

Abiathar: The Priest



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 28:6; Exodus 39:2–7; 1 Samuel 21:1–9; 1 Samuel 22:6–23; 2 Samuel 15:13–29.

MEMORY VERSE: “But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises. He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, Nlrv).

PRIESTS PLAYED A VERY IMPORTANT PART IN THE LIFE AND HISTORY OF ISRAEL. And not just in Israel but in the neighboring nations too. In the Middle East, the king was also a priest. He combined political power with religious power. Groups of priests represented powerful groups at the court. And there are many examples where priests were king-makers. In the Old Testament, the work of priests was central to the life of faith of Israel. Bible history shows the strong influence¹ of the priests in New Testament times too.

The priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) is an idea that became important in the Protestant Reformation² during the 1500s. It is not all a New Testament idea (read Exodus 19:6). It seems that God's ideal has always been for His believers to be holy and to serve others by working for them and by introducing them to the plan of salvation.³

This week we will read the story of Abiathar. This story will give us an important understanding about the Old Testament priesthood. It also will remind us that priesthood is not based only on background or education but on a person's faithfulness to the Lord. As we learn from the case of Abiathar, wrong choices can remove someone from the priesthood.

1. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

2. Protestant Reformation—a movement started by Martin Luther in rebellion against false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

3. plan of salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 7**LIES AND TRAGEDY⁴**
(1 Samuel 21:1–9)

Read 1 Samuel 21:1–9 and 1 Samuel 22:6–23. Then answer the following questions:

- What lie did David tell to Ahimelech about why he was there?
- What happened to Ahimelech when he trusted David?
- How did Saul try to turn his own men against David? What kind of argument did he use?
- What does Ahimelech tell Saul about the character⁵ and faithfulness of David?
- What does this story tell us about how far King Saul had fallen into evil?
- Why do you think Doeg, a foreigner, would do what the servants of Saul refused to do?
- How does David accept the news of the killing? In what ways was his answer correct?
- What promise does David make to the son of Ahimelech who was not killed?

Think about the difference in this story between honor and dishonor, faithfulness and faithlessness. Think about the mess caused by lies and sin. What kind of moral⁶ questions are you facing right now? What kind of moral choices must you make? Think about the results of your actions before you take them.

4. tragedy—a very sad, unfortunate, or upsetting situation; a play or story that is serious and has a sad ending.

5. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; who someone is.

6. moral—concerning or relating to what is right and wrong in the behavior of people.

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 8**ABIATHAR, THE PRIEST**
(1 Samuel 23:9–13)

We are not told how Abiathar escaped the killing of his family. We only know that he escaped and made his way to David. But before he escaped, Abiathar managed to save the ephod (read 1 Samuel 23:6). The ephod was an important piece of clothing worn by a priest. Read Exodus 28:6 and Exodus 39:2–7. It was used to ask God's will when making decisions (choices). At least two times, the writer of the story tells us that David called for Abiathar and the ephod (1 Samuel 23:9–12; 1 Samuel 30:7, 8).

Unlike many of us today, the people in Abiathar's day did not have God's Written Word (the Bible). There were only a few copies of the book of the Law (the Pentateuch) that were all written by hand. So, most people did not have a chance to study the Word of God for themselves. Most of us enjoy the blessing of having our own Bible to study. God has promised to give us the Holy Spirit to explain the Word to each of us (John 14:26). God also uses people to give us advice that comes from Him (Proverbs 20:18). He also works through situations to bless us (Romans 8:28).

Read 1 Samuel 23:9–13; 2 Samuel 15:24; and 2 Samuel 17:15–22. According to these verses, what

were some of the duties of Abiathar when he was priest?



The ephod was a holy vest. It was used to ask God's will in making decisions.

Abiathar the priest went through a lot of suffering. Like David, he was homeless and on the run. But these experiences prepared him even better to serve the future king of Israel (David). Abiathar could understand the frustrations, fears, and betrayals that David and his men must have felt when they were on the run.

Sharing the same experience with a person or a group of people is a big part of the New Testament's understanding of priesthood. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus can be our High Priest because He has gone through the same experiences we have and can understand us (Hebrews 2:17).

Read 1 Peter 2:9. The New Testament clearly teaches that all of us have the responsibilities (duties; tasks) of priests in the places where

we live. Our calling is no self-calling. Jesus said: " 'You did not choose me. Instead, I chose you. I appointed [chose] you to go and bear fruit. It is fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name' " (John 15:16, NIV). God's calling to us does not turn us into Old Testament priests or New Testament apostles (teachers). Instead, God urges us to work for our families, our communities, and all of those around us. How can you better serve in the role of "priest"?

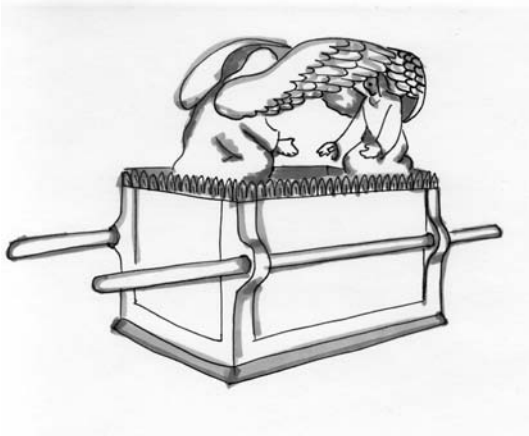
TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 9

ABSALOM'S REBELLION (WAR) (2 Samuel 15:13–29)

Second Samuel 15–18 tells the sad story of Absalom, the son of David who rebelled (fought) against the rule of his father. At one point, Absalom's army is on its way to Jerusalem. This must have been a nightmare for Abiathar. David decides to run away rather than turn Jerusalem into a battlefield and cause a bloodbath. All of his faithful followers prepare to run with him. Abiathar must have remembered his experience after the killing of his family and village under King Saul. He gets ready to leave with David.

Read 2 Samuel 15:13–29. What do these verses teach us about the character of David, even in this time of danger? What part does Abiathar play in this part of history?

Taking the ark of God, Abiathar and the other priests prepare to leave the city. But David orders that the ark stay. David has learned that carrying the symbol⁷ of God's presence does not mean that God is with you. Wearing a cross, showing a religious slogan, or keeping a set of rules does not mean that God is with you. God cannot be controlled by humans (men, women, or children). David wanted the ark to stay where it belonged. This was a true act of faith for David. He trusted that God would save him and bring him back to Jerusalem.



Leaving the ark behind in Jerusalem was an act of faith on David's part. He trusted that God would bring him home safely again.

The ark of God is set down. And Abiathar offers sacrifices (gifts; offerings) (2 Samuel 15:24) until all the people have finished leaving the city. When this is done, Abiathar and Zadok become "spies" for David and his people.

The story of David's spy system is very exciting reading (2 Samuel 17:15–29). Abiathar and Zadok stay in

Jerusalem to find out what Absalom is doing. The sons of Abiathar and Zadok wait for word outside the city. A woman who seems to be a trustworthy servant brings a message out to the young men. But a young man standing around is smart enough to know what is going on and tells Absalom. The priests' sons are chased by Absalom's men and find a woman who hides them. They climb into a well. The woman throws a cloth over the well and sprinkles grain over the top to make it seem that there is no well. This is similar to the way Rahab hid the two spies under flax stalks in Joshua 2:6.

Things are often not what they seem. For example, many broken hearts are hidden by smiles. As followers of Christ, we are called to be His representatives. We become God's hands, reaching out to those around us. We must be open and sensitive to people and understand things for what they really are. And we must be willing to sacrifice (give) of ourselves to help.



We become God's hands to reach out to those around us.

7. symbol—an action, object, or event that expresses or represents (shows) a particular idea or quality.

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 10**ABIATHAR'S CHOICE
(1 Kings 1:1–8)**

We have no record of Abiathar's opinions, politics, or religious views. Everything that he says is written down as God's Word to David. But the actions of Abiathar speak louder than words. None of the words he speaks are written down but being where he is says a lot.

In the time of David, the oldest son was supposed to take the place of his father when the father died. For a king, that would mean that the oldest son would take over the throne when his father died. But the traditions of men do not matter to God. In fact, during the history of Israel God often overlooked the oldest sons and called others to become kings. Sometimes it happened because of certain events or because of choices the oldest sons made (read Genesis 4:1–5; Genesis 21:8–12; Genesis 25:21–36; Genesis 48:8–19; and 1 Samuel 16:6–12).

Read 1 Kings 1:1–8. Abiathar had been so loyal to David. What do these verses say about why Abiathar does what he does here?

Solomon was not the oldest son. So, by custom, he would not normally have become king after his father. But the oldest son, Amnon, was killed by his brother Absalom. Absalom, in turn, was killed during his failed rebellion. Now Adonijah, the oldest living son, tries to claim the throne as rightfully his. Adonijah meets with

Joab and Abiathar, and they give him their support (1 Kings 1:7).

Solomon was younger than Adonijah and had a shameful family history. His mother was Bathsheba, the former wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was the soldier who was murdered to cover the affair David had with Bathsheba. But even with this shameful history, Solomon was loved by God (2 Samuel 12:24). It was clear that God had chosen Solomon to be the next king after David (1 Chronicles 22:9, 10). It may be that Abiathar was afraid that people would be angry about this choice. So Abiathar chooses to depend on tradition, instead of trusting in the will of God.

Tradition can be an easy thing to depend on. It saves us from having to think things through in the light of God's will. It is much easier and "safer" just to say, "We have always done it like this."

How often do we let tradition get in the way of God's leading? At the same time, why must we be careful not to judge things right away as nothing but "tradition" and then dismiss them?



The danger in tradition is that it keeps us from taking responsibility to think things through in the light of God's will.

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 11**ABIATHAR'S FATE (FUTURE)
(1 Kings 2:26, 27)**

Solomon took over the throne when David died. But many things still needed to be settled and taken care of. After Adonijah was put to death (1 Kings 2:13–25), there was still the issue of Abiathar the priest, who had so faithfully served King David. What was to be done with Abiathar for his part in the rebellion against Solomon?

Read 1 Kings 2:26, 27. How does Solomon deal with Abiathar in these verses? What reasons does he give for doing what he does?

It may seem at first that Abiathar is “fired” as a priest because of a prophecy⁸ made to Eli over a hundred years before (1 Samuel 2:30–36). But this is really an example of the way God knows our future free choices. God already knows the free choices we and our future children will make. So, He is able to prophesy (foretell) the future. God knew that the sons of Eli were “fired” from the priestly office for their actions. In the same way, Abiathar also would be “fired” from the priestly office because he would not accept God’s choices.

Read Matthew 26:14–16, 20–25. How does what happened to Abiathar help to explain this prophecy? What principle is found in both cases?

Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray Him. But it did not cause Jesus to push Judas away. Judas became part of the inner circle of the Twelve. He experienced the power of God firsthand. But Judas, like Abiathar, was not prepared to accept the will of God. It seems that Judas and Abiathar shared some ideas about kingship and how power should be used. Judas wanted Jesus to be crowned king of an earthly kingdom. Because Judas was angry that Jesus did not want this, he turned to the traditional leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, and betrayed his true King.

The fact that God knows all does not influence His control over human history. People have choices, as Judas and Abiathar did. Even though God already knows the results of these choices, it does not stop us from making our own free choices.

Free choice is one of the most holy gifts God has given us. It came with a great cost too: the death of Jesus on the cross. (If we were not given free choice, we could not have chosen to sin. And Jesus would not have died for us.) How carefully do you think through and pray about the decisions you make?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 12

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “God has chosen you for a great and serious work. He has been trying to guide, to test, to

8. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

prove you, to make you grow for this holy work that may be done to His own glory. What a thought that God chooses a man and brings him into close connection with Himself. God gives man a mission [special work] to take up, a work to do, for Him. A weak man is made strong. A coward is made brave. The man who cannot make up his mind becomes firm and makes quick decisions. What! How is it possible that man can receive a command from the King of kings? Shall worldly ambition [eager desire] tempt him from the holy trust, the holy command?"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, page 167.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Learning from other parts of the Bible, think about the life of Saul. Think how someone who has been given so much could waste it all. What lessons can we learn from the story of Saul for ourselves? What mistakes did he make that took him down a path of sin that led him to the kind of actions we read about this week?
- ② Think more about the way Jesus in His human form is able to sympathize with us in our struggles. Why is Christ

as a human (man) so important to us?

- ③ Think about the experience of someone in your class who has faced the loss of a loved one. What are some ways that you as a class can help? What can you do beyond giving words of comfort? Are there cases where nothing else can be done other than “just” speaking words of comfort?
- ④ One of the great questions that has challenged Christian thinkers over the centuries is the idea of God’s foreknowledge⁹ and our free will. If God knows our choices ahead of time, are we really free in making them? If not, then where is personal freedom? If we do not have freedom, how can we be judged or punished rightly for our actions? Some argue that some of our actions must be unknown to God, or else those actions could not be free. Others see no problem: just because God knows what a person will do does not mean that the person is not free to make his or her own choices. In class discuss these questions with the expectation that you might not solve the issue at all. What is important to know is that we are free to make choices. God respects our free choices, but God is always in control.

9. foreknowledge—knowing the result of something before it happens.