

YESHUA SHOCKS THE PHARISEES

by Avram Yehoshua

[The Seed of Abraham](#)

In Matthew 12:1-8, which Mark (2:23-28) and Luke (Lk. 6:1-5) condense slightly, Messiah Yeshua is accosted by some Pharisees for allowing His disciples to pick, rub, and eat grain on the Sabbath.¹ All three writers speak of Yeshua's reply to the Pharisees, about David eating the Bread of the Presence when he was hungry (Lk. 6:3-4), but only Matthew has Yeshua speaking of the priests profaning the Sabbath by offering the daily sacrifices and also the additional sacrifices for the Sabbath (Mt. 12:5; Num. 28:1-10). Only Matthew records Yeshua saying, 'One greater than the Temple' was there (Mt. 12:6), along with Hosea's, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'. All three have Yeshua speaking of Himself as Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:7-8), but only Mark notes that Yeshua said the Sabbath was made for Man and not Man for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27).

The Sabbath After Passover

(Mt. 12:1; Mk. 2:23; Lk. 6:1)

Alfred Edersheim places the setting in the second year of Messiah's ministry, on the first Sabbath after the 7th day Sabbath within Passover week.² He and his disciples had been at the synagogue in Capernaum where Yeshua had been most likely teaching about the Kingdom. The people, because His teaching was one of authority with miracles abounding, were literally amazed.³

Luke 6:1 uses a peculiar phrase for this Shabat (Hebrew for Sabbath). In Greek it's rendered the 'second-first Sabbath.'⁴ The King James Version translates it as 'the second Sabbath after the first.' Howard Marshall says it means,

the 'second Sabbath after the Feast of Unleavened Bread...the first Sabbath being that which fell during the actual week of the feast.'⁵

¹ Only Luke speaks of them rubbing the grain together; Lk. 6:1.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 511. During the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread, there is always a 7th day Sabbath. The day after this Sabbath (i.e. Sunday) officially begins the count for the 'counting of the Omer' (Lev. 23:15; 'the sheaf [omer] of the wave offering,' which is barley grain), which is 50 days (Lev. 23:15-16f.) until the next feast of *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost). What this means is that from the 7th day Sabbath in Passover week, one can count seven Sabbaths (which are 49 days, 'to the day after the seventh Sabbath' Lev. 23:16), and the next day, Sunday, is the 50th day for the counting of the Omer (i.e. *Shavu'ot*). Pentecost gets its name from the number 50 in Greek (i.e. the Septuagint). The Feast is also called the Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:15) and the Feast of Weeks (Dt. 16:9-10, 16). An 'omer' of barley is about two pounds or a kilo.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 331, note 2: 'Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 1:22; 6:2', etc.

⁴ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, Translators, J. D. Douglas, Editor, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990), p. 220, at the bottom. The Greek is *sabbato duteroproto*. It's found in a number of ancient manuscripts and the KJV, as well as other Bibles, translates it as 'the second Sabbath after the first'.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, Author; I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, Editors, *The New International Greek*

Edersheim says that the ‘first’ in the phrase (‘second-first Sabbath’) refers to the day when the Omer count⁶ would begin during Passover week.⁷ What this means is that the event happened in the springtime, most likely in April or early May, the first Sabbath being the 7th day Sabbath of Passover week. With Marshall’s understanding it would most likely take the event we’re looking at into late April or early May; a time when the wheat might be ripe enough to be could be eaten by hand.

Unlawful to Pick Grain on the Sabbath?

(Mt. 12:2; Mk. 2:24; Lk. 6:2)

The grain that was being picked was wheat as barley would have ripened and been harvested before Passover (Lev. 23:10). On any common day (days 1-6; i.e. Sunday through Friday), the Jewish followers of Yeshua who had picked, rubbed and eaten grain from a field that was not theirs, would have been lawful. The Pharisees wouldn’t have said anything to Yeshua, and they were certainly not seen as stealing the grain. God, in His mercy, had set up commandments to deal with hungry folks in others’ fields:

‘When you enter your neighbor’s standing grain, then you may pluck (pick), the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor’s standing grain’ (Dt. 23:25; this was also true of grapes in a neighbor’s vineyard, 23:24; and would reasonably extend to any produce in a field).

They weren’t to put any grain in their pockets to take home with them, but they could eat till their hunger was satisfied. The problem with the Pharisees was that this wasn’t any common day. It was Yahveh’s 7th day Shabat and He states that no one is to work on His Shabat (Ex. 20:10; 31:12-17; Dt. 5:12-15, etc.). The Pharisees had accused the disciples of working on Shabat: ‘Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ (Lk. 6:2). This was no light matter. Sabbath desecration was punishable by death.⁸ Yahveh had said to Moses:

‘Speak to the Sons of Israel, saying, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Yahveh who sanctifies you.’⁹ Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you.

Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 230.

⁶ The ‘counting of the Omer’ is a phrase that is used for the days from the time when some of an *omer* (a portion of fine barley flour approximately 3.5 dry quarts) would have been offered up on the Bronze Altar during Passover week. The rest of the barley reverted back to the High Priest who offered it up. This ceremony (Lev. 23:10-21) began the countdown to *Shavuot* (Pentecost) fifty days later. For more on the ceremony and its significance see [The Passover Ceremony](#). Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor, Everett F. Harrison, Roland K. Harrison and William Sanford LaSor, Associate Editors, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. four (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 1051 for the omer quantity.

⁷ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 511, see also, pp. 510, 512. The phrase, the second Sabbath after the first, seems to have been a Jewish way of reckoning the weeks until Shavu’ot (Pentecost), which was seven Sabbaths from the Sabbath within Passover week, plus one day, making Pentecost fall on Sunday, 50 days from the Sunday in Passover week. For more on why Pentecost always fell on Sunday see [First Sheaf](#).

⁸ According to the commandments, Sabbath desecration was punishable by death, but in the days of Yeshua, with the Romans holding authority on matters of life and death and the Rabbis altering God’s commandments, the punishment for what the disciples did might have consisted of lashings and/or the offering of sin sacrifices.

⁹ It’s not the keeping of the Sabbath that sanctifies or makes us holy, but in keeping the Sabbath Yahveh says that

Everyone who profanes it must be put to death for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people' (Ex. 31:13-14).¹⁰

Mishna Shabat 7.2 states that there are 39 different categories of work prohibited on Shabat.¹¹ Everyone there that day knew that they weren't to work on Yahveh's Sabbath. The question is, was it work to do what the disciples had done? According to the Pharisees it was.

David Stern says that the picking of the grain was seen by the Pharisees as reaping or harvesting. Of course, reaping was something that was forbidden. Their rubbing of it in their hands (to take the husks off)¹² was seen as threshing (or winnowing) the grain.¹³ Threshing grain was definitely considered work, too. Marshall states that their eating of the grain was tantamount to having 'prepared a meal' on the Sabbath, which was also forbidden.¹⁴ Food can be prepared on an annual Sabbath, like the first day of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:16), but not on the 7th day Sabbath (Ex. 16:4-5, 22-30). In other words, food should be prepared on Friday that one wanted to eat on Shabat. Edersheim says,

'according to the Talmud, what was really one labour, would, if made up of several acts, each of them forbidden, amount to several acts of labour, each involving sin, punishment, and a sin offering.'¹⁵

Picking, rubbing and eating of the grain were seen as three distinct sins according to Pharisaic interpretation of what God meant when He said not to work on the Sabbath. Edersheim reveals a passage from the Talmud (Jer. *Shabat* 10a) that must have been going through the minds of the Pharisees as they watched the disciples pick, rub and eat their grain:

'In case a woman rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is considered as sifting; if she rubs the heads of wheat, it is regarded as threshing; if she cleans off the side-adherences, it is sifting out fruit; if she bruises the ears, it is grinding; if she throws them up in her hand, it is winnowing.'¹⁶

It's very interesting that Yeshua doesn't initially fence with the Pharisaic interpretation of what constituted Sabbath desecration, in this case, the picking, rubbing and 'preparing.' On the other hand, He would certainly have agreed with them that harvesting, winnowing and preparing meals on Shabat was sin. God is serious about His people ceasing from all work and resting on His Shabat. Rest implies the freedom that God has given to His people by having taken them out of slavery. When they were in Egypt, they worked seven days a week. There was no rest for them. In Yeshua's Kingdom there is rest from the toils of this life and slavery to carnality and Satan. The Sabbath is a 'concrete' picture of God's redemption (Dt. 5:12-15), and as such, God wants His people to walk in the freedom that He has given them through

He will make us holy (Ex. 31:12-17).

¹⁰ When the Sons of Israel were in the Wilderness with Moses, a man was caught picking up sticks of wood on the Sabbath day. Yahveh told Israel to stone him to death (Num. 15:32-36).

¹¹ Robert H. Mounce, Author; W. Ward Gasque, New Testament Editor, *New International Biblical Commentary: Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 111.

¹² Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 512.

¹³ David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 45.

¹⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 231.

¹⁵ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 512, see note 12 which speaks of Shabat 70a: 'if a person were to pull out a feather from the wing of a bird, cut off the top, and then pluck off the fluff below, it would involve three labours and three sin-offerings.'

¹⁶ Ibid.

the blood of His Son.

Yeshua doesn't quibble over whether it's sin to have done those things. He wouldn't have gotten anywhere with them. In His defense, Yeshua appeals twice to the Old Testament, David eating the Bread of the Presence and the priests working twice as hard on Shabat, to justify that what His disciples had done had fallen well within the range of even Pharisaic understanding. In these, Yeshua also discloses a number of revelations about Himself.

1. Based on what Yeshua says about David, Yeshua implied that He too was on a royal mission, which meant that He was David's Son, the Messiah, the Son of God.
2. By speaking of being greater than the Temple, Yeshua declared that He was deity.
3. By saying that He was Lord of the Sabbath, He again proclaimed His deity.

Any one of these should have been enough to satisfy the Pharisees. All three together form a veritable 'fortress defense' for what His disciples had done.

David and the Holy Bread

(Mt. 12:3-4; Mk. 2:25-26; Lk. 6:3-4)

Yeshua's initial reference to David comes from 1st Sam. 21:1-9, where David, escaping the wrath of King Saul, tells the High Priest that he is on a mission from King Saul and needs some food for his men and him. In the story, David doesn't seem to have any men with him, but Yeshua relates that he did. It's quite possible that David did have some men with him, even though David had lied about being on a mission. King Saul hadn't sent him on an 'urgent mission.' David was fleeing for his life. Yet, the men David speaks about will have a direct bearing on an event a thousand years later with Yeshua and His disciples.

Yeshua uses this example knowing full well that the Pharisees didn't think that David or the High Priest had sinned when the High Priest gave David the holy Bread, which was only for the priests (Lev. 24:8-9). The Pharisees had reasoned that it fell under preservation of life, which for them, would overrule the law that only the priests could eat the holy Bread. Yeshua used this example to speak to Pharisaic perception about the incident, but the reason why the High Priest gave the holy Bread to David rested not on hunger (preservation of life), but on the fact that David spoke of being on a mission from the king.

David asked the High Priest for some bread, but the only food that he had was the Bread of the Presence. Only the priests were allowed to eat the 12 loaves of the holy Bread that had been in the Presence of Yahveh in the Holy Place upon the gold Table. The loaves were taken out each Shabat after having been there for a week and were replaced with 12 fresh loaves. The priests were commanded to eat them in a holy place (on the holy Tabernacle grounds) and there was no provision for anyone else to eat the holy Bread:

'Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes' (round loaves) 'with it. Two-tenths of an ephah¹⁷ shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the Gold Table before Yahveh' (Lev. 24:5-6).

'Every Shabat he' (Aaron), 'shall set it in order before Yahveh continually, being taken from the Sons of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, for it is most holy to him from the offerings of

¹⁷ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. four, p. 1051. An ephah was about 35 dry quarts. Two tenths of an ephah would be approximately 7 quarts. Each 'loaf' of Bread would have been large.

Yahveh made by fire, by a perpetual statute' (Lev. 24:8-9).

'So the priest gave him consecrated Bread, for there was no bread there, but the Bread of the Presence, which was removed from before Yahveh in order to put hot Bread in its place when it was taken away' (1st Sam. 21:6).

David had lied and said he was on a royal mission (that David had been sent by the King of Israel, Saul). Yeshua doesn't address the lie, but the fact is that the High Priest thought David was on an urgent mission from the king. This allowed him to give the holy Bread to David. How much? David had initially asked for five loaves, not knowing that there wasn't any common bread available. If it was a Shabat and there were still 12 loaves left, or even a few days after that, David most likely got the five loaves he had asked for (1st Sam. 21:3).

Mark speaks of it being in the 'days of Abiathar the High Priest,' while 1st Samuel names the High Priest as Ahimelech. Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech. Edersheim writes of the father and the son sharing in the high priesthood, not an uncommon phenomenon with kings or high priests whose sons begin to reign while their older father is still alive but not able to deal with the every day administration of things (e.g. Solomon becoming king while David was still alive; 1st Kgs. 1:1-53).¹⁸ Mark is not wrong in writing the way he does, for he doesn't say that David spoke to the son, and he knew that the father would soon be dead (1st Sam. 22:11-23).

The High Priest overrode the fact that neither David or his men were priests, not because, as the Pharisees and many others have thought, that they were hungry and the High Priest had compassion upon them, but because they were seen as being on an urgent royal mission. The High Priest considered them 'consecrated' (set apart for a royal mission) and therefore, able to eat the consecrated Bread.¹⁹ As we'll see, hunger was not what allowed him to give the holy Bread to David and his men.

The question that the High Priest asks David, about whether David's men were defiled, reveals that it wasn't because David and his men were hungry that he got the Bread. David answered that they hadn't been defiled. They hadn't had any contact with women in three days or more. They hadn't had sexual intercourse in that time in which any semen could have gotten on them, or their clothes, or other belongings. If they had been defiled (Lev. 15:18; Dt. 22:5)²⁰ they would not have gotten the holy Bread, no matter how hungry they were.

The Hebrew word *klay* is translated as 'vessels' (1st Sam. 21:5; NASB; NKJV; KJV), but also carries the connotation of 'clothes, as well as such things as were most necessary to meet the wants of life.'²¹ David told the High Priest that he and his men were consecrated:

'The priest answered David, "I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread—provided that the young men have kept themselves from women." David answered the priest

¹⁸ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament*, vol. 2: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001; originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1866-91), p. 511. Note 1 states, 'When Mark (2:26) assigns this action to the days of Abiathar the high priest, the statement rests upon an error of memory, in which Ahimelech is confounded with Abiathar.' See 1st Sam. 21:1 where Ahimelech is named, but Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 513 counters by saying, 'According to 1 Sam. 22:9 Ahimelech (or Ahijah, 1 Sam. 14:3) was the high Priest. We infer, that Abiathar was conjoined with his father in the priesthood.'

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

²⁰ This would have made them unclean for anything that was holy. For example, they wouldn't have been able to go to the Tabernacle to worship Yahveh if they were unclean (Lev. 15:16-17).

²¹ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 513.

and said to him, “Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels (clothes, etc.) of the young men were holy, for if it was an ordinary journey, how much more then today will their vessels (clothes, etc.) be holy?” (1st Sam. 21:4-5)

David assured the High Priest that the men and their clothes, etc., had not come into contact with any semen, and that he was on a royal mission (by saying, ‘for if it was an ordinary journey, how much more’ today). If the men had been defiled, it’s obvious that the High Priest would not have given the Bread of the Presence to David. The giving of the holy Bread rested not upon David and his men’s hunger, but upon whether or not David and his men were truly consecrated (on a royal mission and not defiled).

The High Priest gave David the Bread because David was ‘an ambassador of the Lord’ through King Saul and so there was a certain holiness or consecration about his mission and his men that aligned them with the holy and consecrated priests.²² The Pharisees didn’t understand this aspect, but rested their reasoning on compassion.²³

Yeshua, too, was on an urgent royal mission. He had truly been sent by the King of Israel—His Father. As such, those that followed and attended to Him would be considered consecrated or holy, too, and also on a royal mission, just as David’s men were. The disciples were ‘in the service’ of the Messiah. They belonged to Him, much as the men of David belonged to David. That’s why the High Priest gave the Bread to David and his men.

The Pharisees, thinking that the High Priest had given the holy Bread to David on the Sabbath, thought that the reason David was given the Bread was because David was hungry, and that ‘danger to life superseded the Sabbath Law, and hence, all laws connected with it.’²⁴ Their reasoning was wrong. Hunger wasn’t the reason why David got the holy Bread, but this tells us that the disciples must not have gone too long without food, for if the hunger of the disciples had been seen as starvation, the Pharisees wouldn’t have bothered Yeshua. Edersheim writes that,

‘Even Rabbinism...perceived this. It was a principle, that danger to life superseded the Sabbath Law, and indeed all other obligations.’²⁵

The Pharisees believed that what David did, happened on a Shabat,²⁶ even though it’s not expressly said. They based it on 1st Samuel 21:6 where the bread was ‘taken from before Yahveh.’ It’s an assumption that it was a Shabat when David was there, as it could easily have been said of the holy Bread the next day or the day after, that it had ‘been taken’ (on Shabat) with no reference as to the day that David had spoken to the High Priest. The point here is that Yeshua knew that the Pharisees believed it was a Shabat, and so this also parallels what His disciples had done on that Shabat with the grain. If it was alright for David to eat the Bread of the Presence on Shabat, which was only for the priests, and give some to his men because they were hungry, and the Pharisees acknowledged that it was, it should certainly have been more than alright for Yeshua’s followers to do what they had done. Yeshua addressed the Pharisaic perspective head on. How could His disciples have been guilty?! ‘Look at David!’ And the Pharisees were stopped in their own tracks!

Not mentioned by Yeshua, but certainly implied in the story about David, was the fact that Yeshua, like

²² Ibid., p. 512.

²³ Ibid., p. 513. Also, note 20: ‘*Yalkut* 2, par. 130, p. 18d.’

²⁴ Ibid., p. 513.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 513, note 15: ‘But only where the life of an Israelite, not of a heathen or Samaritan, was in danger (Yoma 84b).’ Note 16: ‘Maimonides, *Hilkh. Shabb.* 2.1 (Yad haCh. vol. 1, part 3, p. 141a): ‘The Sabbath is set aside on account of danger to life, as all other ordinances’.

²⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 228.

David, was the anointed King of Israel; the Messiah—David's Son. Just as David was not 'recognized' by King Saul and much of Israel at that time as God's chosen king, so too Yeshua. Yeshua was not recognized by the religious authorities of His day (the Pharisees being one such group). David had been anointed by Samuel the prophet (1st Sam. 16:1-13), the Holy Spirit coming upon David at that time. Yeshua had been anointed King of Israel when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him at His immersion in the Jordan River (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:32). He was on a royal mission of redemption.

If David's men could eat consecrated Bread on a Sabbath, then surely the Son of David, the Messiah, could allow His men to eat something that was far less holy than the Bread of the Presence, and actually, not even bread at all, but grain. The analogy is overwhelmingly in favor of the disciples, be it in relation to what was eaten, and as to the fact that Yeshua was David's Son, the Messiah, which of course, made Him greater than his father David (Ps. 110:1; Mt. 22:41-46). The Bread that David had received for his men should have been only eaten by the priests, yet the grain that the disciples ate that Shabat was ordinary grain that any animal could eat. Therefore, the Pharisees should not have had any problem with what happened that day, from this perspective either, if they had only acknowledged that Yeshua was the Son of David, the Messiah, sent from God to Israel and so He was on a royal mission. By Yeshua's second year of ministry they would have had ample time and proof to have done so. Their resistance and hatred of Yeshua places them in the same category as King Saul. He too wanted to slay the Lord's anointed (David).

The reason the High Priest gave the holy Bread to David and his men was because he thought that they were on a royal mission. This is seen from what David tells him and what the High Priest asks David concerning the possible defilement of his men. The Pharisees had wrongly thought that the law for the holy Bread was overruled because of preservation of life. Yeshua uses this to show them that if they had thought that of David and his circumstances, how much more should they have allowed His disciples to do what they had done? The disciples had not broken the Sabbath commandment, even under the scrutiny of Pharisaic interpretation.

Yeshua was on an urgent royal mission from His Father, and His men as such, were in the consecrated service of the King of Israel. How could the Pharisees not have seen that Yeshua was David's prophesied Son, the Messiah, and had been sent by God?

The Priests in the Temple

(Mt. 12:5)

The second reference that Yeshua used that day spoke of the priests who sacrificed at the Temple on Shabat. Sacrifice, the actual slaughtering of the animal, skinning of it and dismembering of it, etc., and the placing of it on the Bronze Altar of Sacrifice, was no small amount of work. Yet the priests were not guilty of violating the Sabbath, even though from a physical point of view Yeshua said they 'profane the Sabbath' (Mt. 12:5; KJV, NASB: 'break the Sabbath') by working twice as hard. Yeshua wasn't saying that they were sinning, but that they certainly were working harder on that day than the other days. Again, Yeshua knew that Pharisaic teaching, although not imputing sin to the priests, couldn't understand how it wasn't sin.

Yahveh had commanded the actual doubling of the daily Dedication (whole burnt) sacrifice for the Sabbath (Num. 28:9-10). Was God guilty of breaking His own law? The Pharisees might have thought so, but would never have voiced such. They had no idea why work in the Temple was allowed on the Sabbath, anymore than why David got the Bread. Alfred Edersheim writes, 'The Rabbis were by no means clear on

the rationale of Sabbath-work in the Temple.²⁷

God commanded extra sacrifice on the Sabbath because the theme behind the sacrifices fit in with one of four major themes for the Sabbath. The priests were not guilty of Sabbath desecration because one of the concepts that the Sabbath day pictures is what Yahveh did for Israel in saving her from Egyptian slavery (Redeemer-Savior, Deut. 5:11-15).²⁸ That kind of work, the work of redemption, is permissible on Shabat because it presents in sacrificial picture form the redemption that God gave to Israel. As such, the daily and weekly Sabbath sacrifices also prefigured what Yeshua, the Lamb of God, would do in redeeming Israel from Satan, sin, sickness and death.

The priests were honoring the Sabbath above the others (with more sacrifice), and symbolically representing Yahveh's love and salvation to Israel in sacrificial form, every day, but twice as much on the Sabbath. They were ministering unto Yahveh, which is the essence of the Dedication sacrifice that they were offering. Full and total surrender and dedication to Yahveh was pictured in the death of the sacrificial lambs. It also called to mind, because of the lambs sacrificed and the unleavened flour (Ex. 29:38-46), the Passover itself, the great deliverance and foundation stone of Yahveh's claim to Israel. Of course, it also pointed to the sacrificial death of the Yeshua, the Passover Lamb, also known as the Bread of Life, whose ministry unto His Father was truly dedicated and would bring eternal salvation.²⁹

The priests ministered unto Israel by displaying the Great Deliverance and what God required of His people. As such, they were not guilty of sinning on the Sabbath day even though they did twice as much work. It was the Work of God: redemption. They were displaying God's salvation to the people. Yeshua would also use this as a defense in John (5:16-24), when He said that He saw His Father work on the Sabbath (Redemption work; deliverance of Israel), and that He too must do that kind of work (setting Jews free from Satan, sin, sickness and death), and the Sabbath day was especially the day to do that kind of work as it reflected redemption.

The Work Yeshua did proclaimed that He was the Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel, the Son of Yahveh. He set people free, especially on the Sabbath Day (Lk. 13:10-16; the women bound by Satan for 18 years, etc.).³⁰ It didn't mean He broke or did away with the Sabbath, but showed us one reason why the Sabbath is to be held in such high esteem (Dt. 5:15). It's the day of Redemption, and as such, pictures the Messiah. The Pharisees said that the priests of the Temple were guiltless, even though they worked. In the Talmud, Shabat 132b, it states, 'Temple service takes precedence over (the priest's work on) Shabat.'³¹ They just

²⁷ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 513.

²⁸ The other three are that the Sabbath pictures the Father and the Son as Creator (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-12); as bringer of the Messianic Age (Lev. 25:8-13; Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:14-21); and as Sanctifier of Israel (Ex. 31:12-17).

²⁹ See [Mosaic Sacrifice and the Blood of Jesus](#) for more on the Mosaic Sacrifices and their symbolism pointing to the Lamb of God.

³⁰ It's interesting to note that in the account, Yeshua uses the term 'freed' a number of times. Unfortunately, in English, it isn't translated that way. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath To Sunday* (Rome, Italy: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 36, says that Yeshua declared 'the woman 'freed' from her infirmity...to clarify the meaning of the Sabbath.' 'It is hard to believe that the verb' (lewin; freed), 'was used...accidentally, since in the brief narrative it recurs three times, though in English RSV translation it is rendered each time with a different synonym, namely, 'to free, to untie, to loose' (13:12, 15, 16).' After 'freeing' the woman bent over (Lk. 13:12), Messiah argues that even the Rabbis say that one can 'free' or loosen the rope on their donkey to lead them to water on the Sabbath (13:15), and so shouldn't this woman, whom Satan 'bound for eighteen years, be loosed' (freed) 'from this bond on the' Sabbath day (13:16)?! 'Arguing a *minori ad maius*, that is, from a minor to a greater case, Christ shows how the Sabbath had ben paradoxically distorted.'

³¹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 45.

didn't understand why.

Yeshua now parallels what His disciples had done, in accompanying Him, with the ministry of the priests in the Temple on Shabat. His followers were ministering unto Him. They could eat from the fields on that Sabbath day because their lives revolved around Yeshua. They would be considered 'exempt', as the priests were, and therefore, able to 'work' at picking, rubbing and preparing (eating) the meal because what they were in effect doing was helping God's Savior to be seen by all. This in no way suggests that the disciples were sinning by what they were doing, but in dealing with the Pharisees who thought the disciples were sinning (by breaking Pharisaic law), Yeshua gives the Pharisees two witnesses from Scripture to show them that even from their perspective, the disciples weren't sinning.

Yeshua: Greater than the Temple

(Mt. 12:6)

Yeshua builds on the Temple illustration by saying that He was greater than the Temple. This is the first explicit revelation at this event.³² It must have totally shocked the Pharisees. There was nothing greater than the Temple because Yahveh dwelt there (Jn. 2:16). By saying this, Yeshua emphatically declared that He was deity. The God of Israel was walking among His people Israel.³³

Yeshua wasn't saying that He was the Father, as some erroneously think, but rather, that He was God the Son, the Messiah.³⁴ He was saying that He was one with the Father, as a husband is one with his wife (Gen. 2:24; Jn. 10:30). Concerning Messiah's point here, with this pronouncement, He was declaring that as deity, as God the Son, the disciples were 'in His service' just as much as the priests were in the service of God, and therefore, the Sabbath ordinance was superseded from just this perspective.

Yeshua is not admitting that His disciples broke God's Sabbath. He was showing the Pharisees that even according to Pharisaic understanding they could not be accused of breaking the Sabbath. The priests were truly working hard with all the sacrifices, but how hard was it for the disciples to pick, rub and eat? The priests ministered to a Temple built with hands, but the disciples were ministering to the Living Temple.

³² The first implicit revelation was that just as David was thought to have been on a royal mission, Yeshua truly was on 'royal mission.'

³³ The first stage was Yahveh dwelling in the Tabernacle and Temple. The second stage was Yahveh dwelling in Yeshua. The third stage is Yahveh dwelling in us. The fourth stage is Yahveh again dwelling in Jerusalem through Messiah Yeshua in the thousand year reign of Messiah (Ezk. 40-48; Rev. 20:6). And the fifth and final stage is Yahveh dwelling in us for eternity in a glorified way in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21).

³⁴ See [Yeshua—God the Son](#) for how Yeshua is God the Son, and is not the Father, and what it means to be made in the Image of God. Also see, [Yeshua—His Deity and Sonship](#).

Mercy not Sacrifice

(Mt. 12:7)

Having shocked his antagonists with His declaration of deity, He then tries to pierce their Pharisaic hearts with a stern rebuke. He tells them that they missed the whole point of religion. He says, ‘if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless’ (Mt. 12:7). This is a two-edged sword in that it speaks of both the lack of compassion that the Pharisees had toward the disciples, in harshly judging them, and also the lack of understanding of covenant relationship that they were supposed to have with both God. The word ‘mercy’ should rightly be translated as forgiving-loving-kindness, the essence of how God maintained His covenant with Israel.

The heart of the Torah is to love Yahveh and one’s neighbor as oneself (Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-31). All the laws of God were to be walked out in love, mercy and forgiveness. The Pharisees ‘knew’ this, but were devoid of it. Yeshua rebuked them with the hope that they would hear their failure and change their ways. Who knows? Perhaps some of them there that day became some of the Pharisees that would believe in Yeshua after the Resurrection (Acts 15:5; 23:6)?

The word translated as ‘mercy’ in the KJV (Mt. 12:7) and compassion in the NASB is the Hebrew word *hesed* חֶסֶד. In Hosea 6:6, where the quote of Yeshua comes from, the word is translated as mercy (KJV) and loyalty (NASB). *Hesed* is one of the most powerful words in all of Scripture. It describes God’s heart-felt love toward Israel, and specifically, all those who walk in His covenant. A simple definition of *hesed* is ‘God’s forgiving-loving-kindness.’ God initiates and maintains His relationship with Israel because of His forgiving-loving-kindness. If not for this attitude toward Israel, the relationship would have broken down after Israel’s first sin. In providing sacrifice for sins, an expression of *hesed*, He made a way for the relationship to continue.

Messiah Yeshua’s sacrifice dramatically emphasizes God’s *hesed* for us. This, so we might come to know the eternal life that is Yeshua (John 11:25; 17:3) and to become like our Messiah. The Pharisees thought they had the right to eternal life (Jn. 5:39), but they didn’t know God. They knew about Him, but they didn’t know Him. The second part of Hosea’s sentence would also have been rolling around in their Pharisaic heads also. It speaks of knowledge of God, something that the Pharisees didn’t have, even though God Himself stood there talking with them.

In Hosea 6:6, the sentence reads, ‘For I desire forgiving-loving-kindness and not sacrifice; knowledge of God rather than Dedication sacrifices.’ The Hebrew word for knowledge is *yadah* and signifies an intimate knowledge of another. It’s used of Adam having sexual relations with Eve (Gen. 4:1). The phrase, ‘knowledge of God’ implies a true understanding of Yahveh. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says it parallels,

the ‘fear of’ Yahveh (Is. 11:2; cf. 58:2; Jer. 22:16) ‘as a description of true religion...The prophetic view of the messianic age is of a time in which the knowledge of God covers the earth as water covers the sea (Hab. 2:14; cf. Isa. 11:9).’³⁵

Hesed, God’s forgiving-loving-kindness, as evidenced in His great deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery and pictured in the sacrifices now takes the forefront. *Hesed* alone, without the mentioning of David and the Temple priests, should have been more than enough for those Pharisees. One needn’t have been a theological giant to grasp this as perhaps one might have needed to be with the first two examples

³⁵ R. L. Harris, Editor; Gleason Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, Associate Editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 367.

of David and the Temple priests. All one needed to do was to love God and man with all their heart, the two great commandments. The Pharisees knew the Word of God, but they didn't know the Author, and as such, had failed in implementing the very cord of the Law. They had never fully surrendered their hearts to God. They were content to sacrifice animals, not realizing that the animals spoke of full and unreserved dedication to God. Because their hearts were far from God, their interpretation of God's Sabbath law was askew.

The Pharisees were lost in their own self-righteousness and self-deception. Messiah's rebuke was meant to reveal that they not only lacked compassion toward the disciples, but they also had no understanding of the compassion God had toward them. If they had only walked in *hesed* they wouldn't have needed to sacrifice all those animals for their behavior toward God. All the sacrifices in the world could never cover their snake-like hearts.

The desire to satisfy one's hunger on Shabat, by picking, rubbing and eating the grain was presented by Yeshua as superseding the Pharisaic Sabbath law because of God's *hesed*. In the two previous examples, it was the fact of David's royal mission and the priests working in the Temple on the Sabbath, that superseded Pharisaic Sabbath law not 'to work' (for nowhere does God say it's forbidden to pick grain on the Sabbath day as the disciples did). Here, it's God's *hesed* that takes the forefront.

Yeshua told the Pharisees that *hesed* was not a part of their lives. The Pharisees didn't know God's *hesed* and so could only walk in dry, legalistic interpretations of Torah. This caused them to condemn the disciples for something that God didn't condemn them for. If they had but known God's *hesed* they would have been able to rightly interpret Scripture and not have fallen into the pit of legalism. They also would not have needed to offer vain sacrifices to God, thinking that these would atone or cover their sins in God's eyes, when what God really wanted was their hearts surrendered to Him so He could reveal His *hesed* to them.

The Sabbath Was Made for Man

(Mk. 2:27)

Mark (2:27) is the only account of the three that has Yeshua saying, 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.' Many have illogically used this to say that believers are no longer obligated to keep holy, God's 7th day Sabbath, but their interpretation is very strained and superficial. One of the characteristics of the Pharisees was that even God Himself couldn't teach them. They thought they knew more about God than God the Son who stood in front of them.

The Rabbis had similar sayings to what Yeshua said and no Jew had ever thought that the Rabbis were doing away with the Sabbath. In *Mihilta* on Ex. 31:14 (109b) they say, 'The Sabbath is given over to you and not you to the Sabbath.'³⁶ In *Yoma* 85b, Rabbi Yonatan ben Yosef said, 'For it (Shabat) is holy unto you' (Ex. 31:14). That is, it is committed into your hands, not you into its hands!³⁷

Both statements reveal that the Sabbath wasn't to enslave the Jew. The same holds true for what Messiah said that day. Yeshua was saying something the Pharisees could certainly identify with. Unfortunately, they had strangled the life out of the Sabbath by some of their rules. The same holds true for Orthodox Judaism today, which is the spiritual descendent of the Pharisees. That's why it's so important for us to scrutinize 'Jewish' things: we don't want to walk in Pharisaic understanding of the Scriptures that seem

³⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 232.

³⁷ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 89.

good but are not.

Messiah, in telling the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for Man and not vice-versa, and that Yahveh desires *hesed* (forgiving-loving-kindness), showed them what He thought of picking, rubbing and eating grain on Shabat—that it wasn't sin in His eyes. He had saved this 'debatable' point for last, having met and already overwhelmed the Pharisees on their own turf. He exposed their dry theological legalism first and then turned to the basic principle of God's character—compassion (*hesed*).

Another concept behind keeping God's Sabbath day holy is trust. On the Sabbath believers get to practice 'trusting in God' in a very concrete way. When one could work on that day and earn money to live (food, shelter, etc.), but chooses to obey Yahveh, one is literally trusting God in a very concrete, practical way. It's only simple math, if one works seven days a week instead of six, they will make more money. Money translates into 'life' as food, clothes, rent, cars, etc., but God says that if we keep His Sabbath holy, He will provide wonderful things for us (Is. 58:13-14). It comes down to whether we really believe God or not. It's faith, belief and trust when one doesn't work on Shabat. Conceptually, it's the same with tithing.³⁸

Why does He provide when we don't work? One reason is that Israel (all believers) is the Bride of Messiah Yeshua. Before that, Israel was 'married' to Yahveh (at Mt. Sinai, which is standard Jewish belief for the event, the true essence of covenant). As any good husband would, God loves to provide for His wife (Ps. 113; Eph. 5:25-33; 1st Pet. 3:7) and the Sabbath pictures a wonderful natural and spiritual provision for her.

When we observe God's Sabbath day we are saying to ourselves, first and foremost, that we truly trust God for our physical provisions. It's a 'sign' to us that we are walking with, and trusting in Yeshua. It shows Yeshua this too, and all others who know us. Everything in the natural, like the Sabbath, has a spiritual reality 'behind' it. Just as we must recognize that it's not our intelligence or hard work that earns our daily bread, but that it comes as a gift from the hand of the God (Mt. 6:26), so too with salvation.

As hard as we can 'work out' our salvation (Phil. 2:12), we can never earn it. It's not our work or doing of good deeds that saves us. It is a Gift from Above, and it's the Sabbath day that causes us to realize this more than anything else, as we stop working and enter into His Day of rest (trusting in Him) and thanking Him for His provision and our freedom. We're saying that we trust Him to provide for us, both in the physical realm and in the spiritual, and this is truly freeing. When believers, or traditional Jews, work on the Sabbath they are saying in effect, 'I cannot trust You to provide for my needs, so I must work to do so.'

As we walk in the knowledge of Shabat, we see a concrete picture of not having to work for our salvation. God commands us to rest, both physically and spiritually, and the Sabbath day is a concrete place to walk that understanding out, and to grow in trust of Messiah Yeshua. All Christians believe in Jesus, but if they can't trust Him for provision today, what does that say about their level of trust for salvation tomorrow (on Judgement Day)? The Sabbath offers us, among many other things, an opportunity to show ourselves that we truly trust in God for life today and eternity tomorrow, and that we have been freed from the Kingdom of Satan.

³⁸ See [The Tithe in Ancient Israel](#).

Lord of the Sabbath

(Mt. 12:8; Mk. 2:28; Lk. 6:5)

While the Pharisees were still reeling from His claim to deity (greater than the Temple), Yeshua launches a second salvo into their theological grid-work by saying that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. Can you imagine what THAT sounded like in the ears of the Pharisees?! They knew exactly what Yeshua was saying. They thought He was usurping Yahveh's position! Only Yahveh, the God of Israel, was Lord of the Sabbath! But here was a human being saying that he was God!

In the Tanach (Old Testament), it's mentioned a number of times that the Sabbath is Yahveh's.³⁹ In the Tanach, Yahveh is Lord, but the New Testament declares that Yeshua is Lord. Yeshua was saying that day that He was the Son of God and that He had the same divine authority that His Father had. This meant that He, as Lord of the Sabbath, could interpret what constituted work that was forbidden on Shabat and what work was allowable.

If it weren't for Yeshua's thousands of healings and miracles, the Pharisees would have tossed His claims aside by saying that He was a lunatic. The power of Yeshua's personality, words and deeds negated that. They had to take a stand either for Him or against Him. They chose to defiantly stand against Him, declaring that He healed by the power of Satan. It was not long after this meeting that they accused Him of such (Mt. 12:22-32).

In declaring that He was Lord of the Sabbath, Yeshua was again declaring He deity. As Lord, He had authority and wisdom to interpret Scripture correctly. He is the Son of David and is actually greater than His father David (2nd Sam. 7:8-17; Mt. 22:42). He is King of Israel. He is God the Son (Jn. 8:58; 11:25, etc.) and the Son of God (Ps. 2:2, 6-7).

When King David gave his throne to his son, Solomon, he became King of Israel, but obviously, Solomon was not David. Yahveh, the King of Israel, the Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 23:1; Ezk. 34:12), has given way to His Son, Yeshua, to be King of Israel (Ps. 2:2, 6-7), the Good Shepherd (Ezk. 34:23; Zech. 13:7; Jn. 10:2, 11, 14) and Lord of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8; Mk. 2:28; Lk. 6:5). This Son is exactly like His Father (Heb. 1:1-5). The two verses on Shabat have nothing to do with destroying, nullifying or throwing out the 7th day Sabbath. The Sabbath is a verbal reflection of Him and His character. This incident helps us to see more fully, the glory that our God has given to His Sabbath day.

Conclusion

It was an extraordinary confrontation that day. The Scripture examples and revelations that Yeshua offered were incredibly perfect. He countered the Pharisaic accusation of sinning on Shabat, not by denying it or fencing with the Pharisees, but by bringing up two powerful examples from the Tanach that proved that His followers had to be guiltless, and that, in Pharisaic eyes.

The first one spoke of David and his men breaking the commandment not to eat the Bread of the Presence, and that quite possibly on a Shabat. The Pharisees didn't quite know why David was guiltless, but they taught it as such. That's one reason Yeshua brought it up. He knew the Pharisees thought David and his men were guiltless because of their need to eat, but David spoke of being on a royal mission from the king. That was the reason the High Priest suggested the holy Bread, but had David and his men been de-

³⁹ Ex. 16:23, 25; 20:10; 35:2; Lev. 23:3; Dt. 5:14, etc.

filed? Given the assurance that they hadn't been, David received the Bread. Obviously, the primary consideration wasn't compassion. If the High Priest had heard that the men had known women within the three days previous (Ex. 19:7-15), he wouldn't have given David the holy bread. In other words, if compassion would have been enough for the High Priest to break the Law of God by offering David the holy Bread, which should have only been eaten by the priests, it certainly should have been enough to override the men's ceremonial defilement, but it wouldn't have been, and therefore, compassion wasn't the reason the High Priest gave the holy Bread to David.

Only because the men were consecrated (by their being on a royal mission) and not defiled, could they receive the consecrated Bread and eat something that was lawfully only reserved for the priests. Messiah, David's greater Son, was also on a royal mission and His men should certainly have been allowed to pick, rub and eat common, everyday grain on Shabat, even under Pharisaic law.

The second illustration given by the Master had the priests in the Temple offering twice as much national sacrifice on the Sabbath, but obviously were guiltless because Yahveh had commanded it. Again, though, the Pharisees acknowledged this, but were at a complete loss as to how to understand how the priests could be guiltless. They had failed to see that the reason was because the sacrifices glorified Yahveh by picturing both Yahveh's redemption of Israel (past and future) and what was required of Israel (complete devotion).

Yeshua was glorifying His Father by what He was doing, with His followers serving Him, as the priests served or ministered to God in the Temple on the Sabbath day. The disciples were Yeshua's helpers, ministering to the people as Yeshua directed them ('tell the crowd to sit down' for the feeding of the thousands, going into the Samaritan village to buy food for Him, etc.). In a very real sense, the disciples were ministering unto God, similar to how the Temple priests ministered to God. If the priests could do twice as much manual labor on the Sabbath, profaning the Sabbath, but not being held guilty, surely the disciples could 'work' (according to the Pharisees) by picking, rubbing and eating the grain.

Yeshua also declared Himself greater than the Temple and thereby revealed His deity and the Father within. This built upon His previous illustration of the priests working in the Temple, and completed the illustration of the Temple priests allegedly breaking the Sabbath in the service of God, as the disciples were doing.

Yeshua also rebuked the Pharisees for not desiring the heart of the Scriptures—*hesed*. If only they had known that, they wouldn't have wrongly judged the disciples. One didn't need to be an expert in the Law of Moses to know that God's forgiving-loving-kindness was the heart of the Law. Yet the Pharisees prided themselves on being experts. In their pride they had made something sin that God would not call sin.

The disciples were hungry and it wasn't a sin to pick, rub and eat the grain. Yeshua continued to reprimand them, telling them that the Sabbath was made for Man, and that Man was not to be shackled to the Sabbath. Anyone who says that the Sabbath 'is too hard to keep' makes Yahveh, who made the Sabbath and gave it to His Beloved, Israel, a hard task master, no different than the ones Israel had in Egypt, or the Pharisees that Yeshua faced that day.

Finally, Yeshua revealed again that He was deity. In declaring that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, He directly aligned and equated Himself with His Father. The Pharisees knew exactly what Yeshua was saying. There's no doubt that in this confrontation, Yeshua blasted the Pharisees out of the water. He spoke to them on terms that they had to accept, even if they hadn't understood the biblical reasons behind the illustrations and I'm sure He left several of His own disciples with their mouths open, too.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Revised on June 30, 2019.