

MASSACRE AT NOB

Jon Macon

In 1 Samuel 21:1, David came to the city of Nob while fleeing for his life from King Saul. There, Ahimelech the priest gave sustenance to David and his men by giving them the old showbread that had been replaced that day (1 Sam 21:1-6). Ahimelech also gave David the sword of Goliath (1 Sam 21:8-9). David then fled to the land of the Philistines for refuge (1 Sam 21:10). But there was a witness to the assistance that Ahimelech the priest gave to David that day. *“Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul.”* This Doeg told King Saul what Ahimelech did and then at his behest massacred the priests of Nob.

Doeg’s betrayal of David and Ahimelech

King Saul learned of David’s escape, and spoke to his servants, “Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; that all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or showeth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? 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 inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine”* (1 Sam 22:7-10).

Making a lesson of Nob

King Saul decided to make an object lesson of Nob. He ordered the slaughter of all the priests there because they knew when David fled, and did not show it to Saul (1 Sam 22:17). “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. And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my Lord. 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 inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king’s son-in-law, and goes at thy bidding, and is honorable in thine house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more. And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father’s house. And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord;

MASSACRE AT NOB

(continued)

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. 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. 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*" (1 Sam 22:11-19). After this happened, every city in Israel knew that if Saul were willing to kill the Lord's priests for not revealing to him that David was there, then they certainly would not be spared. Therefore, from this time onward, David's whereabouts were repeatedly revealed, even by his own countrymen of Judah.

Why the massacre of Nob was God's will

It is not always possible to know the exact reason why God allows people to suffer horrible things at the hands of the wicked. But whether we understand the precise reason or not, God is always right in everything that He does (Psa 19:9; Rom 3:4). In the case of the slaughter of the priests at Nob, we do know that it was part of the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecy against the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:17-36; 3:11-14). A prophet came to Eli, and through him, God said, "Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age" (1 Sam 2:31-33). First, Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed (1 Sam 4:10-11). When Eli heard that news (1 Sam 4:12-16), he fell out of his seat backwards and broke his neck and died (1 Sam 4:17-18). When the wife of Phinehas heard that her husband and father-in-law were dead and that the ark of God had been taken by the Philistines, she went into premature labor and died (1 Sam 4:19-22). The high priesthood eventually passed to Ahiah, the son of Phinehas' son Ahitub (1 Sam 14:14:3). We do not know what happened to Ahitub and Ahiah, but we do know that the high priesthood passed to Ahiah's brother Ahimelech (1 Sam 21:1; 22:9). The murder of Ahimelech and all the others of the house of Eli in 1 Samuel 22:11-19 was also part of the fulfillment of the prophecy against the house of Eli. But Saul and Doeg will answer to God for the wickedness they committed against the priests of Nob.