

# Why did Jesus heal on the Sabbath?

The gospels record several occasions when Jesus performed a healing on the Sabbath day. In most of those instances, the healing was followed by a confrontation with the religious leaders (Mark 3:1–6, Luke 6:6–10; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 5:1–18). In another passage, Luke 4:38–41, Jesus heals after teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, but no confrontation is recorded, as the miracle was performed in a private home. Jesus knew the Pharisees' rules regarding the Sabbath, so why did He choose to heal on that day?

It is important to note that Jesus was not violating the law of God when He healed on the Sabbath. He was surely acting against the Pharisaical *interpretation* of the law and against their particular rules. But the Holy One of God, who came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17), did not violate the law. The basic reason that Jesus healed on the Sabbath was that people needed His help. Need knows no calendar.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath in order to reveal the hypocrisy of the Pharisees' religion. In three passages where Jesus' healing led to a confrontation, Jesus references how the Jews "worked" on the Sabbath by taking care of their animals, and that work was sanctioned by the Pharisees. In an agrarian society, animal care was a major part of a normal day. Jesus points out their willingness to work on the Sabbath to help an animal: "Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall

and lead it out to give it water?” ([Luke 13:15](#)), and He rightly calls out their hypocrisy for denying aid to “a daughter of Abraham” (verse 16). If your religious rules allow for helping animals on the Sabbath, then it should definitely allow for helping people.

When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, He was also challenging the religious leaders with the question of doing good or evil on the Sabbath: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” ([Mark 3:4](#)). The leaders remained silent and refused to answer. His healing gave them the answer. Doing good and saving life is lawful, even on the Sabbath. Using the Sabbath rule to do evil or to kill is an ungodly perversion of the law.

Let’s take a look at the law in question. The [Torah](#) is the law proper. But the Pharisees also added their traditions to the law God had given. The religious leaders’ traditions that they combined with the biblical law became as important to them as God’s actual Word. Jesus stood against such additions to the law, rebuking the teachers of the law for “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” ([Mark 7:7, ESV](#)).

The Pharisees’ Sabbath restrictions forbade the following activities: writing, erasing, and tearing; conducting business transactions; shopping; cooking, baking, or kindling a fire; gardening; doing laundry; carrying anything for more than six feet in a public area; moving anything with your hand, even indirectly (with a broom): a broken bowl, flowers in a vase, candles on a table, raw food, a rock, a button that has fallen off (you could move things with your elbow or your breath, but not with your hand). And this is just a partial list.

Compare the complexity and micromanaging of the Pharisees’ rules with the original rule in God’s Word: “Remember the

Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8–11). It was simply manmade traditions that defined Jesus’ healing as “work.” So when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, He was challenging the Pharisees’ beliefs as being from man and not from God.

Another reason Jesus healed on the Sabbath was to remind people of why God instituted the Sabbath day of rest. The Sabbath was meant to benefit people as much as to glorify God: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath helped people recuperate (mentally and physically) after a week of work and redirect their focus from the daily routine to God. Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath was therefore very much compatible with God’s purpose for the Sabbath.

Confronted with Jesus’ undeniable power to heal and restore, the religious leaders passed up their chance to reflect on the possibility that they were wrong. Instead, they dug in their heels and doubled down on their untenable position. Their stubbornness is a good reminder for us of our need to examine our beliefs and ensure they are biblical and in line with the Word of God.