

Study Notes: 1 Samuel 22:6-23
March 8, 2020: “Doeg, You Dirty Dog!”
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Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul was seated, spear in hand, under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing at his side. He said to them, “Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today.”

- At the beginning of 1 Samuel 19, Saul set a bounty on David’s life. As a result, almost everyone in Saul’s service was searching for David. Eventually, David and his men were discovered, and their whereabouts were reported back to Saul.
- From Saul’s setting and posture (seated with his spear in hand), it is clear that Saul was conducting royal business for the kingdom with his kingly authority.
 - However, when the news reached Saul, he launched into what the New American Commentary calls “a half-crazed tirade” against everyone in his presence. Saul was upset that no one showed concern for him and that none of his officials informed him of the treaty between David and Jonathan. Saul’s thinking became so distorted, that he actually believed Jonathan was his true enemy, and that David was only the hired hitman incited by Jonathan to kill him.

But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul’s officials, said, “I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelek inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

- With no one willing to speak, Doeg stepped forward with more concrete information about David’s whereabouts and activities. Doeg was present at Nob when David met Ahimelek (sometimes spelled Ahimelech), and knew how Ahimelek aided David (see 1 Samuel 21:7).
- The New American Commentary notes that Doeg’s words help us to understand the perspectives of David and Saul, “First, it suggests that David was deeply committed to submitting to and receiving help from the Lord during his time of trouble. Second, from Saul’s perspective it indicated that Ahimelech was using the unique powers of his office to give aid to an enemy of the king—anyone might supply David with food and a weapon, but only an Aaronic priest could inquire of the Lord.”

Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. Saul said, “Listen now, son of Ahitub.” “Yes, my lord,” he answered. Saul said to him, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?” Ahimelek answered the king, “Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father’s family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair.”

- At Doeg’s word, Saul sent for Ahimelek and his family. The New American Commentary notes, “Saul’s perverted mind concluded from Doeg’s report that the conspiracy against him was far larger than previously imagined. Now it was not just a son and a son-in-law out to kill him; hundreds of people, including the entire priestly establishment at Nob, were marshaled against him!”

- After Saul’s questioning, Ahimelek defended himself by pointing out David’s previous loyalty and position to Saul. Ahimelek was unaware of David’s actions against Saul, and he provided guidance from the LORD for David, as he had done many times before.

But the king said, “You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family.” Then the king ordered the guards at his side: “Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me.” But the king’s officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord.

- Saul was not satisfied with this answer, and his murderous insanity now turned to Ahimelek and his family. In a royal judgment, Saul ordered his guards to kill Ahimelek and the rest of the priests for not alerting him to David’s plans.
- However, the guards refused to strike the priests down. It’s highly likely that the men who served as Saul’s guards had previously been under the command of David; therefore, they refused to carry Saul’s order, out of a desire to obey God rather than Saul.

The king then ordered Doeg, “You turn and strike down the priests.” So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

- When Saul’s guards would not carry out his orders, he turned to Doeg the Edomite. As an Edomite, Doeg had no problem striking the priests down. He killed 85 priests, then proceeded to travel to Nod to carry out a mass destruction.
- The New American Commentary notes, “This kind of mass execution, elsewhere termed herem, was authorized in the Torah only for use against non-Yahwistic peoples living in Canaan who would otherwise teach the Israelites to sin against the Lord (cf. Deut 20:17–18). The perpetration of this act against a city of Aaronic priests—those who taught Israelites to avoid sinning against Yahweh—was an unspeakable crime.”

But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. Then David said to Abiathar, “That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your whole family. Stay with me; don’t be afraid. The man who wants to kill you is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me.”

- In the midst of Doeg’s destruction, Abiathar was able to escape. He met with David, and told him about what Saul commanded.
- Upon hearing of these events, which transpired because of Doeg, David wrote Psalm 52.
- David realized that he caused the slaughter of the priests by his actions. He encouraged Abiathar to remain with him, and promised to keep him safe.