

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 12 (PART 1)

In this chapter, we will see Jesus interacting with the scribes and Pharisees who at this point become the main antagonists to Jesus and his ministry. There will be conversation on the sabbath, the law, where Jesus' power and authority comes from and the evidence of God's work in a person's life (among other things).

Q - Who/What Are Pharisees? What are some things that inspired the Pharisees to form?

Matthew 12:1-8 - Picking Grain On The Sabbath

Matthew 12:9-15 - Healing On The Sabbath

What is the sabbath? What is the purpose of the sabbath? What is the sabbath *not*?

Deuteronomy 5:1-15 (Sabbath Command: 5:12-15)

Over time, the rabbis developed what would be known as “fence laws”, commands that would help a person not even get close to breaking the actual command of God. Many of these laws were collected in the “Mishnah” which is a collection of the most renowned rabbi's traditions and interpretations.

Here's an example of a fence law. If the law says “don't step in that hole”, if you construct a fence 10 feet away from the hole, and put a sign up that says “don't go near the fence” - this ensures you won't go near the hole. This can be a good thing. However, over time the Pharisees elevated fence law to the same place as the *actual* law from God & someone would be rebuked/condemned, not for stepping in the hole, but by stepping near the fence!

Here is a list of things forbidden on the sabbath from Mishnah Shabbat 7:2:

The primary labors [*melakhah* - work forbidden on Shabbat] are forty less one:

1. Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking.
2. Shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying [knotting] and untying, sewing two stitches, and tearing in order to sew two stitches.
3. Capturing a deer, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it, curing its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, and erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure].
4. Building, pulling down, extinguishing, kindling, striking with a hammer, and carrying out from one domain to another. These are the forty primary labors less one. (Source: jtsa.edu/torah/mishnah-shabbat-72-1)

Examples Of Additional Rabbinical Fence Laws Relating To The Sabbath:

- You could not spit on the Sabbath because it would disturb the dirt and you would be guilty of plowing.
- You could not swat a fly on the Sabbath because you would be guilty of hunting.
- A woman could not look at her reflection because she might see a gray hair and pluck it out, which would be doing work.

Q - What did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of? - How did Jesus respond to their accusations?

Here is a sample of what the Old Testament actually said on these matters:

Regarding Eating Grain:

Deut. 23:24-25 - "When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket. 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.

Regarding David & His Men Eating The Bread (Full story in 1 Samuel 21)

1 Samuel 21:1-6 (NLT) - David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest....3 Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have." 4 "We don't have any regular bread," the priest replied. "But there is the holy bread, which you can have if your young men have not slept with any women recently." 5 "Don't worry," David replied. "I never allow my men to be with women when they are on a campaign. And since they stay clean even on ordinary trips, how much more on this one!" 6 Since there was no other food available, the priest gave him the holy bread-- the Bread of the Presence that was placed before the LORD in the Tabernacle. It had just been replaced that day with fresh bread.

Care for neighbor (or enemy's) animal:

Exodus 23:4-5 - "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. 5 "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.

Deut. 22:1-4 - "You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. 2 "If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 "Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect them. 4 "You shall not see your countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.

We have few things we can take away from this section:

1 - People are more important than things. God cares about people's hearts and compassion more than he cares about rigid adherence to his commands. This doesn't mean one should ignore the commands of God, but often human attempts at religion miss the forest for the trees. Jesus is speaking against this and quotes the Old Testament to make his point (**Hosea 6:6**). The need for David and his men was more important that day than the consecrated bread staying with the priest. The need for the disciples to eat that day was more important than keeping the fence laws. The need for an un-withered hand was greater than helping an animal stuck in a ditch.

2 - Jesus and his teachings are greater than Moses and his teachings. Though Jesus doesn't contradict Moses or the Prophets, his teachings and his ministry are superior to Moses and the prophets. If Jesus says something can or cannot happen on the sabbath - that's the way it goes. (Remember, the term "son of man" is a prophetic and messianic title from Daniel 7 which describes the son of man receiving the kingdom and authority from the Ancient of Days.). As followers of Jesus, we start with and build off of what Jesus the Messiah has said.

3 - For us, we need to be careful to not elevate tradition or good advice over God's truth and God's word. Even well meaning traditions must yield to what God has actually commanded. Too often religious people think that their traditions are what make them right with God. Too often people are hurt by initially well-meaning Christians who judge not based on the Scripture, but their "fence law" tradition. We have to keep compassion and mercy on the forefront of our heart and lives and let love for God and others be the lens through which we live.