

January 2014

Frank W. Nelte

## **JESUS CHRIST NEVER BROKE THE SABBATH**

Sometimes people reason that Jesus Christ Himself didn't actually keep the Sabbath during His earthly ministry. And to support this view they turn to John 5:18. Notice this verse.

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because **He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also** that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:18)

They will claim that right here the Apostle John acknowledged that Jesus Christ had indeed broken the Sabbath. But that is not true!

First let's consider the context for this verse, and then we'll examine this verse itself more closely.

There was a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years (John 5:5). Jesus Christ saw this man on the Sabbath (John 5:9) lying on a thin mat, about the size of our typical two-inch thick gym mats today, by a pool called Bethesda (John 5:2). Jesus Christ then said to this man "rise, take up your bed (i.e. this two-inch thick mat) and walk (i.e. go home)" (John 5:8).

**That is all Jesus Christ did in this incident: speak one short sentence!**

Apart from speaking one short sentence in about 5 seconds, Jesus Christ didn't do anything at all! The point is that here Jesus Christ didn't actually do any kind of work at all! No work of any kind was involved.

That is the first point to keep in mind here: that Jesus Christ Himself didn't actually do anything at all! So then the next point some people bring up is this: well, Jesus Christ Himself may not have done any work, but He instructed someone else to do some work. He instructed the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years to carry his bedroll on the Sabbath. So therefore Christ caused someone else to break the Sabbath.

That line of reasoning is also flawed.

For a start: on the Sabbath day the man was lying on a mat by the pool called Bethesda. **BUT HE HAD NOT SLEPT THERE FOR THE NIGHT!** Some of his friends or relatives had carried him there earlier that Sabbath morning. They obviously had also carried his thin bedroll for him to lie on. But that wasn't something the Pharisees had ever taken exception with. So they didn't object to several people carrying this paralyzed man and his bedroll from the house where the man lived to the pool **every Sabbath morning**; but it was a huge problem for them for that paralyzed man to stand up and to then carry his own bedroll back to his house.

This was nothing other than **staggering hypocrisy** on the part of the Pharisees ... to approve of other people carrying that man and his bedroll Sabbath morning after Sabbath morning, but to rise up in self-righteous indignation when the man actually carried his own bedroll back home, because he had been healed.

So we are dealing with blatant hypocrisy on the part of the Pharisees. So much for the context. Now let's examine verse 18.

## A DEVIOUS MISTRANSLATION

Let's look at this verse again.

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only **had broken** the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18)

The expression "He not only **had broken** the Sabbath" represents the translation of the Greek words "ou monon **eluen** to sabbaton". The Greek verb "eluen", translated "had broken", is the imperfect active indicative third person singular of the Greek verb "**luo**". So the Apostle John used the Greek verb "luo" to describe what Jesus Christ had done here.

Now let's consider our English verb "to break". This verb "to break" implies an action that will cause something to be separated into two or more smaller parts. We can break a plate or a glass or a jar into two or more pieces. We can break up a monopoly into two or more smaller organizations. We can break a stick into two or more pieces. But we cannot really "break" the Sabbath into two or more pieces by our actions. Nothing we do can "break" that 24-hour Sabbath period into smaller pieces, right?

So when we in English use the expression "to break the Sabbath" we really mean "**to transgress the Sabbath**" or "**to violate the Sabbath**". But we are not "breaking" it into smaller pieces. You follow?

So the English translation "He had broken the Sabbath" really means "**He had transgressed the Sabbath**". That is the implication of our English language translation.

No, I am not trying to split hairs! The point is that while in English we can use the word "break" to also mean "to transgress", in New Testament Greek there were completely different words for "to break" and "to transgress", with no overlap in meaning between these words.

The **NT Greek words** which really refer to "**breaking**" something include the following:

- rhexnumi = to break (e.g. bottles) into pieces;
- katagnumi = to destroy by breaking;
- klao = to break bread into pieces;
- klasis = the noun for to break bread into pieces;
- klasma = another noun for to break into fragments;
- thlao = to crush;
- sunthlao = to crush into pieces together; etc.

The point is this: It would not have been appropriate to use any of these verbs for "breaking" the Sabbath, because they all imply a literal breaking of something. In New Testament Greek nobody would have spoken about "breaking" the Sabbath, even though we today freely use that expression in English.

Alright, so if we can't use any of the Greek words that mean "to break" something, then let's look at the Greek words that mean "to transgress".

The **NT Greek words** which refer to "**transgressing**" include the following:

- parabaino = to step on something with disdain, i.e. to transgress;
- parabates = to transgress the law (e.g. Romans 2:27);
- parabasis = e.g. Adam's transgression mentioned in Romans 5:14;
- parerchomai = transgressing in the sense of passing by, Luke 15:29;
- anomos = transgressor in the sense of being without law, Mark 15:28; etc.

The point with all these words for us here is this: In John 5:18 the Apostle John did not use any word that means "to transgress"!

So when the Apostle John used the Greek verb "luo" in John 5:18, then he was not using a verb that either refers to "breaking" anything or a verb that refers to "transgressing" anything! New Testament Greek had very distinct words for expressing both the idea of breaking and the idea of transgressing, and John didn't use a word that conveys either of these two things.

Now let's examine the NT Greek verb "luo".

### **THE NT GREEK VERB "LUO"**

The regular verb "luo" means "**to loose**"! This Greek verb is used 43 times in the New Testament, and in six places in the KJV it is translated as "to break" or as "broken down".

To make clear beyond any doubt that "luo" never has the meaning of "to transgress a law of God", we'll look at how this word "luo" is used throughout the New Testament.

- 1) It is used to refer to **an animal being released** (i.e. "loosed") in: Matthew 21:2; Mark 11:2; Mark 11:4-5; Luke 13:15; Luke 19:30, 31, 33.
- 2) It is used to refer to **a shoe being "loosed"** in: Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27; Acts 7:33; Acts 13:25.
- 3) It is used to refer to the **burial robes** around Lazarus **being untied** (i.e. "loosed") in: John 11:44.
- 4) It is used to refer to **the tongue** of the dumb **being "loosed"** in: Mark 7:35.
- 5) It is used to refer to **a crippled woman being healed** by being freed (i.e. "loosed") from Satan's bond in: Luke 13:16.
- 6) It is used to refer to **being released from chains** or **from prison** in: Acts 22:30; Acts 24:26.
- 7) It is used to refer to a divorced person **being released** (i.e. "loosed") **from** a commitment to **the former spouse** in: 1 Corinthians 7:27.
- 8) It is used to refer to the apostles having **authority to release** (i.e. "to loose") **church members from unspecified obligations** or commitments in: Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18.
- 9) In regard to this last point, however, such "release from unspecified obligations" can never go against the Scriptures, because God has not given any church leaders authority to loose (i.e. "to break") the

Scriptures, as mentioned in: John 10:35. So **scriptural obligations cannot be loosed**.

10) It is used to refer to **Satan being released** (i.e. "loosed") for a short period in: Revelation 20:3; Revelation 20:7.

11) It is used to refer to **the 7 seals** of the book **being opened** (i.e. "loosed") in: Revelation 5:2; Revelation 5:5.

12) It is used to refer to **the 4 angels being released** (i.e. "loosed") to gather a huge army in: Revelation 9:14-15.

13) It is used to refer to **a religious congregation** after services **departing** (i.e. "broken up") in **different directions** to their respective homes in: Acts 13:43.

14) It is used to refer to **the back part of a ship** that had run aground in a storm **being "loosed from"** (i.e. "broken off") **the front part** of the ship in: Acts 27:41.

15) Peter used the verb "luo" three times in the sense of **solid matter "being loosed"** and thus "melting" or "dissolving" in: 2 Peter 3:10-12.

[COMMENT: In 2 Peter 3:10 the verb "shall melt" is the Greek verb "luo", meaning to be loosed from its former state; whereas the verb "shall melt" in 2 Peter 3:12 is the Greek verb "teko", which means "to make or to become a liquid". "Teko" is in fact the correct word for "to melt". So it wasn't really a good idea for the translators two verses earlier to also translate the verb "luo" as "to melt". "To melt" conveys basically the correct picture for verse 10, but it is in fact not an accurate translation of the actual Greek word "luo". The expression "shall be dissolved" in verses 11 and 12 are the other two places where "luo" is used by Peter.]

All the above uses of the word "luo" show us quite clearly that this word doesn't ever have anything to do with violating or transgressing (i.e. "breaking") the laws of God. It very clearly has to do with "making loose" some state or condition .

We've thus far looked at three of the places where in the KJV "luo" is translated as "breaking" (Acts 13:43; Acts 27:41; John 10:35). Let's now look at the other places where "luo" is rendered as "to break".

### **"LUO" AND "TO BREAK"**

Here are the remaining three verses that are involved:

Whosoever therefore **shall break** (luo) one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only **had broken** (luo) the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:18)

If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses **should not be broken** (luo); are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? (John 7:23)

Ignoring John 5:18 for the moment, let's ask a basic question regarding people "breaking" God's laws:

What is actually involved in these cases? Is it that someone tries to smash God's laws into tiny little pieces? Do the false teachers just try to shatter God's laws into numerous fragments? Just what is their approach towards trying to lead us in God's Church astray?

Here is the point:

The false teachers that are easy to identify are those who blatantly, bluntly and contemptuously try to destroy the validity of God's laws. Those who openly and with arrogant disdain "break" the laws of God are hardly likely to deceive us. We easily recognize their open hostility to the laws of God (see Romans 8:7). And they are not really a major threat to our understanding of the truth of God.

The real danger for God's people are not those who flagrantly "break" the laws of God. No, the real danger for God's people are those false teachers who "loose" the laws of God, meaning that they claim that they are not really doing away with God's laws; they are simply "loosening" some of the restraints that applied to Israel in Old Testament times. To promise liberty (see 2 Peter 2:19) from God's requirements is their way of "loosening" God's requirements for us human beings.

So in Matthew 5:19 Jesus Christ was speaking about people who would "loosen the requirements of God's laws", thereby disregarding God's actual instructions embodied in those laws. Can you understand why Jesus Christ used a word that means "to loose" in this statement?

Now let's look at John 7:23.

Christ referred to the fact that the Jews would circumcise a baby boy on the Sabbath, if the Sabbath happened to be the baby's eighth day of life. The Jews did this to comply with "the law of Moses". To have postponed the circumcision to the Sunday (i.e. to the ninth day) in order to keep the Sabbath free of such "work activities" would have amounted to "a loosening" of a part of the law of Moses, something which the Pharisees strongly opposed. So in John 7:23 Jesus Christ was saying:

"If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses **should not be loosed**; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?"

So in both of these places where "luo" has been translated as "to break" (i.e. Matthew 5:19 and John 7:23) the correct meaning really refers to "a loosening" of instructions: in Matthew 5:19 to any attempt to loosen God's instructions, and in John 7:23 to an attempt to avoid any loosening of the instructions of the law of Moses.

Now we are ready to examine John 5:18.

### **JOHN 5:18**

A correct translation of this verse reads as follows:

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only **had loosened** (luo) the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

The first point to understand here is **the perspective of this specific verse**. Many people, including the translators, assume that this statement represents the views of the Jews. But that is not correct.

We need to understand that in John 5:18 **the Apostle John was stating his own assessment** of what

was bugging the religious leaders amongst the Jews! This verse gives us his assessment, not theirs!

**The Jewish leaders would most emphatically never have said that Jesus Christ had "loosed" ("luo") the Sabbath!**

No, in their eyes Jesus Christ had "transgressed" ("parabaino") the Sabbath! And there is a huge difference between "luo" and "parabaino"!

Look at Matthew 15.

Why do thy disciples **transgress** ("**parabaino**") the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also **transgress** ("**parabaino**") the commandment of God by your tradition? (Matthew 15:2-3)

Here the scribes and Pharisees were speaking to Jesus Christ about mere non-biblical traditions. And the word "luo" is not used in this context; here they used the word "parabaino", because they viewed all non-compliance with their rules as "transgressions".

So if the Apostle John in John 5:18 had wanted to convey the assessment of the religious Jews, then John would have used the word "parabaino" and not the word "luo". The word "luo" would never have been sufficient to convey the feelings and the attitude of the Pharisees. For them Jesus Christ's actions were nothing short of "parabaino", transgression of the law. But "luo" correctly described John's own assessment of what Christ had done.

Keep in mind that in John 5:18 the Jews had an attitude of murder; they wanted to kill Jesus Christ. And "luo" is not strong enough to cause people to want to murder someone. Those who wanted to murder Jesus Christ were convinced that Christ was guilty of "parabaino"!

So we need to realize that John 5:18 gives us John's own assessment for why the religious leaders were upset. But even more so, this verse gives us John's own understanding of what Jesus Christ had actually done! John understood that **Jesus Christ had in fact "loosened" the perverse and utterly hypocritical pharisaical rules for the Sabbath!**

**Those pharisaical Sabbath rules are depraved and perverse because they in fact destroy God's intent for the Sabbath day! They are an enormous burden! And they are hypocritical because the Pharisees had worked out ways so that they themselves could get around the restrictions they were in fact imposing on other people. It was really a case of people enacting laws (or rules) and then promptly granting themselves exemptions from the very laws they were imposing on other people, very much like what politicians today like to do.**

John's understanding, revealed in John 5:18, was that Jesus Christ had "loosed" all of the rules the Pharisees had invented, including their rules for Sabbath-keeping. John's understanding was that Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 23:4 also applied to the perverse Sabbath rules the Pharisees had invented.

For **they bind heavy burdens** and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. (Matthew 23:4)

Burdens need to be "loosed", not "broken"!

John 5:18 refers to some of the burdens that Jesus Christ was "loosening", burdens that the Pharisees had imposed on the population at large. And that disregard for their Sabbath rules infuriated the

Pharisees.

So when you understand what John was really saying in John 5:18, then you should be able to see the devious perversity of the mistranslation in our English versions of the Bible.

Instead of highlighting the evil burdens the Pharisees had heaped upon the Sabbath, which Jesus Christ had "loosed", the mistranslation implies that Jesus Christ had done something wrong, that He had "broken" the Sabbath.

That insinuation is perverse! At no point did Jesus Christ ever "break" or even "loosen" any of God's laws. Hebrews 4:15 plainly states that Jesus Christ was "without sin".

Frank W Nelte