

Justice and Sabbath Laws

Key Verse: “*If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent.*”
—**Matthew 12:7**,
New International Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 12:1-14

Jesus called to their attention the Bible narrative concerning the time when David and his companions were fleeing from King Saul. David had asked the Jewish priest Ahimelech for “loaves of bread” or whatever the priest could find. Ahimelech told David that he had no ordinary bread, but only the shewbread which had been removed from the Holy of the Tabernacle and replaced with new bread. The shewbread belonged only to the priesthood, who were to eat it in a holy place. However, Ahimelech gave the old shewbread to David and his companions to eat, so that they could sustain themselves.—I Sam. 21:1-6

Jesus then said to the Pharisees, “In this place is one

UNDER THE LAW GIVEN TO

Moses, the Jews were forbidden to do work of an earthly kind on the Sabbath. After seeing Jesus’ disciples pick heads of grain and eat them on the Sabbath, some Pharisees thought they saw an opportunity to call attention to the disciples of Jesus as being lawbreakers.

Jesus did not accept this reproof by the Pharisees, and instead gave a lesson to illustrate the true spirit of the Law.

greater than the temple, ... For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.” (Matt. 12:6-8) Jesus was greater than the Jewish Temple of his day and the Tabernacle of David’s time because he was the Son of God, and his mouthpiece. As the Lord of the Sabbath he was able to set forth the real meaning of the Law for the Sabbath day. Jesus proceeded to quote the testimony of God through the prophet, “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Hos. 6:6) Had the Pharisees given heed to this proper spirit of the Law, their thoughts would have been more merciful, and they would not have condemned Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus then went to the synagogue, where there was a man with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees, “looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, ... asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus replied: “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” (Matt. 12:10-12, *NIV*) The true spirit of the Law was not to follow fixed rules and regulations, but rather the “more important matters of the law,” which were “justice, mercy and faithfulness.”—Matt. 23:23, *NIV*

“Love is the fulfilling of the law” because “God is love.” (Rom. 13:10; I John 4:16) One of the manifestations of love is the quality of mercy. This includes mercy toward our friends, the brethren, mankind in general, and even our enemies. Indications of a lack of mercy and love in our character are the tendencies to be critical of others, to be fault-finders, and to speak evil.

Our Heavenly Father wishes us to learn, not merely as children, certain fixed rules, but as mature Christians, principles such as love, mercy, justice and humility. God, speaking to us through the Prophet Micah, states: “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”—Micah 6:8, *NIV* ■