

Lord of the Sabbath

Key Verse: “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

—Matthew 12:8,
New International Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 12:1-8

THE FOURTH COMMAND-
ment God gave to Israel through Moses states, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ... On it you shall not do any work.” (Exod. 20:8-11, *NIV*) The Hebrew word “Sabbath” means “to rest.” The Ten Commandments were the basis of the Law

Covenant, compulsory upon every Jew.

However, during Jesus’ ministry many religious leaders had become formalistic, adding illogical, man-made restrictions to the commandments which God had given, rather than teaching the real meaning and principles for each of God’s instructions. Jesus reproved this and, referring to the religious leaders, said, “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders.”—Matt. 23:1-4, *NIV*

An example of this is recorded in our lesson, when the Pharisees accused the Lord’s disciples who, when passing through a wheat field on the Sabbath, had rubbed some grains in their hands and ate them because they were hungry. (Matt. 12:1) The Pharisees construed this as a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus declared they had not disobeyed the Sabbath commandment, stating, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27, *NIV*) He then cited what David had done. In an emergency David had requested for he and his men, some of the shewbread which had been removed

on the Sabbath day from the table in the Tabernacle, which only Jewish priests were allowed to eat. They were not guilty before God.—Matt. 12:3,4; I Sam. 21:1-6; Lev. 24:5-9

Jesus then asserted to the Pharisees his authority to interpret the Law, saying that one “greater than the temple is here.” (Matt. 12:6, *NIV*) As his only begotten son, Jesus was the mouthpiece of God and therefore, the proper teacher to set forth the real significance of the Law to the Jews, including the meaning and principles concerning the Sabbath. (John 12:49,50; 14:10; 17:8) Our Lord pointed out, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.” (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6) In other words, if the Pharisees had given heed to this, their thoughts would have been more merciful, in line with God’s principles, and this would have hindered them from condemning his disciples, who were not guilty of any violation of the Sabbath day commandment.

Many of Jesus’ miraculous healings during his earthly ministry were done on the Sabbath day. (Mark 1:21-27; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-17; 9:1-16) This foreshadowed the work of healing which he will do for the world of mankind during the greater Sabbath, the Messianic Age.—Isa. 35:5,6,10

A personal lesson that we can draw from this account is this: being critical or fault-finding indicates a lack of mercy, a lack of love. Do we have the spirit of love which “thinketh no evil,” is not suspicious of evil, does not look for faults in others, and does not attribute to them evil motives? (I Cor. 13:5) Someone once wisely remarked, “Faults are thick where love is thin.” Paul wrote, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:8,10) The possession of love is indicated by having mercy toward friends, brethren, mankind, and even toward our enemies. Let us heed this important lesson from our Lord Jesus, and strive to apply it daily in our lives. ■