Bethesda was an act of mercy. Such works were always allowed on Shabbat.

Fifth, as the Messiah, He was Lord of the Sabbath. For the Son of Man (see GI - The Son of Man Has No Place to Lay His Head) is Lord even of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). The Oral Law had choked the life out of Shabbat. Isra'el was to welcome the Sabbath as a bride; but, instead, to Isra'el it had become her slave. The school of Shammai held that the duty of Sabbath rest extended not only to men and beasts, but to inanimate objects as well. No process might start on Friday that would go on of itself during Shabbat, such as laying out flax to dry, or putting wool into dye. The school of Hillel excluded inanimate things from the Sabbath rest, but allowed work to be given to Gentiles to complete.<sup>468</sup> The Son of Man could allow what they forbid, and He can forbid what they allowed.

Sixth, they had totally misunderstood the purpose of the Sabbath. Then He said to them: The Sabbath was made for mankind, not mankind for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). The word for man is not *aner*, a male individual, but *anthropos*, the generic term for mankind. The rabbis taught that the reason God made Isra'el was for the worship of the Sabbath; therefore, the belief was that Isra'el was made for the Sabbath. But Jesus

states here the exact opposite. **The Sabbath** is only a means to an end - the good of **mankind**. Isra'el was not made for **Shabbat**, **Shabbat** was made for Isra'el. The purpose was to give Isra'el a day of rest, not to enslave her. But nevertheless, the Oral Law enslaved the Jews on **the Sabbath**.

We have similar problems within the Church today, which has misunderstood **Shabbat** in two ways: First, some believe that Sunday is **the new Sabbath**. Sunday is never called **the Sabbath** anywhere in the Bible. It was, and always will be, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. We are no longer obligated to keep **Shabbat** under **the framework of Torah as upheld by the Messiah (First Corinthians 9:21 CJB)**, but the day of **the Sabbath** has never changed. In addition, Sunday is never called "the Lord's Day," but **the first day of the week (Mattityahu 28:1; Mark 16:2 and 9; Luke 24:1; Yochanan 20:1 and 19; Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:2)**, both before and after the cross.

The second problem is applying rules and regulations to Sunday. For some churches, Sunday is an obligated day of rest and worship. Yes, we are supposed to meet together on a regular basis: **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25)**, but the day of the week is purely optional. Rabbi Sha'ul wrote to the church at Rome: **One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord (Romans 14:5-6a; also see Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 4:8-10)**. **Shabbat** is given, not as a burden, but a gift of ADONAI in which to rejoice. **Therefore, the essence of the Sabbath is to give us a day of rest, not to enslave us with a bunch of rules and regulations.**

*Lord Jesus, help us to clearly see Your authority and lordship. Break through the ways that we diminish You in our thinking. We want to live by Your commandment of love and under Your dominion. Amen. He is faithful.*