

# Lord of the Sabbath

Conflicts are common in life. Conflicts at the national level, city level, business, school, sports, and at home are every day events. I remember an individual who once sat in a meeting and argued for his point and eventually convinced others that he was correct. He was passionate in his appeal and said that he had a strong conviction for his position. He had convinced others that a rule needed to be adopted and applied to a certain group of people without exception. Later I discovered that the man did not have a strong conviction and was willing to make exceptions when he found himself in a difficult situation. He had rules for others but was willing to change them in order to make his situation easier. There is a saying that says rules were made to be broken.

Sometimes churches adopt rules which are supposed to make one more spiritual. Unfortunately, some of the rules are not very biblical. The religious leaders of Jesus' day did the same. They had adopted religious rules which were designed to prevent them from breaking God's laws. But as time went by, these extra rules became "required rules" and standards of holiness that everyone was expected to follow. This is important background information for our study.

**SETTING.** In past studies, Jesus has been accused of blasphemy (Matt. 9:1-8), associating with sinners and tax collectors (Matt. 9:9-13), refusing to fast on a day of fasting (Matt. 9:14-17), and telling someone to work on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17). Repeatedly, the Pharisees have challenged Jesus, and repeatedly they have been wrong.

During our last study, Jesus told the religious leaders that He had the authority to disobey and even break their rules by explaining that He was God. Jesus also explained that He imitated the Father. The Father loved Him. He was the Judge then, now, and at the end of the world. He was and is the path to eternal life. He has always been self-existing - an attribute of God. He warned them that John the Baptist, His miracles and signs, the Father, and the scriptures had all testified that everything He was saying about Himself was true. Yet, they rejected Him. They rejected Him because they were unwilling to submit, did not love God, were intimidated by other religious leaders, and rejected key parts of the scriptures.

What a sad situation! They were religious, but they were not righteous. When we come to our study which is found in Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-3:6; and Luke 6:1-11, we will find Jesus being con-

fronted by these religious leaders once again. They listened but rejected what Jesus said. What a sad situation!

**THE GRAIN FIELD.** The next major event in Jesus' life occurred while His disciples were eating grain in a field.

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. (NASB) Matt. 12:1*

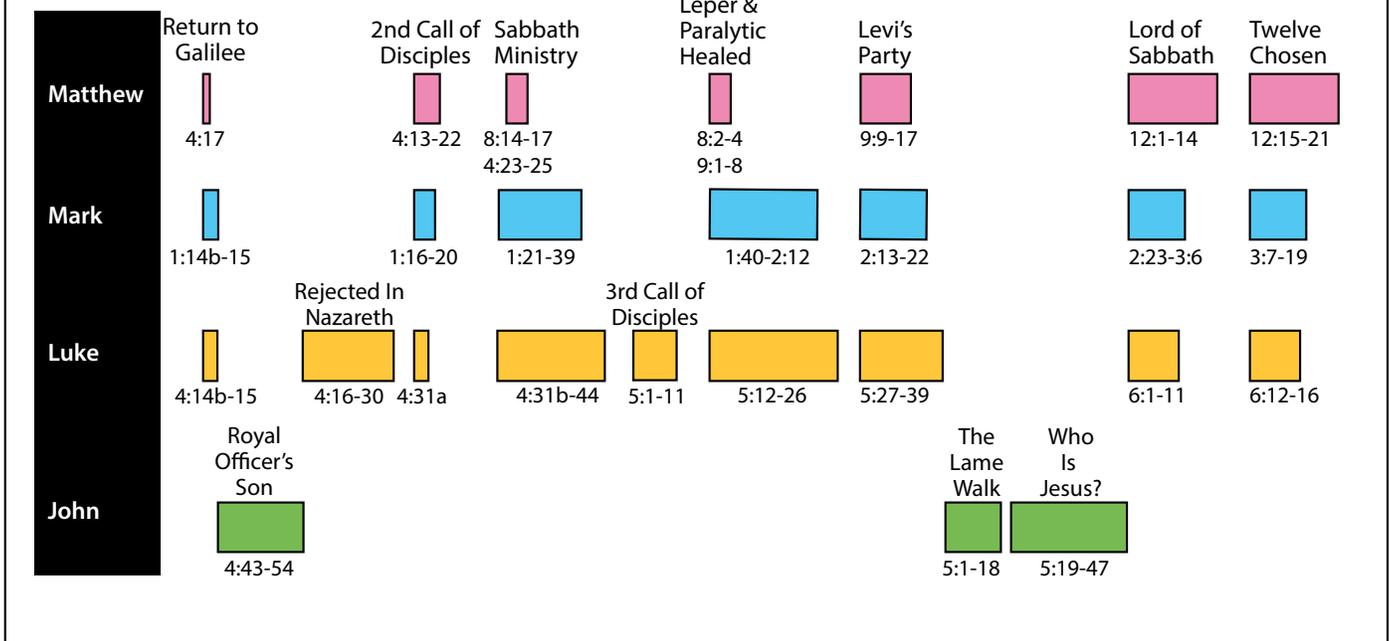
It was generally believed that the disciples were walking through a field of grain which was probably barley. The disciples were hungry and decided to eat some of the grain. So they picked some heads of grain. In order to eat the kernels, they would rub the heads in their hands in order to remove the husk from the kernel. The Old Testament allowed people to eat from their neighbor's field if they were hungry (Deut. 23:24-25). However, the law was very specific and did not allow someone to abuse this privilege. They could not reap the entire field for their own use. So the disciples' action was permitted according to the Mosaic Law.

But the religious rules of the day did not allow the disciples to eat the grain.



# Life and Heart of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (Mid A.D. 31)



God had said in Exodus 20:8-10 that the Israelites were not permitted to work on the Sabbath, but the religious rules of the Pharisees had twisted it to prevent anyone from reaping, threshing, and winnowing grain on that day - even just a small amount to satisfy one's hunger (Mishnah, Shabbat 7.2). This is one example of some thirty-nine categories of various types of work that the Pharisees said were to be avoided. Their religious rules added to God's law and missed the point of the Sabbath command.

**PHARISEES' RESPONSE.** Some Pharisees saw Jesus and His disciples picking the grain and objected.

*But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." (NASB) Matt. 12:2*

Did the Pharisees have a group of "spies" constantly watching Jesus and His disciples in order to find fault? While we do not know the answer, it is clear that some Pharisees had to be in the field in order to observe them picking heads of grain. How likely is it that someone would just notice? These

leaders did not like what they saw and confronted Jesus with, ". . . it is not lawful."

It is common for people to add to God's law. Some churches, sects, and groups add extra laws, rules, or supposed "rules of righteousness." Sometimes they are taught, and sometimes they are communicated unintentionally. These additional laws and rules is sometimes unique standards that every member of the church are expected to follow. The motivations are usually good, but they are still excessive - beyond what God requires. We can learn much from the Pharisees. They were masters of legalism. It is amazing that the people followed them.

**THE 1ST REPLY.** Jesus responded to the Pharisees in five different ways. The first one was a reminder that David and his men had illegally eaten the consecrated bread in the temple.

*But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?"*

(NASB) Matt. 12:3-4

The event Jesus refers to is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. The passage tells us that David and his men were hungry. After they entered the house of God, they asked the priest for something to eat. The priest explained that there was no ordinary bread and gave them the consecrated bread.

Mark 2:26 adds that this event occurred during the “time of Abiathar the high priest.” However, 1 Samuel 21:1 records that Ahimelech was the priest. The two passages are not in conflict because Mark’s wording is precise when he says “during the time” of Abiathar. That is, the event occurred during the time in which Abiathar was alive. He was the man who would some day become the high priest. Abiathar was a constant friend of David and more famous than Ahimelech. Therefore, it is not surprising that Jesus referred to Abiathar. The event did occur during the life of Abiathar. He would become the high priest later.

Both scripture and Josephus tell us that the consecrated bread was actually twelve loaves. The loaves were stacked six in a row and two high (Antiquities of the Jews, 3.6.6; Lev. 24:5-6) on the Table of Showbread which was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. The bread was called the “Bread of the Presence” according to Exodus 25:30. The actual Hebrew wording is the “Bread of the Face.” It symbolizes Jesus’ presence - His life. We live because He lives. Later in our study series Jesus will declare,

*I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh. (NASB) John 6:51*

Therefore, the table with the bread symbolized spiritual life

in Jesus.

According to Lev. 24:9 the bread was supposed to be eaten only by the priests in the Holy Place (Lev. 24:9). Yet, David and his men ate this bread and escaped God’s judgment. Why did they escape? We will see in a few verses that God showed these men compassion. God’s law was broken, but He allowed David and his men to escape. Their hunger was more important than the keeping of the law.

Jesus’ logic was strong and accurate. God’s Sabbath law was for our good and, therefore, He allowed it to be broken. The Pharisees’ Sabbath rules were not equal to or greater than God’s Sabbath law. If God allowed exceptions to His Sabbath law on rare occasions, then shouldn’t the Pharisees?

**THE 2ND REPLY.** Then Jesus reminded the Pharisees that even the priests work every Sabbath. They break the Pharisees’ rules. Even God’s law allowed them to work on the Sabbath.

*Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? (NASB) Matt. 12:5*

In fact, both Numbers 28:9-10 and Leviticus 24:8-9 required the priests to work twice as hard on the Sabbath, and they escaped punishment. God wanted the priests to minister to the people on the Sabbath. So they worked on the Sabbath. The Sabbath laws were not absolute. The law was for the benefit of the people, and the Pharisees were in violation of God’s law.

The Pharisees and some clergy members today consider themselves to be above their people. They have one standard for priests or pastors and another for the members of their church. One such example is the accepted practice where church leaders sin by gossiping about others (2 Cor. 12:20 ) in order “to deal with people issues.” The Pharisees ignored the obvious with their own Sabbath rules.



**THE 3RD REPLY.** Then Jesus dropped a bomb on them when He said,

*But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here.*  
(NASB) Matt. 12:6

The “something that is greater” was and still is Jesus Himself. In our last study Jesus had told them that He was God. If He was God, He could change the rules. So why were these Pharisees questioning God?

**THE 4TH REPLY.** The fourth response to the Pharisees is a quote of Hosea 6:6.

*But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.* (NASB) Matt. 12:7

The Pharisees supposedly accepted the sacred scriptures. How did they respond to the fact that God desired compassion and not their burdensome Sabbath laws? Why did God allow David and his men to escape punishment? Why were the priests required to work extra hard on the Sabbath? The answers to both questions are that God was compassionate towards His people. His laws were imposed for our good and not to make our lives more difficult. God has told us that we need to believe in Jesus; otherwise, we are headed to an eternity of punishment. His loves us.

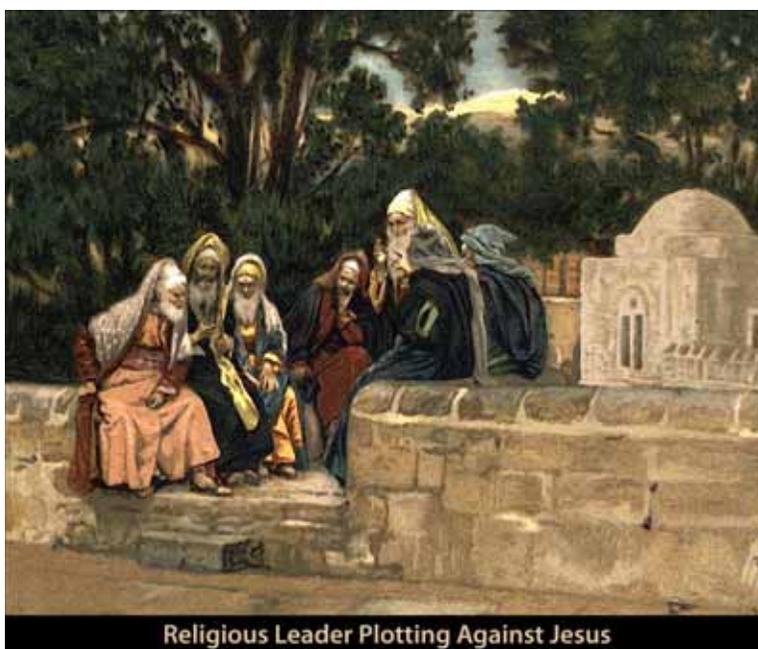
**THE 5TH REPLY.** Jesus’ final response to them was the most shocking statement of all.

*For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.* (NASB) Matt. 12:8

Jesus declared that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. He was the authority over the Sabbath. He established the rules, and therefore He could break them. There was no one greater, including the Pharisees who were standing before Him.

The Pharisees must have been furious, outraged, and angry. He had rebuked them, destroyed their argument, declared Himself to be above them, and said that He was the Lord over the Sabbath. Jesus was either very arrogant or exactly what He declared He was. They could not deny the excellence of His teaching or His skillful mastery of the Old Testament. He was never trapped by their questions. They could not deny His miracles, signs, or healings. They just

decided to ignore them and planned His death. If you are not better than another person, then destroy his/her character or somehow remove him/her. That principle is still practiced in politics both within and without the church. Slander the person’s character or do as these religious leaders planned - murder Jesus. We will find in the next section that they are



building their case and preparing to remove Him.

**ANOTHER SABBATH.** Now the gospels apparently jump to the next Sabbath and take us to another struggle between Jesus and these religious leaders. Luke records,

*On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.*  
(NASB) Luke 6:6

And Mark adds that “they were watching Him.”

*He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him to see if He would*

heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. (NASB)  
Mark 3:1-2

The “they” were the religious leaders. What a sinister setting. The Greek text tells us that “they” had been watching for a while to see if Jesus would heal a man on the Sabbath. Why were they watching? It appears that they had prepared a trap for Jesus. It appears that the Pharisees had brought a man with a deformed hand into the synagogue and were hoping that Jesus would heal him on the Sabbath. These religious leaders knew that Jesus could heal. They also knew that Jesus cared for people.

Matthew says that the Pharisees asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath.

And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”— so that they might accuse Him. (NASB) Matt. 12:10

These wicked men wanted to make sure that Jesus thought about healing the man. They had set a trap and now they want Jesus “to walk into it.” They want Him to heal the man so that they can accuse him of breaking their rules about not healing on the Sabbath.

**THE TENSION.** Jesus responded with wisdom.

And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?” (NASB) Matt. 12:11

Jesus referred to a common practice among the people including the leaders themselves. They would violate the Sabbath rules in order to rescue an animal but not a person who was in need. Then Jesus revealed their hearts.

“How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep!” (NASB) Matt. 12:12a

Jesus then asked the man to come to Him.

He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come

forward!” (NASB) Mark 3:3

There must have been some tension and excitement in that synagogue now. Some people were hoping to see Him perform a miracle, and the Pharisees wanted evidence that would support their plan to remove Jesus. The room must have been very quiet now with everyone’s eyes fixed on Jesus. Maybe someone could have heard a pin drop on the floor.

And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. (NASB) Mark 3:4

“Is it lawful to do good?” Jesus asked. The Pharisees did not want to answer. They knew the answer, but they did not care. They were interested in only one thing - trapping Jesus. They did not care about the man. They did not care about his hand. They did not care about Jesus. They wanted Him dead. So they kept silent and eagerly hoped that Jesus would heal the man and violate their rules. These leaders were anything but wonderful and spiritual.

**JESUS WAS ANGRY.** Then Jesus looked at the leaders. He was angry and upset because they cared more for their animals than for the people.

After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (NASB) Mark 3:5

Some believe that all anger is sin. If this is true, then Jesus sinned. Ephesians 4:26-27 helps us understand that there is a certain type of anger that is okay.

BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. (NASB) Eph. 4:26-27

The Greek language has different words for anger which vary from mild anger to furious, raging anger. One of these words is THUMOS. It has the sense of a raging anger. Another Greek word is PARORGISMOS. This anger includes the

sense of embitterment. Another word for anger is ORGE. It refers to a general state of being angry.

Ephesians 4:26 refers to two types of anger. The first Greek word is ORGE and the second one is PARORGISMOS. The second Greek word in Eph. 4:26 warns us to not be PARORGISMOS when we go to bed (“do not let the sun go down on your anger”). Anger that includes bitterness towards another person or situation is sin and eats away at the insides. The first Greek word used in the verse (“Be angry, and yet do not sin”) is ORGE. That is, it is possible to be angry and not sin. Jesus was angry or ORGE, but He did not sin because He was angry at the cold hearts of the religious leaders. His anger was not a deep, settled anger that included rage, fury, or bitterness.

Jesus was ORGE, but He did not sin. He did not display His anger at the Pharisees. Instead he did something good. He healed the man. Matt 12:13 says that his hand “. . . was restored to normal, like the other.” What a great example for us! Instead of being angry, do something good for someone.

**PHARISEES WERE ANGRY.** Then the Pharisees responded with anger!

*But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus. (NASB) Luke 6:11*

*The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. (NASB) Mark 3:6*

They were filled with raging anger. They had their evidence. Jesus had broken their rules, and now they actively started planning His death. The Herodians were a political group which wanted Herod’s rule to be established over an independent Israel. Normally, the Pharisees and Herodians did not like each other. But they now had a common purpose - to destroy Jesus. So they decided to work together.

**CONCLUSION.** It is amazing how people react to others

when their written or unwritten rules of conduct are broken. Years ago I heard someone say that he was not going to have any “sacred cows” in his church. My response was that he had just established a “sacred cow” by declaring that he would not have any “sacred cows.” In general, every church, every home, and every individual has “sacred cows.” Every organization and individual has unwritten rules that others are supposed to follow. The Pharisees rejected Jesus because He broke their rules.

They were in battle with Jesus. They wanted Jesus to submit to them, but He would not do that. So we are not surprised that they wanted to destroy Jesus. We are not surprised that they were furiously angry with Him.

Are you angry with someone or something? Have they broken one of your unwritten rules - “a sacred cow”? Does your anger include feelings of rage, fury, or bitterness? Would you like to be free of your anger? If your answer is yes, then

the only person who can help you is God. Sometimes counselors encourage people to confront the person that they are

angry with, explain their feelings of anger to someone, or write out their feelings on a sheet of paper. But none of these approaches are biblical.

God never tells us to confront a person because we are angry. Instead we are to forgive the individual (Col. 3:13). We are to love our enemy.

The solution to anger in our heart starts by confessing our sin to God and asking the Holy Spirit to take control of us. Ask Him to help you stop sinning - to stop being angry! That is how you start. Then every time you feel angry, confess it as sin and ask the Holy Spirit to take control of you again. After a while your anger will disappear. The power to change does not lie within you. It is with God.

May the Lord Jesus bless you.

*What a great example for us! Instead of being angry, do something good for someone.*