

Reverse Punitive Action: David Writes that Those Who Avoid Sins of the Tongue Will Prosper, Ps 34:12–13; an Illustration of the Public Lie: David’s Conversation with Ahimelech Is Overheard by Doeg, 1 Sam 21:1–3, 6–9; Doeg Tells Saul but Adds a Public Lie: “Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for David,” vv. 22:7–10; Ahimelech Denies It, vv. 11–15; Saul Has Doeg Execute 85 Priests, vv. 16, 18; Doeg Executes the People of Nob, v. 19; Definition of the Divine Decree

C. David reveals to us that the believer who avoids slandering others will receive blessings from God:

Psalm 34:12 - “Who is the person who desires long life and loves length of days that he may see prosperity?”

v. 13 - Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking slander.”

D. King Saul was driven by murder lust to eliminate David as a possible threat to the throne of Israel. David, while avoiding the king’s pursuit, stopped at the city of Nób where he met with Ahímelech the priest who provided him with food and a sword.

Doeg (Dó-ëg), one of Saul’s herdsmen who was in Nob at the time, observed the transaction and reported it to Saul.

1 Samuel 22:9 - Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul’s officials, said, “I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub \a-hī-tub\ at Nob.

v. 10 - Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

We need to get some background for this, where Doeg is informing Saul of what he observed at Nob between David and Ahimelech the priest. This takes us to:

1 Samuel 21:1 - David went to Ahimelech the priest in Nob. Ahimelech was shaking with fear when he met David, and said to him, “Why are you by yourself with no one accompanying you?”

v. 2 - David replied to Ahimelech the priest, “The king instructed me to do something, but he said to me, ‘Don’t let anyone know the reason I am sending you or the instructions I have given you. I have told my soldiers to wait at a certain place.’”

v. 3 - “Now what do you have at your disposal? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.”

1 Samuel 21:6 - So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there other than the bread of the Presence. It had been removed from before the Lord in order to replace it with hot bread on the day it had been taken away.

v. 7 - (One of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul’s shepherds.)

v. 8 - David said to Ahimelech, “Is there no sword or spear here at your disposal? I don’t have my own sword or equipment in hand due to the urgency of the king’s instructions.”

v. 9 - The priest replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the valley of Elah, is wrapped in a garment behind the ephod. If you wish, take it for yourself. Other than that, there’s nothing here.” David said, “There’s nothing like it! Give it to me!” (NET)

The second passage reveals what Doeg reported to Saul after having left Nob:

1 Samuel 22:7 - Saul said to his servants who were stationed around him, "Listen up, you Benjamites! Is Jesse's son giving fields and vineyards to all of you? Or is he making all of your commanders and officers?"

v. 8 - For all of you have conspired against me! No one informs me when my own son makes an agreement with this son of Jesse! Not one of you feels sorry for me or informs me that my own son has commissioned my own servant to hide in ambush against me, as is the case today!"

v. 9 - But Doeg the Edomite, who had stationed himself with the servants of Saul, replied, "I saw this son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob.

v. 10 - He [Ahimelech] inquired of the Lord for him [David; this is the public lie] and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

v. 11 - Then the king arranged for a meeting with the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and all the priests of his father's house who were at Nob. They all came to the king.

v. 12 - Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub." He replied, "Here I am, my lord."

v. 13 - Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and this son of Jesse? **[The public lie is now enlarged to include the charge of conspiracy.]** You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God on his behalf [the public lie repeated], so that he opposes me and waits in ambush, as is the case today!"

v. 14 - Ahimelech replied to the king, "Who among all your servants is faithful like David? He is the king's son-in-law, the leader of your bodyguard, and honored in your house!

v. 15 - Was it just today that I began to inquire of God on his behalf? Far be it from me! The king should not accuse his servant or any of my father's house. For your servant is not aware of all this – not in whole or in part [Ahimelech denies the public lie]!"

v. 16 - But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!

In cross examination, Ahimelech defended David, stressing that the son of Jesse had no ill intent toward the king. Considering Ahimelech a traitor, Saul ordered Doeg to execute all the priests of Nob:

1 Samuel 22:18 - 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.

v. 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 important to remember at this point the definition of the divine decree:

The decree of God is His eternal, holy, wise, and sovereign purpose, comprehending simultaneously all things that ever were or will be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations and determining their certain futuration.

There is a phrase in the definition of the decree that may be applied to the ramifications of a verbal sin: "causes, conditions, successions, and relations."

Let's see how that plays out in this story:



Causes: Thoughts, decisions and actions. Here the cause was the public lie by Doeg to Saul. Saul already believes there is a conspiracy against him and now Doeg pours fuel on that flame.

Conditions: Refer to its category, i.e., positive or negative, right or wrong, divine good or human good. Here Saul acted on the erroneous information.

Successions: Refer to subsequent causes and effects. Here Saul blamed Ahimelech, who was innocent, and had him executed by Doeg.

Relations: Refer to the cumulative impact of the first cause. Here we have the death of the 84 priests, the sacking of Nob, and the killing of its population and its animals.

1 Samuel 22:20 - But Abiathar \a-bī-a-thār\, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David.

v. 21 - Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord.

v. 22 - Then David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father's household."

Ahimelech's son Abiathar became a close friend of David's. Once David did ascend the throne of Israel, he appointed Abiathar his personal priest in Jerusalem.

We do not know the details of Doeg's Reverse Punitive Action, but David indicates that it was inflicted in Psalm 52.

According to the traditional title, Psalm 52 contains David's tirade against Doeg on this occasion. In the first stanza (52:1-4) David appears to accuse Doeg of falsehood, while in the second (vv.5-7) he foretells divine judgment on him [i.e., reverse punitive action].¹

Psalm 52: Superscription² - For the choir director. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

¹ Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 3:601.

² "Value of the superscriptions. These titles are clearly very old, for the LXX, in the 2d century BC, did not understand many of them. As to many of the musical and liturgical titles, the best learning of Hebrew and Christian scholars is unable to recover the original meaning. These superscriptions all had a worthy meaning, when they were first placed beside individual psalms. Grant that not one of them came from the pen of the writers of the Psalms, but only from editors and compilers of exilic or post-exilic days, it would still be reasonable to give attention to the views of ancient Hebrew scholars. We almost certainly have in them the results of the labors of Hebrew scribes and compilers stretching over several centuries. *Maskil* (Psalm 52): The exact meaning of this common term is not clear" (John Richard Sampey, "Psalms," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956], 4:2487, 2488).