

Matthew 12:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Analysis

Jesus declares 'For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day'—a stunning claim to divine authority. The title 'Son of man' (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου/*ho huios tou anthrōpou*) comes from Daniel 7:13-14, referring to the messianic figure who receives everlasting dominion. By claiming lordship over the sabbath, Jesus asserts authority over an institution God Himself established (Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 20:8-11). This isn't abolishing the sabbath but declaring His right to interpret and fulfill it. The logic flows from verse 6: 'in this place is one greater than the temple.' If Jesus is greater than the temple—the location of God's special presence—then He possesses divine prerogatives. Reformed theology sees this demonstrating Christ's deity: only God can claim lordship over His own commandments. It also establishes that Jesus, not Pharisaic tradition, determines the sabbath's proper observance. The sabbath was made for humanity's benefit (Mark 2:27), and Christ liberates it from legalistic bondage while directing it toward its true purpose: rest in Him (Hebrews 4:9-10).

Historical Context

This confrontation occurred when Pharisees criticized Jesus's disciples for plucking grain on the sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2), which Pharisaic tradition classified as 'reaping'—one of 39 categories of prohibited sabbath work. Jesus responded by citing David eating showbread (1 Samuel 21:1-6), priests' sabbath temple work (Numbers 28:9-10), and prophetic priorities (Hosea 6:6). The Pharisees had created an elaborate system of sabbath restrictions far beyond biblical commandments—the Mishnah tractate Shabbat alone contains 24 chapters

of regulations. By first-century Judaism, sabbath observance had become the primary identity marker distinguishing Jews from Gentiles. Jesus's claim to sabbath lordship was therefore revolutionary: He positioned Himself above Moses, above tradition, above religious authorities. His claim would contribute to charges at His trial. For early Christians, this verse justified Sunday worship (Resurrection day) and freedom from sabbatarian legalism while maintaining the principle of sabbath rest fulfilled in Christ.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's claim to be 'Lord of the sabbath' demonstrate His deity, and what implications does this have for how we approach Him?
2. In what ways do modern Christians sometimes fall into sabbatarian legalism similar to the Pharisees?
3. How do you practice sabbath rest in a way that points to ultimate rest in Christ rather than mere rule-keeping?

Interlinear Text

κύριος	γάρ	ἐστιν	καί	τοῦ	σαββάτου	ὁ	υἱὸς	τοῦ
Lord	For	is	even	G3588	of the sabbath day	G3588	the Son	G3588
G2962	G1063	G2076	G2532		G4521		G5207	
ἀνθρώπου								
of man								
G444								

Additional Cross-References

Mark 2:28 (References Lord): Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Luke 6:5 (References Lord): And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Matthew 9:6 (Parallel theme): But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

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