

Jesus and the Sabbath

Introduction

1. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders criticized Jesus' activities on the Sabbath several times during His ministry.
 - a. On five separate occasions they were critical of miracles that Jesus performed on the Sabbath.
 - b. A sixth confrontation resulted from the behavior of some of Jesus' disciples on that day.
2. In this lesson we will explore the controversy over Jesus' interaction with the Sabbath law.

I. Did Jesus Break the Sabbath Law?

A. *Many Believers Seem to Think So!*

1. Their argument generally goes like this:
 - a) Jesus set aside the Sabbath law in order to work certain miracles.
 - b) But since Jesus was divine He had the right to set aside the OT law without sin.
2. The problem is that this argument would make Jesus incapable of sin!
 - a) Anything that Jesus might choose to do would be accepted, since He was divine.
 - b) The Bible teaches that Jesus *could* have chosen to sin, but didn't. **He. 2:17-18; 4:15**

B. *What If Jesus Did Break the Sabbath Law?*

1. If Jesus broke the Sabbath law, then He could not be a perfect, sinless sacrifice.
 - a) But the Bible says that Jesus was offered as an unblemished lamb. **1Pe. 1:18-19; 2:21-22**
 - b) Because Jesus did not commit any sins He could offer His own blood. **He. 7:26-28**
2. We must conclude that Jesus did *not* violate or set aside God's Sabbath law.

II. What Was the Sabbath Law?

A. *As Spoken By God*

1. The Sabbath law was first given to Israel in the 10 Commandments. **Ex. 20:8-11**
2. Later, further details were given (e.g. do not kindle a fire, capital crime). **Ex. 35:1-3**
3. In the wilderness the law was applied by executing a man with God's approval. **Nu. 15:32-36**

B. *According to the Rabbis*

1. The Pharisees had established hedges around the law to prevent anyone from breaking it.
 - a) Such hedges can be a good thing, when used personally to protect one's holiness.
 - b) But the Pharisees went beyond personal safeguards, and bound their traditions on others!
2. This approach to religious law continues today among many Jews:
 - A gezeirah is a law instituted by the rabbis to prevent people from accidentally violating a Torah mitzvah. For example, the Torah commands us not to work on Shabbat, but a gezeirah commands us not to even handle an implement that you would use to perform prohibited work (such as a pencil, money, a hammer) without a good reason, because someone holding the implement might forget that it was Shabbat and perform prohibited work.

It is important to note that from the point of view of the practicing Jew, there is no difference between a gezeirah and a Torah mitzvah. Both are equally binding; neither can be disregarded on a whim. The difference is generally in the degree of punishment: a violation of Shabbat was punishable by death under Torah law, while a violation of the gezeirah would result in a less severe punishment. --<http://www.jewfaq.org/halakhah.htm>
3. Jewish rabbis have organized 39 categories of violation within the Sabbath law.
 - a) These 39 categories are based upon the work necessary for constructing the Tabernacle.
 - b) E.g. Tying or untying, writing or erasing two letters, extinguishing fire, hitting w/ a hammer
4. Since 1933 modern rabbis have had to confront the question of driving a car on the Sabbath. From a halakhic point of view, riding to the synagogue on Shabbat is forbidden for the following reasons:
 1. Kindling a fire is a biblical prohibition (Exodus 35:3) and turning the key in the ignition creates sparks.
 2. It is forbidden as a shevut or rabbinic prohibition lest the car break down and he be forced to fix it and then he may transgress both biblical and rabbinic prohibitions...
 4. Any item, which may not be used on Shabbat is considered "muktzeh" and may therefore not be touched or carried. When one drives a car, one normally touches a wallet, money, a credit card and other forms of "muktzeh". In addition, one frequently buys gas, which is also forbidden on Shabbat. It is therefore forbidden to drive on Shabbat, because it will lead to carrying and touching muktzeh. (Va'ad Halakhah Volume 4, www.responsafortoday.com)
5. While these are modern examples they give us an idea of this mindset, even in Jesus' day.

III. When Were Jesus' Sabbath Activities Questioned?

A. *Disciples Pluck Grain and Eat*

1. Matthew, Mark and Luke each record this incident. **Mt. 12:1-8**
2. The law specifically allowed the eating of grain when passing through fields. **De. 23:24-25**
3. The Pharisees' objection was not to eating but to a slippery slope which might lead to reaping.

B. *Healing of Man w/ Withered Hand*

1. This event is also recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. **Mt. 12:9-14**
2. Though each writer places it immediately after the last, Luke tells us it was a different Sabbath.

C. *Woman Bent by Infirmity and the Man with Dropsy*

1. Only Luke records these next two encounters.
 - a) The woman bent with a spirit of infirmity for 18 years. **Lk. 13:10-17**
 - b) Man with dropsy (abnormal fluid retention, often due to heart or kidney failure) **Lk. 14:1-6**
2. Jesus uses the same Greek term in chapter 13 (*luo*) to describe freeing a donkey and the woman.

D. *Encounters Recorded By John*

1. Healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda **Jn. 5:5-11, 15-18**
 - a) The Jewish indignation at Jesus' healing of this man did not dissipate.
 - b) Jesus revisited the issue later during the Feast of Tabernacles. **Jn. 7:21-24**
2. Healing of a man born blind **Jn. 9:14-16**
 - a) In this text we do not have any record of Jesus defending His actions, as in other cases.
 - b) Instead, we have insight into the discussions among the Jews going on behind the scenes.

IV. On What Basis Were Jesus' Actions Justified?

A. *A Proper Interpretation of God's Sabbath Law*

1. The Pharisees had "condemned the guiltless" by misinterpreting the Law. (cf. Mt. 12:7)
 - a) Jesus rebuked them for failing to judge the issue properly. **Jn. 7:23-24**
 - b) Jesus did not violate God's law; He only violated the Pharisees' perversion of it!
2. Jesus used several examples to prove this point and justify His actions.
 - a) David and his men were given "forbidden" showbread when in need. **Mt. 12:3-4**
 - (1) Some suggest Jesus did not condone this action, but it seems to me He did.
 - (2) This example illustrates that the law was not intended to prohibit helping the needy.
 - b) Priests kindled fires and worked on the Sabbath; things usually not allowed. **Mt. 12:5-6**
 - (1) Obeying God's laws of service did not violate God's law concerning the Sabbath.
 - c) Any man would rescue his animal in distress on the Sabbath. **Mt. 12:11-12**
 - (1) Yet they felt that people should wait to be healed by the power of God. **Lk. 13:14-16**
 - (2) They accused God of wrongdoing, displaying the hypocrisy of their actions!
 - d) Performing circumcision as God commanded did not violate the Sabbath. (cf. Jn. 7:22-23)
3. The Sabbath was made for man's benefit, not as an empty ritual to observe. **Mk. 2:27**
 - a) God's law was never to be construed as prohibiting the practice of mercy. **Mt. 12:7**
 - b) The Pharisees' twisted interpretation violated fundamental principles of righteousness.
 - c) It is never right to do wrong, but it is also never wrong to do right!

B. *Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath*

1. Jesus said that He was the Master of the Sabbath. **Mt. 12:8**
 - a) It is this statement, along with John 5:17, that some use to argue Jesus' setting aside the law.
 - b) But Jesus was not arguing His exemption from the demands of God's law.
2. Jesus had instituted the law before coming to earth, thus He knew its proper application!
3. The Father did not cease blessing others on the Sabbath, and neither did Jesus. **Jn. 5:17**
4. How could the Jews have known that Jesus' interpretation was correct and the Pharisees' wrong?
 - a) They could and should have known by the miraculous evidence Jesus gave. **Jn. 9:16**
 - b) The Pharisees, blinded by their traditions, could not see the truth. **Jn. 9:24-34**

Conclusion: We must be careful in the interpretation and application of God's law to remain faithful to the truth of what is said, and not be blinded by our own inventiveness, assumptions, and traditions.