

1 Samuel 22

GATHERING AT ADULLAM, ASYLUM AT MOAB, CONFERENCE AT GIBEAH, AND MASSACRE AT NOB

INTRODUCTION

One striking feature of 1 Samuel 22 is the way in which the focus moves from David to Saul and then back to David again. This feature of the chapter actually serves to illustrate the structure of the whole of the second half of the book of 1 Samuel. For the latter section of the book traces the histories of these two key characters – Saul and David – and their histories are closely inter-twined. Sometimes the narrative concentrates on one man or the other – for example, chapter 25 in the case of David (where there is no mention of Saul, except incidentally in v.44), and chapter 31 in the case of Saul (where there is no mention of David at all).¹ More often than not, the narrative mingles the actions of the two men together – as in this chapter.

To some extent, the closing section of the book mirrors the opening section, where we also find the histories of two men intertwined – in that case, the histories of Eli and Samuel.

In both of these sections of the book, the Holy Spirit draws attention to the character of the two principal characters, contrasting the one with the other. In both sections, we find one man who failed in his God-given office set over against another man who was faithful to God. In both cases, it was the first man who proved unfaithful, who subsequently forfeited his office (of priest and king respectively), and who was, to some extent or other, 'replaced' by another - a God-appointed - man. I refer, of course, to Eli and Saul who failed, and to Samuel and David who were subsequently brought on the scene as faithful both to God and to His people. There are mainly negative lessons to be learned from the men who failed, and positive lessons to be learned from the faithful men.

Interestingly, as we will discover, it is in our chapter God that over-rides the sinful action of *the unfaithful king* to fulfil largely His word of judgement on *the unfaithful priest* and his house.²

CHAPTER DIVISION

Focus on David

David at the cave of Adullam, vv.1-2
David at the watchtower (Mizpeh) of Moab, vv.3-4
David at the forest of Hareth, v.5

Focus on Saul

Saul and his servants at Gibeah, vv.6-10
Saul and Ahimelech at Gibeah, vv.11-16
Saul and the slaughter of the priests of Nob, vv.17-19

Focus on David

David and Abiathar, vv.20-23

EXPOSITION

Verses 1-2 David at the cave of Adullam

Verse 1. *'Escaped to the cave (of) Adullam'*. The town of Adullam was an ancient royal Canaanite city³ which stood a mile or two south of the valley of Elah, the scene of David's combat with Goliath. There are many very large caves burrowed into the limestone hills south of the valley of Elah, several of which could accommodate over 400 people.

Adullam was part of the inheritance of the tribe of Judah⁴ – from which tribe, of course, David came, and where he may therefore have felt safer than in other areas in Israel. Josephus noted, 'When David had escaped in this manner out of Gath, *he came to the tribe of Judah*, and abode in a cave by the city of Adullam'.⁵

Both town and cave were located about 10 miles east of Gath, not very far across the Philistine/Israel border. David chose a secluded hideout far enough away from Gath for him to be safe from Achish and his men but not close enough to Saul to be in danger from him.

'When his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him'. Bethlehem was a further 10 miles, east/northeast, of Adullam. David's family apparently no longer felt safe in their home. I guess that it was not unlikely that Saul would search for David at Bethlehem, and if Saul was prepared to let fly violently at his own family, 20.33, there was no saying what he would be prepared to do to David's. It was not uncommon in the ancient world for a whole family to be put to death on account of an action by just one member – as Saul's massacre of the priests of Nob was soon to demonstrate.

And so David's family 'went down' – from the higher ground at Bethlehem – to join David in his hideout/refuge. We have no record of what later happened to Eliab and David's other older brothers. Certainly they did not fill positions of responsibility in his kingdom.

It was no doubt at this point that David's three nephews⁶, Joab, Abishai and Asahel, who do feature later in the story, threw in their lot with him. It is clear that their home was also at Bethlehem; for we read that, following Asahel's death at the hand of Abner, he was buried 'in the sepulchre of his father, which was at Bethlehem', 2 Sam. 2.32.

Verse 2. David became a magnet for many in Israel who had some reason to be unhappy with the state of affairs under Saul's rule.

'Every one that was in distress'. That is, 'everyone who was hard-pressed, in anguish, in desperate straits'.⁷ No doubt, there were many who were oppressed and in affliction during the troubled times of Saul's reign.

'And every one that was in debt'. Saul's appointment as king had done much to create conditions which opened the door for many to fall into debt. Samuel had warned the people in advance about some of the unpleasant consequences of having a king like Saul; 'He will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take ... your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep ... And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you', 8.14-18. It is also clear that Saul had shown favouritism to his own kinsmen – giving them the top jobs, v.7, and, human nature being what it is, no doubt these men had taken advantage of their position to exploit others. All this made for a set of social conditions in which many, through no fault of their own, were forced to run up great debts.

To protect the poor, God's law was strict on the subject of lending, borrowing and usury⁸. But in times of weak or poor government it was easy for many to fall into debt to unscrupulous men. It is clear from Neh. 5 that Nehemiah saw the enforcing of God's law against usury as one of the first duties of an upright and God-fearing governor; 'I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren?', Neh. 5.7-8. Saul evidently didn't share Nehemiah's concern.

'And every one that was discontented'. The Hebrew phrase translated 'discontented' means 'bitter of soul', being used, for example, to describe Hannah, who 'was in bitterness of soul ... and wept sore', 1.10. Here the expression suggests that many in Israel were in despair at some of the conditions which prevailed throughout the kingdom. Perhaps there were many in Saul's day, as there were in our Lord's days on earth, who were hoping for the coming of a new kingdom to overthrow the old.

But we know that, under no circumstances, would David have ever led these men in any form of rebellion or uprising against Saul and his regime. This would have run altogether contrary to the allegiance and loyalty which he showed to Saul at all times.

So that, if David trained this rather motley assortment of men to wage war, and if he shaped them into a formidable fighting force – both of which things he most certainly did – it was with a view to them fighting *the Lord's* battles, 25.28 – battles not against king Saul, but against enemies such as the Philistines, which Saul's own pre-occupation with killing David (along with his having been forsaken by God) altogether prevented him from doing; see 23. 1-8.

'Gathered themselves together unto him'. To the last man, David's 400 'men' were willing volunteers – in marked contrast to Saul's 'men', vv.25-26, who were conscripts; for 'when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him', 14.52. Saul took the best; David took whoever came – and at the outset at least they were anything but the best! If Saul took the cream, some of David's 'cream' must have seemed rather sour!

What a lovely and meaningful expression 'gathered ... together' is to the believer today. It recalls our Lord's matchless promise, 'Where are two or three, having been gathered into my name, there I am in the midst of them', Matt. 18.20 lit. It may be significant that the Lord didn't say, 'Where two or three *gather themselves together*' – as happened in the case of David's men. The (passive) form of verb in Matt. 18.20 may well indicate that 'the two or three' don't gather selves, but that they *are* gathered' – by implication, I guess, as a result of the work of God. And, one day, at His coming we shall all be gathered together to Him; 'We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him ...', 2 Thess. 2.1. And what a thrill it is to know that, just as in that day, when gathered together to Him, we will experience His personal presence (part of the thought included in the word 'coming' – *παρουσία*), even so now, when we are gathered together to Him, as He promised, He is in the midst. 'Unto him shall the gathering of the people be', Gen. 49.10 AV. In a similar manner, David's men were gathered 'unto him' – not simply 'with him' (as in the last expression of the verse) but 'to him'. David was the gathering-centre. He was the attracting force.⁹

'He became a captain (or, leader) over them: and there were with him about four hundred men'. That David was able to keep such a relatively large and motley band in order – let alone train them for military greatness – at such a young age is a tribute to the organisational gift and genius with which God had blessed him – a tribute to those God-given skills which had no doubt been honed and developed in the years spent shepherding his father's sheep. And no doubt, in turn, the time now spent shaping these 400 men when on the run from Saul helped equip David for his rule over the nation of Israel later.

Under David's leadership this unpromising assortment of men ripened into a most impressive fighting force, some of whom doubtless featured among David's 'mighty men', whose remarkable exploits and acts of bravery are recounted both in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Chron. 11.

It *may* be that one of those very exploits was actually performed while David and the 400 were now at Adullam.¹⁰ We read, both in 2 Sam. 23.13-17 and 1 Chron. 11.15-19, of the 'three' who 'went down' to David 'unto' (2 Sam.

23.13)/'into' (1 Chron. 11.15) 'the cave of Adullam'.¹¹ The incident for which these 'three' became famous arose out of David's expressed craving for a drink from the well of Bethlehem. The three responded to David's longing by breaking through the forces of the Philistine garrison then stationed at Bethlehem, drawing water out of the well, and bringing it to David.¹² I guess that most of us, if we had been there to hear David's expressed longing, would have mentally responded: 'It's too far to go!¹³ It's too dangerous to tackle! It's too much to ask! It's too much for us to risk!' And no-one – least of all David – would have thought any less of these three men if they had ignored David's words and just let the moment pass. But their loyalty and devotion to their outlawed captain wouldn't let them do that – their love constrained them.¹⁴

And I note that these men didn't furtively sneak into Bethlehem past the Philistine sentries – they tackled the garrison head on and cut their way through the Philistine lines! When they returned with 'David's desired draught', David was so moved by their dedication and selfless courage that he poured out the water 'unto the Lord'. In his eyes, only the Lord was worthy of such sacrifice! To David, that water was in effect 'the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives'.¹⁵ And God's law made it clear that no-one was to eat or drink blood – in which was life. The blood of all sacrifices was to be poured 'upon the earth as water'.¹⁶ And that was just how David treated the water from Bethlehem's well.¹⁷ Whether this exploit was performed now or later, it illustrates, not only the devotion of David's men, but the military competence which they acquired under his leadership.

There are two of David's psalms which likely give us an insight into his feelings when in the cave of Adullam (Psa. 57 and Psa. 142¹⁸) – just as two of his psalms gave us an insight into his feelings when recently at Gath (Psa. 34 and Psa. 56).

The one psalm reveals that there were moments at Adullam when David felt downcast and thoroughly discouraged. Psa. 142 gives us an honest 'scan' of David's heart at that time; 'My spirit was *overwhelmed* within me ... I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was *no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul*. I cried unto thee, O Lord ... Attend unto my cry; for *I am brought very low* ... my persecutors ... are stronger than I', vv.3-6. David felt that his very soul was 'in prison', v.7 – a reasonable description of someone holed up in a cave. But David soon rose above his moments of dejection, and in both Psa. 57 and Psa. 142 he affirms that his real trust lay, not in the cave, but in the Lord as his true 'refuge'; 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make *my refuge* ('a place of trust'), until these calamities be overpast', Psa. 57.1, and, 'I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art *my refuge* ('a shelter') and my portion in the land of the living', Psa. 142.5.¹⁹ In spite of extremely trying circumstances at the time, David lifted his eyes to God, and broke out in praise; 'Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth (said twice!) ... I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds, vv.5, 9-10; cf. v.11. Note the references to 'the heavens', 'above all the earth' and 'the clouds' – David was very much looking above his circumstances to 'God most high', v.2. Do I do that?

Verses 3-4 David at the watchtower (Mizpeh) of Moab

Verses 3-4. 'David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab'. The name 'Mizpeh' means 'watch-tower or mountain height'.²⁰ David evidently went first to some lofty place or beacon-hill in the highlands of Moab.

'He said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you'. David's parents were now very old; Jesse 'went among men for an old man in the days of Saul', 17.12. And David could see that, with king Saul now so bitterly opposed to him, there was no safety whatever for his parents in any fixed location in the land of Israel. And yet there was no way in which they would be able to endure the hardship and rigours of his inevitable future travels. Zimmer-frames simply weren't made for rapid movements from one stronghold to another!

We read no more of David's parents in scripture. It is possible, of course, that, given their already advancing years, they both simply died not long after. But it is also possible that, for some reason or other, the Moabites later put David's mother and father to death. Kirkpatrick comments, 'A Jewish tradition relates that the king of Moab betrayed his trust and murdered David's parents'.²¹ What we know is that around 20 years later David was especially severe in his treatment of the Moabites; 'he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive', 2 Sam. 8.2. That is, David made all his Moabite prisoners-of-war lie down on the ground and then used a long length of cord to indicate his chosen cut-off point – which was two-thirds the way down the line. He then executed the two-thirds. This may suggest that something had made David particularly mad with the people of Moab.

But, for now, we can only admire the care and consideration which David showed for his aged parents. At this time, he had more than enough problems of his own. But then the law of God, in which David loved to meditate, had long taught him, 'Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long ...', Exod. 20.12. And David may well have noticed that this, the fifth commandment, came at a strategic point in that law; marking the division between his duty to God and his duty to his fellowmen. He may also have noted, as later did the apostle Paul, that it was 'the first commandment with promise', Eph. 6.2.

'Till I know what God will do for me'. In one of the psalms which he had recently written in the cave, David had said that his cry was to 'God that performeth ('who perfects', 'who brings to an end') all things *for me*', Psa. 57.2 – 'to God who fulfils his purpose *for me*', ESV.²² At this juncture in his life (unlike when he had fled to Achish), David's eyes were clearly on God – and he would now happily rest in whatever it was that God would *do 'for' him*, 1 Sam. 22.3, as God went about *accomplishing His purpose 'for' him*, Psa. 57.2! Happy is the man who knows that God is

not only 'for' him, Rom. 8.31, but 'works' all things 'for' him! And, as we are about to discover, the first thing that God did 'for' David at this point was to send one of His prophets to bring him a message.

'All the while that David was in the hold/stronghold'. Given that David could have been in a stronghold in Moab for only a short time and that he soon moved on from the stronghold at Adullam to others, 23.14, 19, 29; 24.22, the expression no doubt means 'in strongholds' – and covers the time when David was a fugitive from Saul.

Verse 5 David at the forest of Hareth

Verse 5. *'The prophet Gad'*. During his life, David had links with three of God's prophets – Samuel, Gad and Nathan – each of whom wrote up both his deeds and 'the times that went ('passed') over him' – the seasons both of good and ill, the seasons both of joy and sorrow; 'Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him', 1 Chron. 29.29. Given the fact that Gad is mentioned last there, and that he was certainly still active when David foolishly numbered the people at a very late stage in his reign (see Annex B to chapter 16), Gad must have been a young man at this time. Although Samuel had not yet died (see 25.1), he may well have been too feeble to travel from Ramah. It was possibly for this reason that God chose to send the younger man. We do not read of Gad again until David came to reign, when Gad held the official position of David's 'seer', 1 Chron. 21.9; 2 Chron. 29.25²³.

'Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah'. I am unsure which 'hold/stronghold' this refers to. If we take the expression 'the land of Judah' in its normal wider sense (e.g. 30.16), then the stronghold was clearly outside of Israel - namely in the land of Moab - and probably at Mizpeh.²⁴ That is, Gad (and, through him, God) was telling David not to seek any long-term refuge outside of the land - with the implication that the Lord was well able to preserve His servant in the more dangerous situation of Saul's own kingdom. David was to calculate his safety, not in terms of distance from danger, but in terms of the nearness of God - as he did when he wrote, 'Yea, when I am walking in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil', Psa. 23.4 lit. It was to persecuted saints that the writer to the Hebrews wrote, 'he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me', Heb. 13.6.

In chapter 26, David will give us (and Saul) another good reason for dwelling in God's land rather than in Moab; 'If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord; for *they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods'*, 26.19. That is, in a land like Moab, with its own gods (principally Chemosh and Ba'al), David would have been exposed to the temptation to worship idols. David was clearly alive to the spiritual dangers of mixing too long and too closely with the nations around.

If Gad's reference was to a stronghold in Moab, then, in effect, the Lord was telling David to follow in the footsteps of his great-grandmother Ruth, who had accompanied Naomi when she 'arose ... that she might return *from the country of Moab* ... and they went on the way to return *unto the land of Judah'*, Ruth 1.6-7. In many other ways also, David could have done much worse than to follow the example of one who, according to the testimony of her husband-to-be, had 'come to trust' under 'the wings' of the Lord God of Israel, Ruth 2.12. Interestingly, David had only recently written, 'in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge', Psa. 57.1.

But it may well be that the 'hold/stronghold' in question wasn't in Moab, but rather that at Adullam.²⁵ If the reference is to Adullam, which was itself in the territory of Judah, the expression 'land of Judah' must refer here to some other area in that territory. This more limited meaning finds support in the words of David's men in 23.3; 'Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah'. Given that Keilah, as Adullam, was itself within the land of Judah, Josh. 15.44, David's men appear to have been using the word 'Judah' in a special and restricted sense – perhaps to describe the area of the lowlands around the actual towns.²⁶

Perhaps the Lord was telling David to leave the stronghold at Adullam for a time to impress on him that his trust should be, not in any physical 'stronghold', but in Himself as the 'stronghold' of His people. Certainly David used this very word several times in his psalms to describe what the Lord was to him; see 'The Lord is my rock, and my *fortress'*, Psa. 18.2; 'Thou art my rock and my *fortress'*, 31.3; 'my *fortress*; my high tower', 144.2 - where in each case the AV translates the word by 'fortress'. So if this was the lesson which the Lord wanted David to learn, David learnt it!

In whichever of these ways we understand the word 'hold', there is a lesson for us here. If we take it to refer to a stronghold in Moab, we learn to avoid places of known temptation ('Lead us not ...', Matt. 6.13); if we take it to refer to Adullam, we learn that ultimately the Lord alone is our true and unfailing 'stronghold' and that our trust should always be in Him.

'The forest of Hareth'. This forest is not mentioned again by name in scripture. Given that Keilah, where we find David going next, was only about three miles south-east of Adullam, the forest of Hareth must have been somewhere in the region around Adullam. It has no connection with the 'wood' of 23.15-19, which was located many miles to the south east in the area around Ziph.²⁷

Verses 6-10 Saul and his servants

Verse 6. *'Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree'*. The Hebrew signifies 'a tamarisk tree'. The tamarisk tree, which grows as a multi-trunked shrubby tree up to 25 feet in height, is also known as 'the salt cedar'. The reason for this second name is interesting. During the heat of the day, the tamarisk secretes salt, which then dries. During the night the salt absorbs water from the air and in the morning this water evaporates, creating a sort of natural air-

conditioning. This cooling effect is another reason for the popularity of the tamarisk as a tree for shade.²⁸ In days before large civic buildings, what better place for Saul to hold the meetings of his military council? But we note that on this particular day the main item on the agenda was not some pressing military exercise; it was the king's 'feeling-sorry-for-himself' whinge.

'His spear in his hand'. As we have seen, the king's spear was a distinctive symbol of his kingship - effectively his sceptre.²⁹

Verse 7. Saul's outburst may well have been occasioned by his hearing that David was not now alone – that there were 'men that were with him', v.6. In which case, in Saul's eyes, David posed a far greater threat than he had earlier realized.

'All his servants were standing about him'. Each, no doubt, in his own appointed place around the king.

'Ye Benjamites, will the son of Jesse give every one of you ...'. Clearly, in Saul's book, 'blood was thicker than water', and, in return for their loyalty, Saul had evidently handed out the plumb military jobs and political perks to members of his own tribe.³⁰

Saul attempted to browbeat his inner circle of military leaders by pointing out that, in the nature of politics, if the regime changed, they would all be out on their necks – and the perks would cease. It is typical of Saul that he couldn't imagine anyone being influenced by any motive other than that of sordid selfishness; compare his recent words to Jonathan, 'as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom', 20.31.

'Give every one of you fields and vineyards'. Many years before, Samuel had warned the people that, if they persisted with their demand for a king, the king they would get would take their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and the tenth of both their seed and their sheep to give to his officers and servants, 8.14-17. Clearly Samuel had been right – Saul had evidently done just that.

'Make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds'. This point would have come across with increased force if Saul and his officials had heard, not only that David now had men with him, v.6, but that David had now himself become a 'captain' (same word) over a company which in its entirety numbered no more than 400 men. There were then, Saul was saying, no prospects whatever for his henchmen if they sided with David – either in terms of tribal association or in the size of David's current band of followers.³¹

Verse 8. *'There is none that sheweth me ... there is none ... that ... sheweth me'*. Literally, 'There is none that uncovers my ear' – a reference to the lifting of a man's turban or headgear when speaking to him privately.

'Against me ... sheweth me ... my son ... me ... sheweth me ... my servant ... against me'. Saul's short but impassioned whine is littered with 'me' and 'my'. In Saul's own carnal and self-focused world, everything revolved around *him*. The Old Testament Saul would have found nothing attractive in the life-pattern set out by his namesake of a thousand years later, 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others', Phil. 2.4! But then the Old Testament Saul knew nothing of the supreme example set by the Lord Jesus of selflessly 'looking on the things of others', Phil. 2.5-8. He didn't, but I do! Ouch!

'My son hath made a league with the son of Jesse'. 'Made a league' is, literally, 'cut a covenant'. We do not know whether the covenant between Jonathan and David, 18.3; 20.13-17, had somehow become known to Saul, or whether he only suspected that there would have been something of the kind between them on the grounds of their close friendship – and of Jonathan's persistently speaking up for David, 19.4-6; 20.32.

'My son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait'. Saul's charge against Jonathan was simply ludicrous. One can hardly imagine how he could ever have cast Jonathan in the role of initiator and ringleader of a conspiracy against his own father – how he could make out that Jonathan had been responsible for leading David astray! It is clear (to us the readers at least – if it wasn't actually to Saul's own officers and officials at the time) that Saul's paranoia has now tipped him completely over the edge.

'To lie in wait'. That is, with a view to ambushing somebody.

Verse 9. *'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech'*. Doeg had no wish to lose his prestigious position as Saul's chief herdsman, 21.7! And so he spoke up. Although already a person of some importance in Saul's regime, he may well have read into Saul's words in v.7 a veiled half-promise of even further advancement. And so, careful to imitate the somewhat disparaging way in which Saul had spoken of David, Doeg informed Saul that he had previously witnessed a very revealing meeting between 'the son of Jesse' and Ahimelech. Saul's lackey was fully aware of course that Ahimelech had acted honourably throughout, that the priest had cross-questioned David carefully, that David had lied to him, and that everything which Ahimelech had done he had done in good faith. But such extenuating circumstances would have been the last things Saul wanted to hear – and so, wishing to curry the maximum favour with the king, Doeg kept those parts of what he had witnessed to himself!

Verse 10. *'He enquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine'*. There are no issues for us over the last two charges; they accord perfectly with what we are told actually did happen, 21.6, 9. But, given that chapter 21 made no mention of Ahimelech enquiring of the Lord for David, the first charge prompts the obvious question, 'Was Doeg telling the truth at this point, or was he making this bit up?'

I have to confess that I really don't know the answer to that question. I suppose I incline to the view that he was lying, but I cannot say that I find the evidence conclusive. For some of the known factors, see Annex A.

Verses 11-16 Saul and Ahimelech

Verse 11. *'Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob'*. Doeg's report led to Saul sending, not for Ahimelech alone to answer the charges, but for the whole priestly family. Saul had clearly already decided the outcome of Ahimelech's 'trial' - and its sequel!

'They came all of them to the king'. This was not difficult; Nob was only a short way from Gibeah. The repeated *'all'* emphasizes the near total annihilation of the priesthood about to take place – from which only one of the priests, Abiathar, would escape.

Verse 12. *'Hear now, thou son of Ahitub'*. Saul addresses Ahimelech by name only when he passes sentence on him in v.16! For now, he addresses him as 'son of Ahitub', in much the same way as he *usually* alluded to David as the 'son of Jesse', vv.7, 8, 13 – although see his one reference to 'David', v.17. If Saul meant to express disdain for Ahimelech by addressing him obliquely through his father's name, Ahimelech nobly ignored the insult and addressed the king respectfully as 'my lord'. We too are to 'render ... to all their dues ... honour to whom honour', Rom. 13.7.

Verse 13. Obsessed with ideas of conspiracies and ambushes, Saul repeats concerning *Ahimelech* and David the exact words he had earlier used about *his officials* and David; 'have conspired against me ... against me, to lie in wait, as at this day'; compare v.8.

The charge was extremely serious – of treason and of being an accomplice to rebellion. I suspect that Saul regarded the accusation that Ahimelech had enquired of God on David's behalf as particularly worrying. If this was true then it meant that David had a decided – indeed a 'supernatural' – advantage over him.

Saul had never been big on asking counsel of God himself. Even when he had the ark of God available to him (before which the priest evidently could enquire of God - probably by means of the ephod³²), Saul made next to no use of it. When David later planned to bring up the ark from the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem, 'David said unto all the congregation of Israel ... let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for *we enquired not at it in the days of Saul*', 1 Chron. 13.3. In the one incident when Saul had asked the priest to bring the ark to him, he pulled back at the last moment, 1 Sam. 14.18-19, and when later, at the priest's prompting, he 'enquired of God', 14.37 (lit.), the Lord 'answered him not'.³³ As far as we know, he never attempted to enquire of the Lord again³⁴ until, in his desperation, he did so just before the battle at Gilboa, but then again 'the Lord answered him not', 28.6. Yet, though Saul had no taste for consulting God – about anything! – he was no doubt perturbed that Ahimelech had allegedly done just this on behalf of his most dreaded enemy. It may well have been this charge – more than any other – which, to Saul's disturbed mind, sealed Ahimelech's doom. It would then be particularly tragic, at least at the human level, if Ahimelech was in fact innocent of the charge (see Annex A) and that the priesthood was massacred, not only on account of Doeg's silence about David's lies to Ahimelech, but on account of Doeg's own lie to Saul.

Verses 14-15. Ahimelech gave a faithful and ungarnished account of his meeting with David. But in so doing stuck his neck out by defending David against the charges Saul had levelled against him. 'But Saul', the priest said in effect, 'David is family! He is your own son-in-law! He obeys you - going wherever you send him. (Remember that Ahimelech had accepted at face value David's word that the king had 'commanded' him on 'the top-secret mission' which took him to Nob, 21.2). David is held in honour in your own house. Surely, you can't be serious'.

'Did I then begin to enquire ...'. See point (iii) of Annex A.

'Thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more'. 'Saul, honestly', Ahimelech continued, 'my hands are clean. Anything I did for David I did in all good faith. I knew nothing of any conspiracy or plot against you.'

Verse 16. *'Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house'*. As the people saw it, an essential part of Saul's 'job description' as king was to 'judge' them, 8.20. But here, in violation of the law of God which, as king, he should have read and obeyed throughout his life,³⁵ the king makes his judgement and passes sentence on the testimony of just one witness. Sadly, to Saul's mind, the case had been decided against the priesthood before it was ever heard. Saul was deaf to anything which Ahimelech might say. Frustrated by his failure to capture and eliminate David, he will turn mercilessly on any he suspects of aiding and abetting him – even Jonathan, 20.33, or the innocent priesthood.

Saul hurtles faster and fast down the slope of sin and disaster. Having tried to kill David on many occasions, and even having tried to kill his own son, he will readily give the command to slaughter the Lord's priests and their families in cold blood.

Can this bloodthirsty tyrant be the same monarch who, at the outset of reign, would not let one man in Israel be put to death on his account, 11.13? What bitter fruit Saul's disobedience to God's word has yielded! Let us determine to deal with the beginnings of sin in our hearts.

Verses 17-19 Saul and the slaughter of the priests

Verse 17. *'The footmen'*. Literally, 'the runners'. These were the royal bodyguard, who ran before the king's horse or chariot as an escort; 'This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall *run* before his chariots', 8.11. We read later of how 'Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to *run* before him', 1 Kings 1.5.

Such men were also stationed at the door of the king's residence; see 'King Rehoboam made ... brazen shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard (the same word as 'footmen'), which kept the door of the king's house', 1 Kin. 14:27. The position of 'the king's runner' was an honoured one in the Ancient Near East.

These men also fulfilled the role of the royal executioners; see 'Jehu said to the guard (the same word again) and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword', 2 Kings 10.25.

'Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord'. It is nothing short of incredible that Israel's king should give the order to slay those who he publicly recognized as 'the priests of the Lord'. Such a command was far better suited to the painted lips of a pagan Jezebel - who, in the days of Elijah, 'cut off the prophets of the Lord', 1 Kings 18.4, 13!

'But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord'. Like a later Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, Hitler and Stalin, being a despot, Saul held absolute power. Such rulers could do as they pleased - even if irrational and insane. No man dared try to stop them.

And yet, remarkably, the following sentence opens with the word 'but!' Josephus gets the point across pithily; 'they ... were more afraid of disobeying God than the king'.³⁶ Yes, to their credit, Saul's 'runner-executioners' feared the King of heaven more than they did the king of Israel, and refused to murder His priests. In their eyes, *they* may be 'servants of the king' but his intended victims were 'priests of the Lord! Full marks to such men - who recognized a higher authority than that vested in any man - even the king. 'Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men', Acts 5.29.

They refuse to 'put forth their hand' against the (anointed) priests of the Lord. In a similar way, the fugitive David would later say, 'I will not *put forth mine hand* against my lord (Saul); for he is the Lord's anointed', 24.10. Alas, Saul had no such scruples about murdering those who - as he was - were numbered among 'the Lord's anointed!'³⁷ In chapter 14, when Saul intended to put his own son, Jonathan, to death, the people immediately intervened and insisted that Jonathan would most certainly *not* be put to death, 14.45. I guess that it was hardly an option for a handful of Saul's bodyguard to restrain their 'mad monarch' from his murderous intentions - even if they believed, as they may well might have, that, *though the priests were 'all there', the king most certainly wasn't!* But, at least, they took their stand - with all the risks that entailed - and refused to stain their own hands with the blood of the Lord's priests.

Verse 18. *'The king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests'*. Undeterred, to ensure the slaughter of God's priests, Saul is happy to enlist the help of a gentile - and so 'the deceitful informer' becomes 'the savage executioner'.

It is noticeable that every time Doeg is mentioned in scripture, he is described as 'the Edomite'. The Spirit of God clearly will not let us forget that he was a descendant of Esau³⁸ - the man who was characterised as having no regard for anything which was sacred or spiritual; 'Lest there be any fornicator, or *profane person, as Esau*, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright', Heb.12.16. 'With the ... sword', v.19, was also typical of an Edomite; in the days of Moses, 'Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee *with the sword*', Num. 20.18.

'And slew on that day fourscore and five persons'. So reads the Hebrew text. The Septuagint inflates the number to 305, and Josephus, presumably aware of both versions, merges them both to get to 385!³⁹ But, even at just 85, the family of Ithamar (Eli's family head - see Annex B) suffered such a heavy blow from this slaughter that when David organized the courses of priests for the temple service, 'there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar' - indeed, there were twice as many; namely, sixteen to eight, 1 Chron. 24.4.

When David had asked Ahimelech, 'Is there not here under thine hand spear or sword?', Ahimelech had responded, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod', 21.8-9. It seems therefore that the priests were without weapons to defend themselves from Doeg's brutal assault.

'That did wear a linen ephod'. The reference to the linen ephod worn by each priest serves a double purpose in the story. First, as the distinctive priestly dress, it should have reminded Saul - if he needed reminding - of the sacredness of their office. But, second, it links this incident back to the word of God to Eli in chapter 2. There, through an unnamed 'man of God' (viz. a prophet), the Lord had reminded Eli concerning Aaron, 'did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear *an ephod* before me?', 2.28. The word of God to Eli had continued, 'Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house ... and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever ... and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age', vv.31-33. The reference to the 'linen ephod' therefore reminds the reader of God's pending judgement on the house of Eli.

The threefold reference '... all the house of my father ... all his father's house ... all thy father's house', 22.11, 15, 16, also connects this passage to 'thy father's house' in the prophecy to Eli. Note also that the Septuagint, supported by the Qumran fragments, renders the end of 2.33 as saying that those who remained in Eli's house 'shall fall by the sword of men' - and compare with this the striking double mention in 22.19, 'With the edge of the sword ... with the edge of the sword'.

That prophetic word had probably been spoken over 80 years before,⁴⁰ and, in the intervening years, many might well have doubted that it would ever be fulfilled. For, over that period, the priestly line had continued uninterrupted from Eli, through Phinehas and Ahitub, to Eli's great-grandson Ahimelech. But now the time had come for the prophecy to Eli to be largely fulfilled. I say 'largely' because one of Ahimelech's sons escaped the carnage - Abiathar, v.20. And so, in the event, it would be well over another 40 years before 'Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfill the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh', 1 Kings 2.27.⁴¹ It was therefore some 120 years between the declaration of the Lord's word and the fulfillment of that word in its completeness. But of its fulfillment there had never been any doubt, for - invariably - that which goes out of the mouth of the Lord never returns to Him 'void' - it always accomplishes that which He pleases, Isa. 55.11. We can always trust God's words and always believe the promises of the God 'that cannot lie', Tit. 1.2. The house of Eli certainly proved that, 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small'.⁴²

Verse 19. *'Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword'*. The expression, 'the edge (lit. 'mouth', so translated 340 times; e.g. 17.35) of the sword', probably derives from the sickle-shaped blades of the swords in common use throughout the ancient world.

'Smote ... both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep'. We can hardly miss the connection between these words and those of the Lord to Saul through Samuel concerning Amalek in chapter 15; *'Smite ... both man and woman, infant ('child' – as 22.19) and suckling, ox and sheep, camel⁴³ and ass'*, 15.3. But, unlike now, Saul hadn't then smitten the Amalekites as instructed! He had failed to 'utterly destroy' all the Amalekites. He had 'spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen ... and all that was good, and would not destroy them', 15.9. (Lying behind both chapters is the idea of the devoting of a city or a people to 'the ban' of 'utter destruction'.⁴⁴)

Assuming (as I do) that the butcher from Edom was acting on the king's instructions, now, through the 'edge of the sword' of a *foreigner*, 22.19, Saul executes upon *his fellow-Israelites* (the priests of the Lord), the 'utter destruction' which he and *his fellow-Israelites* had earlier been unwilling to execute by 'the edge of the sword', 15.8, upon *foreigners* (the Amalekites)!

How far must Saul have fallen that he would spare God's sworn enemies (Exod. 17.16⁴⁵) and slaughter God's anointed priests!

According to God's law, any Israelite city which harboured idolaters was to be treated as a Canaanite city – and was to be 'utterly destroyed ... with the edge of the sword'⁴⁶; 'If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city *with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword'*, Deut.13.12-15. Here, in 1 Sam. 22, Saul treated 'the city of the priests' as if it had been either a Canaanite city or an Israelite city of idolaters!

'Oxen, and asses, and sheep'. Ironically, the 'chief of the herdsmen (or 'shepherds')', 21.7, now becomes the chief slaughterer of the oxen, asses and sheep, v.19.

When Saul 'utterly destroyed' Nob, he would have known that the news of his action would spread like wildfire. There could hardly have been a more effective way, in his eyes, of deterring others from assisting David. The disgraceful actions of both the men of Keilah and of Ziph in the next chapter may well have been influenced – to say no more – by what they had heard of the fate of Nob. 'If Saul would do that to the Lord's own priests'

Only once before had the descendants of Aaron suffered such a terrible calamity. That was when – sometime following their victory over Israel in chapter 4 – the Philistines had destroyed Shiloh and slain many of God's priests there.⁴⁷ Note carefully what Asaph's psalm tells us of that occasion; the Lord 'forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men ... He gave his people over also unto the sword ... the fire consumed their young men; and *their maidens were not given to marriage*. Their priests fell by the sword; and *their widows made no lamentation'*, Psa. 78.60-64. Note especially that the young men and priests, who were slain by Philistines, left behind unmarried maidens and widows. The latter were too greatly distressed to weep over the dead – but, like the younger women, they were left alive! That is, even a pagan – 'uncircumcised' – people such as the Philistines would spare the lives of the womenfolk of an Israelite priestly city. It beggars belief that *only Israel's own king* would stoop so low as to murder the womenfolk of an Israelite priestly city!

Verses 20-23 David and Abiathar

This section stands in marked contrast to the 'Saul and Ahimelech' section, vv. 11-16. Note, for example, the contrasting words spoken by Saul and David to the priests in the last verses of each section – 'You shall surely die', v.16 NRSV, and 'you shall be safe', v.23 NKJV. If Saul is the destroyer of priests, David is the preserver of priests.

Verse 20. *'One of the sons'*. Only 'one' of the priests escaped. But one was enough to provide priestly support for David in the coming years. In a similar way, it was sufficient for one of the royal seed to survive Athaliah's massacre; 'when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber', 2 Chron. 22.10-11.

So too, it was enough that only One of the male children of Bethlehem (just a few miles south of Nob) was delivered from the slaughter commanded by Herod the Great, Matt. 2.13-16. (Note that Herod was not only a king – like Saul – but he was an Idumean {an Edomite⁴⁸} – like Doeg.) There is no mistaking the hand of God on each of these three occasions.

'One of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped'. It is likely that Abiathar had been left by his father Ahimelech to take care of the tabernacle and its holy things, while Ahimelech and the rest of the priests went to Gibeah. We gather from the fact that Abiathar outlived David (whose 40-year reign did not commence for some time yet) that Abiathar was a relatively young man at this time – quite likely the youngest of Ahimelech's sons. And, in the same way that David, as Jesse's youngest son, had been expected to look after his father's sheep while his father and his older brothers attended a special function in response to an invitation from the prophet, Samuel, so Abiathar, as Ahimelech's youngest son, may have been expected to stay at Nob to look after his father's priestly affairs while his father and his older brothers attended a special function in response to an invitation from the king, Saul.

'And fled after David'. Having somehow heard of the massacre at Gibeah before Doeg and his accomplices arrived at Nob to complete their infamous work – by killing the wives, children and flocks of the priests – Abiathar fled to David, having had the presence of mind to take with him the high priest's ephod (with its Urim and Thummim), 23.6, which was to play such a crucial part in later events; e.g. 23.2, 4, 9-13; 30.7-8; 2 Sam. 2.1.

And so, as a consequence of the cruel carnage, David obtained the services of a priest with the ephod. I can think of no other obvious way in which this could have happened. It seems clear from both Ahimelech's actions in chapter 21 and his words in our chapter, that he wouldn't have chosen to throw in his lot with David. And though Ahimelech was prepared to show David the ephod, 21.9 (and even may have used it to enquire of God for him – but see Annex A), there was no way in which he would have ever parted with it. And so, yet again, God made the wrath of man (in this case, of Saul) to praise Him, Psa. 76.10, by over-ruling it to provide David with the unique facility and privilege of being able to enquire of the Lord as and when he wished.

When Samuel had told Eli 'every whit' of what God had revealed to him concerning God's inescapable judgement on Eli's house, Eli had responded, 'It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good', 3.11-18. Little did Eli suspect that in due course, in the mysterious workings of His providence, God would bring about by far the main fulfillment of His word to him through the perverseness of an unstable king and the barbarity of a self-serving descendant of Esau.

Eli, who had twice been told by God that his dynasty stood under God's judgement, 2.27-35, would never have dreamt that God would one day use a man, who had twice been told by God that his own dynasty similarly stood under God's judgement, to (in large part) bring about that very judgement on his house!

Indeed, had Saul but had the eyes to see it, this major fulfilment of God's declared judgement on the priestly line of Eli (in which Saul played such a key role himself) was confirmation indeed to him that, in God's time, God's declared judgement would fall with equal certainty on his own kingly line.

We can rest assured that God always fulfils His word, sometimes doing so by employing the most unlikely instruments.

But the whole idea of God catching up the exceedingly sinful actions of men like Saul and Doeg in the sweep of His own will and purpose raises profound – and familiar – theological questions. And it is crucial that we distinguish carefully between the *just* purpose of God to visit His judgement on sin – in this case a judgement which had hovered over the house of Eli since chapter 2 – and the free actions of the men who God used to accomplish His purpose and to fulfil His word. The fact that God over-ruled their wickedness for the good of His own (in this case David) and for His own glory in no way absolved them from their guilt or accountability to Him for their actions.⁴⁹

Frankly, the Lord's ways – with us as with others – are often shrouded in mystery. We have simply to bow low before Him, and exclaim, 'How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!', Rom. 11.33.

Verses 21-22. *'I knew it that day ... I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house'*. No doubt, the news of the slaughter of God's priests shocked and horrified every sane man and woman in Israel. And David also expressed something of his own sense of outrage in Psa. 52, 'Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?', v.1, and found consolation in the knowledge of God's sure and certain judgment, 'God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and uproot you from the land of the living', v.5.

But, apart from his sense of horror and indignation, David felt the bitter pangs of guilt and regret. He had, unintentionally, been the direct cause both of Doeg's accusations and of the horrific sequel. Following his recent 'excursion' to Gath, David had written, 'Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile', Psa. 34.13. In the light of the events at Nob, David may have come to see all the more clearly the need for honesty and openness.

Verse 23. *'Abide thou with me ... with me thou shalt be ...'*. Note the double 'with me'. And from that moment on, until they were parted by David's death, Abiathar remained 'with' David.

Solomon had regard to this close association later when he spared Abiathar's life, after Abiathar was implicated in Adonijah's attempt to take the throne; 'unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because *thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted*⁵⁰, 1 Kings 2.26.⁵¹

'He that seeketh my life seeketh thy life'. And so their mutual danger united the king-elect and the priest-elect together.

'Fear not ... with me thou shalt be in safeguard'. Note David's confidence at this time. Psa. 52 reveals something of his present trust in God; 'This (Doeg) is the man that ... trusted in the abundance of his riches ... But ... I trust in the mercy ('loving-kindness, steadfast love') of God for ever and ever ... I will wait on thy name', vv. 7-9.

As we leave chapter 22, we remember that Ahimelech was a godly, high-principled man – who did what he believed was right and who was prepared to speak out for someone he believed was a good man. Yet, for this, Ahimelech paid dearly – not only with his own life, but in knowing before he died that his actions and words had led to the pronouncing of a death sentence on the whole of his family – and indeed on many others. In this way, our chapter bears witness that, even in Old Testament times, living a godly life gave no guarantee of safety from suffering, trouble, and even death. Still less should we today confuse earthly comfort and prosperity with God's approval and blessing. God often allows His choicest servants to suffer the severest afflictions and trials.

Again, we remember that Saul got everything backwards – sparing God's enemies and slaying His people. We must take great care that we know who our 'enemies' are. God save us from ever confusing fellow believers (including those who neither meet with us nor see eye to eye with us on many matters) with those who are 'enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction', Phil. 3.18. The former we are to love as brethren; the latter to be on our

guard against. Ultimately, of course, our spiritual 'enemies' are not 'flesh and blood' at all – and it is against the sinister 'world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of evil in the heavenlies' that we are to contend! (See Eph. 6.10-18.)

It is said that when the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec. He was given orders to wait for the British land forces to arrive, then support them when they attacked the city. Phipps' navy arrived early. As the admiral waited, he became annoyed by the statues of the saints that adorned the towers of a nearby cathedral. So he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons. No one knows how many rounds were fired or how many statues were knocked out. But when the land forces arrived and the signal was given to attack, the admiral was of no help. He had used up all his ammunition shooting at the 'saints'. May God save us from doing the same!

End-notes

¹ Again, Saul is very much the central figure in chapter 28, with David mentioned only incidentally after v.2 – in v.17.

² Compare 22.18-19 with 2.31-36; 3.11-14.

³ Josh. 12.15; for its long existence see Gen. 38.1.

⁴ Josh. 15.20-21, 35.

⁵ Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter XII, para.3.

⁶ The 'sons of Zeruah', 26.6; 2 Sam. 2.13, 18; 3.39; 8.16; 14.1; 16.9-10; 17.25; 18.2; 19.21-22; 21.17; 23.18, 37; 1 Kings 1.7; 2.5, 22; 1 Chron. 2.16; 11.6, 39; 18.12, 15; 26.38; 27.24 – the elder of David's two sisters, 1 Chron. 2.16.

⁷ See TWOT, Vol.2, page 760; NIDOTTE, Vol. 3, page 788.

⁸ See, in particular, Lev. 25.

⁹ We remember the Lord's words, 'I have other sheep which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd', John 10.16 JND. Note the difference between the 'fold' and the 'flock' (which is obscured by the AV). It has been said that 'a fold is a circumference without a centre, but a flock is a centre without a circumference'!

¹⁰ It is possible that the famous incident took place later – after David had been made king over all Israel. Neither 2 Sam. 23 nor 1 Chron. 11 provide any clear time-note. But both passages do speak of 'the troop/host of the Philistines' being then encamped in the valley of Rephaim – situated only a short way west of Jerusalem. We read in 2 Sam. 5.18 that 'the Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim'; being soon after David had captured the citadel of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, vv.6-9 – compare 1 Chron. 14.9, 13. On the basis of this, many commentators date the exploit of the 'three' to that time. (That the 'three' are described as 'chief', 2 Sam. 23.13, and as 'captains', 1 Chron. 11.15, could be pleaded in support. It could be, however, that these descriptions simply identify what the three later became.) If the incident did take place at that later time, the explicit reference made (in both accounts) to the three coming to David when he was at the cave of Adullam – some 15 miles south east of Jerusalem – may represent something of a difficulty. Either, in 2 Sam. 5, David must have returned, from his 'city of David' fort at Jerusalem, 2 Sam. 5.9, to the cave at Adullam for some reason (which was, given the geography of the Philistine movements, unlikely in the extreme), or the passages in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Chron. 11 first acquaint the reader with the fact that the 'three' had been with David from the very beginning (i.e. the cave of Adullam) and then proceed to recount the famous exploit which they (later) performed.

I am in no position to be dogmatic about which dating of the famous incident is correct. (Josephus dates it to the time when David was 'at Jerusalem' in 2 Sam. 5; Antiquities, Book VII, Chapter XII, para. 4.) I do note, however, the repeated emphasis in both accounts on the word 'then'; e.g. 'three of the thirty captains went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the host of the Philistines encamped in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in the hold, and the Philistines' garrison was then at Bethlehem', 1 Chron. 11.15-16. (The 'hold' could have been located on the 'rock' at Adullam. The reference to the 'hold' in 1 Sam. 22.4-5 may be to the same place. Alternatively, the 'hold' may have been the 'hold' at Jerusalem, 1 Chron. 11.5 {'castle', AV}, 16.) It seems to me that the most natural reading of both passages is that the famous incident did take place when David was at Adullam in 1 Sam. 22. But I am by no means sure of this.

¹¹ It seems that Abishai was chief of the three heroes who fought their way to the well and back; 'the three brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well ... these things did these three mightiest. And Abishai the brother of Joab, he was chief of the three', 1 Chron. 11.18-20. We remember that Abishai and his two brothers were from Bethlehem, 2 Sam. 2.32. He would therefore have been familiar with the terrain and the exact location of the well.

¹² If this incident took place while David was at Adullam in 1 Sam. 22, the approach of a Philistine garrison towards Bethlehem may well have provided additional motivation for David's family to pack their bags and join David!

¹³ Remember that Bethlehem was about 10 miles from Adullam, involving these men in a round trip of over 20 miles – all for a drink of water!

¹⁴ Compare, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us', 2 Cor. 5.14.

¹⁵ In New Testament imagery, David regarded the odour of such a sacrifice as far too fragrant for him to interrupt its ascent to the heart and throne of God; see Phil. 4.18.

¹⁶ Deut. 12.16, 23-25; 15.23.

¹⁷ It is tempting to read the account of what these three 'ordinary men with extraordinary courage and commitment' did, and to simply say, 'Wow, wasn't that amazing ... what incredible courage ... I'm filled with admiration for such selfless devotion'. Fine ... but what about me? But what about comfortable and complacent me? Am I not willing to risk just a little for Christ? Or do I live in the 'too far ... too risky' camp? Where are those today who are willing to 'jeopardise' their lives to bring the Lord a 'drink' from some foreign field?

¹⁸ It is possible that David wrote either (or, indeed, both) of these psalms when he and his men took refuge in the cave at En-gedi, 24.1-8, rather than when he was at Adullam. But, speaking personally, I think the evidence points to them having been written in the cave of Adullam.

I note that there are certain similarities between Psa. 57 and Psa. 56 - which latter was certainly written either just before or during the time when David was at Adullam. Psalm 57 'is, in many respects, a companion Psalm to the preceding Psalm 56. the structure is similar, with two divisions concluding with the same refrain, and there are certain phrases which are common to both Psalms. The tone and the spirit of the two Psalms are almost identical',

J. Flanigan, 'Psalms' in the 'What the Bible Teaches' series, John Ritchie Ltd, 2001, page 248. To me these literary affinities suggest that they were written around the same time.

In that both the titles to both Psa. 57 and Psa. 142 use the identical and unqualified expression 'in the cave', I suspect that David wrote both these psalms concerning his time in the same cave.

¹⁹ I have seen it claimed that the name 'Adullam' itself means 'Refuge', but I can find no reliable evidence for this – and the name certainly bears no resemblance to either the word translated 'refuge' in Psa. 57 or the word translated 'refuge' Psa. 142.

²⁰ See Gesenius and the New Brown Driver Briggs, Strong's code 4707/4708

²¹ A. F. Kirkpatrick, 'The Second Book of Samuel', page 105. John Gill cites a source for the tradition – 'Bemnidbar Rabba, sect.14, fol.212.1' – but this means nothing to me.

²² So too RSV, NRSV, NIV.

²³ There seems to be no real distinction between a 'seer' and a 'prophet'. Gad is called both in 2 Sam. 24.11. Cf. the identification of the two offices in 2 Kings 17.13; Isa. 29.10; Amos 7.12. Also the use of two different words for 'seer' along with the word 'prophet' in 1 Chron. 29.19. Those who formerly were spoken of as 'seers' became known as 'prophets', 1 Sam. 9.9. See NIDOTTE, Vol. 2, page 60, and TWOT, Vol 1, page 275.

²⁴ We know that there were strongholds in Moab, Jer. 48.41.

²⁵ It is possible that the description 'hold/stronghold' is used of Adullam also in 2 Sam. 23.14//1 Chron. 11.16. The Hebrew words used for 'hold/stronghold' are often used of natural fortresses. At this time of his life, David moved from one natural stronghold to another, 1 Sam. 23.14, 19, 29 (note the plural in 23.19 and 29). See NIDOTTE, Vol. 2, page 1064 – curiously reproduced on page 1069!

²⁶ The lowlands between the land of the Philistines and the hill country of Judea is known as 'the Shephelah' – a Hebrew word meaning 'lowlands'.

²⁷ The Hebrew word translated 'wood', 23.15-19, is different to that translated 'forest', 22.5.

²⁸ The animals of the desert are well aware of this, and apparently, even today, if you want to see desert gazelles in the heat of the day, you can do no better than look for the tamarisks. (The information about the tamarisk tree is taken in part from an article entitled 'Under the tamarisk tree' in the Jerusalem Post on 28 June 1996.)

²⁹ See the note to 18.10.

³⁰ It is in many ways ironic that Saul should have done this, having earlier given a tremendous sense of corporate unity to the various tribes of Israel at the time of his first great military exploit, 11.7-8, 15.

³¹ The day came when, in facing the forces of Absalom, David did appoint 'captains of thousands and captains of hundreds' over his own forces - and set Joab, Abishai and Ittai as his Commanders-in-Chief over them, 2 Sam. 18.1-2.

³² See Annex A to chapter 23.

³³ 'In 14.37 ... God does not answer the inquiry of this king ... later, David inquires and the Lord does respond, 22.10. Saul was quick to recognize this incongruity and let his anger over the matter be known, 22.13', John A.Beck in NIDOTTE, Vol. 4, page 9.

³⁴ Unless the identification of Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14.38-42 was performed by means of enquiring of God through the ephod – see Annex A to chapter 23.

³⁵ Deut. 17.18-20; 19.15. Note that Deut. 19.15-19 required 'judges' to 'make diligent inquisition' before initiating any action!

³⁶ Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter XII, para. 6.

³⁷ '... the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed', Num. 3.3.

³⁸ Gen. 36.1, 8.

³⁹ Of Doeg, Josephus wrote 'he took to his assistance such wicked men as were like himself, and slew Ahimelech and all his family, who were in all three hundred and eighty-five', Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter XII, para. 6.

⁴⁰ Assuming that Samuel was born circ. 1100 BC (see Leon Wood, 'Survey of Israel's History', page 229), that the prophecy concerning Eli was delivered within a few years of Samuel's birth, and that the events of 1 Sam. 22 took place circ. 1015 BC – some 5 years before David began to reign over the house of Judah.

⁴¹ Solomon fulfilled the word of the Lord both to Phinehas (in the line of Eleazar, not that of Ithamar), Num. 25.12-13, and to Eli, 1 Sam. 2.27-30. For the long-term fulfilment of God's promise to Phinehas, see Ezek. 40.46; 43.19; 44.15; 48.11.

⁴² Friedrich von Logau, 'Sinnegedichte', translating an anonymous verse in Sextus Empiricus Adversus Mathematicos book 1, section 287.

⁴³ Note that, unlike the Amalekites, the priests of Israel boasted no camels! The Amalekites (along with the Midianites) had camels 'without number', Judg. 6.5; 7.12 – a kind of ancient tank!

⁴⁴ The basic meaning of the Hebrew word 'hērem' is that of a special act of consecration – of something or someone being excluded from common use. On the one hand, this can mean consecrating something or someone to God's service; 'no devoted thing, that a man shall devote to the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord', Lev. 27.28. Everything that was devoted became the property of the priests or of God's sanctuary, Num. 18.14; cf. Josh. 6.19; Ezek. 44.29. On the other hand, and more commonly, the word is used to describe those things or people who were placed under 'a ban' for utter destruction. This latter idea is found first in scripture in Num. 21.2-3, where the Lord 'utterly destroyed' the cities at Hormah; compare what is said about Sihon and Og, Josh. 2.10 with Num. 21.24, 33-35. The Hebrew word 'hērem' is most frequently translated 'utterly destroy(ed/ing)' in the AV, and is used to describe the destruction of almost all the cities which fell to Israel in the days of Joshua; e.g. Jericho, Josh. 6.21;

Ai, 8.26; Makkedah, 10.28; Eglon, 10.35; Hebron, 10.37; Hazor, 11.1 – together with the Anakim, 11.21. The rationale for this destruction is given in Deut. 7.1-5.

The word is also used of 'foreign nations "utterly destroying" a city or country; cf. 2 Kings 19.11; 2 Chron. 20.23. Light on this may come from the Mesha inscription. [The 'Moabite Stone' is now in the Louvre, Paris]. On line 17 King Mesha (cf. 2 Kings 3.4) uses the word as he explains that he slaughtered all the inhabitants of Nebo because he made the city a "devoted" city to his god Chemosh', TWOT, Vol. 1, page 324. See the helpful articles on 'hērem' in NIDOTTE, Vol. 2, page 276 and TWOT, Vol 1, page 324.

⁴⁵ 'The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation', Exod. 17.16. Perhaps, if Saul had obeyed the command of God in 1 Sam. 15, the Jews in Persia would have been spared the threat of extermination from Haman, the Agagite, Esther 3.1 and onwards.

⁴⁶ See the reference to the Canaanite cities being 'utterly destroyed' or 'smitten' 'with the edge of the sword'; e.g. Jericho, Josh. 6.21; Ai, 8.24; Makkedah, 10.28; Libnah, 10.30; Lachish, 10.32; Eglon, 10.35; Hebron, 10.37; Debir, 10.39; Hazor, 11.11; Leshem, 19.47. Note the summary at Josh. 11.12-14. Clearly 'the edge of the sword' was an important part of the 'utterly destroy' vocabulary.

⁴⁷ The text of 1 Sam. 4 doesn't actually say that Shiloh was destroyed. But this is the implication of the words of Jeremiah; 'go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel ... Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh', Jer. 7. 12-14; cf. 26.6, 9. 'Jeremiah's references to its destruction have been confirmed by excavations of the site, which revealed a city destroyed by the Philistines about 1050 B.C., probably after the Battle of Ebenezer', Expositors Bible Commentary. But for the timing of Shiloh's actual destruction see too footnote 83 on page 176 of Eugene Merrill's 'Kingdom of Priests'.

⁴⁸ See, for example, the article 'Edom' by A. H. Sayce in Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, Vol.1, page 646. 'Idumea' was the Greek name by which Edom was known.

⁴⁹ Any more than in the well-known case of those responsible for the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus, "Truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed", Luke 22.22; 'Ye men of Israel ... Him, being delivered (up) by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, yet have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain', Acts 2.22-23.

⁵⁰ Compare what is said of the Lord Himself and the house of Israel, 'In all their affliction he was afflicted', Isa. 63.9. We too have, not only a priest, nor even a high priest, but a Great High Priest who is able to sympathise with us in our weaknesses, Heb. 4.14-15.

⁵¹ When David ascended the throne of Judah, Abiathar was appointed high priest. It seems that, meanwhile, Zadok, of the house of Eleazar, had been made high priest – presumably by Saul. These joint appointments continued in force till the end of David's reign; 'So king Solomon was king over all Israel ... and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests', 1 Kings 4.1, 4. As far as I know, Abiathar had the dubious distinction of being the only case where a high priest was deposed before Israel returned from the exile and came under gentile domination. He was banished to his home at Anathoth by Solomon, because he took part in the rebellious attempt to install Adonijah as king. Zadok became sole high priest and so the priesthood passed from the house of Ithamar to the house of Eleazar; see 1 Sam. 2.30-36; 1 Kings 1.19; 2.26, 27).

DID AHIMELECH ACTUALLY 'ENQUIRE OF THE LORD' FOR DAVID?

There are many factors we need to take into account in attempting to answer this question. The following are some which strike me.

(i) What God would likely have said in answer to any such enquiry from David.

Given the context, we can probably take it for granted that David's main reason for asking Ahimelech to enquire of the Lord for him would have been to obtain direction from God as to his next movements. But, following his session with Ahimelech, David left Nob and went to Achish at Gath, 21.10. I find it difficult to believe that God would have directed his servant there!

Again, for David to have asked Ahimelech to bring the ephod and to consult God for him would have involved David in considerable risk. Even with plain 'yes/no' answers to specific questions (see the note to 23.6), there was a distinct risk that opening up any kind of dialogue with the One who knew the truth about David's reason for going to Nob could easily have resulted in David's exposure as a liar. Indeed, apart from any 'unwelcome' information which might have come to light as a result of one of David's own questions, there was a real danger that Ahimelech, having once been persuaded to bring the ephod, might have decided to throw in one or two questions of his own. And the more so because of his initial suspicions - which may well have lingered following David's rather far-fetched answers. Would David really have wanted to open a door which might easily have led to having his deception uncovered?

(ii) The high priest's ephod seems to have been in its usual place - unmoved - when Ahimelech produced Goliath's sword for David.

'The priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth *behind the ephod*', 21.9.

(iii) The meaning of Ahimelech's words to Saul in 1 Sam. 22.15.

As part of his defence before Saul, Ahimelech said, 'Have I begun today¹ to ask of God for him? Far be it from me²', v.15. Perhaps the most natural reading of Ahimelech's words is that he was pleading that, in enquiring of God for David, he had done nothing new or novel - let alone anything inappropriate. That this had been by no means the first time David had come to him to ask him to inquire of the Lord on his behalf. In other words, 'I don't see, O king, what the fuss is all about - I was doing nothing out of the ordinary'. And who knows, there may even be a veiled rebuke lurking in Ahimelech's words - 'David has visited me many times in the past, O king, seeking God's guidance and direction - which I readily obtained for him, with no criticism - but, come to think of it, I don't recall having seen you lately at Nob ...!'

But, on the other hand, perhaps we can interpret Ahimelech's words as meaning, 'I don't deny the bits about the food and the sword, O king, but I'm *not* guilty on the charge of having enquired of God for David. That bit just isn't true. I wouldn't have done that for him - anymore than I have ever done it for him previously. I had never enquired of God for him before he came that day, and I didn't start then!'

(iv) What we know of David's later practice.

For David to have enquired of God would have been entirely consistent with what we know of David's character from subsequent events. We know that, once he had access to a high priest with his ephod, David made it his habit to consult God in many of his later crises; 23.2,4; 30.8; 2 Sam. 2.1; 5.19; 5.23. So it wouldn't have been at all incongruous for David to have done so at Nob.

(We ought to make it our practice similarly to seek God's direction. We ought to come before Him so that He can tell us what He wants us to do for Him, rather than only so we can tell Him what we want Him to do for us. We ought to call on Him to ask what He wants of us, and not only what we want of Him.)

(v) The light which Psa. 52 sheds on Doeg's character and actions.

Twice in Psa. 52, David accuses Doeg of having a 'deceitful' tongue - 'Thy *tongue* deviseth mischiefs...working *deceitfully* ... thou lovest all devouring words, O thou *deceitful tongue*', Psa. 52.2,4, and of lying, 'Thou lovest ... *lying* rather than to speak righteousness, v.3.

The most natural reading of David's words suggests that Doeg had actually lied about some critical matter. But the only thing which Doeg is reported as having said to Saul which is not explicitly supported by chapter 21 is his reference to Ahimelech having enquired for David.

It is, I suppose, just possible to interpret David's censures in the psalm as relating to the way in which Doeg had deliberately kept silent about Ahimelech's innocence - about the way in which Ahimelech had been imposed on and deceived by David. Indeed, Doeg's silence may well have done more to seal the doom of the priests of Nob than anything he actually said. By withholding the facts about Ahimelech acting in good faith, Doeg cut the ground right out from Ahimelech's own protest of innocence later - 'let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for *thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more*', v.15. Doeg seems to have deliberately given Saul the impression that Ahimelech had joined with David in a conspiracy against him. Doeg knew that, after all, this was the sort of thing Saul wanted to hear!

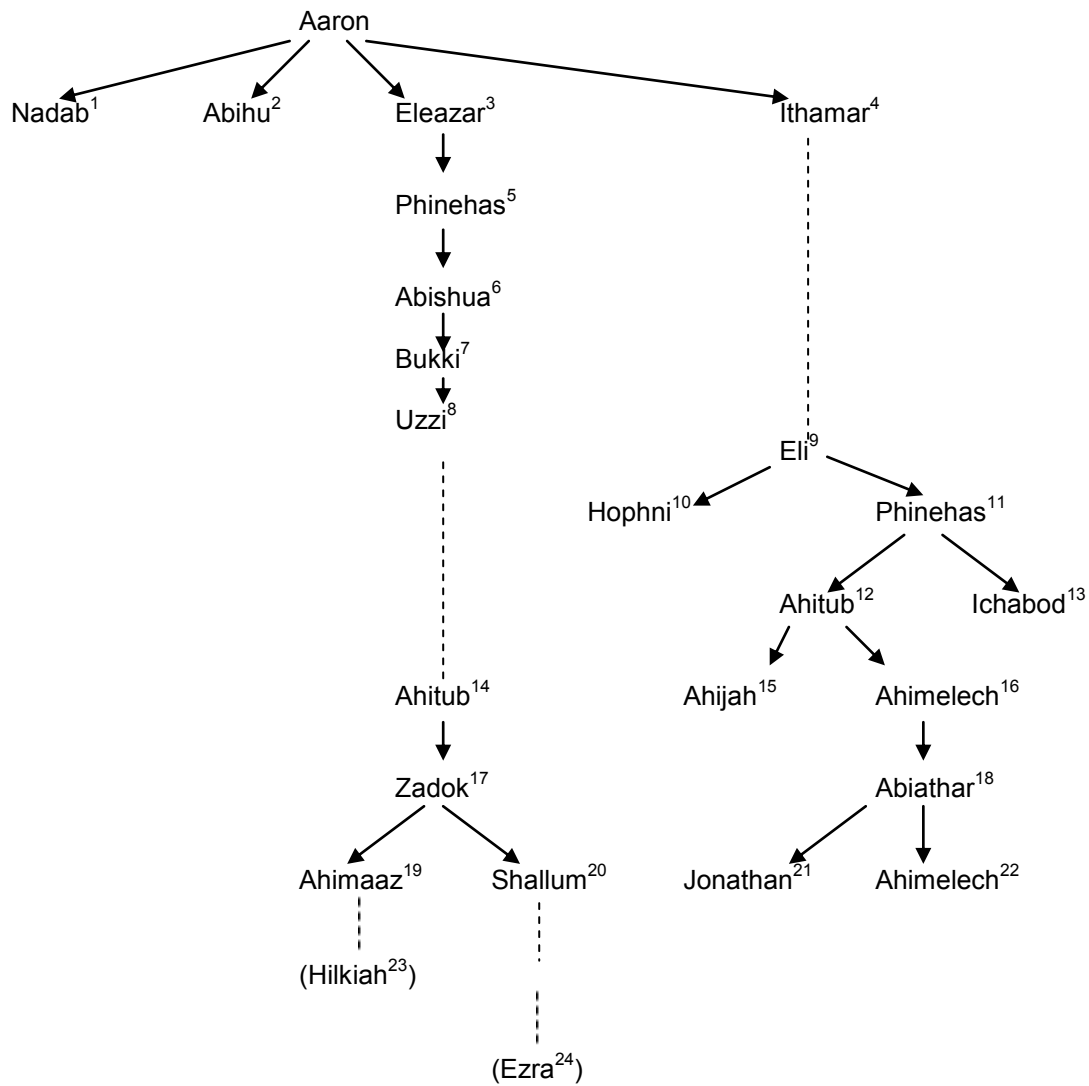
But I have to say that David's actual words in Psa. 52 - including his reference to Doeg loving 'lying' - suggest to me that Doeg did more than withhold information from the king - even if it was critical information. Not that I have any doubt but that we can 'bear false witness' against 'our neighbour' equally as much if we deliberately conceal part of the truth, as if we maliciously invent a lie.

Footnotes

¹ For the same combination of the Hebrew words 'begin' and 'day' see Deut. 2.25 and Josh. 3.7; in both instances the phrase is translated '(this) day will I begin' - that is, as a statement and not as a question.

² For the expression 'Far be it from me', see 12.23; 14.45; 20.2,9; 24.6; 26.11.

THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD



Footnotes

¹ Num. 3. 4; 1 Chron. 6. 3.

² Num. 3. 4; 1 Chron. 6. 3.

³ Num. 3. 4; Num. 20. 28; Deut. 10. 6; 1 Chron. 6. 3.

⁴ Num. 3. 4; 1 Chron. 6. 3.

⁵ Exod. 6. 25; Num. 25. 7-13; Josh. 22. 13; Judg. 20. 28.

⁶ 1 Chron. 6. 4.

⁷ 1 Chron. 6. 5.

⁸ 1 Chron. 6. 4-7, 50-52.

⁹ I know of no scriptural explanation why the high priesthood jumped across from the line of Eleazar/Phinehas to Eli. 'For some reason unknown the descendants of Ithamar seem to have held the chief position among the priests from Eli till the accession of Solomon'. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article 'Eleazar'.)

I note that Josephus, the Jewish historian, simply reports it as fact : 'Eli was the first of the family of Ithamar, the other son of Aaron, that had the government; for the family of Eleazar officiated as high priest at first, the son still receiving that honour from the father which Eleazar bequeathed to his son Phinehas; after whom Abiezer his son took the honour, and delivered it to his son, whose name was Bukki, from whom his son Ozi [Uzzi] received it; after whom Eli, of whom we have been speaking, had the priesthood, and so he and his posterity until the time of

Solomon's reign; but then the posterity of Eleazar reassumed it'. (Flavius Josephus, '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book V, Chapter XI, Paragraph 5.)

It does seem that the Lord endorsed Eli as the legitimate high priest of the day, 1 Sam. 2. 27-28.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. 1. 3; 2. 34; 4. 4, 11, 17.

¹¹ 1 Sam. 1. 3; 2. 34; 4. 4, 11, 17.

¹² 1 Sam. 14. 3 – to be distinguished from the 'Ahitub' of 1 Chron. 6. 7-8, a descendant of the line of Eleazar.

¹³ 1 Sam. 4. 19-22.

¹⁴ 1 Chron. 6, 7.

¹⁵ 1 Sam. 14. 3 (the KJV renders his name 'Ahiah'). It is just possible that Ahijah ('Friend of the Lord') and Ahimelech ('Friend of the King') were one and the same person.

¹⁶ 1 Sam. 22. 9, 11. In 1 Samuel 22 (verse 18), the family of Ithamar (Eli's family head) suffered such a heavy blow from the slaughter by Doeg that when David organized the courses of priests for the temple service, 'there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar' – indeed, there were twice as many; namely, sixteen to eight, 1 Chron. 24. 4.

¹⁷ 2 Sam. 8. 17; 1 Chron. 6. 8; 24. 3-4. David left Zadok to minister at the tabernacle at Gibeon, and to offer the required sacrifices, 1 Chron. 16. 39-40, when the ark of the covenant of the Lord was brought up to Jerusalem, 1 Chron. 16. 1, 37. As a result of Abiathar later throwing in his lot with Adonijah, Solomon removed Abiathar from the priesthood, leaving Zadok as high priest, 1 Kings 2. 27, 35. In so doing, Solomon fulfilled the word of the Lord *both to Phinehas* (in the line of Eleazar, not the son of Eli in the line of Ithamar), Num. 25. 12-13, *and to Eli*, 1 Sam. 2. 27-30.

See Ezek. 40. 46; 43. 19; 44. 15; 48. 11 for the long-term fulfilment of God's promise to Phinehas. '... the Zadokites were to be recognised as the official priesthood and, by implication, all other descendants of Levi were excluded from this office. They had remained faithful when the people of Israel went astray and they would, in due course, receive the reward for their loyalty to God'. (F. A. Tatford, '*Dead Bones Live*', page 254.)

¹⁸ 1 Sam. 22. 20; 23.6; 1 Chron. 24.3-4. See footnote 17 above.

¹⁹ 2 Sam. 15. 27; 1 Chron. 6. 53.

²⁰ 1 Chron. 6. 12.

²¹ 2 Sam. 15. 27; 17. 17, 20.

²² 2 Sam. 8. 17.

²³ 1 Chron. 6, 13; 2 Kings 22. 4.

²⁴ Ezra 7. 1-2.