

9 when arguing at the Jerusalem Council that converted Gentiles should not be compelled to be circumcised:

“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon

whom My name is called, saith the Lord, Who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (Acts 15:13-19).

The implication from this is that David did not compel the Philistines he converted to be circumcised.

David pondered the Word. Throughout the day his thoughts were on his God, and his actions followed those thoughts. He was a man after God’s own heart, and he sets a powerful example for us to follow.

In the grain fields on the sabbath

2. Hungry disciples

Malcolm Window

In the second article of this three-part study we consider why the disciples were hungry and the provision made by the Lord Jesus for their spiritual needs.

IN MATTHEW 12:1,2 we read, “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day”. These verses prompt a few questions:

- Why were the disciples hungry?
- Why were they out in the field on the sabbath and not in the synagogue?
- Why were the Pharisees watching them?
- Why did they find fault?
- What was the background to this incident?

We look at the first three of these questions in this article, leaving the last two to be answered in the [final article](#).

Note that verse 1 says that Jesus’ disciples (plural) were hungry. Not one, not some or a few, but, it would appear, all. In verse 2 the Pharisees say, “thy disciples do that which is not lawful”. The words imply that all the disciples were hungry

and ate, although it seems that Christ did not. What are the circumstances that would cause all of Jesus’ disciples to become so hungry that they would be prepared to eat corn in this way, and thus incur the wrath of the watching Pharisees?

The timing of the incident

Matthew’s Gospel gives us some idea of the timing by virtue of the fact that the incident took place during the grain harvest. Luke’s Gospel gives us some extra information, which allows us to pinpoint the exact day: “And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands” (6:1).

Regarding “the second sabbath after the first”, literally the Greek word *deuteroprōtos* means ‘second-first’, so it is ‘the second-first sabbath’. It is an interesting expression. As this is the only time in which the word *deuteroprōtos* occurs in Scripture there is some debate as to what it means. It suggests a numbering system, that there were some sabbath days which were numbered in some way to differentiate them from each other, or to count

out a specified period of time. And so we ask, Was there any time in Israel's calendar when sabbath days were numbered or counted out?

In Leviticus 23:15,16 it is stated that the offering of the wave loaves on the Feast of Pentecost was to be fifty days after the offering of the wave sheaf in the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD".

Notice how this period of time was counted. It was marked off by seven sabbaths, from the morrow after the sabbath till the morrow after the seventh sabbath. We therefore have the morrow after the first, the morrow after the second, the morrow after the third, and so on. When Luke says Jesus went through the fields on the second-first sabbath it is suggested he is referring to the second day after the first sabbath, or the morrow after the first week of counting was made. The day when Jesus and his disciples went through the fields of corn was just over one week from Passover.

This explanation fits in perfectly with the facts as they are given, for the grain harvest was not eaten until the first wave sheaf was presented in the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:10-14), whereas the harvest ended around the time of Pentecost (Deut. 16:9). This shows that the disciples must have eaten some time during this seven-week window.

Why were the disciples hungry?

Having established the time, we are in a better position to answer the original question, Why were the disciples hungry? Our answer is found in the events recorded in John 5, which are generally accepted to have occurred at the time of Passover (v. 1) and thus one week before the incident we are considering. In this chapter Jesus heals on the sabbath a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. In verses 15 and 16 we see the Jews' reaction to this healing: "The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day". In verse 18 this reaction is further intensified: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but

said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God".

It is possible to read these words without really appreciating their force and significance. But when we consider the words of 7:1, written of a time some eighteen months later, we realise just how real the danger was to Jesus, and how strong was the Jews' hatred of him: "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because *the Jews sought to kill him*". And verse 23 shows that reference was still being made to this event, despite the long passage of time: "are ye *angry at me*, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?".

If the Jews' rage was such that they were still seeking Christ's death eighteen months after the healing of the lame man on the sabbath, how would it have been for our Lord and his disciples one week after the event? In John 5:43 Jesus said, "I am come in my Father's name, and *ye receive me not*". We interpret this to mean that the Jews did not receive Christ as the Messiah, that they would not accept his doctrine, the things he said, his authority.

No doubt this interpretation is at least partly true. But in the context of the situation, with the Jews actively seeking Jesus' death, the words "ye receive me not" have another application. We can imagine the Jews using their power and influence to bar Jesus and his disciples from the public eating houses in and around Jerusalem: "You serve him food, and we will see to it that your business will suffer". Individuals would have been intimidated, and pressure brought to bear, so that people did not take him into their homes. "If you fellowship this man, then you have no fellowship with us", they would say. The threat of excommunication would hang heavily on the mind of any charitably minded individual. Such measures are entirely consistent with their stated aim of killing Jesus.

Jesus' disciples were hungry because wherever they went they found the door of hospitality shut firmly in their faces. Their loyalty to Jesus brought oppression and suffering. And so, after one week in the vicinity of Jerusalem, it is not hard to see why the disciples were driven to pick and eat from the heads of grain on the sabbath.

A life of hardship

The grain the disciples were eating was almost certainly barley, as the barley harvest began two days after Passover, just one week earlier. The wheat harvest, on the other hand, did not begin

until some four or five weeks later. Barley was usually fed to stock or the poorer members of the community. You would only eat it unprocessed if you were very hungry. It is not the sort of food you would eat by choice.

We can imagine, then, that Jesus and his disciples were out in the field to escape the authorities, to find some respite; somewhere they could find some time alone. Young's Literal Translation renders Mark 2:23, "his disciples began to *make a way*, plucking the ears". In other words, they were out of the city, off the beaten track, forging a new path through the grain to a place not frequented by others. Yet even here there were Pharisees watching, on the lookout for a mistake, a sign of weakness, an opportunity to pounce, ensuring no one gave them food or sustenance.

This context opens up a whole new dimension to Christ's words in Matthew 11:28-30, which introduce this incident: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light".

These words might appear a little incongruous in the light of their context. Christ offered rest and relief, yet the disciples experienced hardship and deprivation. The burdens the disciples bore were directly attributable to their association with Jesus. "I will give you rest", said Jesus, and yet the very next thing recorded is the harassment and hunger their loyalty brought. The lightness of their burden, the rest that was promised, had to be accepted as a matter of faith.

What was the rest that our Lord promised his disciples? Was it a life of ease or luxury? Was it a life free from the struggle and turmoil that seems so frequently to plague mankind? It was none of these things. The life of a disciple is not one of languid repose. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Lk. 9:23,24).

Present suffering and future glory

Paul speaks in a similar vein: "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: *if we suffer*, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:11,12). In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul shows that, if we are to be true followers of Christ, then suffering

in this life is unavoidable. He writes in absolute terms: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall *suffer persecution*". Again, in Romans 8:13-18 we read: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God . . . and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; *if so be that we suffer with him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us".

We are left in no uncertain terms about what life in the Truth should be like. No rest or holiday, but a warfare where we fight against the flesh, discipline our spirit, and earnestly contend for the glory and rest which is to come. We need to ask ourselves where our loyalties lie. Are we loyal to God or do we serve self? Do we suffer hunger for the Truth's sake, or are our lusts gratified at every turn?

The disciples were persecuted yet remained loyal. Why were they hungry? Because they each made a conscious decision to be with Christ. Had they left him, their present hardship would have been immediately alleviated. But they could see the big picture. They understood that the things of this life are temporary, transitory, passing away, whereas Jesus had the words of eternal life, and so they looked for the greater rest to come.

The light burden, the rest, needs to be considered in the context of the big picture. At the judgement seat, with the Kingdom age before them, and with the exhilarating experience of immortality, the faithful are going to be able to look back on their time of probation and say, "Yes, Jesus was right. His burden was light, and his yoke was easy. The sufferings of the past simply do not compare with the glory we experience now! What did we do to deserve all this? It was nothing, it was easy, it was not hard at all".

But how heavy will be the burden of the rejected as they grind their teeth in sheer frustration at their own stupidity! "What a heavy burden I have borne! What a high price I have paid! I have given up the joy, the energy, the boundless enthusiasm of immortality, eternal fellowship with the Father, for a few brief years of cynicism and self-gratification. What a fool I have been! How overrated were the pleasures of this world, and how heavily does my foolishness weigh down upon me!".

[\(To be concluded\)](#)