

Six Tests for Leadership

David the Fugitive Pt.3

1 Samuel 22:6-22 3-22-2009

Summary: The scene shifts to give an update on Saul, who is concerned above all to establish evidence of a conspiracy against him. He uses coercive methods to pressure his men to produce evidence along that line and finally Doeg speaks up and falsely portrays Ahimelech as a conspirator. Saul reverses the authority laid out in Scripture (priests above kings) and puts Ahimelech on trial, convicts him (and God) and retaliates with a HARAM against God (which turns out to be nothing but the fulfillment of God's prophetic plan).

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1 Samuel 22:6 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand, was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him. **7** Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?"

8 Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. **10** Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. **12** Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." "Yes, my lord," he answered. **13** Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?" **14** Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? **15** Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair." **16** But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD. **18** The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore

the linen ephod. 19 He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. 21 He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 22 Then David said to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family.

Review

We pick up the story of David this morning with David and his 400 men hiding in the forest of Hereth. They had escaped out of the country and went to Moab and David said, "I'll stay here until I find out what God will do for me," and what God did for him was send him right back to the place he had just run away from. God has work for David to do there. So verse 5 leaves David there in Hereth hiding with his 400 men, and then in verse 6 the scene shifts up to Gibeah. Now it is time for an update on what Saul is up to.

Saul's "Leadership"

6 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand, (he loved that spear)

He always had to have that spear handy in case he needed to throw it at one of his officials – or a family member.

was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him.

All those details – the tree and his officials standing there, etc. give us a picture of Saul conducting official business as king.¹ We are going to get a snapshot here of what it looks like when Saul conducts official kingdom business. Last week we saw how David leads; now we get to see how Saul leads. And it is wonderfully providential that we would happen to hit this passage this Sunday, when we are ordaining new leaders. So today's sermon is a study of leadership. But it is not just for the new deacons. As we found last week, the definition of leadership is when someone is following you. If you are voted the #1 evangelical leader in the world, or you have the office of President of the United States and they call you the leader of the free world, whatever position or title of leadership you might have, if you turn around and find that no one is following you, you are not leading. And conversely, if someone is following you, then you are leading.

And all of us – every single person in this room, have some people who follow our lead. We all have some people who are influenced by what we do, and so a sermon on leadership is important for every one of us, because God will hold each one of us accountable for what we did with our influence. So let's take a look at how Saul went about this task of leadership. I want to show you seven marks of godly leadership that we can learn from the contrast between David

¹ Tamarisk trees were somewhat uncommon, which made them distinctive, and this is the traditional posture of an official setting.

and Saul. There are six questions that will help each of us discern which style of leadership we have.

1. Do I coerce or inspire?

Bribery

7 Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards?"

(He cannot bring himself to say the name "David." By referring to him as "the son of Jesse" Saul puts kind of a distant, cool tone on his references to David.)

Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8 Is that why you have all conspired against me?

Saul is implying that if someone will give him information on David he will give them these rewards. He cannot get anyone to just speak up out of loyalty, and so he has to revert to bribing them.² Having to bribe people to do what you want them to do is not a mark of good leadership. "But wait a minute – what's wrong with using rewards as a motivation?" There is a big difference between proper use of rewards and bribing. Proper reward encourages good behavior, bribery encourages bad behavior. You tell your kid, "Eat your peas," and he refuses, so you say, "I'll give you a treat if you eat your peas" and then he does it. You do that and you have just rewarded your kid for disobedience. You have just used rewards to teach him that it really pays to disobey. That is the wrong approach.

And that is what Saul is doing here. I have always pictured it as though Doeg was lurking in the Tabernacle, gathering intel about David, then as soon as David left he is racing off to go tell Saul. But if you read carefully you can see that is not really what happened. This is quite some time after Doeg saw David in the Temple. A lot of time has transpired since David was at Nob. He has been to Gath, then Adullam, then Moab, then Hereth, and yet, at the beginning of chapter 23 Saul still has not even heard about him being at Nob. And it is not as though Doeg hadn't come back to Saul yet – he is right there. And yet he does not say anything until after Saul gives his big coercive speech.

Guilt Trip

So Saul uses bribery to get his men to respond. Doeg still does not say anything, and so Saul moves to his next technique – guilt trip. Saul is such a child.

² Remember back when Samuel was warning the people about what it would be like under a human king?

1 Samuel 8:11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do ... 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties ... 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.

When you first read that you might wonder, "What's wrong with a king offering rewards?" There is nothing wrong with giving rewards per se, but it becomes wrong when the king uses those things to bribe people.

8 ...No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today.

Saul is doing his Rodney Dangerfield impersonation – “I get no respect” and tries to get the men to feel sorry for him. That is how Saul gets people to respond – bribery, guilt trips, sympathy plays, and no doubt you could add to that list intimidation. It says he had spear in hand. We have seen twice now that if he gets mad at you, you had better be ready to dodge that spear.

And he actually accuses his son Jonathan of being the instigator of the whole thing. But his complaint is not about his son turning against him or David lying in wait for him - what he is complaining about is that *no one seems to care* that he is going through this terrible hardship.

That is Saul’s brand of leadership – use bribery, guilt trips, and intimidation to threaten, coerce, manipulate, and cajole people into going along with what you want them to do. That is the wrong way. What is the right way? How did David lead his men? How on earth did he convince 400 cowardly, scared, ninnyes to leave their safe fortress in Moab and go to back to Israel? There are no reports that he had to make any threats or revert to manipulation. He just started walking and they followed. David’s love for God’s will was so infectious and contagious that it made everyone around him feel like there just was not any other rational option. He loved God’s will so much it made God’s will attractive to everyone around him. So do you lead like Saul or like David? Question #1 is do you coerce or do you inspire? One area where this is crucial is in parenting. When they are little you use the rod to teach your children the right behavior. And that works great until they hit their teens. After that – all of those who have raised teens will tell you – negative consequences are no longer very effective. You tell them they are grounded, take away the car keys, throw their cell phone in the trash, take away all their privileges, no friends, no prom, cancel Christmas, and still they won’t clean up their room. Why? Because when you start to approach adulthood the flesh becomes so powerful that negative consequences by themselves are not enough to overcome it. But if you have spent the last 10 years living your life in such a way as to make the will of God seem beautiful and good and supremely important and non-negotiable, then you can inspire them to do what is right. You sit them down and show them that laziness versus diligence is a matter of righteousness, and you show them the significance of God being pleased or displeased, and instead of it going in one ear and out the other it has a powerful impact on their heart.

2. Do I appeal to the flesh or the redeemed heart?

But Saul did not inspire anyone, so he had to use coercion and finally in verse 9 one guy falls for it. (You are almost glad Doeg finally speaks up in verse 9 just so Saul doesn’t keep going with that pathetic speech.) And here we get to see the effect this kind of leadership has on people.

9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob.

Doeg picks up on Saul’s lingo and calls David “son of Jesse” too. He is following Saul’s lead in the way he talks because he is trying to get Saul’s favor.

10 Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Wait a second – that is your whole report? Aren't you going to mention the part about David claiming he was on a mission for Saul? Aren't you going to let Saul know that Ahimelech did not know he was helping a fugitive?

Doeg leaves all that out. What a liar! This is perjury. He is leaving out the key evidence that proves Ahimelech is innocent. Every word out of Doeg's mouth was technically true, and yet listen to what David says about him in his prayer in Psalm 52:

Psalm 52:2 Your tongue...is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. 3 You love ... falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah 4 You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!

Even if every word out of your mouth is technically true, if you leave out key information to hide the truth that is still lying.

Why do this? Why endanger Ahimelech before Saul for no reason? What did Ahimelech ever do to Doeg? Doeg did this because he wanted favor with Saul. He wanted to give Saul what Saul wanted. And what Saul wanted was evidence of a conspiracy. Look at all the things Saul says – he is not interested in just indicting David as a traitor. He wants it to be a conspiracy (when a group of people plan together to do some bad thing). (If Saul goes after one man it looks like a childish vendetta. But if there is a vast conspiracy, then major, military action is warranted and it doesn't look petty.) So if you look at what he says, he is not asking primarily for help in locating David. He is asking for information about people who are on David's side in this conspiracy.

So Doeg gives Saul what he wants. He puts Ahimelech's life at risk just for his own personal, political gain. In fact, that is exactly the point David made in his prayers to God about this. When David heard about what Doeg did he wrote Psalm 52.

Psalm 52:1 For the director of music. A *maskil* of David. When Doeg the Edomite went and reported to Saul, telling him, "David went to Ahimelech's house."

5 Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah 6 The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, 7 "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!"

Doeg grew strong politically by destroying Ahimelech, and he did that because he trusted in wealth and political power as his stronghold rather than in God (v.7). Choosing the wrong stronghold was a big mistake, because when God came and snatched Doeg up and ripped him right out of his tent to thrust him into everlasting ruin in hell, all that money and political power could not even begin to help him.

3 You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah 4 You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!

Doeg didn't just speak evil and lies – he *loved* doing it. That is what happens in the heart that gives itself to sin – you end up actually loving the sin, which is the worst possible thing that could happen to your heart. That means the corruption has penetrated to the deepest level.

And again - this happened because of Saul's influence. It was Saul's method of leadership that corrupted Doeg. Only after the big "woe is me" speech does Doeg finally speak up. That is the fruit of Saul's leadership - evil influence.

Inspiring leadership appeals to what is good in people, but coercive leadership tends to appeal to the flesh. It activates and stimulates and feeds the sin in people's hearts. No doubt those 400 who joined David in the cave showed up with plenty of bad characteristics. And yet time and again we see them doing good things under David's leadership. Inspiring leadership draws out what is good in people and coercive leadership draws out what is bad in people.

And beyond that, most of the people who follow your lead will not be all that discerning about following the good and rejecting the bad. The people who look up to you will be influenced by your good points, but in their flesh they will also tend to use your bad points as justification. "Darrell's a good guy, and he does this thing – so it must be OK." That is why Scripture requires leaders in the church to be exemplary in so many areas. If you have one area of sin, that is going to influence people.

Look at the people who are influenced by you. Is your influence sparking sin, or drawing out righteousness? That is question #2 – Does my leadership appeal to the flesh or to the redeemed heart?

3. Do I see my sins in everyone else's hearts or do I assume the best?

Priest on Trial

What happens next is probably the most chilling event in the whole book. First Saul puts God's priest on trial.

11 Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. 12 Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

(Now he won't say Ahimelech's name. It seems the son of Kish is on a last name basis with just about everyone.) But Ahimelech is respectful to Saul.

12 ... "Yes, my lord," he answered.

Priests are above kings

But Saul is not only disrespectful to Ahimelech, he is about to put him on trial. That should not happen. In God's Kingdom, kings were not above the priests – the priests were above the kings. If anyone should be putting anyone on trial it should be Ahimelech trying Saul. In Deuteronomy 17 God made it clear that the priests were to function as the judicial branch of Israel's government. They were the court system.

Deuteronomy 17:8 If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge ... 9 Go to the priests, who are Levites ... Inquire of them and they will give you the

verdict. 10 You must act according to the decisions they give you at the place the LORD will choose. Be careful to do everything they direct you to do. 11 Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left. 12 The man who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the LORD your God must be put to death.

Even Moses was to submit to the authority of the priests. And if you are so much as guilty of contempt of court before a priest you were to be put to death. But Saul has the priest on trial.

13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

That is the second time he accused David of lying in wait for him. What has David ever done that would make him think that? Nothing. Saul has absolutely no reason whatsoever to believe that. So why does he? He believes it because when you have a sin in your heart you tend to impose that same sin on everyone else's heart. Saul was trying to kill David, and so he could not imagine that David wouldn't do the same thing.

That is one of the ways we justify ourselves – by imposing our bad motives on everyone else. That way you don't seem so bad, because you are no worse than everyone else. And so when you do things for selfish reasons, you tend to assume other people must have similar motives for what they do. When you do things out of greed you figure others must have that same motive. And then you get mad at them for those bad motives, when you do not even have any knowledge that they even have that bad motive. Saul does that constantly. He thought he saw sin in David's heart, Jonathan's heart, Ahimelech's heart – everyone's heart. He assumed everyone else had the same wicked motives that he had.

That is why Saul is so insistent on turning this into a conspiracy. David is in on it, Jonathan is in on it, the priests – even *God Himself*. Keep in mind, the priest represents God. So even God is in on it. It is the ultimate vast, right-wing conspiracy.

People who destroy themselves tend to blame everyone else – and ultimately God.

Proverbs 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

Sometimes they will say, "Yeah, I know it's my own fault" and yet deep down inside they have anger toward God for letting it happen.

When Saul makes his accusations in this section the word "you" is plural. He is accusing all the entire priestly community. This is the irrationality of anger. How often do we get angry at someone, but we do not have the power to do anything to the person we are mad at, so we take it out on someone else who is totally innocent? How many times have our family members been snapped at by us because we were angry with someone else? Think of the insanity of that. Why do you accomplish by punishing an innocent party? It makes absolutely no sense at all. Sinful anger is irrational.

Think of how different we are from God. What we do with anger, God does with love. He loves His Son so much that He "takes that out" on us! He takes all His love out on us! We impute the guilt of the one who hurt us onto some innocent party and then take out our anger on them. God imputes the righteousness of the One He loves onto guilty parties and then pours out

that love on them. Let's learn from God. Let's take out our love on innocent bystanders, not our anger.

One of the most painful things to handle in this story is the silence that prevails at this point. Saul accuses Ahimelech of conspiring against him. Who should speak up at that point? Doeg. Doeg should say, "Well, in all fairness, the priest wasn't in on it. He didn't know." But he does not say anything. He does not care who gets hurt as long as he can gain the political favor he wants. So question #3 in our leadership test – Do you impose your sinful motives on the hearts of others, or do you assume the best?

4. Am I above reproach?

Ahimelech's answer

Well, let's look at Ahimelech's response. Ahimelech is a good man. He does not back down from Saul at all. And he is going to defend himself... - but not just yet. He will get to that, but first he has a more urgent thing on his mind. Before he defends himself in verse 15 he wants to defend David in verse 14. That is such a great picture of Christian love. The first thought that pops into his mind after having been falsely accused is to think, "Wait a minute – what he's saying about David isn't right." And only after that does it finally occur to him to defend himself.

14 Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household?"

Right off the top of his head Ahimelech has four arguments for how ridiculous it is for Saul to suspect David of disloyalty. He really seems genuinely surprised that Saul would suspect David.

And that tells us something about David, doesn't it? David is above reproach. When the truth comes out – the whole truth, David ends up smelling like a rose. Not even his bitterest enemies can say anything negative about him that is true. You know, if there were the slightest evidence that pointed to David being guilty, Saul would be all over it. But that evidence did not exist.

If you were on trial, and the whole truth about you came out, would you still be worth following? Scripture exposes everything about David – his private moments, his inner thoughts, his feelings – everything, and at this stage in his life still, even when you see everything, even the most godly, righteous people alive want to follow his example and be more like him. So that is question #4 for your leadership: Are you above reproach? Above reproach does not mean perfect. It means there is no obvious, ongoing sin that can be observed, and when you do sin your repentance and recovery from that failure is exemplary.

Finally in verse 15 Ahimelech defends himself.

15 Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

Seeking guidance from God on David's behalf was a routine thing for Ahimelech. It happened all the time. And besides that he knew nothing about whatever was going on between

David and Saul. (And again – there was an eye-witness standing there who could have confirmed that. Doeg knew that Ahimelech really did not know that David was running from Saul, but he keeps silent.)

5. Do I love & honor those who represent God?

Saul's HARAM

16 But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

This is the same thing that happened when Saul ordered them to kill Jonathan. They wouldn't do it. When you lead like Saul you develop followers who have to pick and choose when to follow you. Saul's men knew that he was so unstable that from time to time they just needed to ignore an order. That is why Saul had to resort to all those coercive techniques to get them to do what he wanted. Killing Jonathan for innocently eating some honey was over the line. And if that was over the line – attacking the priests of Yahweh is WAY over the line.

Saul's officials are probably not the most righteous or God-fearing individuals in Israel, and no doubt they did plenty of wicked things, but not even they are willing to slaughter all the priests of Yahweh. You do not kill the priest of any god unless you are certain that god either doesn't exist or is powerless against whatever god is protecting you. These guys knew better than to mess with the priests of Yahweh.

And so Saul turns to Doeg. And what happens next is a bloodbath.

18 The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.

Doeg must have been a pretty powerful character. Even in Psalm 52 David calls him a **mighty man**.

The commentaries say that Doeg was willing to do this because he was an Edomite, so he did not have any fear of Israel's God. But remember, Doeg happened to overhear what went on when David came to the Tabernacle because he was detained there, which means he must have been there worshipping or fulfilling some sort of vow to Yahweh. Doeg was a religious man who worshipped the God of Israel. Or at least he thought he did. He worshipped at Yahweh's tabernacle, but obviously he didn't really know the Lord.

He executed 85 priests – and he did not stop there.

19 He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

It is not clear if the **he** of verse 19 is Doeg or Saul. It may be that once Doeg killed the priests, the rest of Saul's men became willing to follow the order to exterminate the rest of the people in the town. Or, it may have just been Doeg. It could be that Saul's soldiers, while they

couldn't bring themselves to kill the priests, were willing to contain the people of Nob while Doeg was carrying out the slaughter.

Let this sink in. Imagine a little 12 year old girl begging for mercy, and he runs her through with his sword. Then a six year old boy. A toddler. And then he rips the infants right out of the arms of their mothers and kills them. Then the mothers themselves. Old women, young men – everyone. And then the animals. An entire city covered with blood, and amid all the screams and cries of the children and pleas for mercy, Saul never says, “OK, that’s enough.”

Why kill everyone? Were those little babies in on the conspiracy? Was some elderly widow in Nob a threat to Saul’s kingdom? Were some of those goats conspiring to bring down Saul? And why kill the animals? Those animals are worth a lot of money – why not keep them?

Exterminating every living thing in a village was a practice that actually has a technical name. It is called a HARAM, and it was a religious action (Dt.20:17, 18). From time to time God commanded Israel to carry out a HARAM against some city. The purpose of a HARAM was to eliminate completely the influence a city would have to draw the hearts of God’s people away from Him. And killing even the animals was a symbolic statement. It showed it was not an issue of just trying to get plunder – it was a religious matter.

In fact, if you think back to chapter 15 you will remember that Saul was supposed to have carried out a HARAM against the Amalekites, but he failed to do it. He got greedy and spared some of the animals. That was what caused God to finally reject Saul as king.

So this slaughter of Nob, as horrible as it sounds, was actually a lot worse than you think. Saul was actually carrying out a religious HARAM against Yahweh. What he would not do to the Amalekites he did to the priests of Yahweh. It is nothing short of an effort to exterminate the influence of the Lord Himself.

Did you notice during the trial what really made Saul mad about Ahimelech’s actions? It was not so much giving David bread or even the sword. When Doeg made his report he mentions those things in a secondary way..., but the very first thing he mentions is the fact that Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for David. And when Saul accuses Ahimelech he mentions that too. And when Ahimelech gives his defense, that is the *only* thing he mentions. That is the central issue of the trial. Ahimelech was put to death for the crime of seeking God’s will for David. The last thing Saul wants is God’s will.

At this point Saul’s cold war against God turns into a hot war. There is debate right now between the US and China over the question of whether our surveillance down there is illegal or some kind of act of aggression. But if we dropped a nuclear bomb on Beijing there would not be any discussion about the subtleties of whether it qualified as an actual act of aggression. You drop a bomb on your enemy and you have just declared war in the clearest possible terms. Saul is dropping his version of a nuclear warhead on God’s capital.

War on God’s people = war on God

I do not know if Saul actually thought of it in those terms. There is no question that is how the inspired writer is portraying it, and that is what was actually happening in Saul’s heart whether he realized it or not. Saul may have just been so blinded with pride and anger and selfishness that he was oblivious to what it was he was actually doing. I can tell you that back in Saul’s earlier days when he was first empowered by the Holy Spirit and he was respectful of Samuel and was worshipping the Lord, if you told him back then that someday he would declare war on God he would probably think you were out of your mind. He never intended to sink this low.

The tiniest sin, if you do not repent of it, will lead to this. Moving away from God, no matter how tiny your steps, can result in nothing but further and further distance from God if you do not turn around. And if you continue too long in unrepentance God may just give you over to your sin, and then the result will be all out nuclear war against God without any ability to repent. Your flesh will fight to eliminate any influence from God on your heart. "A small sin" is an oxymoron. There is no such thing as small rebellion against the King of the Universe. But what does all this have to do with us today? We do not even have priests anymore, do we? Of course we do. The New Testament is crystal clear that the Church is a kingdom of priests. Every Christian is a priest of the Most High God. Be careful when you get into a dispute with another Christian. When you make one of the children of God your enemy, you inevitably end up fighting against God Himself. Remember Jesus' words – whatever you do to His brothers you do to the Lord Himself (Mt.25:40). The reason Jesus commanded us to be so urgent about reconciling broken relationships in the Church, and to leave your sacrifice sitting there on the altar while you go reconcile is because God is not interested in your worship as long as you continue in an unreconciled relationship because while you are at war with that person you are at war with God. (Now, God understands that it is not always within your power to reconcile. That is why Romans 12:18 says to live at peace **if possible, as far as it depends on you**. If you have humbled yourself and tried everything you can possibly try, and the other person simply refuses to reconcile, then it is out of your control and it is not your responsibility. But if you have not tried everything, then your estrangement and alienation from that person – whether it is a cold war inside your heart or a hot war of arguing and fighting – either way it is estrangement and alienation from God.) Leadership question #5 – How do you treat those people who represent Almighty God? Do you love and honor them like David did, or do you despise them like Saul did?

God Wins

So Saul's HARAM against the priesthood of Yahweh was nothing less than an attack on God Himself. And it sure seems like God loses the first battle in the hot war between Him and Saul, doesn't it? The priests all die, the priesthood is wiped out (which means the whole religious system would be extinguished - without the sacrificial system there is not really much of anything left of Judaism as it is described in the Law of Moses). And Saul does not seem to suffer any reprisal or consequence from this. God does not strike him with leprosy, or send down fire from heaven. The incident is never even brought up again. Saul seems to just walk away from this scott-free while the entire, formal religious system of Yahweh lies dead and rotting on the streets of what used to be the city of Nob.

Is God powerless to defend Himself? Is the Lord God Almighty overcome by the sword of Doeg? Has the plan and purpose and Kingdom of the real King suffered a setback here at the hands of Saul?

Not at all – just the opposite in fact. Those of you who were here back when we studied chapter 2 might remember that this very thing was prophesied by God at the beginning of the book. In 2:12-16 it describes some wicked, vile things the sons of Eli were doing in their work as priests. Eli gave them a slap on the wrist, but it was meaningless because he was involved in it himself. And so God cursed the line of Eli and said his descendents would be cut down in the prime of life (except for one escapee).

What Saul did was no surprise to God. It was no defeat to God's plan – it was fulfillment of God's own Word! This was a judgment against the house of Eli that had been in the works from before Saul was ever born! Saul did not derail God's Kingdom by what he did. All Saul did was

make himself the tool that carried out the very plan and purposes of God in fulfillment of prophecy.

Does that make Saul innocent? No – no more than Babylon or Judas or Satan are innocent. If God uses your wickedness to carry out some good part of His plan that does not change the fact of your wickedness. Saul was not forced against his will to do this. He is as responsible and as guilty as he can be.

And the other question you might have is, “Isn’t that kind of unfair for the priests in Nob?” They weren’t evil – why should they have to die for the sins of Eli and his sons? The answer is, that is the nature of sin – it brings harm on innocent parties all the time. And God allows it to bring harm on innocent parties. However, if those innocent parties are God’s children, God sees to it that what happens to them is ultimately in their best interests (Ro.8:28).

So what happened in Nob? God fulfilled His purposes in prophecy. And God fulfilled His purposes in the lives of each person in Nob – good or bad. And was the religious system of Judaism and Yahweh worship wiped out? No, as we will see God enabled at least one priest to escape, so the priesthood continues. Even when the enemy does wicked things, God remains in total unruffled control, and His plan is not damaged in the slightest. Do not ever fight against God because God always wins.

6. Do I focus on my sins or others’?

David takes responsibility

20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. 21 He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 22 Then David said to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family.

In the midst of that whole, bloody massacre Abiathar saw an opening, made a break for it, and got away and he comes and tells David what happened. David thought he had protected Ahimelech by making up that story. But he underestimated how wicked Doeg really was so David takes full responsibility for the deaths of all those people.

That is another mark of humility and great leadership. Usually, if it is more someone else’s fault than it is your fault, then you become blind to your culpability altogether. If it is 2% your fault and 98% your husband’s fault, you tend not to make too much of your 2%. This slaughter was 99.999% Saul and Doeg’s fault, and yet David finds one little sliver of responsibility he had and focuses on that first. So question #6 – Do you focus mostly on your own sin or mostly on the sins of those who are hurting you?

Benediction: Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Devotionals

Day 1

1 Samuel 22:6 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him.

All those details – the tree and his officials standing there, etc. give us a picture of Saul conducting official business as king.³ Last week we saw how David leads; now we get to see how Saul leads.

The definition of leadership is when someone is following you. All of us have some people who follow our lead - who are influenced by what we do, and so a sermon on leadership is important for every one of us, because God will hold each one of us accountable for what we did with our influence. From this passage we find six marks of a good leader.

1. Do I coerce or inspire?

7 Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8 Is that why you have all conspired against me?"

Saul is implying that if someone will give him information on David he will give them these rewards. He cannot get anyone to just speak up out of loyalty so he has to revert to bribing them.⁴ Having to bribe people to do what you want them to do is not a mark of good leadership. “But wait a minute – what’s wrong with using rewards as a motivation?” There is a big difference between proper use of rewards and bribing. Proper reward encourages good behavior, bribery encourages bad behavior. You tell your kid, “Eat your peas,” and he refuses, so you say, “I’ll give you a treat if you eat your peas” and then he does it. You do that and you have just rewarded your kid for disobedience. You have just used rewards to teach him that it really pays to disobey. That is the wrong approach.

Saul uses bribery to get his men to respond. Doeg still does not say anything, and so Saul moves to his next technique – guilt trip.

8 ...No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today.

That is how Saul gets people to respond – bribery, guilt trips, sympathy plays, and no doubt you could add to that list intimidation. It says he had spear in hand. We have seen twice now that if he gets mad at you, you had better be ready to dodge that spear.

And he actually accuses his son Jonathan of being the instigator of the whole thing. But his complaint is not about his son turning against him or David lying in wait for him- what he is complaining about is that *no one seems to care* that he is going through this terrible hardship.

³ Tamarisk trees were somewhat uncommon, which made them distinctive, and this is the traditional posture of an official setting.

⁴ Remember back when Samuel was warning the people about what it would be like under a human king?

1 Samuel 8:11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do ... 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties ... 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.

When you first read that you might wonder, “What’s wrong with a king offering rewards?” There is nothing wrong with giving rewards per se, but it becomes wrong when the king uses those things to bribe people.

That is Saul's brand of leadership – use bribery, guilt trips, and intimidation to threaten, coerce, manipulate, and cajole people into going along with what you want them to do. That is the wrong way. What is the right way? How did David lead his men? How on earth did he convince 400 cowardly, scared, ninnyes to leave their safe fortress in Moab and go to back Israel? There are no reports that he had to make any threats or revert to manipulation. He just started walking and they followed. David's love for God's will was so infectious and contagious that it made everyone around him feel like there just was not any other rational option. He loved God's will so much it made God's will attractive to everyone around him.

So do you lead like Saul or like David? Question #1 is do you coerce or do you inspire? One area where this is crucial is in parenting. When they are little you use the rod to teach your children the right behavior. And that works great until they hit their teens. After that – all of those who have raised teens will tell you – negative consequences are no longer very effective. You tell them they are grounded, take away the car keys, throw their cell phone in the trash, take away all their privileges, no friends, no prom, cancel Christmas, and still they won't clean up their room. Why? Because when you start to approach adulthood the flesh becomes so powerful that negative consequences by themselves are not enough to overcome it. But if you have spent the last 10 years living your life in such a way as to make the will of God seem beautiful and good and supremely important and non-negotiable, then you can inspire them to do what is right. You sit them down and show them that laziness versus diligence is a matter of righteousness, and you show them the significance of God being pleased or displeased, and instead of it going in one ear and out the other it has a powerful impact on their heart.

Day 2

From this passage we find six marks of a good leader.

1. Do I coerce or inspire?

2. Do I appeal to the flesh or the redeemed heart?

Saul did not inspire anyone, so he had to use coercion, and finally in verse 9 one guy falls for it. And here we get to see the effect this kind of leadership has on people.

1 Samuel 22:9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob.

Doeg picks up on Saul's lingo and calls David "son of Jesse" too. He is following Saul's lead in the way he talks because he is trying to get Saul's favor.

10 Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Wait a second – that is your whole report? Aren't you going to mention the part about David claiming he was on a mission for Saul? Aren't you going to let Saul know that Ahimelech did not know he was helping a fugitive?

Doeg leaves all that out. What a liar! This is perjury. He is leaving out the key evidence that proves Ahimelech is innocent. Every word out of Doeg's mouth was technically true, and yet listen to what David says about him in his prayer in Psalm 52:

Psalm 52:2 Your tongue...is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. 3 You love ... falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah 4 You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!

Even if every word out of your mouth is technically true, if you leave out key information to hide the truth, that is still lying.

Why do this? Why endanger Ahimelech before Saul for no reason? What did Ahimelech ever do to Doeg? Doeg did this because he wanted favor with Saul. He wanted to give Saul what Saul wanted. And what Saul wanted was evidence of a conspiracy. Look at all the things Saul says – he is not interested in just indicting David as a traitor. He wants it to be a conspiracy (when a group of people plan together to do some bad thing). (If Saul goes after one man it looks like a childish vendetta. But if there is a vast conspiracy, then major, military action is warranted and it does not look petty.) So if you look at what he says, he is not asking primarily for help in locating David. He is asking for information about people who are on David's side in this conspiracy.

So Doeg gives Saul what he wants. He puts Ahimelech's life at risk just for his own personal, political gain. In fact, that is exactly the point David made in his prayers to God about this. When David heard about what Doeg did he wrote Psalm 52.

Psalm 52:1 For the director of music. A *maskil* of David. When Doeg the Edomite went and reported to Saul, telling him, "David went to Ahimelech's house."

5 Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah 6 The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, 7 "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!"

Doeg grew strong politically by destroying Ahimelech and he did that because he trusted in wealth and political power as his stronghold rather than in God (v.7). Choosing the wrong stronghold was a big mistake, because when God came and snatched Doeg up and ripped him right out of his tent to thrust him into everlasting ruin in hell, all that money and political power could not even begin to help him.

3 You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah 4 You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!

Doeg did not just speak evil and lies – he *loved* doing it. That is what happens in the heart that gives itself to sin – you end up actually loving the sin, which is the worst possible thing that could happen to your heart. That means the corruption has penetrated to the deepest level.

And the thing we need to realize is that this happened because of Saul's influence. It was Saul's method of leadership that corrupted Doeg. And that is what Saul is doing here. It has been a long time since Doeg saw David in Nob, but he does not say anything until after Saul gives his big coercive speech.

Only after the big "woe is me" speech does Doeg finally speak up. It was Saul's coercive leadership practices that led Doeg into this sin. That is the fruit of Saul's leadership - evil influence.

Inspiring leadership appeals to what is good in people, but coercive leadership tends to appeal to the flesh. It activates and stimulates and feeds the sin in people's hearts. No doubt those 400 who joined David in the cave showed up with plenty of bad characteristics. And yet time and again we see them doing good things under David's leadership. Inspiring leadership draws out what is good in people and coercive leadership draws out what is bad in people.

And beyond that, most of the people who follow your lead will not be all that discerning about following the good and rejecting the bad. The people who look up to you will be influenced by your good points, but in their flesh they will also tend to use your bad points as justification. "Darrell's a good guy, and he does this thing – so it must be OK." That is why

Scripture requires leaders in the church to be exemplary in so many areas. If you have one area of sin, that is going to influence people.

Look at the people who are influenced by you. Is your influence sparking sin, or drawing out righteousness? That is question #2 – Does my leadership appeal to the flesh or to the redeemed heart?

Day 3

From this passage we find six marks of a good leader.

1. Do I coerce or inspire?
2. Do I appeal to the flesh or the redeemed heart?
3. Do I see me sins in everyone else's hearts or do I assume the best?

1 Samuel 22:13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

That is the second time he accused David of lying in wait for him. What has David ever done that would make him think that? Nothing. Saul has absolutely no reason whatsoever to believe that. So why does he? He believes it because when you have a sin in your heart you tend to impose that same sin on everyone else's heart. Saul was trying to kill David, and so he couldn't imagine that David would not do the same thing.

That is one of the ways we justify ourselves – by imposing our bad motives on everyone else. That way you don't seem so bad, because you are no worse than everyone else, so when you do things for selfish reasons, you tend to assume other people must have similar motives for what they do. When you do things out of greed you figure others must have that same motive. And then you get mad at them for those bad motives, when you do not even have any knowledge that they even have that bad motive. Saul does that constantly. He thought he saw sin in David's heart, Jonathan's heart, Ahimelech's heart – everyone's heart. He assumed everyone else had the same wicked motives that he had.

That is why Saul is so insistent on turning this into a conspiracy. David is in on it, Jonathan is in on it, the priests – even *God Himself*. Keep in mind, the priest represents God. So even God is in on it. It is the ultimate vast, right-wing conspiracy.

People who destroy themselves tend to blame everyone else – and ultimately God.

Proverbs 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

Sometimes they will say, "Yeah, I know it's my own fault" and yet deep down inside they have anger toward God for letting it happen.

When Saul makes his accusations in this section the word "you" is plural. He is accusing all the entire priestly community. This is the irrationality of anger. How often do we get angry at someone, but we don't have the power to do anything to the person we are mad at, so we take it out on someone else who is totally innocent? How many times have our family members been snapped at by us because we were angry with someone else? Think of the insanity of that. Why do you accomplish by punishing an innocent party? It makes absolutely no sense at all. Sinful anger is irrational.

Think of how different we are from God. What we do with anger, God does with love. He loves His Son so much that He "takes that out" on us! He takes all His love out on us! We impute the guilt of the one who hurt us onto some innocent party and then take out our anger on

them. God imputes the righteousness of the One He loves onto guilty parties and then pours out that love on them. Let's learn from God. Let's take out our love on innocent bystanders, not our anger.

One of the most painful things to handle in this story is the silence that prevails at this point. Saul accuses Ahimelech of conspiring against him. Who should speak up at that point? Doeg. Doeg should say, "Well, in all fairness, the priest wasn't in on it. He didn't know." But he does not say anything. He does not care who gets hurt as long as he can gain the political favor he wants. So question #3 in our leadership test – Do you impose your sinful motives on the hearts of others, or do you assume the best?

Day 4

From this passage we find six marks of a good leader.

- 1. Do I coerce or inspire?**
- 2. Do I appeal to the flesh or the redeemed heart?**
- 3. Do I see me sins in everyone else's hearts or do I assume the best?**
- 4. Am I above reproach? and**
- 5. Do I focus on my sins or others'?**

Ahimelech is a good man. He does not back down from Saul at all. And he is going to defend himself - but not just yet. He will get to that, but first he has a more urgent thing on his mind. Before he defends himself in verse 15 he wants to defend David in verse 14. That is such a great picture of Christian love. The first thought that pops into his mind after having been falsely accused is to think, "Wait a minute – what he is saying about David isn't right." And only after that does it finally occur to him to defend himself.

1 Samuel 22:14 Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household?"

Right off the top of his head Ahimelech has four arguments for how ridiculous it is for Saul to suspect David of disloyalty. He really seems genuinely surprised that Saul would suspect David.

And that tells us something about David, doesn't it? David is above reproach. When the truth comes out – the whole truth, David ends up smelling like a rose. Not even his bitterest enemies can say anything negative about him that is true. You know, if there were the slightest evidence that pointed to David being guilty, Saul would be all over it. But that evidence did not exist.

If you were on trial, and the whole truth about you came out, would you still be worth following? Scripture exposes everything about David – his private moments, his inner thoughts, his feelings – everything, and at this stage in his life still, even when you see everything, even the most godly, righteous people alive want to follow his example and be more like him. So that is question #4 for your leadership: Are you above reproach? Above reproach does not mean perfect. It means there is no obvious, ongoing sin that can be observed, and when you do sin your repentance and recovery from that failure is exemplary.

- 5. Do I focus on my sins or others'?**

1 Samuel 22:20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. 21 He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 22 Then David said

to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family.

In the midst of that whole, bloody massacre Abiathar saw an opening, made a break for it, and got away and he comes and tells David what happened. David thought he had protected Ahimelech by making up that story. But he underestimated how wicked Doeg really was, so David takes full responsibility for the deaths of all those people.

That is another mark of humility and great leadership. Usually, if it is more someone else's fault than it is your fault, then you become blind to your culpability altogether. If it is 2% your fault and 98% your husband's fault, you tend not to make too much of your 2%. This slaughter was 99.999% Saul and Doeg's fault, and yet David finds one little sliver of responsibility he had and focuses on that first. So question #5– Do you focus mostly on your own sin or mostly on the sins of those who are hurting you?

Day 5

From this passage we find six marks of a good leader.

- 1. Do I coerce or inspire?**
- 2. Do I appeal to the flesh or the redeemed heart?**
- 3. Do I see me sins in everyone else's hearts or do I assume the best?**
- 4. Am I above reproach?**
- 5. Do I focus on my sins or others'?**
- 6. Do I love & honor those who represent God?**

1 Samuel 22:16 But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family." 17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

This is the same thing that happened when Saul ordered them to kill Jonathan. They wouldn't do it. When you lead like Saul you develop followers who have to pick and choose when to follow you. Saul's men knew that he was so unstable that from time to time they just needed to ignore an order. That is why Saul had to resort to all those coercive techniques to get them to do what he wanted. Killing Jonathan for innocently eating some honey was over the line. And if that was over the line – attacking the priests of Yahweh is WAY over the line.

Saul's officials are probably not the most righteous or God-fearing individuals in Israel, and no doubt they did plenty of wicked things, but not even they are willing to slaughter all the priests of Yahweh. You do not kill the priest of any god unless you are certain that God either doesn't exist or is powerless against whatever god is protecting you. These guys knew better than to mess with the priests of Yahweh.

And so Saul turns to Doeg. And what happens next is a bloodbath.

18 The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.

He executed 85 priests – and he didn't stop there.

19 He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

Why kill everyone? Exterminating every living thing in a village was a practice that actually has a technical name. It is called a HARAM, and it was a religious action (Dt.20:17, 18). From time to time God commanded Israel to carry out a HARAM against some city. The purpose of a HARAM was to eliminate completely the influence a city would have to draw the hearts of God's people away from Him and killing even the animals was a symbolic statement. It showed it was not an issue of just trying to get plunder – it was a religious matter.

In fact, if you think back to chapter 15 you will remember that Saul was supposed to have carried out a HARAM against the Amalekites, but he failed to do it. He got greedy and spared some of the animals. That was what caused God to finally reject Saul as king.

So this slaughter of Nob, as horrible as it sounds, was actually a lot worse than you think. Saul was actually carrying out a religious HARAM against Yahweh. What he would not do to the Amalekites he did to the priests of Yahweh. It was nothing short of an effort to exterminate the influence of the Lord Himself.

Did you notice during the trial what really made Saul mad about Ahimelech's actions? It was not so much giving David bread or even the sword. When Doeg made his report he mentions those things in a secondary way..., but the very first thing he mentions is the fact that Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for David and when Saul accuses Ahimelech he mentions that too. And when Ahimelech gives his defense, that is the *only* thing he mentions. That is the central issue of the trial. Ahimelech was put to death for the crime of seeking God's will for David. The last thing Saul wants is God's will.

At this point Saul's cold war against God turns into a hot war. There is debate right now between the US and China over the question of whether our surveillance down there is illegal or some kind of act of aggression. But if we dropped a nuclear bomb on Beijing there would not be any discussion about the subtleties of whether it qualified as an actual act of aggression. You drop a bomb on your enemy and you have just declared war in the clearest possible terms. Saul is dropping his version of a nuclear warhead on God's capital.

I do not know if Saul actually thought of it in those terms. There is no question that is how the inspired writer is portraying it, and that is what was actually happening in Saul's heart whether he realized it or not. Saul may have just been so blinded with pride and anger and selfishness that he was oblivious to what it was he was actually doing. I can tell you that back in Saul's earlier days when he was first empowered by the Holy Spirit and he was respectful of Samuel and was worshipping the Lord, if you told him back then that someday he would declare war on God he would probably think you were out of your mind. He never intended to sink this low.

The tiniest sin, if you do not repent of it, will lead to this. Moving away from God, no matter how tiny your steps, can result in nothing but further and further distance from God if you don't turn around. And if you continue too long in unrepentance God may just give you over to your sin, and then the result will be all out nuclear war against God without any ability to repent. "A small sin" is an oxymoron. There is no such thing as small rebellion against the King of the Universe.

But what does all this have to do with us today? We do not even have priests anymore, do we? Of course we do. The New Testament is crystal clear that the Church is a kingdom of priests. Every Christian is a priest of the Most High God. Be careful when you get into a dispute with another Christian. When you make one of the children of God your enemy, you inevitably end up fighting against God Himself. Remember Jesus' words – whatever you do to His brothers you do to the Lord Himself (Mt.25:40). The reason Jesus commanded us to be so urgent about reconciling broken relationships in the Church, and to leave your sacrifice sitting there on the altar while you go reconcile, is because God is not interested in your worship as long as you

continue in an unreconciled relationship because while you are at war with that person you are at war with God. (Now, God understands that it is not always within your power to reconcile. That is why Romans 12:18 says to live at peace **if possible, as far as it depends on you**. If you have humbled yourself and tried everything you can possibly try, and the other person simply refuses to reconcile, then it is out of your control and it is not your responsibility. But if you have not tried everything, then your estrangement and alienation from that person – whether it is a cold war inside your heart or a hot war of arguing and fighting – either way it is estrangement and alienation from God.) Leadership question #5 – How do you treat those people who represent Almighty God? Do you love and honor them like David did, or do you despise them like Saul did?

So Saul's HARAM against the priesthood of Yahweh was nothing less than an attack on God Himself. And it sure seems like God loses the first battle in the hot war between Him and Saul, doesn't it? The priests all die, the priesthood is wiped out (which means the whole religious system would be extinguished - without the sacrificial system there is not really much of anything left of Judaism as it is described in the Law of Moses). And Saul does not seem to suffer any reprisal or consequence from this. God does not strike him with leprosy, or send down fire from heaven. The incident is never even brought up again. Saul seems to just walk away from this scott-free while the entire, formal religious system of Yahweh lies dead and rotting on the streets of what used to be the city of Nob.

Is God powerless to defend Himself? Is the Lord God Almighty overcome by the sword of Doeg? Has the plan and purpose and Kingdom of the real King suffered a setback here at the hands of Saul?

Not at all – just the opposite in fact. Those of you who were here back when we studied chapter 2 might remember that this very thing was prophesied by God at the beginning of the book. In 2:12-16 it describes some wicked, vile things the sons of Eli were doing in their work as priests. Eli gave them a slap on the wrist, but it was meaningless because he was involved in it himself. And so God cursed the line of Eli and said his descendents would be cut down in the prime of life (except for one escapee).

What Saul did was no surprise to God. It was no defeat to God's plan – it was fulfillment of God's own Word! This was a judgment against the house of Eli that had been in the works from before Saul was ever born! Saul did not derail God's Kingdom by what he did. All Saul did was make himself the tool that carried out the very plan and purposes of God in fulfillment of prophecy.

Does that make Saul innocent? No – no more than Babylon or Judas or Satan are innocent. If God uses your wickedness to carry out some good part of His plan that does not change the fact of your wickedness. Saul was not forced against his will to do this. He is as responsible and as guilty as he can be.

And the other question you might have is, "Isn't that kind of unfair for the priests in Nob?" They weren't evil – why should they have to die for the sins of Eli and his sons? The answer is, that is the nature of sin – it brings harm on innocent parties all the time. And God allows it to bring harm on innocent parties. However, if those innocent parties are God's children, God sees to it that what happens to them is ultimately in their best interests (Ro.8:28).

So what happened in Nob? God fulfilled His purposes in prophecy, and God fulfilled His purposes in the lives of each person in Nob – good or bad. And was the religious system of Judaism and Yahweh worship wiped out? No, as we will see God enabled at least one priest to escape, so the priesthood continues. Even when the enemy does wicked things, God remains in total unruffled control, and His plan is not damaged in the slightest.