

OPPOSITION TO GOD'S KINGDOM

How can this man forgive sins? Why does he eat with outcasts? Why don't his disciples fast? Why are they doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath? We're hardly through a chapter and half of the Gospel and the Scribes and Pharisees had fired these questions at Jesus. By chapter 3 they want him dead – and they send for the big guns, the Jerusalem Scribes, for back-up. These judge that Jesus is in league with Satan himself. Why was it that Jesus met with so much opposition? Some possible answers...

1. Jesus is the Light ...

Light guides but it also shows up blemishes and faults.

2. My ways are not your ways ...

God's intentions are far from those of humans. For many, Jesus did not meet their human expectations of the Messiah.

3. Old & New ...

Jesus was establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. This would require a new way of thinking, believing and living which would not mix with the old.

4. Handle with care ...

Jews were extremely sensitive and protective of their religious heritage. They had suffered much to preserve it.

Jesus and the Law

There were over 600 laws in the Torah for Jews to keep. The law of God was a delight for the devout Jew – and keeping every part of it was a strict obligation. In the Torah, some commands seem to make sense, whilst others do not. For example, there are commands

- not to murder, to make a stranger welcome, not to steal, not to slander, and so on.
- not to trim a beard, not to boil a young goat in its mother's milk, not to eat certain foods, and so on.

The latter commands make sense when you realise they were to prevent the Israelites copying the pagan Canaanites. They were to drive home the fact that

Israel was a people set apart, a holy people. They were like the seed coat protected the precious kernel. Once the seed has germinated, the seed coat shrivels away.

Christians believe that Jesus had come to *fulfil the Law*. What would this mean? It would mean that

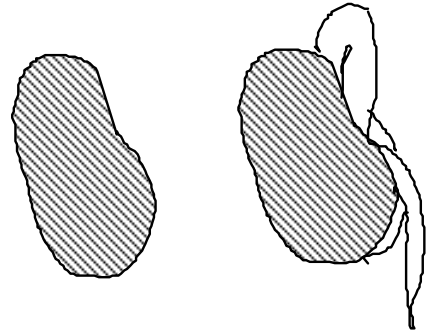
- the 'heart of the law' concerning love, justice and mercy was destined to blossom out.
- other laws, which had served their purpose, were destined to disappear.

Jesus clashed with the religious authorities over certain religious laws, chiefly laws:

- governing the Jewish Sabbath,
- about ritual diet and hygiene.

seed coat vital
before germination

after germination
seed coat rots away



Sabbath conflicts

The idea of keeping the Sabbath day was very important for the Jews. They recalled the Creation accounts in the Book of Genesis, which speaks of God working for six days and then resting on the seventh. The Jewish Sabbath Day was from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The Scribes and Pharisees developed very strict rules about what activities were allowed and what were not.

Jesus came into conflict with them because he put people and personal needs before the detailed laws. Also, with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, old ways of being righteous would be fulfilled by a new way: the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Some of the questions discussed among the scribes are in the box beside.

Ask your local Scribe

'Spitting on the ground on the Sabbath.' Is it work since it turns the earth in the same way as ploughing?

What about an egg laid on the Sabbath? Has work been done? Should such an egg be eaten?

Should a woman look in the mirror on the Sabbath? She might see a grey hair, be tempted to pluck it and thus do work.

Picking corn and chewing it on the Sabbath – isn't that harvesting a crop, in other words, work?

Questions about the Sabbath 2:23-8

'The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' (2:27-8)

While out for a walk, the disciples picked ears of corn. This could be considered 'reaping and threshing' according to a strict interpretation of Sabbath laws.

Jesus gave an example to get across that Sabbath laws were meant to help humans live more fully for God, not to block real human need. Further, Jesus claimed lordship over the Sabbath, that its laws did not bind him. The listening Pharisees must have found this a shocking statement – small wonder that opposition deepened as Jesus' reputation spread.



Man with the withered hand 3:1-6

'What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save someone's life or to destroy it?' (3:4)

Although the law allowed someone to be healed on the Sabbath if his or her life was in danger, this was not the case here. Jesus challenges the Pharisees to consider what the purpose of the Sabbath laws. Each of them would help out an animal in difficulty on the Sabbath – why not help a person?

St Mark is the only evangelist to mention the *anger* of Jesus as he meets with such hard hearts. Plans were hatched to kill Jesus. His crime? Healing on the Sabbath.

Sunday - Christian Sabbath

Christians have continued to observe a day of rest, but have changed the day to Sunday. This is to honour the day Jesus rose from the dead. By trying to keep Sunday as a special day in their lives, Christians are firstly honouring the day Jesus rose from the dead. Every Sunday is a 'mini-Easter'. They are also fulfilling the requirements of the Ten Commandments to keep the Sabbath holy. In addition, they are recognising the importance of keeping at least one day special to foster love within families and friendships.

Activities

1 Choosing the correct endings, answer the following in a sentence each.

When exactly is the Jewish Sabbath?

- A Friday eve to Saturday eve
- B Saturday - 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- C Sunday

When is the Christian Sabbath?

- A Saturday
- B Sunday
- C Friday

The Jewish Sabbath reminds us of

- A the day God rested after Creation.
- B the day God began Creation.
- C the day David was made King.

The Christian Sabbath reminds us of

- A the day Jesus died.
- B the day of the Last Supper.
- C the day of the Resurrection.

The Pharisees planned to kill Jesus after

- A the healing of the paralysed man.
- C the feeding of the five thousand.
- D the cure of a man with a withered hand.

What is a synagogue?

- A a smaller version of the Temple
- B a place for preaching and prayer
- C a type of house

Why did the Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples' behaviour?

- A they were eating on the Sabbath
- B they were picking corn on the Sabbath
- C they were talking on the Sabbath

2 Some of the following statements are false. Rewrite them so as to make them true.

Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed about the need to keep the Sabbath holy.

One of the Ten Commandments is about keeping the Sabbath holy.

According to Mark, Jesus called himself 'Lord/Master of the Sabbath'.

It was against Sabbath law to bury the dead on the Sabbath.

Christians consider their Sabbath to be like any working day.

In the time of the early Christians, Sunday was a working day.

Strict Jews of Jesus' day would consider healing a kind of work.

It was against Sabbath law to water and feed animals on the Sabbath.

Jesus taught that human beings were made to keep the Sabbath.

The whole idea of the Jewish Sabbath was to set aside a time for God and each other.

3 Suppose you were witness to the two healings mentioned.

- a) How would you react and expect others to react?
- b) Suppose someone in the crowd shouted at the man, 'You can't do that, it's against the rules', what would you think?
- c) Jesus suffered this treatment for healing on the Sabbath. In fact, the Pharisees planned to kill him. What does this tell you about the opposition Jesus faced?

Imagine this. You are in a crowd. You see a man in the middle. People want his attention. He calls to someone you know, a friend of yours. Your friend's arm is severely deformed. The man tells your friend to stretch out this arm. Your friend tries. As he does so, the arm becomes completely whole and healthv.

4 "To keep Sunday special all shops should be shut on Sundays." Evaluate this.

for the statement

- Clearly following the commandments
- A public witness to the importance of the resurrection of Jesus
- Reminds all people of the need to pray
- Gives everyone the chance to have at least one day for rest
- gives time for family life
- ...

against the statement

- Not everybody believes in Christ. Why should Christians dictate what all people do?
- We do not want to get to the extremes of the Pharisees. People can organise their time to worship God and shop if required.
- Some people have to work on Sundays
- Perhaps Easter Sunday should be special, but not every Sunday
- ...