



It is quite interesting that Jesus uses the story of David at Nob to illustrate the point of the Sabbath in his discussion with the Pharisees in Matthew 12. David's interaction with Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 doesn't involve the Sabbath, but it involves the Bread of the Presence, which incorporates many of the same ideas as the Sabbath. Leviticus 24:5-9 tells us that the Bread of the Presence is to be made of the finest flour, baked into twelve loaves representing the tribes, put before the Lord, and then eaten by the priests. Every Sabbath the bread would be placed on the Table of the Presence across from the Ark of the Covenant "on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant" (24:8).

It may seem unusual to place so much significance on bread, but the priests were only allowed to eat the bread in the Tabernacle (or Temple). It served as a sign of God's covenant of fellowship with Israel. Think of it as God inviting Israel to dinner on a regular basis. It creates a picture of God providing for the Israelites, the Israelites showing their gratitude to God, and God inviting them into a personal relationship of trust and care. The priests represented the people to God as they served in the Tabernacle, but they also received refreshment in spending time with God and receiving his provision.

When David approaches Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 21 and asks for food, Ahimelech understands that the Bread of the Presence represents the covenant between God and his people, so he doesn't treat it lightly. Nevertheless, he is willing to use it for its intended purpose even if that purpose doesn't fit the usual requirements. David is neither a priest, nor will he be eating the bread in a "holy place" as required in the Law. David isn't even honest with Ahimelech, though he likely lies to him in order to keep the priest out of his conflict with Saul. Whatever the case, it seems clear to Ahimelech that David is serving Israel and the Lord and that he needs God's refreshment to fulfill his "mission."

Even more significant than Ahimelech giving David the sacred bread is the Lord's apparent agreement. We discover later in 1 Samuel 22 that Ahimelech also "inquires of the Lord" for David. So David receives food, Goliath's sword, and most importantly, God's guidance and direction from the service of Ahimelech. When David's life is threatened by Saul and he's on the run alone with nowhere to go, the Lord provides him rest and refreshment through his servant Ahimelech. David and Ahimelech provide a great example of what Jesus means when he quotes Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," to explain the importance of Sabbath rest.

### Discussion Questions

How have you seen people attempt to fulfill the fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath holy? What other similar or related religious expectations or observances have you run into or held yourself?

Rules and laws are typically one-sided requirements for functioning within a society, organization, or other group of people. How are relational covenants different, and how should Sabbath as a sign of God's covenant relationship with us affect how we see Sabbath?

What can we do both individually and corporately to observe Sabbath so as to improve our experience of rest and refreshment with God?