

Matthew 12:1-8

Introduction.

1. Read Matthew 12:1-8.

MAT 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.

MAT 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

MAT 12:3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; MAT 12:4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?

MAT 12:5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?

MAT 12:6 "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here.

MAT 12:7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

MAT 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

- a. This narrative is also recorded by Mark and Luke. (Mk. 2:23-28; Lk. 6:1-5).
 - b. In this lesson we will follow Matthew's account and occasionally look at Mark's and Luke's account.
2. This passage poses some problems that need our consideration.

- a. We will take a look at these problems.
- b. We will do this by asking a series of questions and studying what the Bible has to say about them.

Question 1 - Did Jesus and His disciples sin by exceeding the Sabbath day journey on the Sabbath?

1. A Sabbath day journey was about 1/2 mile. (Acts 1:12).

ACT 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

- A Sabbath day journey was often defined as 2000 cubits, that is, 1000 yards.
- A thousands yards is technically .57 hundreds of a mile.
- It seems to be based on Numbers 35:4.
- In coming out of Egypt, no part of the camp was more than 2000 cubits from the tabernacle. (Josh. 3:4).

- a. This was a law that was a matter of oral tradition.
 - b. It was not a part of the Mosaic law.
2. The Pharisees who held to this tradition did not raise a question about this law.
 3. They did not charge Jesus and His disciples of going beyond a Sabbath day journey.
 4. It is not known how far they traveled on that day.

Question 2 - Did Jesus' disciples pluck and eat ears of corn?

1. The KJV uses the words "through the corn" and "pluck the ears of corn."
 - a. The Greek "stachus" [**stah** koos] means "an ear of grain." (Matt. 12:1; Mk. 2:23; Lk.6:1)
 - b. "Corn" is an improbable interpretation.
 - c. This question is important because there is no evidence "corn" was grown in Palestine.
 - d. Some charge Matthew made a mistake, but no error was made by the inspired penman.
2. The Greek word "sporimos" [**spah** ree mahs] translated "corn" in the KJV is a generic word "grain."
 - a. The RSV has "grainfields" and "pluck heads of grain." See also ASV
 - b. It is probable that the grain here was barley or wheat. McCord translates "to pick and eat heads of wheat."
 - c. Such grains they could get out of the husks easily by rubbing the ears in their hands as they walked through the field.
 - d. The grain ripened in Palestine in late spring - likely in April near the time of the Passover.

Question 3 - Did Jesus' disciples sin by eating someone else's grain?

1. The answer is "no."
2. The Mosaic law permitted the eating of another's grain when going through a field as long as they did not put the sickle to the grain. (Deut. 23:25).

DEU 23:25 "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain."

3. The Pharisees did not criticize the eating of someone else's grain. (Matt. 12:1, 2).

MAT 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat.

MAT 12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

4. Their objection was based on what could be done on the Sabbath Day.
5. They charged the disciples of Jesus violated the prohibition against working on the Sabbath - not with the crime of eating someone else's grain.

Question 4 - Did Jesus' disciples violate the Sabbath by eating the grain?

1. Again the answer is "no."

- a. Luke's account sheds some light on what they considered unlawful. (Lk. 6:1,2).

LUK 6:1 Now it came about that on a certain Sabbath He was passing through some grainfields; and His disciples were picking and eating the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

LUK 6:2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

- b. The disciples were rubbing their hands together and were separating the kernel from the husk.
- c. The Pharisees argued the small amount of labor involved in plucking the grain and rubbing out the grain was a violation of the law.
- d. This was considered reaping and threshing which according to Jewish tradition was wrong. (See Shabbath 7:2; bShabbath 73b).

2. The law did condemn doing manual labor on the Sabbath. (Exod.20:10;35:2,3;Lev. 23:3; Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 5:14).

3. The law did not forbid doing any work on the Sabbath.

- a. It did not forbid necessary work.

- 1) The Jews circumcised on the Sabbath if the 8th day occurred on the Sabbath.
- 2) Most held it was right to save a valuable animal on the Sabbath. (Matt. 12:11).
- 3) The Jews would defend themselves if attacked on that day.

- b. It did not forbid doing good on the Sabbath. (Matt. 12:9-14).

MAT 12:9 And departing from there, He went into their synagogue.

MAT 12:10 And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"-- in order that they might accuse Him.

MAT 12:11 And He said to them, "What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out?"

MAT 12:12 "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

MAT 12:13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.

MAT 12:14 But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

4. Jesus said they were "guiltless." (Matt. 12:7). See Matthew 12:5 in regard to the priests who were "guiltless" or

"innocent" of wrongdoing by performing their religious duties on the Sabbath.

MAT 12:5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent?"

Question 5 - Did David sin by eating the shew bread?

1. Jesus said David when he was hungry entered the house of God (the tabernacle) and ate the shewbread was not lawful for him to eat. (1 Sam. 21:1-7).

a. "House of God" includes the courts of the tabernacle, as in Psalm 1.

b. Jesus did not condone what David did.

2. He said it was "unlawful," and it was "only for the priests." (Matt. 12:4).

MAT 12:4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?

3. Ahimelech (Gr. Abiathar) the high priest at Nob, merely required that David and his men (who were not priests) be in a state of ritual cleanliness before they ate the bread.

Question 6 - Why did Jesus bring up the example of David?

1. The Pharisees excused the unlawful thing David did because he was hungry. We do not know how they explained or rationalized this exception.

2. The Pharisees condemned Jesus' disciples for doing what they considered unlawful though the disciples were hungry.

3. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 12:7 and said "I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

a. Sacrifice is important, but mercy is more important.

b. The point Jesus was making was they should have mercy upon the hungry disciples.

c. The Pharisees were lacking in mercy. (Matt. 23:23).

MAT 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

d. The disciples should have been pitied for their hunger.

Question 7 - Did Jesus teach the priests sinned by doing their duties on the Sabbath?

1. The Sabbath was a busy day for the priests.

a. They burned incense, changed the shewbread, and offered a double burnt offering.

- b. This work was not considered by the law and by the Pharisees as a transgression against the law.
2. They did not violate the Sabbath because what they did was in obedience to God's word. (Lev. 24:5-9; Num. 28:9,10).

Question 8 - Why did Jesus bring up the example of the priests working on the Sabbath?

1. The Sabbath law against work was not absolute.
2. Religious work was an exception to the Sabbath rule.
3. It was not wrong to do good on the Sabbath or to save the life of a man or animal on that day.

Question 9 - What is meant by the words "one greater than the temple is here?" RSV

1. The oldest Greek texts have "something greater than the temple is here." See also NASB.
 - a. The adjective is neuter in the best manuscripts.
 - b. Some less attested texts have the masculine adjective and the greater one Jesus Himself.
 - c. Some believe it refers to Jesus even though it is neuter and this is possible. (Lk. 1:35;1 Jn. 1:1).

LUK 1:35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. Lit. "also the thing being born holy will be called Son of God."

1JO 1:1 **What** was from the beginning, **what** we have heard, **what** we have seen with our eyes, **what** we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life— "what" is neuter.

2. The Greek text has "meizon" [**may** zahn] and likely refers to the authority of Jesus or perhaps to Jesus and His authority.
3. This language is used later in this chapter. (Matt. 12:41,42).

MAT 12:41 "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, **something greater than Jonah is here.**

MAT 12:42 "The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, **something greater than Solomon is here.**

Question 10- Did Jesus teach it was right to sin if mercy was at stake?

1. The answer is "no."
2. Jesus did not condone sinful conduct.
 - a. He clearly stated David did what was unlawful. (Matt. 12:4).
 - b. The priests appeared to be doing wrong, but they were only doing what God's word commanded.

3. The disciples were also doing what was permitted by the law. (Deut. 23:25).
4. Jesus said "you would not have condemned the innocent."(Matt. 12:7).
 - a. They had mercy on David who was guilty of sin.
 - b. They had no mercy on the disciples who had not sinned.

Question 11 - Was Jesus teaching it is right to sin under some circumstances?

1. Some answer "yes" to this question, but this is not what Jesus was teaching.
 - a. He was teaching a lesson on mercy.
 - b. God's children are to be merciful. (Matt. 5:7; Jas. 2:13).
2. Mercy is not, however, an excuse to sin and violate God's word.

Question 12 - What is the meaning of the words "For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day?" Matt. 12:8; Lk. 12:5.

1. It does not mean Jesus could disregard the Sabbath law and do as He pleased.
2. Jesus was asserting His authority over the Sabbath.
3. He, not the Pharisees, could rule on the proper observance of the day.
4. The Sabbath law did not demand that one go hungry or suffer on the Sabbath.

Question 13 - Are we under the Sabbath law today?

1. No. (Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 10:9, 10 8:1-11; Rom. 7:9).
2. Though we are not under the Sabbath law, there is a principle taught here.
 - a. Our duties to God do not become an excuse for not showing mercy.
 - b. We are required to assemble to worship God (Heb. 10:25), but what is a mother to do if her child is sick on Sunday.
 - c. What are we to do if we pass a wreck on our way to worship service?
3. God requires that we do our duties to Him, but our duties include showing mercy.

Question 14 - Was the Sabbath intended for the welfare of man?

1. The answer is "yes."
 - a. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." (Mk.2:27).
 - b. "The Sabbath came into being for mankind, not mankind for the Sabbath." Rieu

2. The law was not given to all mankind, but to the Jews. (Deut. 5:3,4, 15).

DEU 5:3 "The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.

DEU 5:4 "The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire,

DEU 5:15 'And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

a. The law of Moses was given to the Jews.

b. The Sabbath was a memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

c. We have no record of any man observing the Sabbath in the book of Genesis.

d. It was first observed by the Jews in the wilderness (Exod. 16:22-30), and soon thereafter was given to them as a law. (Exod. 20:8-10).

3. The Sabbath was a great blessing!

a. Man and beast must have some much needed rest.

b. The law required all (both man and beast) to rest on the Sabbath.

c. The Sabbath gave the Jew a special day to spend more time worshiping God and drawing nearer to Him.

Conclusion.

1. All of God's laws are intended for the good of man.

2. God is a good and gracious God, and He only wants the best for man.

3. Finite man must not question the wisdom of the infinite God of heaven.

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