

# Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)

## 1. The Context of the Sabbath

### A. What is the Sabbath?

- The verb Sabbath (Shabbat) means to “rest” or “cease from work or activity.” The verb is first used in Genesis 2:2-3, where God *rested/ceased* (Shabbat) from creating, making it holy. The first time the noun is used is in Ex. 16:23.
- It is proleptic (given with future anticipation) for the full expression of that rest which will be revealed through progressive revelation.

### B. To whom was the Sabbath given?

- It may have been given to Adam and Eve as positive law on the seventh day (though not recorded in Scripture) for them and the patriarchs (Gen. 26:5; Mk. 2:27) to observe.
- It was a sign to the nation of Israel as a covenant people, published and enshrined in the Mosaic Law (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:13; Ezek. 20:12).
- The Sabbath “day” for the Jew begins at sundown Friday evening and concludes Saturday evening (Friday 6 PM- Saturday 6 PM).

### C. What were some prohibitions on the Sabbath?

- No “work” is permitted (at the least), not only regarding Jewish employers and employees but also the foreigner and animals (Ex. 20:10; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-14). “Moving” places of residence (Jer. 17:21-22), cooking (Ex. 35:3), traveling that can be confused with “labor” (Ex. 16:29), and economic commerce (Neh. 10:31; 13:15, 19) were all prohibited as well.

The Sabbath (as the seventh day) is the only commandment in the Decalogue that does not reflect the moral code intrinsic to mankind as image bearers. As a result, it can alter, change, and come to a greater expression through progressive and subsequent revelation.

## 2. The Conflict on the Sabbath

### A. Scene #1: Gleaning on Grainfields (v.1-2):

- Through the Mosaic Legislation, the Jewish legal code contained gracious provisions for the hungry (Lev. 23:22; Deut. 23:25):
  - During harvest time, the edges of the crops were to remain unharvested for the “poor.” Additionally, grain that fell to the ground was also reserved for them.
- On the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples traveled through a grainfield, and His disciples “plucked and rubbed grains together” (to separate the wheat from the chaff).
- Jesus and His disciples are walking through a field on the Sabbath since traveling on that day was considered “work” and restricted to a “Sabbath day’s walk” (Acts 1:12), which was equivalent to two thousand cubits (1100 meters) (m. Sotah 5:3; m. Shabbat 7:2).
- Some Pharisees saw this and said: “why are you (plural) doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (v.2).
  - According to the Mosaic Law, cooking, working, and food preparation was prohibited on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; 35:3).
- Some of the Pharisees interpreted:
  - The “plucking” with the fingers is equivalent to taking a proverbial sickle to the whole stalk (violation of Ex. 20:10).
  - The “rubbing” of the grain to separate the chaff is equivalent to the threshing floor with animals treading the grain (violation of Ex. 20:10).
  - Placing food into the mouth is equivalent to cooking (violation of 35:3).
- The Pharisees (following the Maccabean Revolt) began to implement Sabbath “rules” to protect their distinction as Jews (circumcision and Sabbath) from foreign influence.
  - By the time of Jesus, there were “forty minus one” (39) distinct Sabbath regulations that were not explicitly derivative from the Mosaic Law (Shabbat 7:2).
  - There were also over a thousand other man-made rules that regulated Jewish life not found in the Law but drafted to insulate the nation from potential violation of the Law.

### B. Scene #2: Saving in a Synagogue (v.6-10):

- On “another Sabbath” (v.6), Jesus is teaching in a synagogue where a man with a “crippled” hand is present. Shriveled hands were considered divine punishment for sin (1 Kgs. 13:4-6; Ps. 137:5).
- Jewish man-made Sabbath regulations only permitted “help or healing” in cases of endangerment to life (m. Yoma 8:6).
- The Scribes and Pharisees “watched” Jesus to see if He would heal this man (v.7). They were watching Him because they wanted to put Him to death, as Sabbath lawbreakers received the death penalty (Ex. 31:14).
- Knowing their thoughts (4:23; 9:47; 11:17; 24:38), He called the man to stand presumably before Himself (v.8) and asked the religious leaders a question that received no response (v.9).

## 3. The Clarity of the Sabbath (v.3-5, 9-10)

### A. Scene #1: Gleaning on Grainfields (v.1-2):

- Jesus responds on behalf of the disciples to the Pharisees by referring to David as he fled from Saul (1 Sam. 21:1-7), arriving at Nob, requesting “bread” from the High Priest, Ahimelech.
- The only bread available was the shewbread, also known as the Bread of the Presence (Ex. 25:30; 35:13; 39:36), which was consecrated and reserved only for the priests (Ex. 40:23; Lev. 24:5-9). Not only did Ahimelech give David the shewbread, but David also received it and ate it. As the High Priest, Ahimelech extended mercy (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 12:6).
- David violated the Torah’s ceremonial instruction and received no rebuke from any Old Testament prophet or writer, let alone was put to death (Ex. 31:14).
- Jesus is arguing from the greater to the lesser. If David was blameless for eating shewbread, how can the Pharisees condemn Jesus’ disciples for plucking grain?
- Why does Jesus provide David as an example?
  - Although not explicitly stated, the Davidic messianic hope was enshrined in the Eighteen Benedictions. Jesus was the inaugurator of a messianic reign (2 Sam. 7). Jesus, in appealing to David, is defining His authority as the royal Son of God that has been anticipated since the reign of David.
- Jesus identifies Himself as the “Son of Man” (v.5). This title appears over eighty times in the New Testament - seventy-eight are from Jesus’ mouth. This is the title that Jesus uses most to speak of Himself. The term primarily concerns His deity (Dan. 7:9-14) as the incarnate YHWH.
- Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, argues that God’s law was never intended to exclude people from meeting basic needs (mercy). David’s account at Nob demonstrates the spirit of the law, and Jesus argues that Sabbath regulations can be superseded in certain situations.

### B. Scene #2: Saving in a Synagogue (v.9-11):

- From the vantage point of the religious leaders, there is silence to Jesus’ question.
- Instead of doing “good” to this cripple, they prefer tradition by ignoring his needs. Rather than repent of self-righteousness, they were filled with “fury” and conspired with the Herodians (Mk. 3:6). The Greek word for “fury” indicates a mind that is thoughtless and unreasonable.
- Jesus did not break any law, for “He came under the law” (Gal. 4:4-5) and was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5). He broke human traditions.

As Lord of the Sabbath, the incarnate YHWH brings to reality the full expression of the Sabbath, not by abrogating it, but being more concerned with bringing the grace of God to concrete expression in His ministry. As Lord, He has the authority to do that.

The Sabbath days (and rules/regulations) are not naturally derivative from man as image bearers (Rom. 2:14) but given as a sign of creation (Gen. 2:1-3) and potential positive law to Adam and Eve (not recorded in Scripture) which regulated Jewish cultic worship that was published at Sinai. This sign pointed to a person, location, and state of existence revealed and procured partially in the coming of the incarnate YHWH (Jesus of Nazareth) and will be consummated at the end of the age (Heb. 4:1-10).