

Luke 6:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This incident ignites controversy over Sabbath observance. The phrase **the second sabbath after the first** (ἐν σαββάτῳ δευτεροπρώτῳ, en sabbatō deuteroprōtō) uses a compound adjective deuteroprōtos (δευτερόπρωτος, literally "second-first") appearing only here in Scripture. Scholars debate its meaning—possibly the first Sabbath after Passover's second day, or the second Sabbath in a counting sequence. Regardless, it establishes clear Sabbath context.

Jesus and disciples **went through the corn fields** (διαπορεύεσθαι διὰ τῶν σπορίμων, diaporeuesthai dia tōn sporimōn). Sporimoi (σπόριμοι) refers to grain fields—wheat or barley, not American corn. The verb diaporeuomai (διαπορεύομαι) means to go through, travel across—they were walking through standing grain. **His disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands** (ἔτιλλον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ τοὺς στάχυας καὶ ἤσθιον, ψώχοντες ταῖς χερσίν, etillon hoi mathētai autou tous stachyas kai ēsthiōn, psōchontes tais chersin). Three verbs describe the action: tillō (τίλλω, "plucked"), esthiō (έσθιω, "ate"), and psōchō (ψώχω, "rubbing")—they picked grain heads, rubbed them in their hands to remove chaff, and ate the kernels.

This was perfectly legal under Mosaic law: Deuteronomy 23:25 allowed travelers

to eat grain by hand from others' fields, though harvesting with a sickle was forbidden. The controversy wasn't theft but Sabbath violation. Pharisaic tradition classified plucking grain as 'reaping' and rubbing it as 'threshing'—both forbidden Sabbath work under their 39 categories of prohibited labor. Jesus's disciples violated Pharisaic tradition, not Torah itself. This sets up Jesus's authoritative reinterpretation of Sabbath law.

Historical Context

Sabbath observance was central to Jewish identity, codified in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11) and reinforced throughout Torah. By the first century, Pharisaic scribes had developed extensive oral tradition defining Sabbath work—the Mishnah later enumerated 39 primary categories of forbidden labor, with countless subcategories. 'Reaping' and 'threshing' were among the 39, making the disciples' actions technically violate tradition though not Torah.

This incident occurred during grain harvest season (April-May), when disciples would be hungry from travel and ministry. That they resorted to eating raw grain suggests poverty—they had no provisions. Jewish hospitality normally provided for traveling teachers and disciples, but Jesus's itinerant ministry often meant going hungry (Matthew 8:20). The Pharisees' criticism reveals their priority: ritual purity over human need, tradition over mercy.

The debate reflects broader conflict between Jesus and Pharisees over authority. Who determines God's will—scribal tradition or Scripture itself? Jesus consistently prioritized Scripture over tradition (Mark 7:1-13), mercy over sacrifice (Matthew 9:13, 12:7), and human welfare over ritual (Mark 2:27). This Sabbath controversy became a major flashpoint leading to Pharisaic plots to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Early Christians faced similar conflicts over Sabbath and Jewish law, eventually recognizing Sunday (the Lord's Day, Revelation 1:10) as the Christian worship day, celebrating resurrection rather than creation rest.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the conflict between Torah and Pharisaic tradition illustrate the danger of adding human rules to God's commands?
2. What does Jesus's defense of the disciples teach about the relationship between law-keeping and meeting human needs?
3. How should Christians today navigate the tension between religious traditions and biblical principles?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν σαββάτῳ δευτεροπρώτῳ διαπορεύεσθαι
it came to pass And on sabbath after the first went
G1096 G1161 G1722 G4521 G1207 G1279

αὐτοῦ διὰ τῶν σπορίμων καὶ ἔτιλλον οἱ μαθηταὶ¹
his through the corn fields and plucked oi disciples
G846 G1223 G3588 G4702 G2532 G5089 G3588 G3101

αὐτοῦ τοὺς στάχυας καὶ ἤσθιον ψώχοντες ταῖς
his G3588 the ears of corn and did eat rubbing G3588
G846 G4719 G2532 G2068 G5597

χερσὶν
them in their hands
G5495

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 23:25 (Parallel theme): When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.