

located on higher ground to the north, where the wealthy priestly families lived.

This palace is thought to be that of Queen Helena of Adiabene, a territory beyond the Tigris River in Mesopotamia. She was in fact the queen mother of that country, which was outside of Roman control, and her son Izates was the king. Along with

her son she became a convert to Judaism, and it is known that she built a large palace for herself near the temple. Josephus records that in the famine foretold by Agabus (Acts 11:27-30) she provided large quantities of food for the people of Judea, and her son contributed a large sum of money to the leaders of the city for famine relief. It

is likely, however, that those who had embraced the gospel would not have benefited from this largesse, hence the need for Gentile converts to provide help, as recorded in the above passage.

**Source:** "Uncovered ruins thought to be palace of Queen Helena", Etgar Lefkovits, *International Jerusalem Post*, date not known.

# In the grain fields on the sabbath

## 1. Christ's challenge to the authorities of his day

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*This three-part study draws lessons from the occasion when the disciples of Jesus ate of the corn as they walked through the fields on the sabbath, and were criticised by the Pharisees for breaking the Law. In this first article we consider the challenge that the teaching and actions of Jesus presented to the acknowledged leaders of his day.*

**I**T IS EASY, with the benefit of hindsight and the guidance of the written word, to condemn the Pharisees and decry their lack of empathy, their rigid and ritualistic way of interpreting the Law, the way in which they lost sight of the basic foundation principles that make up God's laws, and instead became dominated by outward externals. But where would we be if we were living in the time of Christ? Whose arguments would we find appealing? Whose authority would we accept?

### **Christ and the authorities**

On the one hand there were the Pharisees, people who were widely respected. They were learned, they had the years of experience behind them. They were, by and large, looked up to as the spiritual leaders of the people. They had tradition on their side. They did things the way their grandfathers had done, and their fathers before them. They were the faithful custodians of the national religion.

On the other hand there were Christ and his disciples. They were comparatively young. They did not respect the traditions of the fathers, but spoke out against them, denouncing them as hypocrisy. Christ was different from anyone they had ever heard before. His words sounded right, they had a ring of truth about them, yet the scribes, chief priests and Pharisees all hated him and denounced him. The leaders of the Jewish universities, the teachers at the rabbinical schools, the members of the Sanhedrin—all the academics, all the great minds of their day—had rejected him.

"This man Jesus is dangerous", they said, and pointed to the way he so flagrantly rejected the teachings of the law. "Look at the sabbath", they said, "a day in which God specifically commanded us not to work, and yet here is Jesus using this day to perform some of the greatest works you could ever imagine. On so many occasions, in so many ways, he shows contempt for what our law teaches. He touches lepers, the dead, things unclean, and yet never offers for his uncleanness. He appropriates to himself the role of priest, and forgives sins, and yet he is not even of the tribe of Levi! He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners, and has no concept of separateness".

“What about his miracles?”, the inquiring mind would ask. Surely they prove that Jesus was sent from God. Who else could have the power to perform such miracles as these? It was here that the scribe would shake his head wisely, and direct his listener to the words of Deuteronomy 13:1-5, saying, “Yes, we admit he has done miracles, but God has said that such would be the case. He warned of false prophets to come, who will, if possible, deceive the very elect. We *know* that this man is not of God because he breaks the law in such an open, blatant, unrepentant way. He will only lead you astray”.

### **How would we have reacted?**

Against this backdrop, where would we have stood? Would we have trusted the advice of the scribes and Pharisees? Would we have been swayed by their social standing, their long prayers, their open fasting? These were men whose very being seemed to be synonymous with religion. Or would we have taken the time to listen to the words of Jesus, with his rag-tag group of Galilean followers? Would we have sat down and compared his words with the words of Scripture to see if his declarations were true? Would we have afforded ourselves the time and effort to make an unbiased assessment of truth? Or would we have run off to the very men whom Jesus had denounced to see what answers they had? When we put it this way, the issues do not seem to be quite so clear cut.

Where would I have stood? Would I have been swayed by the arguments of the scribes and Pharisees, or would I have identified myself with Jesus and his disciples? And what would I have done when discipleship cost me my family, my position in the synagogue; when it meant suffering and hardship? When service to God meant I had to leave them all behind, would I still have the courage to follow my convictions? These are hard questions.

It is necessary, however, to put ourselves in the picture and see the real issues at stake in life. Are we following Christ or are we not? What are the

factors that influence our decisions in life? Do we do what we do just because our family does? Do we place greater store in the reputation of men than we do in a prayerful consideration of God’s Word? Do we take the important decisions of life to God in prayer? Do we believe that He will give us guidance, and show us the right way? Or do we effectively neglect the reality of God, and rely only on the opinions of others? Where do we look for answers: to God or to men? Are we concerned about following truth, or do we just go with the flow and do what everyone else does?

The vast majority of Israel chanted for the death of the Messiah, when they had been first-hand witnesses to his three-and-a-half-year ministry. We need to be humble and honest with ourselves, and with our God, to ensure we do not make the same mistake.

It is with this rather sobering introduction that we want to examine the incidents of Luke 6, in particular the Pharisees’ criticism of the disciples for eating the ripened corn as they walked through the fields. We do not want to approach this study merely as a Pharisee-bagging exercise, where we point the finger at those in the wrong, ridicule their stupidity and in so doing feel comfortable in the fact that we would never be guilty of their sin. We need to remember that the Pharisees were guided by the same human impulses that drive each and every one of us, and, but for the grace of God, our attitudes and decisions might be no different.

What we want to do is to examine the disciples’ actions from Christ’s perspective. What did he see that the Pharisees missed? Why did Jesus judge his disciples as being innocent, when the Pharisees saw otherwise? What is the standard upon which we are judged? What is it that makes something right or wrong in the eyes of our God? As we explore this incident, examine the background, elicit the motive, we want to try to come to a better understanding of what the mind of Christ is, and what it means to be a disciple.

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

### **Australia agent**

Brother Hubert has served Australia readers and the *Testimony* itself very well for over twenty years, but due to advancing years would like to hand over to someone else. I recall receiving an email from a reader some years ago offering to take over should the need arise, but this email was unfortunately lost in a computer crash. If the brother concerned reads this and is still interested would he please contact me. Expressions of interest from anyone else would of course be welcome also, either to me or to our Australia Editor Brother Geoff Henstock, who is aware of the need.