

David and the Showbread

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In the New Testament, Jesus Christ referred to an incident in which King David and his associates ate unleavened bread that was in the Temple. This bread was supposed to be given to the priests after it had been on display for 1 week. This example has been used by some to say that there are times when the law and commandments of the One True God are flexible, negotiable, or can be over-ruled; especially when extenuating circumstances occur.

What lessons are actually being taught in this section of scripture?

To begin, we will examine this New Testament reference in the context it was given:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" (Mt. 12:1-2 New King James Version throughout).

The Pharisees had determined that this activity was unlawful because it was construed as working on the Sabbath even though food preparation was allowed (Ex. 12:16), and the so-called work being done had nothing to do with their occupation in life (Lev. 23:7-8).

Also, there was no prohibition regarding the poor and the stranger garnering food as they traveled on a Sabbath.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. **You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger:** I am the Lord your God (Lev. 23:22).

It is interesting to note that the Pharisees did not include Christ in this accusation because he was not eating at the time.

Then he (Christ) said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? (Mt. 12:3-4)

At this point, we need to examine which law Christ was referring to when he said it was not lawful for David to do what he did. Was Christ referring to the 10 commandments and other laws related to those commandments, or was he referring to a different and separate set of laws? Whenever the term "law" is used, we need to distinguish which aspect of God's word is being referred to. For example, Christ used the term "law" when referring to the Psalms:

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law [ref. Psalms 82:6], 'I said, "You are gods" (Jn. 10:34).

But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law [ref. Ps. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3-5], 'They hated me without a cause' (Jn. 15:25).

Christ referred to the writings of a minor prophet as being part of God's law; even though it was not part of the first five books of the Bible usually referred to as the Pentateuch, or the Law.

The people answered him (Christ), "We have heard from the law [ref. Micah 4:7] that the Christ remains forever; and how can you say, 'The son of Man must be lifted up'? (Jn. 12:34).

The book of Isaiah was also referred to as the law.

In the law (ref. Isaiah 28:11-12) it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear me" (1Cr. 14:21).

Now we need to look at the example of King David to see what law he was guilty of breaking and whether this law was part of what, "was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19).

Now therefore, what have you (ref. Ahimelech the priest) on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found (1Sa. 21:3).

It is unlikely that David's request for five loaves of bread was purely coincidental and it is also unlikely that David would have purposely and publicly broken one of God's 10 commandments over a food issue. As Christ was a son of King David, it is interesting to note that he (Christ) made a similar request that food be provided for the people who were with him. The number of loaves during Christ's ministry were also five, and these were multiplied miraculously to feed five thousand people (Mt. 14:16-21). Consequently, we can look at David's example as being prophetic; pointing to his descendant (Christ) who would fulfill the symbolism of the showbread, and that the number 5 would be associated with this example.

Christ is known, among other things, as the bread of life (Jn. 6:33-58), and he has the authority to impart eternal life to those the Father has given to him.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:21-22).

We see many examples of Christ being compared to this showbread. For instance, the application of frankincense to the showbread mentioned in Leviticus 24:7. Frankincense was an expensive and precious spice, and it was given to Christ, the bread of life (Mt. 2:11). The prayers of those who have partaken of this bread are associated with frankincense (Ex. 30:34 cf. Ps. 141:2; Isa. 60:6; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4), and both the prayers and frankincense are precious to the Father. The aroma of frankincense is released when it is burned. Therefore the fiery trials that Christ went through, as well as the trials of those who are faithful and obedient to the Only True God, end in a very pleasing result.

For you our God, have tested us; you have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; you laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our

heads; we went through fire and through water; **but you brought us out to rich fulfillment** (Psa. 66:10-12).

There are a number of comparisons between the showbread and the Angel of His Presence, which links Christ to the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt.

In all their (Israel's) affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence (**SHD # 6440**) saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old (Isa. 63:9).

And you shall set the showbread (**SHD # 6440**) on the table before Me always (Ex. 25:30).

The showbread in the Temple consisted of twelve separate pieces of unleavened bread; each representing one of the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). As everyone coming into the Kingdom of God has to be grafted into the twelve tribes of Israel through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 11:11-24), so too these twelve pieces of unleavened bread represent the finished work of the One True God (Lk. 22:28-29); which now includes all the fragments that would otherwise have been left behind (i.e. the gentiles). It was because of Christ's sacrifice that these fragments would be gathered up, and included in the nation of Israel under Christ.

So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of fragments that **remained** (Mt. 14:20).

Christ is the fulfillment of the showbread and anyone who has God's Holy Spirit has to eat of that unleavened bread (Jn. 6:51; Mt. 26:26, cf. Mt. 5:17).

Consequently, from a prophetic point of view, King David would have the right to access the bread of the presence of God (i.e. Christ) in the Temple because the literal fulfillment of the bread of the presence of God would come through David's lineage (Mt. 9:27), and this son of David (Christ) would be deemed greater than the physical Temple itself (Mt. 12:6). As the showbread in the Temple represented Christ and his work, David would have to partake of that unleavened bread in order to retain the Holy Spirit, and be resurrected.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever (Jn. 6:51).

Whoever eats my flesh (i.e. unleavened bread at the Passover/ Lord's Supper) and drinks my blood (i.e. wine at the Passover/Lord's Supper) has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn. 6:54).

According to a book entitled, *The Temple*,

the high-priest had the right to take what portion of the offerings he chose, and one half of the showbread every Sabbath also belonged to him (*The Temple, Dr. Edersheim, Pg. 103*).

It is interesting that David only took 5 loaves which implies that he was not presumptuous enough to ask for the entire portion that would normally be given to the High Priest (i.e. 6 loaves). It is also important to remember that anyone who retains the Holy Spirit is regarded as greater than the Temple, and greater than the physical High Priest (cf. Lk. 7:28). We will examine this aspect later. David's actions were also prophetic; these actions were picturing the Levitical priesthood being transferred to a tribe other than Levi and through this other tribe (i.e. Judah - David) would come someone (Judah – David -Christ) who would eventually extend the priesthood to include the gentiles. Before we get into these other concepts, we will continue examining David's actions strictly from a legal perspective.

And the priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand; but there is consecrated 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 young men are **ceremonially** undefiled, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was sanctified in the vessel this day" (1Sa. 21:4-5).

The following quotation in response to this situation,

The priest objected that he had none but hallowed bread which had stood a week on the golden table in the sanctuary, and was taken thence for use of the priests and their families. David pleads that he and those that were with him, in this case of necessity, might lawfully eat of the hallowed bread, for they were not only able to answer his terms of keeping from women for three days past, but the vessels (i.e. bodies) of the young men were holy, being possessed in sanctification and honor at all times. David pleads that the bread is in a manner common now that what was primarily the religious use of it is over; especially when there is other bread (i.e. hot, v. 6) sanctified this day in the vessel.

So the priest gave him (David) 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 (1Sa. 21:6) (*The Matthew Henry Commentary, Pg. 312*).

David was in the right place at the right time as there was a changing of the showbread taking place just as there would be a changing of the priesthood itself at a future date. This changing of the showbread occurred at the end of the sixth day, just before it was to be eaten by the priests, and it prophetically points to a time when the Melchizedek priesthood will govern this planet starting on the seventh day; the seventh day pictures the millennial rest referred to by the Apostle Paul.

For if Joshua had given them rest [ancient Israel], then he would not afterward have spoken of another day [i.e. millennium under Messiah's rule on earth cf. Rev. 20:4]. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God [now including gentile nations cf. Gal. 3:29] (Heb. 4:8-9).

We should also note that David did not steal the showbread; 5 loaves were given to him by the officiating priest. This too is prophetic because in doing so, David left 7 loaves for the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood.

The number 7 denotes a completeness of time and it regulates every period of incubation and gestation, in insects, birds, animals, and man (*Companion Bible, Appendix 10, Pg.14*).

The Aaronic/Levitical priesthood was given a complete period of time before and after the death of Messiah to repent, but they did not (Mt. 3:7-12; 23:1-35; Ac. 7:51-60).

The number 5 (i.e. loaves) denotes divine grace (*Companion Bible, Appendix 10, Pg. 14*).

Five is the leading factor in the tabernacle measurements. It points to the fact that others that would receive the opportunity for salvation and inclusion in the spiritual Tabernacle, or household, of God. It is probably no coincidence that 5 church eras are pictured in the book of Revelation as being found worthy, through the grace of the Father, to participate in the first resurrection (i.e. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Philadelphia). Two eras are left out, but according to the order of the lighting of the candlestick in the temple, these will have their opportunity later.

Now, while one set of priests were busy in the Court of the Priests offering the sacrifice, the two on whom it devolved to trim the lamps of the candlestick and to prepare the altar of incense had gone into the Holy Place. As nearly as possible while the lamb was being slain without, the first of these priests took with his hands the burnt coals and ashes from the golden altar, and put them into a golden vessel – called 'teni' – and withdrew, leaving it in the sanctuary. Similarly, as the blood of the lamb was being sprinkled on the altar of burnt-offering, the second priest ascended the three steps, hewn in stone, which led up to the candlestick. He trimmed and refilled the lamps that were still burning, removed the wick and old oil from those which had become extinguished, supplied fresh oil, and re-lit them from one of the other lamps. But the large central lamp, towards which all the others bent, and which was called the western, because it inclined westward towards the Most Holy Place, might only be re-lit by fire from the altar itself. Only five, however, of the lamps were then trimmed; the other two were reserved to a later period of the service. Close to the end of the daily service, prayers having ended, he who had formerly trimmed the candlestick once more entered the Holy Place, to kindle the two lamps that had been left unlit (*The Temple by Dr. Edersheim, Pg. 163-164; 169*).

Going back now to which law David broke, we can see that it had to do specifically with what happened to the showbread after it had been removed from the sanctuary, and these activities are associated with **ceremonial aspects** of God's Law as mentioned in the central margin of the New King James version of the Bible (1Sa. 21:5),

And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. And you shall put pure frankincense (i.e. symbolic of Christ's work) on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the Lord. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the Lord made by fire, by a **perpetual statute** (Lev. 24:5-9).

Those of the Aaronic priesthood would later be replaced by those of the Melchizedek priesthood (Heb. 5),.The unleavened bread of sincerity and truth is eaten annually by those of the Melchizedek priesthood during the Passover/Lord's supper service (1Cr. 5:7-8). Therefore, this unleavened bread is still eaten as a **perpetual statute**. Again, David would have been entitled to eat this unleavened bread if he had God's Holy Spirit, just as Christians should do today during the Passover/Lord's Supper if we possess God's Holy Spirit (Jn. 6:48-51; cf. Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22). The fact that David was not a Levite is irrelevant as the apostle Paul points out in the following scripture:

There is neither Jew nor Greek (i.e. gentile), there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

As we know, David had the Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11), and therefore he had the right to partake of the showbread. This shewbread was a type of the real bread of life (Jn. 6:32-33), pictured symbolically by the unleavened bread eaten during the Passover/Lord's supper service. It was not only Christ that was greater than the physical temple. David was also greater than the physical Temple because he too had the Holy Spirit from the Father, but apparently the Pharisees were unable to make that connection, or they were unwilling to.

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are (1Cr. 3:16-17).

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? (1Cr. 6:19)

For David to obtain God's Holy Spirit he had to have faith in the promised future sacrifice of Christ pictured, among other things, by the showbread.

And we (the disciples of Christ) declare to you glad tidings – that **promise** which was made to the fathers (including David) (Ac. 13:32).

What promise?

God has fulfilled this (promise) for us their (the forefathers') children, in that He has raised up Jesus (Ac. 13:33).

The entire sacrificial/ceremonial law of God pointed to the promise of a Messiah to come, and once he came this sacrificial/ceremonial aspect of God's law would no longer be required of true believers. Christ was actually pointing out to the Pharisees that the physical law regarding the showbread, and animal sacrifices, was soon to be fulfilled in his sacrifice thus making the temple with its priesthood, sacrifices and associated ceremonies redundant. Therefore any physical activities related to this sacrificial/ceremonial system would be irrelevant to a person who had repented, as David clearly did, and believed in the promise of God to provide the atonement (i.e. the sacrifice of Christ) that would offer eternal life to the repentant believer.

It could be argued that David broke one aspect of the ceremonial law associated with the Aaronic priesthood, of which David was not a part, but this example does not excuse people who wish to justify breaking God's commandments or the laws related to those commandments. Because God's leaders sometimes broke commandments does not mean that their actions were condoned or that we should follow their bad example. On the contrary, it shows that God is merciful, patient, and willing to forgive once we repent and because he is longsuffering, we are granted time to repent. This seems contrary to some teachings that show God immediately punishes someone when they step out of line.

It should be noted that David lied to the priest just before asking for the bread in 1Sa. 21:2. Because David lied, does that give Christians license to do the same?

David did not behave like himself. He told Ahimelech a gross untruth, that Saul had ordered him business to dispatch, that his attendants were dismissed to such a place, and that he (David) was charged to observe secrecy. This was all false (*The Matthew Henry Commentary*, pg. 312).

Going back to the incident where the Pharisees accused Christ's disciples of breaking the Sabbath, we can see that Christ's reference to David's activities pertained to the ceremonial law associated with the Aaronic/Levitical system. This system was coming to an end as evidenced by Christ's actions in the 10th chapter of Luke, and statements made by the Apostle Paul.

In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (i.e. Destruction of the Temple in 70 AD) (Hb. 8:13).

The next law that Christ referred to pertained to the **sacrificial system**.

Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the Sabbath, and are blameless? (Mt. 12:5)

Here Christ was referring to the large amount of work associated with sacrificing animals which was part of the priesthood's normal vocation in life. Therefore, the priests were doing their usual servile work on the Sabbath contrary to God's law (cf. Lev. 23:7; 21; 25; 35-36). They were blameless, however, because they were doing God's work on the Sabbath as instructed. One could argue that the priesthood was obeying a higher law. This same principle applies to David when he ate of the showbread, and it also applies to Christians today providing they are doing God's work and not their own pleasure on the Sabbath (cf. Isa. 58:13). When we examine the animal sacrificial system, we should see that it was meant to teach ancient Israel that the One True God wanted them to learn about His mercy, which was being extended to them through the future sacrifice of His son, the Messiah. The animal sacrifices were a mere shadow, or reminder, of the ultimate sacrifice to come. That sacrifice was Christ, and Christ's sacrifice proved how much love and mercy God the Father has for all those He has created.

For **the law**, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same **sacrifices**, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once cleansed would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those **sacrifices** there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

The Father was also teaching us by His example, and that of Jesus Christ, that our thoughts, words and deeds need to reflect this same mercy.

But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless (Mt. 12:7).

This statement was also prophetic because the Pharisees had already condemned Christ in their minds and the action of murdering him would soon follow. However, had Christ wanted to minimize the commandments and laws of His Father, this would have been the perfect opportunity to say, "I desire mercy **and not law keeping**", but he didn't. Therefore, we shouldn't use the example of David eating some of the showbread to justify compromising or minimizing the commandments and other laws that are not associated with the sacrificial/ceremonial system. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, instead of focusing on the disciples' apparent transgression of eating grain on the Sabbath, they should have seen the bigger, more serious picture; the example Christ gave of David eating the showbread was to foreshadow the end of the Levitical priesthood as well as the Temple system. It pictured the Melchizedek priesthood replacing that of Levi (Heb. 7:17), coming to its ultimate fulfillment at Christ's second coming, and the commencement of the millennium. The main reason it is mentioned that Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek symbolically (Heb. 7:9) was to show that the Melchizedek priesthood has pre-eminence. The Melchizedek priesthood is associated with eternal life (2Cr. 3:8-9) while Levi's ministry is associated more with death (2Cr. 3:7), pictured by the animal sacrificial system.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law – i.e. ceremonial/sacrificial), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law (temporary suspension of the sacrificial system cf. Zechariah 14:21; Ezekiel 40:38-43). For he of whom these things are spoken (i.e. Christ) belongs to another tribe (i.e. Judah), from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to **the law of a fleshly commandment [i.e. ceremonial/sacrificial law]**, but according to the power of an endless life (Heb. 7:11-16)

The fleshly commandment (ceremonial/sacrificial system) did not offer the worshipper eternal life, but the sacrifice of Christ did. However, giving up the animal sacrifices and the associated ceremonies that took place in and around the Temple was tantamount to heresy. It was far too entrenched in the culture and psyche of the Jewish people; this is the main reason the Apostle Paul addressed the issue of the law at such great length in his writings. Nothing short of intervention from the Only True God would make anyone change their way of

doing things. As we know, the bread of life (Christ) predicted that this change would come through the Holy Spirit as a result of his fulfillment of the sacrificial system (Mt. 5:17). The destruction of the physical Temple in 70 C.E. forced this sacrificial system to end. If David breached any of the law, it would be associated with the animal sacrificial system administered by the Levitical priesthood, which his future son (Christ) would fulfill. Therefore, using the example of David eating the showbread as an excuse to break the laws and commandments not associated with the animal sacrificial system is very misleading.

In fact, Christ pointed out at the end of his discussion with the Pharisees that he was Lord (i.e. master) of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8; Mk. 2:28; Lk. 6:5). As such, he had the authority to determine what conduct was suitable or not. The Sabbath day was never meant to be a burden, but the Pharisees made it so by adding many “do’s and don’ts” that were never mentioned or intended in the commandment regarding Sabbath observance.

In reality, the Pharisees were challenging Christ’s authority by accusing him of breaking the Sabbath and they were seeking an occasion to condemn him. Christ turned their accusation on their head (Psa. 7:14-16), and pointed out that they lacked understanding of the purpose behind the Sabbath law.

And he (Christ) said to them,

The Sabbath was made for man(kind), and not man(kind) for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28).

Therefore, the Sabbath was created as a blessing for mankind, when it is properly observed (Isa. 58:13-14). The Sabbath was intended to give mankind rest every week and an opportunity to fellowship with their Creator in a manner unimpeded by the usual concerns and distractions of daily work.

To conclude that David taking from the showbread gives license to break the Sabbath command, or any of God’s laws and commandments, is contrary to scripture and shows the same lack of understanding that the Pharisees exhibited.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God’s truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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