

Significant Lessons From The Seemingly Insignificant

#7 Doeg, the Edomite

Ponder: Who would you place on the list of the "bottom 10" people in the Bible?

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|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Cain | 1 st murderer |
| 2. Ahab/Jezebel | Evil rulers during Israel's darkest period |
| 3. Manasseh | Child sacrifice |
| 4. Jeroboam I | Led the Northern Kingdom into evil and idolatry |
| 5. Herod the Great | Slaughterer of children |
| 6. Herodias & Herod Antipas | Beheaded John the Baptist |
| 7. Judas | Betrayal of Jesus Christ |
| 8. Pontius Pilate | Washed his hand of the blood of Jesus Christ |
| 9. Saul | Fierce persecutor of Christians |
| 10. Doeg, the Edomite | Wreaks havoc; epitome of evil [4 verses in the Bible] |

Focal Passage: I Samuel 21-22

Scene 1: Ahimelech's Aid To David - I Sam. 21:1-10

1. David has begun his "life as a fugitive" from Saul; a period of 10 years during which he was "public enemy #1" in all of Israel.
2. David has no weapons or food as he heads into the wilderness.
3. David goes to Nob, the town of the priests and Tabernacle.
4. He meets with Ahimelech, the high priest. [also known as Ahijah; great-grandson of Eli]
5. David's lies and deception will ultimately bring death to the innocent priests and Ahimelech.
6. Ahimelech was trembling when he met David. "Why are you alone and no one with you?"
7. David's Deception: The king has sent me on a mission and I am not to tell anyone about the matter. He tells Ahimelech he has left his men at a certain place.
8. David deliberately misrepresents the fact; he is there as a direct result of Saul's anger.
9. David requests bread. He gives David the holy bread; no common bread. Why???
10. In 21:8, David asks Ahimelech for a weapon claiming he doesn't have his sword or weapons with him because the king's business required haste.
 - Ahimelech: We have the "sword of Goliath, the Philistine whom you struck down."
 - David said: "There is none like that; give it to me."

TAKE NOTE: Between David's request for bread and a weapon, the writer abruptly inserts an ominous side reference to a previously unknown figure.

21:7 "Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen."

This is all we are told and the text reverts to David's and Ahimelech's conversation.

Does this perk your interest and catch your attention? One of Saul's trusted men has witnessed the priests providing shelter and aid to Saul's sworn enemy, David.

In I Samuel 22, Doeg, the Edomite will be mentioned only 3 times, but the impact of this shadowy character is tragic.

Scene 2: Saul's Pity Party - I Sam 22:6-8

1. Saul is sitting under a tamarisk tree in nearby Gibeah. Saul accuses his entire Benjaminite guard of being in league with David in order to obtain material benefits [22:7], and he concludes that "all of you have conspired against me" because "no one discloses to me" the activities of David. No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day. [22:8]

Saul's statement reveals how much of the plot, in fact, hinges on the issue of disclosure.

David has brought the priests into the ensuing predicament by failing to disclose to Ahimelech the full truth.

Saul then accuses his tribesmen of a similar failure to disclose the truth.

Scene 3: I Sam. 22:9-10

Doeg, not a Benjaminite but an Edomite, alone steps forward to provide the devastating full disclosure. He enumerates 4 charges, but fails to include the innocency of Ahimelech.

Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he enquired of the LORD for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.

Scene 4: Saul's Sends For Ahimelech - I Sam 22:11

Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob: and they came all of them to the king.

Scene 5: Saul Accuses The Priests Of Conspiracy. - I Sam. 22:12-13

And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord.

¹³ And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast enquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?

- The priests' crime was in failing to disclose to Saul the news about David's visit.

Ahimelech responds: he discloses that he helped David, but "your servant has known nothing" about the broader conflict between David and Saul; due to David's lack of full disclosure ???

Scene 6: Saul's Irrational Reaction - I Sam. 22:16-17

And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house.

¹⁷ And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD: because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not show it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

Scene 7: Doeg, the Edomite Steps Forward - I Sam. 22:18-19

And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

¹⁹ And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

Scene 8: Abiathar, the Priest Who Escaped - I Sam. 22:20-23

And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David. ²¹ And Abiathar shewed David that Saul had slain the LORD's priests.

²² And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.

²³ Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.

Doeg, The Edomite: A Prototype Of Evil

Doeg: "an ethnic Edomite, a high-ranking official in Saul's court, becomes a zealous executioner of God's chosen priests and an entire city of innocent people."

He divulges the actions of David to the maniacal Saul, proceeds to kill the eighty-five priests of Nob, and then, without explanation, slaughters the entire city - man, woman, and child - in the form of the *cherem* ("ban").

Deut. 7:2 when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then You Must devote them to complete destruction. [cherem: ban]

Joshua 6:17 Jericho was doomed...to destruction

The cherem of Israel against the enemies of God was meant to be an intrusion of Christ's final judgment; a foreshadowing of how He will ultimately defeat the serpent's seed.

- By inverting this pattern and turning the cherem against God's own priests, Doeg shows the extent of the evil that God's people are up against and our need for a conquering King.
- There is real evil in the world that is diabolically and violently opposed to the church of Jesus Christ.

We are stunned at the simplicity of his wickedness: on the surface, Doeg seems little more than a "flat, underdeveloped epitome of evil."

When we look at his characterization in I Samuel, his role in the unfolding plot, and the redemptive-historical implications of the massacre at Nob, we find in Doeg a nuanced case study of the mystery of God's providence in using evil men to further his will.

Redemptive-Historical Analysis: Doeg and the Ambiguity of Providence

1. Doeg is undoubtedly evil, and his activities are undoubtedly sinful and wretched in God's eyes.
2. Doeg's actions facilitate numerous providential events that achieve the will of God in the end.
3. The relationship between God, instruments of evil, and ultimate good is quite complex.

For those who demand a simplistic formula between God (who is good) and tragic events (which are bad), it may come as a bit of a shock to discover how God uses Doeg's massacre as a critical link in three important dimensions of his redemptive plan, which come to a head at Nob.

A. Securing The Change of Priesthood

1. Nob was a central worship sanctuary at the time.

2. The priests at Nob are direct descendants of Eli: Ahimelech is the son of Ahitub (I Sam. 22:20), the son of Phinehas (I Sam 14:3), the son of Eli (I Sam 4:4).

3. They possess the linen ephod (I Sam 22:18), enabling them to communicate with God, and they serve as the core group of remaining priests in Saul's time. These were no ordinary priests.

4. Many commentators have observed that Doeg's massacre of all these priests (except one) is *more than just a random evil act*: it is, rather:

The Fulfillment Of The Lord's Promised Judgment Against The Priestly House Of Eli.

- Years before, God had sent a prophet to Eli, in response to his sons' escalating wickedness, to declare, "Behold, the days are coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house" (I Sam 2:31).
- His two sons Hophni and Phinehas died in battle, but it is not until the massacre at Nob that God makes good on this promise by ending Eli's line [except 1].
- The lone survivor Abiathar escapes Doeg's wrath and joins David's cause; however, later Abiathar supports Adonijah instead of Solomon, and Solomon subsequently exiles Abiathar (I Kgs 2:26), which completes the curse against Eli.

5. Furthermore, Doeg's destruction of the remaining priests in the line of Eli prepares the way for the rise of the new line that God had foretold to Eli: "And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind" (I Sam 2:35).

- This faithful priest is Zadok, who originally serves alongside Abiathar (the survivor) and becomes the founder of the all-important *Zadokite line* that would rise to prominence under David and continue for centuries thereafter, retaining significant importance through the major and minor prophets.
- They are the line who will serve King Jesus in the Millennium.

First major surprise: Doeg's massacre of the priests at Nob - though clearly tragic - is the historical circumstance God uses to "*fulfill His curse against Eli and His promise to raise up a new righteous line of priests.*"

B. Expediting the Demise of Saul.

"Doeg's actions also act as both a foil to Saul and a catalyst for his ultimate demise, which brought judgment on Israel for demanding a king that was not of God's own choosing and prepared the way for the real king, the one after God's own heart, King David."

1. It is ironic that Doeg is described as Saul's "chief shepherd" or "driver of mules" (LXX).

- Saul is characterized as a faltering shepherd who cannot find his father's donkeys. [I Sam 9:3] and who utterly fails as Israel's shepherd-king [II Sam 5:2].

2. Doeg's actions to put all of Nob "to the sword" [I Sam 22:19] were after the fashion of the *cherem* ["ban"].

- This stands in sharp contrast to Saul's own failure to do the same thing when God commanded it against the Amalekites. ["Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction All That They Have," I Sam 15:3].
- It is this disobedience of Saul to execute the "ban" [I Sam 15:19] that results in God's decisive pronouncement of rejection: "For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel" [I Sam 15:26].

3. Doeg's massacre at Nob facilitates the events leading to promised demise of Saul.

- Previously, Saul had rejected Samuel and replaced him with the priest Ahijah [I Sam 14:3ff], who was a descendent of Eli.
- Due to Saul's continuing spiral into chaos, the prophets and priests (including those at Nob) turn against him and instead support David.
- Having been rejected in principle by God, and having turned away from God's Word, Saul seals his fate by having Doeg kill the very priests who, bearing the ephod, can inquire of God for Saul.

Doeg's slaughter of the priests is a major transition point in the fall of Saul. The murder of the priests symbolizes God's complete withdrawal from Saul. He continues his insane pursuit of David, losing his family's support, resorting to necromancy, and ultimately dying a cowardly death in a losing battle.

Thus, Doeg's *cherem* has multiple levels of meaning with respect to Saul.

1. The "ban" is intended for God's enemies, but Doeg directs it at the priests who are Saul's enemies and, in theory, the allies of God.
2. Yet, these same priests are under God's curse to Eli and are, in a sense, God's enemies.
3. This juxtaposition of Doeg's successful (but unlawful and, thus, evil) *cherem* with Saul's failed (but lawful) *cherem* serves to escalate the very downfall of Saul that God promised as a result of his failure in the first place. It is really quite profound and complicated after all!

Note: The Bible often juxtaposes God's goodness and His sovereign, all-encompassing will up against very wicked human deeds. It is not always tidy. God is good, God is not sinful, God is morally perfect, God is wise, but God also directs wickedness to achieve His ends in ways far beyond our simple understanding.

C. Perpetuating Seed Conflict.

The fact that an Edomite stands at the center of such a complex sequence of events involving Israel's present king, future king, and priests draws out attention.

1. The Edomites descend from Esau [Gen 36:1], brother of Jacob, patriarch of the twelve tribes.
2. The perpetual antagonism between the descendants of Esau and Jacob is a manifestation of a "conflict of the seeds," referring to the enmity God imposed between the "seed" (זרע) of the woman and the "seed" of the serpent [Gen 3:15].

3. This enmity erupts at numerous points in Israel's history: Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, Ham and Shem, Isaac and Ishmael, Egypt and Israel - and Jacob and Esau, or Edom (of which Doeg was one).

The first true war with Edom transpires under none other than Saul [I Sam 14:47].

This sets the stage for further conflict with Edom under David [II Sam 8:13ff), Solomon [I Kings 11:14-15), Jehoshaphat [I Kings 22:47], Jehoram [II Kings 8:20ff], and Amaziah [II Kings 14:7), culminating at last in Obadiah's bitter prophecy against Edom ("because of the violence done to your brother Jacob"; [Obadiah 1:10].

4. Against this backdrop, it becomes evident that Doeg the Edomite, whose ethnic identity immediately marks him as bad news for Israel, is perpetuating another stage in the seed conflict: he opposes David, betrays the high priest Ahimelech, further exacerbates the collapse of Saul, murders Israel's priests, and destroys Nob.

5. Doeg the Edomite is God's ordained instrument to perpetuate the seed conflict at Nob, which nevertheless results in God's judgment upon him for his evil deeds.

Consider: God achieved several of His purposes through a massively evil event.

David attacks Doeg in Psalm 52, stating that God's everlasting $\tau\omicron\nu$ ("covenant love") - the very power behind His promise to redeem the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent - will triumph [Ps 52:1, 8].

Ps. 52: The Steadfast Love of God Endures

To the choirmaster: A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.

² Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.

³ You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. *Selah*

⁴ You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

⁵ But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*

⁶ The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying,

⁷ "See the man who would not make God his refuge,

but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!"

⁸ But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

⁹ I will thank you forever, because you have done it.

I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly.

We can mourn evil, but rejoice in God's good purposes, ultimately being reminded how "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). "In the cross the goodness and total sovereignty of God intersect with the wickedness of men (like Doeg) in ways that are hard to wrap our heads around but which further God's redemptive plans in ways we could never have imagined."