

King Saul's Massacre

When David realized that King Saul was trying to kill him, he ran for his life. On his way out of town, though, he stopped at the Temple and asked Ahimelech the priest for help. After Ahimelech gave him some food and the sword of Goliath, David went on his way.

While David was there Doeg the Edomite happened to see him, and Doeg later told King Saul about it. Saul was outraged and had Ahimelech killed – along with an entire city of priests:

I Samuel 22:16: “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 shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

18 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.”

One thing the Bible makes clear is that Ahimelech was not

trying to rebel against the king. He had no idea that David had fallen out of favor or that the king was trying to kill him. Ahimelech acted in his integrity – but Saul was enraged and murdered him anyway. Saul went on to destroy the entire city of Nob; he murdered men, women, children, and even animals – all because Ahimelech gave David some bread and a sword.

So why did God allow this to happen? Why did God allow Saul to go on a bloody rampage and kill dozens of priests? Why didn't God step in and protect them, the way God continually protected David?

Sometimes there is no way to know why God does things, but this is not one of those times. You see, this was not a random act of violence. God was actually keeping a promise that He had made many years earlier.

You see, Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub:

1 Samuel 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.”

Ahitub, in turn, was related to Eli:

1 Samuel 14:3: “And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, **the son of Eli**, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone.”

If you know the story of Eli then you already know where this is going. Eli the priest had two sons who were also priests. These two sons were extremely wicked; they abused the sacrifices that were offered to the Lord. Now, being a priest was a big deal, and deliberately defiling the Lord's offerings was a very serious sin. Since Eli refused to stop his sons from defiling the offerings, God pronounced a curse upon his entire family:

I Samuel 2:29: “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

30 Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 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.**

32 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.

33 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.**

34 And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

36 And it shall come to pass, **that every one that is left in thine house shall come and**

crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

God promised to slaughter Eli's descendents "in the flower of their age", starting with his two children – and that's exactly what He did. When Saul later murdered Ahimelech and the entire city of Nob he was unknowingly carrying out the judgment that God had decreed upon the house of Eli. There was nothing random about what happened; God was keeping His promise.

There are a number of times in the Old Testament where God cursed entire families because of someone's sin. This seems surprising, but it shouldn't. After all, in the Ten Commandments God did say this:

Exodus 20:5: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children** unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6 And **showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me**, and keep my commandments."

If you love God and repent then God will show mercy to you; if you do not then you will not be spared. A good example of this can be found in the case of King Jeroboam. God pronounced a curse upon Jeroboam and his offspring – but God exempted one of the king's sons. The Lord explained why:

I Kings 14:12: "Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.
13 And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the

grave, **because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel** in the house of Jeroboam.”

Something good was found in this one child, so he was shown mercy. Nothing good was found in the others, though, so they were not shown mercy. That is how it works.

The massacre of King Saul was not a random act of violence. It is true that Saul certainly meant it for evil; he probably had no idea that he was carrying out God’s sentence against Eli. He was just in a murderous rage, lashing out against everyone who he thought was connected to David. But God used Saul’s rage to accomplish His purposes and fulfill His word.

