

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes one event in our lives can become a watershed event so that our lives take a different direction and are changed forever. It may be a sad event like the tragic loss of a loved one; or a marriage breakdown, or the loss of a job or a health issue that changes your life for good.

It could be something that is a pleasant experience like an addition to our family or a marriage or an academic success or a job opportunity that has taken our lives in a totally new direction. As we look back over our lives perhaps we can point to one or a number events that we consider to be watershed events in our lives; events that have changed the direction of our lives for good; sometimes for the better sometimes for the worst but whatever may be the case they are watershed events.

For David the cave of Adullam was a watershed event. Before David's flight to Adullam he had always entertained the hope of reconciliation with Saul and a return to the normal life within the King's court. Therefore it must have been devastating for David to realise that Saul now viewed him as an enemy and an ever present threat to him and that Saul would not rest until David was dead. David came to understand that Saul's hatred towards him was relentless and therefore there was no longer any hope of returning to Saul or to his service. David's life would never be the same again; and his life would constantly be under threat until Saul's life comes to an end.

This was a watershed that David would never forget and now he has to understand that his only hope is to trust in his God and depend upon him to protect him and guide him in his fugitive lifestyle.

### 1. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT (vs. 6-23)?

Saul heard of David's return to the border of Judah and so he summons all his officers to a meeting in Gibeah. Among those summoned was Doeg who witnessed all the events at Nob (22:7). All the officers summoned were from the tribe of Benjamin it seems that Saul does not trust anyone else not even his own son Jonathan.

He asks this inner circle of henchmen if they think that this "son of Jesse" he cannot bring himself to say his name will pass out government jobs and perks to them as Saul has done (v 7). Saul alleges that these henchmen have entered into a conspiracy of silence; they are callously withholding from him intelligence about his own son's subversive support for the "son of Jesse" (v 8). Doeg who was not a Benjamite but an Edomite, was also present which shows that Saul clearly trusted this man; perhaps he was known for his support of Saul and his opposition to David as verse 22 seems to imply. Doeg speaks out and discloses that fact that while he was detained in Nob he saw David seeking guidance of the Lord through Ahimelech and David received support from him (vs.9-10).

Doeg does not mention David's deception of Ahimelech for he is putting his spin on the situation in order to look favourable before Saul. Saul responds to the information gleaned and he summons Ahimelech and his "father's whole family" who were the priests at Nob to a meeting with him (v 11). Saul now applies his conspiracy theory to Ahimelech stating the help that David received from the hands of Ahimelech as clear evidence of his support of David (v 13).

Ahimelech gives his defence; a defence that he must have thought was credible considering the circumstances of what actually happened and David's deception. Ahimelech could honestly say "he did not know what was going on" (v 15). Ahimelech says that because he thought that David

was a loyal servant of the King and his son in law as well as being captain of the King's bodyguard and a man who is highly respected within the King's court that he felt he needed to help him (v 14). Besides seeking the Lord's direction was not something new for Ahimelech because he had sought the Lord's purpose before for David on many other occasions so for Ahimelech he had no idea why the King was talking about conspiracy (v 15).

But Saul would not listen he has made his mind up anyone who helps David is doomed from now on and so he orders the slaughter of all the priests because in Saul's mind they had sided with David. But the King's officials rebelled for they refused to touch the servants of the Lord knowing full well that the Lord would hold them accountable for doing so (vs. 16-17).

So Doeg was ordered to do it and he had no problem doing such a thing, his political career was more important than anything else and so he kills 85 priests (v 18) and he also killed those living in Nob which included men, women, children and babies along with all the animals. In fact he treated everything in Nob as animals and slaughtered them all (v 19).

But Abiathar the son of Ahimelech managed to escape and reported all that happened to David and David rightly took the blame for what happened (vs. 20-22). That day was a watershed for Abiathar as well for his life would never be the same again. But what does this horrific passage of God's word teach us?

## 2. THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNT (vs. 6-23)

There are three lessons that we can learn from this passage:

i) **God's word is fulfilled through this incident** – Although as far as Saul and Doeg were concerned they were seeking to protect their own interest and although what happens here is horrific, ghastly, brutal and unjust yet it is fulfilling God's word of judgement upon house of Eli. In 2:30-33 God says that not one of Eli's family line would see old age and that word spoken probably 40 or 50 years earlier is now being fulfilled through this carnage at Gibeah and Nob.

Of course God is not the author of this evil act Saul and Doeg are responsible for their actions but at the same time their actions fulfilled God's word perfectly. God in his wonderful and mysterious sovereign will and purposes uses evil people and evil actions to bring about the fulfilment of his word and He does so for the glory of God. Those who were opposing God's kingdom were actually bringing about the purposes of his kingdom. We need to understand that God's word will be fulfilled and even those who oppose God and his purposes are unbeknown to them being used by God to bring about God's purposes in our world. There is nothing that happens in our world that is not accomplishing God's purposes for the world; sometimes those purposes are purposes of judgment and at other times they are purposes of salvation and blessing.

We must not be downhearted in days when it seems that unbelief and evil is rampant. When God and his church are despised for all that is happening today is part and parcel of fulfilling God's purpose for our town and for our nation and our world. Even evil and wickedness ultimately serve to bring glory to God.

We may not be able to understand or even see this in our world but in eternity all will become clear and I believe we will be amazed when we see how God worked out his purposes through every event of life whether good or evil. But we also need to realise that God is never in a hurry to fulfil his word. We live in a society where we expect quick results; instant results but God does not work like that and in this case as I said his word may have been fulfilled about 50 years later.

Had people forgotten his word to the house of Eli? They probably had forgotten, but God never forgets and at the right time He brings his word to fulfilment and that is how He works today. He fulfils his word; He will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In our own nation that promise can sometimes seem to be untrue for it seems his church is in decline rather than being built but of course in other nations of the world that is not the case but even in our own nation God will build his church; He will save everyone of his people that He has chosen and He will do it in his time and it is our task as a church to believe God's word and to look to him to fulfil his word in our own town and nation through prayer and through evangelism.

So hold on to God's word, it is true and it will be fulfilled; keep trusting in God for every one of his sure promises will be fulfilled.

**ii) God's people will face opposition from the world** – Saul here vents his fury on the priests at Nob and upon that city but in doing so he is showing his opposition to God for the priests were God's designated servants and representative of the people which is why the King's officials refused to touch them (v 17). They knew that to do so was to oppose God and such actions have consequences. But this teaches us that in this world God's people can expect opposition from those who oppose God. Sometimes that opposition takes the form of outright persecution and there are many in our world that are experiencing such things at the present time; however in our nation opposition to Christ and his church is more subtle.

It might take the form of the Christian couple who are being sued because they refused a double bed to a homosexual couple at their Bed and Breakfast establishment. It might take the form of the police officer stopping a preacher preaching in the open air accusing him of racial hatred when no such offence has happened.

It might take the form of being overlooked at work for promotion or it can take the form of a loved one making life hard for you at home simply because they oppose your Christian beliefs. In truth opposition can take all sorts of forms but one thing is sure that we can all expect to face opposition in one form or another because this world hates Christ and therefore all who attach themselves to him will be persecuted.

We must expect opposition and we must pray that God will give his people the grace to face up to it and persevere in it but ultimately we must remember that because we belong to Christ we will overcome the opposition of the world because Christ through his death and resurrection gained the victory on our behalf. But there is a final lesson that we need to think about.

**iii) God always saves a remnant to proclaim his name (vs. 20-23)** – The word "but" (v 20) is important because although Saul and Doeg in particular have managed to slaughter the priests and put to death all in the town of Nob. Therefore it seems that there is little hope for God's people against the mighty power of Saul yet we read "but Abiathar the son of Ahimelech" managed to escape and fled to tell David the news and he finds security with him (vs. 20 & 23).

These closing verses are important for they tell us that God always preserves his people in the midst of destruction. Many of God's people may be killed by those who oppose God but not all are killed; some are left and preserved in order to continue to worship their God and proclaim his name among the unbelieving nations of our world. Only a few can make a radical difference in the purposes of God. This seems to be the pattern throughout the Scriptures.

Remember the slaughter of the Israelite babies ordered by Pharaoh but yet God hides one in the reeds along the bank of the Nile and that one Moses makes all the difference; for he will be used by God to lead his people out of Egypt (Exodus 2:1-10). Then when it seems that Baal has

conquered and is lord and master over Israel God sees to it that there are 7000 whose knees that do not bend in worship of Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

Then there is the wicked king Herod who cut down all Bethlehem's toddlers in his anger. Yet one of those toddlers by the name of Jesus escapes and what a difference He would make to the whole world (Matthew 2:13-15). So you see Abiathar stands as a witness to the way God preserves a remnant of his people; even in the hardest of times; God has a few that He preserves for his own glory.

I was thinking during our door to door evening on Wednesday night and the apathy we faced just how many Christians are there in Leyburn. Being very generous in my estimation I think if there are 5-10 of us out of a population of some 2000 then that is only a remnant and I have to confess I fear there are probably a lot less than that number. Perhaps it is in single figures.

In many ways in most towns cities and villages there is only a remnant of true believers seeking to proclaim the truth of God to their community; but that remnant is a testimony to how God preserves his church and his witness in this world. Even though the world tries to extinguish the work of God yet God preserves the one's and two's for his own glory and there is no telling what impact under God a few can have upon a community and a nation as our biblical illustrations clearly show.

God's people may face times of severe persecution when the church is nearly destroyed, devastated it may be, but it will never be completely destroyed. This does not mean that God's people are immune from being put to death by the wickedness of the world but it means that the world may do great harm and great deeds of wickedness upon the church but it will and never can completely wipe out God's church, for God will always preserve a remnant for his own glory.

The fact that there is a church at all in Leyburn is an illustration of this truth; God has preserved a remnant for himself and although we often struggle because of our size yet the fact that we are here at all is a testimony to God's preserving grace and a testimony to his commitment to this principle of preserving a remnant to carry on his work and to proclaim his name among the people of our day. I find this truth very encouraging and I hope you do as well. God never promises that we will not die for the kingdom but He does promise that his kingdom will never die which of course is what we are seeking first and foremost (Matthew 6:33) and therefore this truth is most encouraging.

Although the church of Jesus Christ faces many onslaughts from the world without and from heresy within, yet there shall always be a church on earth to worship God in accordance with his will until He comes and Abiathar is a witness to this truth. So let us rejoice in the church of Jesus Christ for it is a testimony of God's preserving grace of his people and a fulfilment of his promise to build his church and "the gates of Hades shall not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

Amen