

# Did Ahimelech Inquire of the Eternal for David?

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

In our book titled *The Sabbath Test*, we state that the high priest Ahimelech inquired of God for David and that Christ, the God of the Old Covenant, gave him permission to eat the showbread. Our book states that the only reason we can do ordinary business on the Sabbath is protect life or property. The evidence comes from the fact that Christ likened the disciple's unique situation of picking grain on the Sabbath to the circumstances of David and his men when they were desperate for food (Mat. 12).

Because of the disciple's unique situation, some ministers teach that it is acceptable to dine out at a restaurant on the Sabbath when the individual is traveling. They think that the disciples walking through the grain fields and taking a few handfuls of grain justifies their tradition. They wrest the Scriptures and say that Doeg actually lied and the priest did NOT inquire of the Eternal for David. What is the truth? Did the priest inquire for David or not?

We understand the Scriptures to say that the priest did inquire of the Eternal, thereby getting permission from God to give David the showbread. The bread was not given to David as a result of the high priest making a decision on his own. The lesson for us is that, like this example of David, we also do not have the authority to decide to do something unlawful on our own. Consider Samuel's words where he first wrote of the account and omitted any statement of the priest inquiring of God. The prophet wrote:

Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why *are* you alone, and no one is with you?" So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed *my* young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give *me* five *loaves* of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found." And the priest answered David and said, "*There is* no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women." Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women *have been* kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and *the bread is* in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day." So the priest gave him holy *bread*; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* on the day when it was taken away. Now a certain man of the servants of Saul *was* there that day, detained before the LORD. And his name *was* Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who *belonged* to Saul (1 Samuel 21:1-7).

In the account above, there is no mention of the priest inquiring of God in order to get permission to give David the showbread. However, Doeg, a servant of Saul witnessed the

events, and when Saul caught up with the priests he explained these things to the king. The account is explained in the next chapter when Saul accosts those who helped David. Samuel records Saul to say:

All of you have conspired against me, and *there is* no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and *there is* not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as *it is* this day.” Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, “I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. **And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.**” So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father’s house, the priests who *were* in Nob. And they all came to the king. And Saul said, “Hear now, son of Ahitub!” He answered, “Here I am, my lord” (1 Samuel 22:8-12).

In this set of verses Doeg told Saul that the priest inquired of the Eternal for David. In those days, God had directed the priests to make an ephod. They wore a breast plate with 12 stones and the Urim and Thumin. When the high priest wore the breast plate, he could inquire of God and these unique stones would light up indicating God’s judgment on a matter (Exo. 28:29-30).

Did Ahimelech inquire of the Eternal for David in this manner or did Doeg lie about this? Some believe that the first account does not plainly state that the priest inquired and therefore this act never occurred. However, there are many cases in the Scriptures in which a second account clarifies what was not first stated.

A second point to consider is that when Samuel recorded the words of Doeg, he in no way contradicts his story. Samuel makes it clear that David lied about being on a mission for Saul. He makes it clear that Saul lied about the motives and character of David, and that Doeg joined him in that lie. However, Samuel never indicates that Doeg’s account was a lie.

Finally, consider that there was no reason for Doeg to lie about the priest inquiring on David’s behalf. The purpose of Doeg giving this report was an attempt to find favor in the king’s eyes and become an ally against David. If anything, Doeg’s statement about Ahimelech would lend itself to absolving the priest and David of any guilt against Saul. For example, if Ahimelech had asked God what to do, and God rendered a judgment, then the priest and David were innocent of any wrong doing. God alone was the responsible party.

On the other hand, if Doeg had said that the priest gave David the showbread on his own authority, then it would appear that the priest and David were the conspirators Saul believed them to be. From this story it is obvious that if Saul would have killed the priests while knowing that they were only following God’s will he certainly would have killed them if they were following their own will. Thus, there was no advantage for Doeg to lie about the priest. To charge the priest with inquiring for David implicated him less not more.

To claim that Doeg lied can only be a result of personal conjecture and speculation. Armed with only these verses, we can conclude that Ahimelech actually did inquire of the Eternal for David.

Still, some continue to claim that the priest did not inquire for David. They base their dissent on two other verses. One of these is Psalm 52 in which David wrote about the incident where Doeg implicated the priest and David in a conspiracy against Saul. In this psalm, David

does call Doeg a liar, but what was it that Doeg lied about? David wrote:

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of David When Doeg the Edomite Went and Told Saul, and Said to Him, "David Has Gone to the House of Ahimelech." Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God *endures* continually. Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah You love all devouring words, *You* deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place, And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah (Psalm 52:1-5).

David wrote that Doeg loved lying rather than righteousness. Does this mean that he lied about the priest inquiring of the Eternal or was he lying about something else?

Notice first that nowhere in this psalm does David state that Doeg lied about Ahimelech inquiring. The incident started with Saul's accusation that David conspired against him. He also accused all those who were present of siding with David against him. Likely fearing for his own life, Doeg implicated the priest in Saul's false accusation in an attempt to ingratiate himself to the King for personal advantage. However, there was no advantage to his testifying that the priest inquired of the Eternal. In fact, as stated earlier, his testimony that the priest inquired could be seen as an attempt to intimidate King Saul into not harming the priests. Therefore, what was Doeg's lie?

His lie was twofold. First he was dishonest about David's character. He implied that his motive for betraying David was honest, that David was a traitor to the king, and that Saul's desire to kill him was legitimate. Doeg's estimation of David was in stark contrast to Ahimelech's true assessment. The priest knew David personally, and said the following about him:

So Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants *is as* faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house?" (1 Samuel 22:14).

Secondarily, Doeg did not tell the truth about what had really happened. He should have told Saul that David had made Ahimelech believe he was on a mission regarding the king's business. This would have shown that the priest's service to David was done to honor Saul. It would have cleared Ahimelech and thrown all the blame upon David who was now out of the king's reach. Instead, Doeg's story made it appear as though David was indeed a traitor, that the priest knew as much, and had joined with David in a plot to depose and murder the king.

Certainly Doeg's lie was not that the priest had inquired for David. The lie was validating Saul's accusation that David was out to kill him, and insinuating that the priest was involved in a conspiracy to murder the king. While David's psalm calls Doeg a liar, it does not ever say that the lie was about Ahimelech inquiring of the Eternal for David.

There is yet another reason that some claim Doeg lied about the priest inquiring. This is found in a statement made by Ahimelech himself. Samuel records Saul accusing the priests:

So Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants *is as* faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? So Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among

all your servants *is as* faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? **Did I then begin to inquire of God for him?** Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, *or* to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much" (1 Samuel 22:13-15).

Ahimelech defended David and questioned Saul. Some interpret this verse to mean that Ahimelech did not inquire for David. However, this is not the case. This verse is actually saying that he had begun to inquire of God for David long before that day. The priest is stating that he did not "begin" to inquire for David on that day because he had always inquired of the Eternal for David in the past. Ahimelech always knew that David was a trusted servant of the king. However, the priest indicated that he knew nothing about a supposed conspiracy against the king.

Other translations of the Bible relate this truth more clearly:

This isn't the first time I've talked with God for David, and it's never made you angry before (*Contemporary English Version*)

Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! (*English Standard Version*)

I didn't start consulting God for him just today. Heaven forbid! (*Complete Jewish Bible*).

Yes, I consulted God for him, and it wasn't the first time (*Good News Bible*).

Have I to-day begun to inquire of God for him? be it far from me (*American Standard Version*).

Is this the first time I have prayed to God for him? Not at all! (*God's Word Bible*)

Was today the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! (*Holman Christian Standard Bible*)

Have I today begun to ask of God for him? Be it far from me (*Modern King James*).

Do you think that was the first time I prayed with him for God's guidance? Hardly! (*Message Bible*).

Is this the first time I have got directions from God for him? Far be the thought! (*Bible in Basic English*).

The priest's words, "did I then begin" means that he did not just begin to inquire of God on David's behalf. If the priest had not enjoyed a long standing relationship with David before this, then he would have no reason to recommend David to the king as a faithful servant. The priest knew David from times past when in the service of the king. David had asked the priest for God's judgment on matters. To this, most scholars and Bible commentators agree. Notice the comments of the following scholars:

Did I then: He seems to intimate, that his inquiring now for David was no new thing, having often done so before, without ever being informed it was wrong in itself or displeasing to the king (*Treasure of Scriptural Knowledge*).

Did I then begin to inquire of God - He probably means that his inquiring now for David was no new thing, having often done so before, and without ever being informed it was either wrong in itself, or displeasing to the king (*Adam Clarkes Commentary*).

He had inquired of God for him (which the priest used not to do but for public persons and about public affairs) and he had furnished him with bread and a sword (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*).

“Did I then begin to inquire of God for him this day?” i.e., was it the first time that I had obtained the decision of God for David concerning important enterprises, which he had to carry out in the service of the king? “Far be from me” (*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*).

Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Was this the first time of inquiring of God for him? no; I have done this many a time, when he has been going upon the king's business, engaging in war with his enemies; he has then consulted the Eternal by me, and I have inquired of the Eternal for him, as I now did; and which I did as innocently, and as much for the king's service, as ever I did any (*John Gill's Commentary*).

It is clear from the words of the Bible and the understanding of many scholars that Ahimelech did inquire for David and that the Creator of the universe gave David permission to take the showbread. For this reason when interrogated by the Pharisees for allowing His disciples to eat the gleanings of the field, Christ gave the example of David eating the showbread which was not lawful. However, the Word had given David permission to eat that bread, and He was also giving the disciples permission to eat the grain. For this reason, when questioned by His antagonists, Christ told them that He was greater than the temple. He later added that He was the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:3-8).