

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

There are many factors we need to be 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.