

Introduction: One of the biggest questions in life is: why do wicked, paranoid, murderous rulers stay in power to terrorize innocent people? It is often followed with: IF there is a good and righteous God, why does He allow this? *** The life of Israel's first king, Saul of Benjamin, is a case study in how a humble young man can disobey God because he becomes jealous and proud (pays attention to his 'press clippings'). When these character faults are prophetically exposed as sin, he only partially repents, before falling deeper into rebellion against God, and is rejected by God. *** Even when God gives Saul another decade to live, rather than coming to full repentance before Israel's God, he regresses deeper into paranoia, and executes mass killings of innocent and righteous people. All of this is continually fueled by his fear of his most loyal and faithful servant whom he has vilified; but, who will always spare his life and seek reconciliation to the end. *** In today's incident, Saul follows up on the intelligence report given to him by a pagan officer in his inner circle. After his Israelite soldiers are unwilling to kill God's priests, he orders the pagan to kill them. Doeg then slays eighty-five priests. *** Saul is spiraling down and out. This will only get worse. *** However, God is patient with Saul, and gives him every opportunity to repent (2 Peter 3:9). *** As a counter to Saul, David pledges to protect the one priest to escape Saul. *** We will consider a psalm that ends with this truth for God's people: know that in the end, God will cut off all wicked rulers who slay God's people who are righteous by faith.

I. Saul accuses Ahimelek of plotting with David to kill him; when Ahimelek defends David, Saul swears to kill him; then, when Saul's men are not willing, he commands Doeg who then kills eighty-five priests. (1 Samuel 22:11-19)

- A. Saul confronts Ahimelek the high priest, of conspiring with David to ambush him; Ahimelek supports David as a faithful servant to Saul, who then swears to slay Ahimelek. (*Verses 11-16*)
 1. Then the king sent to call Ahimelek, son of Ahitub and all his father's family who were at Nōb; then they all came to the king and Saul said: Y'all must now hear, I exhort, thee son of Ahitub; and he said: Behold me, my lord! (*Verses 11-12*)
Saul sets his trap: Based on Doeg's report, Saul has already determined his revenge on the priests of Yahweh. He is now ironically challenging the 'son of Ahitub' (again a contemptuous name)!
 2. Saul said: Why have thou and the 'son of Jesse' conspired against me that thou gave him bread and a sword, and inquired of God for him, so that he rose against me to ambush (me) in this day? (*Verse 13*)
The accusation: Saul accuses the priest and David of plotting to take his life by surprise. He has his facts straight, but his mind has twisted their motives so he reaches a false conclusion!
 3. Ahimelek answered: Who among all thy servants being (as) faithful as David thy son-in-law; and, he goes out at thy command, being honored in thy house? (*Verse 14*)
The priest vouches for David: Ahimelek confronts Saul with the truth about his most loyal and courageous servant who puts Saul's needs above his own.
 4. That day, did I begin to ask God for him? Far from true! The king will not put on his servant anything in all the family of my father, for thy servant has not known any of this, little or much. (*Verse 15*)
Ahimelek proclaims innocence: Ahimelek says he has long sought God on David's behalf. Then, again addressing Saul only with respect of his title, he says he is innocent of knowing that David has any intentions on his life.
5. Then the king said: To die, thou will die, Ahimelek! Thou, and all thy father's family! (*Verse 16*)
Saul's verdict – death: The Author of this narrative cannot use Saul's name – 'desired' because of his vehement and emphatic declaration of death to Ahimelek and all God's priests when all they did was help God's chosen king who has only been a faithful and courageous servant to Saul.

Helping God's chosen can lead to death

- B. Saul commands his men to put all the priests of Yahweh to death; and, when they are not willing, he commands Doeg, who kills eighty-five priests. (*Verses 16-19*)
 1. The king said to the footmen being stood by him: Y'all must turn and kill the priests of Yahweh because their hand (is) also with David; and, because they knew he (was) fleeing, and did not disclose it to me; and, the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of Yahweh. (*Verse 17*)
Saul's servants UN-willing: The soldiers serving the king were not willing to harm their covenant God's priests. Saul may have called Him by His covenant Name, but his heart is far from Him.
2. Then the king said to Doeg: Thou must turn and fall upon the priests; and, the Edomite turned and fell upon the priests; then, he killed on that day eighty-five men wearing the linen ephod. (*Verse 18*)
Doeg, mass slaughter: Un-named Saul gets his pagan henchman to slaughter seven dozen priests in addition to the high priest. All the priest 'sons of Aaron' wore linen when ministering to Yahweh (Exodus 28:40-43). They all died because Saul accused them of aiding God's chosen, David.

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3. And he slew with the sword Nōb, the city of priests: men, women, children, nursing babies; cattle, donkeys, sheep he slew with the sword. (*Verse 19*)
The whole priestly city: He totally killed all that had breath in Nōb. This was a reversal of God's will that His people totally destroy all the pagan cities (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). Because they failed to do so, the tables are now turned on God's people because of an unrighteous king.

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However: However, a man of God had spoken to Eli to say all his descendant priests would die in the ‘flower’ of their youth (1 Samuel 2:27-36). Even the smallest of their sins could lead to death, so ‘guard your heart’ (Proverbs 423, NLT).

Application: We must all avoid even the smallest sins by fully surrendering to God IN the Lord Jesus Christ, every moment of our lives.

II. One of Ahimelek’s sons escaped to tell David, who accepts blame and pledges to protect him; a psalmist questions wicked rulers killing the righteous, then calls Yahweh his stronghold who slays the wicked. (1 Samuel 22:20-23; Psalm 94:20-23)

A. One of Ahimelek’s sons escaped to David and told him what Saul did; David realizes he was uneasy about Doeg, accepts blame, and says to stay with him to be guarded. (1 Samuel 22:20-23)

1. One son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub escaped, and his name (was) Abiathar; and he fled after David; Abiathar told David that Saul had slain the priests of Yahweh. (Verses 20-21)

One left: When Jezebel’s wicked daughter killed all the sons of the king of Judah, Jehosheba the king’s sister, rescued her nephew Joash so the Davidic line could continue (2 Kings 11).

2. David said to Abiathar: I knew on that day when Doeg the Edomite was there, that to tell, he would tell Saul; I, even I, have brought around (the deaths) of every soul in thy father’s family. (Verse 22)

David’s confession: In hindsight, David confesses to the ‘lone survivor’ that he was uneasy about what Doeg saw and heard and should have acted on his suspicion and warned Ahimelek and his family.

It seems the Spirit of God had put on David’s heart that helping Saul’s enemy could lead to Ahimelek’s death.

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3. Thou must dwell with me and thou will not fear; because the one who will seek my soul, will seek thy soul (and) because thou (being) guarded (kept safe) with me. (Verse 23)

David steps up: David now steps up and pledges to keep the high priest’s son from being harmed by Saul.

He is progressing from his first sin of lying to the high priest when he first fled Saul (causing his death) to now offering to guard his son at any cost to himself because of his growing faith in Yahweh.

Application: Let us learn from this to never let failure stop us; but, that we will always turn to God in repentance and confession to receive by grace through faith His forgiveness, reconciliation and strength in the Holy Spirit.

B. The psalmist questions God about wicked rulers putting righteous people to death; and, he calls Yahweh his stronghold who will cut off the wicked. (Psalm 94:20-23)

1. Will a throne of destruction have fellowship with Thee? / one fashioning trouble by decree? (Verse 20)

Evil has no fellowship with God: Evil, in the person of rulers who trouble their people with plans to destroy them by decree, cannot have any fellowship with Yahweh (verse 18). The Church is instructed to separate from unbelievers because there is no fellowship of righteousness and unrighteousness, or light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

2. They will gather together against the soul of the righteous / and innocent blood they will condemn. (Verse 21)

Seek to kill righteous: These evil rulers seek to kill the righteous. The new covenant testifies that the righteousness God requires is through the faith of Jesus Christ to all believing (Romans 3:22). Righteousness under the Mosaic covenant was similarly through faithful obedience to the Torah.

3. Yahweh has become to me (a) stronghold / my God (is) the rock of my refuge. (Verse 22)

Covenant God: The covenant God protects his people as a mighty fortress, a refuge from all troubles all people experience. Solomon said: The name of Yahweh is (a) strong tower / the righteous will run to it and be (safely) set on high (Proverbs 18:10).

Application: Putting it all together, we must make every effort to be found righteous IN Jesus Christ, praying we will be moved by God to love Him fully with all we are. And also that, we will be guided in all we do and say to testify to His faithfulness and life-changing LOVE to all people He brings into our lives.

4. Then He will return upon them their iniquity / and in their evil He will cut them off / He will cut them off, Yahweh our God. (Verse 23)

He ‘destroys’ evil: This is the final promise of Yahweh concerning corrupt and wicked rulers plotting evil:

He will eventually destroy them.

Corrupt rulers are eventually destroyed

Conclusion: Saul accuses Ahimelek of plotting with David to kill him. When Ahimelek defends David, Saul swears to kill him. Then, when Saul’s men are not willing, he commands Doeg who then kills eighty-five priests. One of Ahimelek’s sons escaped to tell David, who accepts blame and pledges to protect him. The psalmist questions wicked rulers killing the righteous, then calls Yahweh his stronghold who destroys the wicked.

Helping God’s chosen can lead to death