

Doeg the Edomite: A Man After Saul's Own Heart

By Jim Elliff



David was on the run. King Saul, now possessed by an evil spirit, was after him. In his escape, he stops for food at Nob, where the Ark resided in the ancient tabernacle. Ahimilech was priest on duty. David asked for bread. In a historic move about which Jesus later would comment, Ahimilech gave him the loaves of the consecrated bread that sat that week on the table in the Holy Place.

But David also needed a weapon. He had left with none at all. “Is there not a spear or a sword on hand?” Lying behind the ephod, a special priestly garment, was the spear of Goliath himself. “There is none like it; give it to me.” And why wouldn’t it be given to David, the one who killed Goliath a short time before?

Nestled in this fascinating text in 1 Samuel 22 are these foreboding words, “Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul’s shepherds.”

Though Doeg was on King Saul’s staff as chief shepherd, he was obviously a traitor to his own people. Israel and Edom were currently enemies (1 Sam 14:47). The statement, “detained by the Lord” does not improve our confidence in him either. It doesn’t speak of Doeg’s true devotion, for his heart was far from God, but speaks of his feigned religiosity among his adopted people.

Now move ahead to the tamarisk tree where King Saul sat with his own spear in his hand. With his servants around him he complained: “All of you have conspired against me . . . there is none of you who is sorry for me.” He openly

gripped about the covenant between David and Jonathan, his son, that had recently come to light, which fueled even more jealousy and hatred toward David.

Then Doeg speaks up, a man ready with an inside word. “I saw the son of Jesse (David) coming to Nob, to Ahimelech . . . He inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

That was all it took. Ahimilech the priest was summoned immediately by Saul, and he dutifully came with his entire household—a large number of fellow priests. In a moment he was tried and condemned to die, though he was an innocent man. But no servant of the King would do Saul’s bidding, indicating that they were afraid to kill God’s anointed priests or that they privately had sympathies for David.

But one man will do it: Doeg.

Doeg killed 85 priests that day, and “he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword.” Only a Doeg could be so thorough.

This episode ends when one priest, who had escaped, reports the slaughter to David. David’s reply is sobering:

“I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father’s household.”

David, “a man after God’s own heart” was betrayed by Doeg, a man after Saul’s own heart.

Moral: You cannot tell a man by where he worships, but only by his heart.

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