

Difficult Passages in Mark

Mark 2:26

Who is Abiathar, and why does Jesus speak his name?

He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” (Mark 2:25–26, NIV)

The issue in this confrontation is that Jesus’ disciples are picking heads of grain on the Sabbath as they walk along with Jesus. The Pharisees (legal scholars) ask Jesus why they are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath because they consider picking a head of grain “work.”

- The text in red is the words of Jesus, and he speaks to Jewish religious leaders who are threatened by his ministry.
- “David” is an Old Testament character who will one day become king of Israel.
- “Abiathar” was not the high priest when this event happened in the Old Testament.
 - See 1 Samuel 21, next page

“David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? . . .” David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission . . . Now then, what do have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.” But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here. . . So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, . . .” (1 Samuel 21:1–6, NIV)

The problem is that Samuel names Ahimelek as the priest whom David confronted about bread, not ABIATHAR as Jesus said in Mark 2:26

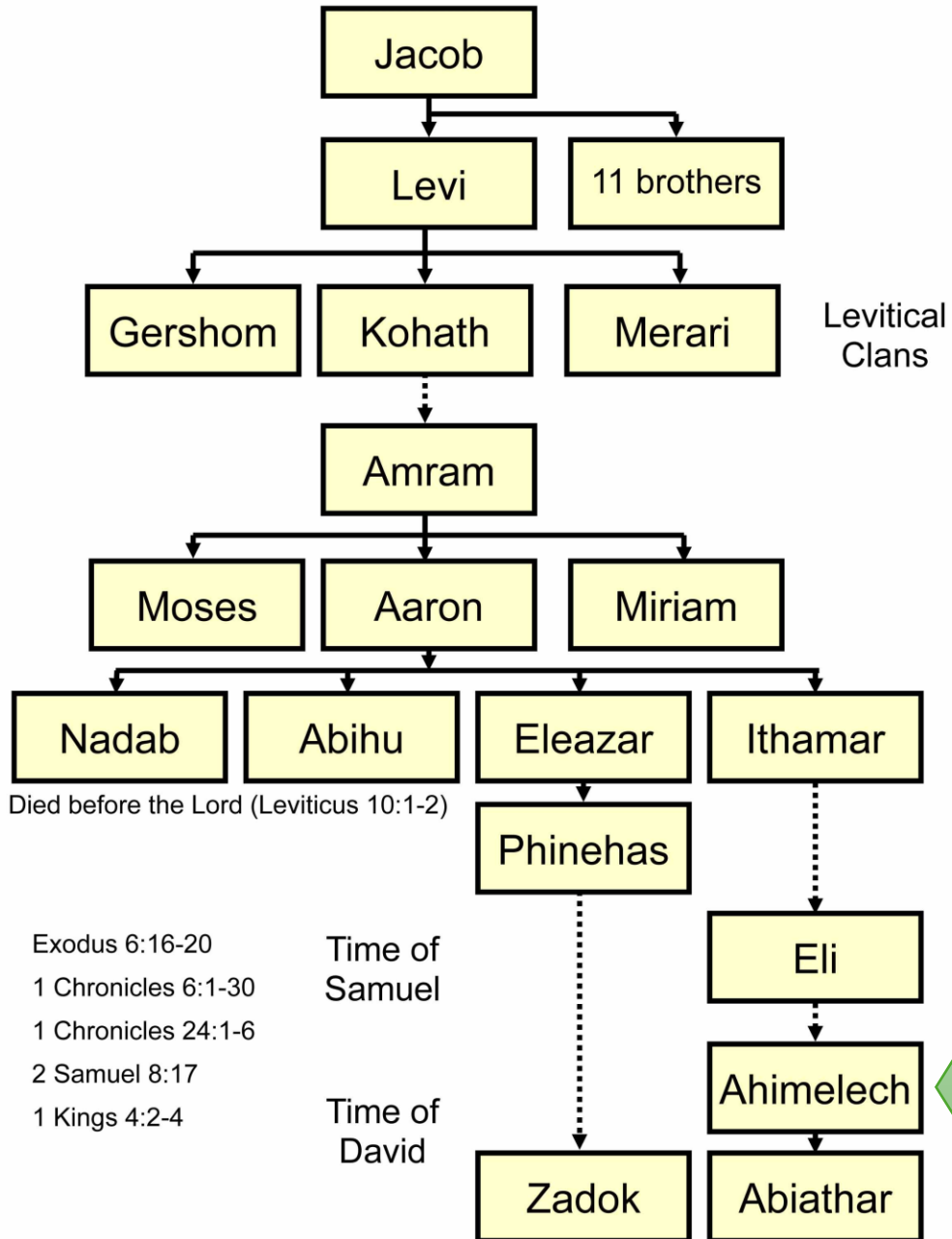
How Can This Happen?

- Was Mark (and therefore Peter) mistaken about what Jesus said?
- Did the Old Testament have it wrong?
- Was Jesus mistaken about the high priest's name in the OT?
- Did a scribe copy an ancient version of Mark's letter incorrectly?
- Is there another explanation?

The Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus, is taking the law professors to the classroom. Continue reading below

The answer is found in the Old Testament, which involves the genealogy of the Priesthood. Eli was a bad priest, and his son was Ahimelech and his son was Abiathar. Jesus named the son who gave bread to David, but it was his father, Ahimelech (also spelled Ahimelek).

Genealogy of the Priesthood



“So Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the LORD, fulfilling the word the LORD had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli.” (1 Kings 2:27, NIV)

The priesthood for the house of Eli ends with Abiathar.

Jesus is being intentional about what he is saying. He is speaking about the Pharisees, and they don't understand. See below

Jesus refers to the son, but it was his father who gave bread to David.

David

- Israel's true king-in-waiting
- King Saul is trying to kill David
- Samuel prepares the way & anoints David
- Doeg henchman for Saul, betrays & kills all the priests, except Abiathar
- David's friends are allowed consecrated bread on Sabbath
- Abiathar is last High Priest in the family of Eli

Jesus

- Israel's true king presently
- King Herod already tried to kill Jesus
- John the Baptist prepares the way & baptizes Jesus
- Judas the treasurer for Jesus will soon betray Jesus to the Pharisees and high priest
- Jesus' disciples are allowed consecrated bread on the Sabbath
- Pharisees are the current priesthood; soon to end.

Jesus is Trying to Open The Eyes of Those who Should be the First to Understand.

- The legal scholars don't understand that Jesus is talking about their role and status as people who are the current priesthood that fails to recognize the Messiah sent by God to Israel.
- They also don't understand when Jesus tells them that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."