

The Life of David

David and Abigail—Part 1

1 Samuel 25:1-31

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September 29, 2019

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Scripture

David was on the run from King Saul, who wanted to kill David. Saul caught up with David near the wilderness of Engedi, but David spared Saul's life. Saul affirmed that David would be the next king over Israel, and went back to his home in Gibeah, while David remained in the caves at Engedi. Then the great Prophet Samuel died. First Samuel 25:1 says, "Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah." Today we learn about what happened next.

Let's read about David and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:1-31:

¹Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.

Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. ²And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. ³Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite. ⁴David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. ⁵So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. ⁶And thus you shall greet him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. ⁷I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. ⁸Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.' "

⁹ When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. ¹⁰ And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. ¹¹ Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" ¹² So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this. ¹³ And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. ¹⁷ Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

¹⁸ Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. ¹⁹ And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I come after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. ²⁰ And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. ²¹ Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good. ²² God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him."

²³ When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. ²⁵ Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ²⁶ Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. ²⁷ And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ²⁸ Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. ²⁹ If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. ³⁰ And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, ³¹ my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.” (1 Samuel 25:1-31)

Introduction

The following warnings were found on consumer products:

On a Duraflame fireplace log: “Caution—Risk of Fire.”

On a Batman costume: “Warning: Cape does not enable user to fly.”

On a bottle of hair coloring: “Do not use as an ice cream

topping.”

On a cardboard sun shield for a car: “Do not drive with sun shield in place.”

On a portable stroller: “Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage.”¹

As I read today’s text I want to add the following warning: “Do not let one man’s folly be the cause of your own folly.” David became really upset because of Nabal’s actions, and he very nearly acted in a way that could have been disastrous for him. Thankfully, the Lord intervened in David’s life.

Lesson

First Samuel 25:1-31 shows us the Lord’s restraining providence in the life of his servant.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. A Man Who Does Not Fear the Lord (25:1-13)
2. A Woman Who Does Fear the Lord (25:14-31)

I. A Man Who Does Not Fear the Lord (25:1-13)

First, let’s look at a man who does not fear the Lord.

There are three characters in this narrative. There is David, of course. And there is also a husband and wife, Nabal and Abigail.

A. *The Request (25:1-9)*

First, there is the request.

After Samuel’s death and burial, which David most likely did not attend, he **rose** from Engedi **and went down to the wilderness of Paran** (25:1b), which was much further south, in the Sinai Peninsula. Presumably, David wanted to get even further away

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2006/july/8070306.html>.

from Saul. However, **there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel** (25:2a). This was back in the area from which David had come. **Carmel** was west of Engedi. We are told that the man, whose name was **Nabal**, was **very rich**. At the time when Nabal was shearing his sheep, David sent ten of his men to ask Nabal for food. David had an army of six hundred men and their families to feed. So, he told the men exactly what to say. They were to be respectful and polite. They were to tell Nabal how they had protected him and his flocks (probably from enemies and thieves), and that they had not taken anything by force from Nabal's farm. **When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited** (25:9).

Bible scholars say that it was customary at shearing time, which was also a feast, for wealthy landowners to share their wealth with others. So, David's request—especially in view of his protection of Nabal and his flocks—was entirely appropriate.

B. The Refusal (25:10-11)

Second, there is the refusal.

And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" (25:11-11). Nabal refused David's request. He was utterly scornful. He accused David of running away from his master, Saul. Moreover, Nabal believed that his wealth was because of his own ability. Notice that seven times he used the words **"I"** and **"my."**

In verse 25 we learn that the name **Nabal** literally means "fool." In what sense was Nabal a fool? Nabal had everything that this world had to offer. He was very rich, he was influential, and he had a beautiful wife. People who are wealthy, influential, and

have a beautiful wife are not considered foolish at all. So, in what sense was Nabal a fool? Nabal was a fool in God's eyes. Commentator Gordon Keddie writes of Nabal:

His foolishness—like all true foolishness—concerns his relationship to the Lord. All sin is sheer foolishness, for it is the contradiction of God. The way he dealt with David was foolish at the obvious level that it is not prudent to insult a man who has the power to do you great harm. But he was foolish at the deeper level of offending God through rejecting his servant in a contemptuous and uncaring manner. David had been kind to Nabal, for all that it was unsolicited. At the very least, he could expect common courtesy. As the Lord's anointed, and a well-known national figure with an unimpeachable personal history, he was entitled to some respect, if not indeed the assistance of his brethren, the Lord's people!²

Nabal's folly is an illustration of one who did not fear the Lord. He was concerned about himself, and he had no regard for the things of the Lord. Let us be aware that a person who does not fear the Lord is indeed a foolish person.

C. The Retaliation (25:12-13)

And third, there is the retaliation.

So, David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this (25:12). But instead of being restrained, David was incensed. He immediately wanted to retaliate and **said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage (25:13).**

David's retaliation was wrong. He was responding in kind to

² Gordon J. Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1988), 232.

Nabal's refusal. One wonders how he could react in the way he did when, in just the previous chapter, he had acted so magnanimously toward Saul by sparing his life. Well, perhaps the answer lies in the fact that he knew that Saul was out to kill him, and he was on his guard against acting in an improper manner. However, he expected a friendly response from Nabal, and was instead rebuffed. He was surprised by Nabal's unexpected refusal. "And," as Gordon Keddie writes, "it is nasty surprises that always tend to raise the hackles and give occasion for the temptation to overreact. We are vulnerable at such moments, not only to the flushes of our own sinfulness but to the influences of demonic suggestion."³

Do not let one man's folly be the cause of your own folly.

II. A Woman Who Does Fear the Lord (25:14-31)

And second, let's look at a woman who does fear the Lord.

Nabal's wife was named Abigail. In verse 3 we learn that she "was discerning and beautiful." She was the opposite of Nabal.

A. *The Appraisal (25:14-17)*

First, there is the appraisal.

One of the young men who heard the exchange between Nabal and David's messengers went and told Abigail about it. He told her how Nabal "**railed at them**" (25:14), even though David's men had been very good to Nabal's servants and had protected them (25:15-16). He concluded by saying, "**Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him**" (25:17). Apparently, even Nabal's own servants did not have a high view of him, calling him a "**a worthless man.**"

³ Gordon J. Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel*, 233.

B. *The Action (25:18-19)*

Second, there is the action.

Abigail immediately sprang into action. She took a bunch of provisions—not enough to feed six hundred men, but enough to show goodwill—and sent them ahead of her to intercept David and his men. Notably, **she did not tell her husband Nabal** (25:19b). Keddie writes, “Abigail looks like the competent wife who had been called upon before to rectify some of her husband’s pigheadedness. Men like that rarely know how much they owe to the faithfulness of their wives.... Wifely submissiveness does not extend to initiating fruitless arguments, still less to potentially suicidal delay.”⁴

C. *The Anger (25:20-22)*

Third, there is the anger.

And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them (25:20). Apparently, however, before she met them, and before they saw her, she heard David say, in anger, that he was going to destroy every male in Nabal’s household.

David was not thinking or speaking clearly. He was about to do something that would ruin his future, for if he had killed Nabal and his household, David would have been no better than Saul. People would have had difficulty submitting to his leadership.

C. *The Appeal (25:23-31)*

And fourth, there is the appeal.

⁴ Gordon J. Keddie, *Dawn of a Kingdom: The Message of 1 Samuel*, 235.

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground (25:23). Abigail was magnificent in her appeal to David. Let's note five features of her appeal.

First, she took upon herself her husband's guilt. She said, **“On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant”** (24:24). Even though she had nothing to do with the encounter between David's men and Nabal, she was willing to take upon herself her husband's guilt.

Second, she confessed her husband's folly. She said, **“...Nabal is his name, and folly is with him”** (25:25). Abigail knew that her husband did not fear the Lord. And she indicated that perhaps things would have been different if she had been there to meet with David's men.

Third, she asked for forgiveness. She said, **“Please forgive the trespass of your servant”** (25:28a). Nabal should have provided some of his wealth with David and his men, but he did not do so. Therefore, Abigail asked for David's forgiveness for this insult and made restitution by providing him with various foods.

Fourth, she affirmed David's future kingdom. She said, **“For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live”** (25:28b). She understood that the Lord had raised David up to become the future king over Israel, and she affirmed his anointing.

And fifth, she warned David of having regrets should he carry out his murderous intention. She said, **“And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself”** (25:30-31b).

Abigail's brilliant appeal stopped David from carrying out his murderous attack. Her brilliant appeal is a model to us in how to deal with others who are mad at us or mad at others with whom we are associated. We should admit guilt, confess folly, ask for forgiveness, affirm future possibilities, and warn of regrets if sinful actions are carried out.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David and Abigail as set forth in 1 Samuel 25:1-31, let us pay attention to God's restraining providence in our lives.

God used Abigail in a marvelous way to restrain David. Had she not intervened, David would have caused a grave injustice. God even used the servant who reported the exchange between Nabal and David's messengers to Abigail. Had he not said anything, Abigail would not have been able to act as she did.

But in his marvelous mercy, God's restraining providence prevented David from doing something that would have damaged his credibility and caused him great regret.

Friends, as we read this chapter we should recognize that God is in sovereign control of establishing his kingdom. We must recognize that only God can establish his kingdom in his way and in his time. Left to himself, David would have blown it. This was not David at his finest. But, God was providentially restraining his servant so that God would establish David's kingdom.

David's Greater Son Jesus endured insults and indignations and scourging. He did not retaliate so that his eternal kingdom would be established for sinners like us. Oh, let us thank God for his restraining providence in the life of his Servant, Jesus. Amen.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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