

Luke 13:10-17

“Yeshua Healing a Woman on the Sabbath”

“And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Yeshua saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and *began* glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Yeshua had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, ‘There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.’ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him*? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’ As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.”

Luke 13:10 Yeshua’s healing of a woman bent over on the Sabbath is a scene unique to the Gospel of Luke. Previously in Luke 6:1-6, 6-11, was witnessed a demonstration of Yeshua’s Lordship of the Sabbath, but in this healing on *Shabbat*, readers encounter what the venue of the weekly Sabbath indeed means for Yeshua. “Now Yeshua was teaching in one of the synagogues on *Shabbat*” (TLV), serves as an indication that as Yeshua was teaching in the synagogue service, He noticed the woman with the ailment. Yeshua had to stop what He was doing, and then focus on the problem at hand. There was a moment of interruption in the normal teaching activity, which then apparently gave way to a more significant time of direction via a Divine healing.

Luke 13:11 It is narrated, “And, behold, there was a woman having a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent together and was not able to be completely erect” (LITV). The particular condition is *astheneia* (ἀσθένεια), “a state of debilitating illness, *sickness, disease*” or “*incapacity for someth. or experience of limitation, weakness*” (BDAG).¹ That there was a spiritual cause of some kind for this condition is clear enough from *pneuma echousa astheneias* (πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας), “having~a spirit of illness” (Brown and Comfort).² There are other illnesses witnessed in the Gospels, with either demonic possession or oppression as a cause, including mental disturbances (John 10:20) or unprovoked and violent actions (Luke 8:26-29). Because of the actions which follow in this woman being healed of her malady, it is often thought that the cause of this condition was not demonic possession, but instead demonic oppression.³ I. Howard Marshall describes how there was an evil origin of the *astheneia*, but that the healing was not manifested in the form of a demonic deliverance:

“Certainly the illness is attributed ultimately to the evil power of Satan, but the cure is not described as an exorcism, but as a release from a fairly literal ‘bond’. Perhaps we should not try to give too definite a meaning to πνεῦμα [*pneuma*] and think of it simply as an evil influence. Medically the illness has been diagnosed as *spondylitis ankylopoietica* (a fusion of the spinal bones) or as *skoliosis hysterica...*, i.e., a hysterical rather than an organic paralysis.”⁴

Joel Green addresses some of the further dynamics present in the woman’s illness, not only regarding its origin within an evil world ruled by the Devil *and* how the Kingdom of God will demonstrate its power by her healing—but also how once healed, any kind of social ostracism she had once experienced should come to a halt:

“[T]his woman’s illness has a physiological expression but is rooted in a cosmological disorder. Because Luke has presented Jesus as the divine agent of salvation in whose ministry the kingdom of God is made present and in whose ministry the domain of Satan is rolled back, Luke’s depiction of the woman’s illness prepares us for a redemptive encounter of startling proportions...[A] further aspect of this woman’s illness is worth mentioning. Crippled for eighteen years, she may well have

¹ BDAG, 142.

² Brown and Comfort, 264.

³ Ellis, 186

⁴ Marshall, *Luke*, 557.

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come to regard as ordinary experience the social ostracism meted out to her in the village where she lived. In fact, the verb Luke uses to describe her symptom, 'bent over,' portrays her physical appearance and serves as a metaphor for her ignominious social position."⁵

Luke 13:12-13 Recognizing that the woman's bent over condition is more medical than spiritual, is seen by how after noticing her, Yeshua decreed, "Woman, you are released from your weakness" (v. 12, Moffat New Testament). Here, the verb *apoluō* (ἀπολύω) would obviously relate "to release from a painful condition, free" (BDAG).⁶ "Then He laid His hands on her, and instantly she was restored and began to glorify God" (v. 13, HCSB). Within Lukan materials, the laying on of hands often involves not just healing, but also a conference of blessing (Acts 6:6; 8:17-18; 9:12, 17; 13:3; 19:6; 28:8). A response of praise is the proper response to the actions of Yeshua, something witnessed throughout Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:20; 5:25-26; 7:16; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47).

Luke 13:14 In His healing of the woman bent over, was Yeshua the Messiah actually violating the Sabbath? The *archisunagōgos* (ἀρχισυνάγωγος)⁷ or *rosh ha'knesset* (רֹאשׁ הַכְּנֶסֶת; Delitzsch) certainly thought so:

"But the president of the synagogue, indignant that Yeshua had healed on *Shabbat*, spoke up and said to the congregation, 'There are six days in the week for working; so come during those days to be healed, not on *Shabbat!*'" (CJB).

The rebuke of Yeshua healing the woman was appropriated directly from the Fourth Commandment, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exodus 20:9; also Deuteronomy 5:13). Immediately following in vs. 15-17 will be some statements regarding Yeshua's approach to the institution of the Sabbath. The real problem, as properly observed by Craig A. Evans, is that Divine power has manifested itself in healing a woman—and that such a miracle is **completely lost** on this synagogue official:

"Herein lies the irony of the whole episode. Jesus has healed a woman who has suffered for many years. But does the synagogue ruler rejoice and praise God, as the woman did? No. He has found something wrong with Jesus' 'religion.' The ruler is utterly blind to the significance of what has happened. The gracious and mighty act of God was completely lost on him. That a fellow Israelite has been **set free** from a horrible oppression seems to him to be of little consequence in comparison to a violation of one or more of the oral laws and stipulations set up to protect the sanctity of the Sabbath."⁸

Luke 13:15 Yeshua's response to His critics who have witnessed the healing is to the point: "However, the Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Each one of you on *Shabbat*—don't you unloose your ox or your donkey from the stall and lead him off to drink?'" (CJB). Green, making light of the Fourth Commandment from Deuteronomy 5:13-14, astutely observes,

"Because the ruler of the synagogue had alluded to Deut 5:13, Jesus returns to that deuteronomic co-text in order to remind his debate partner that the prohibition to work extends not only to human beings but also to oxen and donkeys (Deut 5:14). If this is so, why then are people allowed to untie their animals, and why are these animals allowed to walk to the trough for water? (It is not because the need is life-threatening!)"⁹

Yeshua has introduced a lesser to greater argument: loosening or untying animals wanting to drink is widely practiced on *Shabbat*, so why is there an objection with loosening a woman who suffered from an eighteen-year bond?

Within the record of the Mishnah, tying and untying knots were among the major work prohibitions regulated on the Sabbath (m.*Shabbat* 7:2). At the same time, though, there are

⁵ Green, pp 521-522.

The actual verb for "bent over" is *sugkruptō* (συγκρίπτω).

⁶ BDAG, 117.

⁷ "the ruler of a synagogue" (LS, 122).

⁸ Evans, pp 207-208.

⁹ Green, 524.

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discussions present about tying and untying animals on the Sabbath (m.*Shabbat* 5:1-4), particularly with disputes present about the types of knots that could be tied on the Sabbath. It is witnessed for sure that animals could be tied up on the Sabbath, so that they would not go astray:

“On account of [tying] what sorts of knots [on the Sabbath] are [people] liable? A camel driver’s knot, and a sailor’s knot. And just as one is liable for tying them, so he is liable for untying them. R. Meir says, ‘Any knot which he can untie with one hand—they are not liable on its account [for tying it].’ You have knots on account of which they are not liable, like a camel driver’s knot and a sailor’s knot...R. Eliezer b. Jacob says, ‘They tie a knot before a domestic beast so that it will not go forth’” (m.*Shabbat* 15:1-2).¹⁰

In the estimation of Marshall, “there were variations of opinion among the Pharisees,”¹¹ as it regarded tying and untying animals on the Sabbath. Leon Morris affirms that within much of the Jewish community, care for animals was a priority, even with some attention needing to be paid on the Sabbath:

“The rabbis were greatly concerned that animals be treated well. On the sabbath, animals could be led out by a chain or the like as long as nothing was carried (*Shabbath* 5:1). Water could be drawn for them and poured into a trough, though a man must not hold a bucket for the animal to drink from (*Erubin* 20b, 21a). If animals may be cared for in such ways, much more may a daughter of Abraham be set free from Satan’s bondage on the sabbath.”¹²

Care for animals, representing the more important care for one’s fellow human beings, is something which Yeshua will discuss later in Luke 14:5: “And He said to them, ‘Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?’”

While many Messianic readers of this scene will conclude that if within the time of Yeshua, it was widely permissible for animals to be untied so they could be watered—and hence human beings could be “untied” or “loosened” from the bonds which ailed them—this is not the only vantage point witnessed. A much more conservative view present among a number of people in the Messianic movement, which would affirm that on some level Yeshua the Messiah was culpable for at least a quasi-violation of the Sabbath, is represented by D. Thomas Lancaster in his 2013 book *The Sabbath Breaker*. For Luke 13:10-17 he broadly concludes,

“If the Master believed that healing did not constitute a violation of the Sabbath, he would have said so at that point. Instead, his ensuing argument assumed that healing does violate the Sabbath, but he argued that *chesed* (mercy) for a human being should take precedence over Sabbath prohibitions....

“Jewish Sabbath-laws prohibit the tying and untying of certain types of knots on the Sabbath day. Both tying and untying can constitute *melachah*, prohibited forms of work on the Sabbath. The sages, however, specifically permitted the tying and untying of knots for the purpose of leashing animals and drawing water...

“Jesus took it for granted that tying and untying knots violates the Sabbath. He also took it for granted that an exception must be made for the sake of watering one’s animal. In this case, the owner of the animal violates the Sabbath prohibitions merely for the sake of alleviating the animal’s discomfort—so that it does not suffer from thirst. Immediate threat to life is not necessarily in view. Surely the animal’s thirst could be slated after the Sabbath’s conclusion.

“Having established that the accepted *halachah* (legal interpretation) permitted violating some Sabbath prohibitions in order to prevent suffering to animals, Jesus reasoned from the light to the heavy (*kal vachomer*, קל והחמיר): How much more so then is it permissible to violate the Sabbath in order to alleviate the suffering of a human being?

“Most Gospel readers probably would not consider the mere tying or untying of a knot to constitute *melachah* [מלאכה], a form of work forbidden on the Sabbath, but apparently Jesus did. If he considered tying or untying as actually permissible on the Sabbath, his argument loses all its force.”¹³

The type of knot tied to constrain or release an animal on *Shabbat* was a simple, single loop (m.*Shabbat* 15:1-2). But in tying or untying an animal on *Shabbat*, the intention of the owner would

¹⁰ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 197-198.

¹¹ Marshall, *Luke*, 559.

¹² Morris, *Luke*, 245.

¹³ Lancaster, *Sabbath Breaker*, pp 55-56.

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be in paying attention to the condition and well-being of his property, and allowing his animals the opportunity to rest and be refreshed as the Sabbath commandment specifies (Deuteronomy 5:14). *Human beings are much more valuable than animals*, though. The issue in v. 15 may indeed assume some legitimacy to the traditional *halachah* regarding tying and untying knots—an affirmation that the issue is not how the institution of the Sabbath is all at fault for the woman having a malady. But the issue in v. 15 also may assume a more permissive, or even liberal stance, in tying and untying knots, and from that basis be used to emphasize the supreme value of human beings in need of being released of their infirmities.

Luke 13:16 Yeshua directs one of His detractors how if animals can be unbound on the Sabbath, with the definite intention of them being watered and refreshed, **then by all means people can be unbound from their ailments and pain**: “So this one, a daughter of Abraham incapacitated by satan for eighteen years, shouldn’t she be set free from this imprisonment on *Yom Shabbat*?” (TLV). As John Nolland excellently states, “The woman’s restriction is compared to that of an animal that is not free to get the drinking water that it needs. The animal is not left tethered for *one day*; the woman has been restricted in this way for *eighteen years!*”¹⁴ Yeshua is One with the definite task of releasing those who are captive (4:18; cf. Isaiah 61:1).

Yeshua exclaims to His opponents in the synagogue, as the Phillips New Testament puts it, “This woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom you all know Satan has kept bound for eighteen years surely she should be released from such bonds on the Sabbath day!” The seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת)—far from being a time when being rested and refreshed and abstaining from labor eschews acts of goodness, mercy, and restoration of well-being—is **precisely the appropriate venue when God’s own appeal to His justice and intervention so that all maladies may be removed!** That the Sabbath was to be a time when God’s people focused on both His Instruction and His justice was emphasized by the Jewish philosopher Philo:

“Accordingly, on the seventh day there are spread before the people in every city innumerable lessons of prudence, and temperance, and courage, and justice, and all other virtues; during the giving of which the common people sit down, keeping silence and pricking up their ears, with all possible attention, from their thirst for wholesome instruction; but some of those who are very learned explain to them what is of great importance and use, lessons by which the whole of their lives may be improved. And there are, as we may say, two most especially important heads of all the innumerable particular lessons and doctrines; the regulating of one’s conduct towards God by the rules of piety and holiness, and of one’s conduct towards men by the rules of humanity and justice; each of which is subdivided into a great number of subordinate ideas, all praiseworthy” (*Special Laws* 2.62-63).¹⁵

Evans properly asks, “What better day is there than the Sabbath to demonstrate God’s power over Satan?”¹⁶ Marshall similarly asserts that “it was necessary (ἔδει [*edei*]) for her to be released immediately, even though it was the Sabbath, perhaps indeed all the more fitting on the Sabbath; in this way the Sabbath is positive hallowed.”¹⁷ And, Robert H. Stein is quite keen to direct how “Jesus, who already had displayed his authority over the Sabbath in 6:1-5, now clarified the Sabbath’s meaning...Jesus had come to do God’s bidding (4:18-19). Doing God’s will should not/cannot be limited to certain days. If it is right to perform God’s will on the first six days of the week, how much more should God’s will, mercy, and love be performed on the Sabbath.”¹⁸

That the greater dignity of human beings, in contrast to animals (13:15), is a factor in play here, is something present by Yeshua emphasizing the healed woman as a “daughter of Abraham,” *thugatera Abraam* (θυγατέρα Ἀβραάμ) or *bat-Avraham* (בת־אֲבִרָהָם; Delitzsch). The Jewish mother of

¹⁴ John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:34*, Vol 35b (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 724.

¹⁵ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 574.

¹⁶ Evans, 208.

¹⁷ Marshall, *Luke*, 559.

¹⁸ Stein, 374.

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the seven martyrs, during the Maccabean crisis, was titled as a daughter of Abraham (4 Maccabees 15:28; 18:20). It can and should be recognized that there is not only “a lesser to greater” argument made in comparison of human beings to animals; there is also a certain elevation of the position of women or females in this healing present as well. As is widely true of the Gospel of Luke,¹⁹ disenfranchised groups within the First Century Mediterranean Jewish and Greco-Roman world—such as the infirm, the poor, and women—have a definite place within his writing. R. Alan Culpepper properly draws out that for this scene,

“[S]everal features of the story suggest that the woman’s condition may be seen as indicative of her diminished status as a woman; her condition is attributed to ‘a spirit of weakness,’ this weakness has left her bent over and unable to stand straight, Jesus addresses her with the general term ‘Woman,’ and Jesus answers the leader of the synagogue by contrasting what one would do for an animal with what he has done for the woman. In the end, Jesus confers on the woman a status of dignity: She is a ‘daughter of Abraham’ (see 16:22-31; 19:9). Jesus is in the process of releasing the captive, freeing the oppressed (4:18), and raising up children to Abraham (3:8). As in other scenes in Luke in which Jesus responds to the needs of a woman, this scene points to a new status for women in the kingdom of God.”²⁰

Luke 13:17 A widely positive scene is depicted by the closing narration, “By these words, Yeshua put to shame the people who opposed him; but the rest of the crowd were happy about all the wonderful things that were taking place through him” (CJB). To some degree, one can detect an echo of Isaiah 45:16: “They will be put to shame and even humiliated, all of them; the manufacturers of idols will go away together in humiliation.” Perhaps more important, is how various examiners have drawn attention to Exodus 34:10 as playing some role in what is stated here:

“Then God said, ‘Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.’”

Yeshua the Messiah healed a woman on the Sabbath, He emphasized the value of human beings released from their ailments on the Sabbath, and many people saw the Divine workings and rejoiced over them on the Sabbath. Many would rightfully affirm that the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is to be a time of entering into the presence of the Divine, and witnessing the significant action of God. Many would concur that *Shabbat* is the appropriate venue for the justice and healing of God to be present, and indeed that the healing of human beings from their physical maladies, is most appropriate *if not to be expected and anticipated*.

Luke 13:10-17 application That Yeshua the Messiah has a different approach to the intuition of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* in Luke 13:10-17—one different from at least one synagogue leader (v. 14)—is deduced enough from what has been narrated. Yeshua’s Sabbath is a time not just for teaching in the Instruction of the Lord, or rest and refreshment from the physical processes of the previous six days, **but one of release from the bonds and hurts of a world dominated by the Evil One** (v. 16). Yet, a critical question is raised: Is there at all an intention for Yeshua to abolish the institution of the Sabbath here? We need to evaluate what various commentators have stated.

Even with a number of liberal presuppositions, David L. Balch draws the conclusion, “In this controversy, Jesus is not criticizing or annulling the traditional sabbath but rather (re)interpreting

¹⁹ If necessary, consult the entry for the Gospel of Luke in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

²⁰ Culpepper, in *NIB*, 9:273.

One publication, as part of Messianic Apologetics’ Confronting Issues series, still in the early planning stages, is *Elevating Women in the Body of Messiah and an evaluation of gender related issues* by J.K. McKee.

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the function that holy day.”²¹ Noting the standard Mishnaic Jewish convention of only life-threatening maladies requiring attention the Sabbath (m.*Yoma* 8:6),²² Culpepper states, “Jesus directly opposed the rabbinic principle that healing on the sabbath was allowed only in critical cases, not for chronic conditions.”²³ Green, however, comes the closest to thinking that the institution of the seventh-day Sabbath was a barrier, of sorts, which separated God’s people from God’s purposes:

“The synagogue leader’s view led him to function as a barrier to the healing of this woman, and, thus, to represent the synagogue and Sabbath as entities segregating this needy woman from divine help. Jesus’ view led him to regard today, this day, even a Sabbath day, as the right time for the redemptive purpose of God to be realized. In the end...the fundamental issue at work in this scene is the divine legitimation of the character of Jesus’ mission—liberation and restoration for such poor persons as this woman of lowly status, through which activity he renders present the dominion of God in the present.”²⁴

Green does have to go on and clarify a few things:

“He [Jesus] regards his act of healing as an act of liberation from satanic bondage, as direct engagement in cosmic conflict, through which God’s eschatological purpose comes to fruition (see 11:20). If this breaks the boundaries of the practices of Judaism, this does not mean that the Scriptures are thereby nullified.”²⁵

This thought is at least widely compatible with the idea that Yeshua the Messiah did not challenge the Sabbath, as much as He challenged the Sabbath as it was often understood and applied in His day. Other Christian examiners are more keen to recognize how the issue in Luke 13:10-17 is Sabbath application seen in ancient Jewish tradition,²⁶ not the validity or relevance of the institution of the Sabbath. Today’s Messianic people would widely affirm that the synagogue leader (v. 14) was misguided, in failing to recognize the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* as the ideal time for all of the pains and injustices in a world dominated by the power of Satan to be overturned.

²¹ Balch, in *ECB*, 1134.

²² “Further did R. Mattiah b. Harash say, ‘Who who has a pain in his throat—they drop medicine into his mouth on the Sabbath, because it is a matter of doubt as to danger to life. And any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath.’ He upon whom a building fell down—it is a matter of doubt whether or not he is there, it is a matter of doubt whether [if he is there], he is alive or dead, it is a matter of doubt whether [if he is there and alive] he is a gentile or an Israelite—they clear away the ruin from above him. [If] they found him alive, they remove the [remaining] ruins from above him. But if they found him dead, they leave him be [until after the Sabbath]” (m.*Yoma* 8:6; Neusner, *Mishnah*, 278).

²³ Culpepper, in *NIB*, 9:274.

²⁴ Green, pp 524-525.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 525.

²⁶ Evans, 209.