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## DID JESUS MAKE A CRUCIAL HISTORICAL BLUNDER IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK?

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“The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” (Prov. 18:17).

One of the reasons cited by famed New Testament scholar and best-selling author Bart Ehrman for his transition from fundamentalist Christian to fundamentalist agnostic is that the gospel of Mark is riddled with factual and historical errors. A prominent example is that David and his men ate the showbread “when Abiathar was the high priest.” In reality, argues Ehrman, Ahimelech (Abiathar’s father) was high priest at the time. Did Mark make a mistake, or is it Ehrman who is dead wrong?

First, it should be noted that it is Ehrman, not Mark, who makes a crucial blunder. A quick reading of the text in question reveals that, far from saying that Abiathar was high priest, Mark states that David and his men ate the showbread “*in the days of Abiathar the high priest*” (Mark 2:26, emphasis added). Put another way, there is no direct indication that Abiathar was serving in the office of high priest at the time, only that he was alive. Had Jesus erred, the Jewish leaders who were intimately acquainted with their history would have jumped all over him.

Furthermore, the reason Jesus references Abiathar rather than his father Ahimelech should be self-evident—particularly to a New Testament scholar. Namely, while David has little interaction with Ahimelech in biblical history, he is inextricably linked to Abiathar. In fact, after Saul killed Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:1–19), Abiathar found protection under David (1 Sam. 22:23), became priest to David (1 Sam. 23:6, 9; 2 Sam. 8:17), and eventually was exalted to the highest priestly office under David (1 Chron. 15:11; 1 Kings 2:35). Put another way, Abiathar was the star—Ahimelech was but a footnote.

Finally, one-thousand years from now people may well say that Desert Storm occurred in the days of President George W. Bush, though he was *not* President at the time—his dad was. Indeed, the entire Iraq crisis from 9/11 to the toppling and trial of Saddam are associated with George W. Bush’s Iraq war, not with George Herbert Walker Bush. In much the same way, Jesus is justified in speaking of David eating the showbread “in the days of Abiathar the high priest.”

Through a fair and balanced application of interpretive principles, this and a host of apparent contradictions are easily resolved.<sup>1</sup>

— Hank Hanegraaff

### NOTES

1. For further study, see Hank Hanegraaff’s *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004), *The Bible Answer Book Volume 2* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004), and the forthcoming *The Bible Answer Book One, Two and More* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), in which the above previously unpublished question and answer will appear.