

Samuel to king David David and Abigail 1st Samuel 25

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

1 Samuel 25 starts at a bad time for the people of Israel. In verse 1 we read,

“Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the Wilderness of Paran.”

A lot is hidden behind this short verse. Not much fuss is made about the death of Samuel, but without doubt, one of the heroes of the nation had died. Samuel had guided the people of Israel and been a spiritual light in difficult days. At the start of the 1 Samuel we were introduced to Eli and his family. They were the priests who oversaw the decline in the nation as the people drifted away from God and gave up on following His laws. Samuel oversaw the transition to a monarchy as Saul was anointed king and crowned. For a short period this seemed a positive move, but by the time we arrive at chapter 25 of 1 Samuel, it's been clear for a while that Saul was no longer following God. His uncontrollable jealousy led him to hunt multiple times for David, trying to eradicate the man God had chosen to be the next king.

So these were difficult days for the people of Israel. Their king had lost the plot. The priests were failing to lead the people. And Samuel, their last judge and a great prophet had now died. Competent, godly leadership was lacking. What were the people to do?

I wonder what we'd do in such a circumstance? In fact, we wouldn't have to change the scenario too much to fit in with the circumstances many of us face today. In my own experience, many of the men and women I've looked up to as spiritual leaders in one form or another throughout my life have now gone to be with the Lord. It's not that there are no godly Christian leaders in their place, but I certainly feel the loss of people I've admired and been helped by. We live in a different kind of society to the people of Samuel's day. The people of Israel were a nation still in theory at least, living under the direction of God, and according to His commands. The Western democracies that we live in have much to say in favour of them, but it would be fair to say that obedience to God's word is not their number one priority. So, it's not so hard to find ourselves in a situation not very different from the situation described in 1 Samuel 25, with a lack of spiritual and moral leadership.

In these circumstances God's people can respond in very different ways. And that's what we see in 1 Samuel 25. It's a long chapter, so we won't read every verse today. That's something you can do for yourselves to consolidate the things we'll talk about. But the chapter revolves mainly around 3 characters. The first two are a husband and wife, Nabal and Abigail. The final character is certainly the most famous and well known. It's David. You might have heard of him and remember how he killed the giant Goliath. That happened back in chapter 17 of 1 Samuel. He was Israel's most famous king, possibly alongside his son Solomon. When we get to 1 Samuel chapter 25, David isn't king yet. At this point, Saul was still king and was hunting for David, trying to kill him.

So we have these three characters, Nabal, Abigail, and David. As we'll see, each of them behaves in very different ways. I'm sure God has something for us to learn from each character's example. And that's how we'll proceed through the chapter today. I'm going to take each character in turn and read some of the verses relevant to that person. Then I'll outline some of the things we can learn from their behaviour and think about how their example might challenge us today. Because I'm taking up the chapter by looking at characters, there will necessarily be a little bit of overlap and repeating of verses. And since we're not taking the chapter in a strictly chronological manner, we may initially miss some bits of the story. But at each point I'll try to make sure we get enough of the story to understand what's going on at that point.

So let's come first to Nabal. We'll pick up the story by reading verses 2 and 3.

"Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel, and the man was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings. He was of the house of Caleb."

The initial introduction to Nabal reveals some interesting things. He was a businessman. He was very successful at his business since he's described as very rich. So rich in fact, that he had 3000 sheep and 1000 goats. On first glance, Nabal was a very successful individual. He'd done well in business. He was wealthy and prosperous. And he had a beautiful wife, Abigail.

On top of all that, he had a good family ancestry. Why do I say that? The last part of verse 3 said that Nabal was of the house of Caleb. As we read that today, we might not think much of this interesting detail. We don't like to think much about family history. It's not as important today as it was even just a few generations ago to come from a good family. In fact, today, it's more likely to count against someone. If someone today tried to make a big deal of their family ancestry, it would most likely lead to protest about the amount of privilege they had had. Rather than impress people, mention of ancestry is likely to drive people away, and give the impression of some sort of stuck up "otherness" that most people can't relate to.

But it was different in the culture of Israel in Samuel's day. They laid great weight on family history. Maybe you've noticed that there are quite a lot of long lists of genealogies scattered through the Old Testament? That's because your ancestors were important. So when Caleb is listed as one of Nabal's ancestors, what are we to learn from that?

Caleb was a man who lived about 400 years before Nabal. He was a mighty man of God. He was one of the twelve spies that Moses sent to spy out the Promised Land after they had left slavery in Egypt. You can read that account in Numbers 13. Sadly, Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies who trusted that God could give them the land of Canaan. Caleb reports to the people,

"Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30).

The other ten were afraid by what they saw, and as a result of this lack of faith, the people of Israel wandered around a desert for 40 years, whilst everyone who had left Egypt died, apart from Joshua and Caleb. God had said of Caleb,

"But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring him into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it" (Numbers 14:24).

So Caleb was faithful to God and followed Him fully.

Caleb appears again in Joshua 14. The people of Israel were finally in the Promised Land and Caleb was given land to possess as a reward for his faithfulness. Caleb by this point was 85 years old. Time to retire from public life and let younger people deal with the enemies in the land perhaps? Caleb didn't think so! You can read the full account in Joshua 14, but Caleb once again faithfully trusts the Lord, and sets an example to the people. [We can pick out some of the main points between verses 6 and 12 of Joshua 14.](#)

“And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: “You know the word which the Lord said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the Lord my God. ... And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the Lord spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said.””

I'm sure there is a challenge there for my older listeners today. What example are you setting to younger Christians? Have you given up and left the Lord's work to others? Or are you going on setting good examples and showing younger believers what faithful living looks like?

So Nabal had a good heritage. His ancestry contained one of Israel's heroes. He had had the very best of examples. But the verses we read at the start of 1 Samuel 25 suggest Nabal had not followed Caleb's faithful example. He was described as “harsh, and evil in his doings.” This is confirmed to be the case by what happens next in the story. We're going to jump to verses 10 and 11 of 1 Samuel 25, but to fill in the gaps, Nabal had been shearing his sheep and threw a party for his servants. They were celebrating the profits of the business. It appears that David and his men had been protecting Nabal's shepherds whilst they were out in the countryside. So David sent his men to Nabal to ask if they could have a little of the feast food. It was not an unreasonable request. They had helped keep the sheep safe so that Nabal profited from them. But Nabal's response to this request was telling. Let's read verses 10 and 11.

“Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?””

Did you notice how many times Nabal said “my” or “I” in these two verses. He was selfish. All his profit belonged to him. And he wasn't going to share it with anyone. More than this, he clearly fails to recognise that David was God's chosen king. There was disrespect in Nabal's question “Who is David?” To Nabal, David was just one of many servants who had rebelled against their master. Nabal was not going to give David or his men anything.

Nabal seems to have had a poor reputation with almost everyone he knew. His servants, and even his wife call him a scoundrel in verses 17 and 25. Nabal is portrayed as a self-centred character who only seems interested in his own wealth and pleasure. When we get down to verse 36, we read:

“Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or much, until morning light.”

Nabal had thrown such a luxurious feast that it’s described as like “the feast of a king.” It all reminds me of the parable of the rich fool that the Lord told in Luke 12. [The story is developed in verses 16-21.](#)

[“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.””](#)

The man in the Lord’s parable had profited in business. Nothing wrong with that. But he thought only about his profit and was selfish in his thinking. And God said to him, “You fool.” That could be a description of Nabal in 1 Samuel 25.

Nabal was a person who found himself in a situation where almost all godly influence had gone. Samuel had died. Eli and his family were no good. Saul was essentially useless. And in the absence of restraint, Nabal focused on his own pleasure. He was self-centred and forgot about God’s commands. In that sense, he’s representative of many people today. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes to Timothy of people who are,

“Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4).

Throughout the Bible we get examples of people who essentially lived for pleasure. That was expressed in different ways. People who sought pleasure through good food and wine. People who sought pleasure through possessions and extreme wealth. People who sought pleasure through sex and gratification of various lusts. And the picture is never a good one. They get their pleasures but forget about God, usually with disastrous, and long-lasting consequences.

It’s not that enjoying things is wrong. The Bible doesn’t teach that. We can enjoy nice food, nice possessions, and all things that God gives us to enjoy. But we must enjoy them in the way God gave them to us to be enjoyed. Not according to our own excesses. And we must learn this lesson from Nabal – don’t enjoy the pleasures but forget about God. Don’t forget the good example of those around you and focus on your own pleasures.

The next character we come to in 1 Samuel 25 is Abigail, Nabal’s wife. We’ve already mentioned that she was a beautiful woman. Verse 3 also told us that she was a woman of good understanding. In that sense she had a good heritage too. But unlike Nabal she used her God-given gifts wisely. We’ll pick up the story of Abigail in verse 23 of chapter 25. What we’ve skipped over is that David’s men returned to David to tell him of Nabal’s insult, and David was furious. He was prepared to go to Nabal and get revenge for this insult. But Nabal’s servants wisely go to

Abigail and tell her what has happened. Abigail acts wisely and goes to David. Let's read verses 23-25:

"Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. So she fell at his feet and said: "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent."

Abigail shows great loyalty to her unworthy husband in this section. She goes to plead on his behalf and to calm David and stay his desire for revenge. She recognises that God was at work. Let's read verse 26:

"Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, since the LORD has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal."

Abigail didn't need godly leaders to notice God at work. It didn't matter that Samuel had died. It didn't matter that Saul was not leading the nation in a godly direction. God was still at work, and anyone who trusted Him could see it. Abigail recognised that God had delayed David enough for her to be able to intercept before he reached Nabal.

Interestingly, Abigail also seemed to realise that being close to God's king was a good idea. Let's read verses 30-31, where Abigail says:

"And it shall come to pass, when the LORD has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."

Abigail wisely saw that if God was at work, then she wanted to be attached to that. She wanted to be close to God's king. She didn't want to be where God was not at work. And so she said, "remember your maidservant." There's a good challenge for us. If we see what God wants from the Scriptures, do we listen to it and obey? David was going to be God's king, but God has a greater King, the Lord Jesus. Do we want to be close to Him? Do we follow where He goes? Or are we more like Nabal, enjoying our own possessions and wealth and thinking of ourselves as our own little kings? May we be more like Abigail than Nabal and recognise how God is at work.

So we've thought about Nabal and Abigail. Now we come to the third character, David. We've mentioned that he was mistreated by Nabal. Let's fill in some of the gaps in the story. We'll read verses 12 and 13:

"So David's young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies."

We get an explanation of what was going on in David's mind in verses 21 and 22:

"Now David had said, "Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light.""

David was determined to kill Nabal and all the males in his family for the insult shown to him. I think we'd have to say that this was not the most godly of responses to personal insult. In the New Testament, Paul encourages Christians to remove anger from their lives (Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8). Peter encouraged the Christians he was writing to in 1 Peter 3:8-9:

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing."

Whenever we're insulted, let's not react like David did! Let's listen to Peter's exhortation.

Thankfully Abigail intercepted David before any blood was shed. This was the Lord's doing. It allowed time for Abigail to apologise to David and for her to correct his thinking. Remarkably, Abigail tells David that God would build an enduring house for David and that God could deal with Nabal's insults without David needing to intervene. Listen to the words of verses 28 and 29:

"Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights the battles of the LORD, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling."

We don't have time left to look into this, but I think if you went away and studied 2 Samuel 7:11, 16, 1 Kings 11:38, Isaiah 55:3 and Acts 13:34, you'll see that Abigail's statement, or we could even say prophesy, looked even beyond David to an everlasting kingdom and an even greater King.

God would see to it that David became king. He would deal with David's enemies. David didn't need to take this matter with Nabal into his own hands. God could deal with it. And so He did. Listen to verses 37-38:

"So it was, in the morning, when the wine had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. Then it happened, after about ten days, that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died."

David started off on a wrong course. But wise Abigail corrected him. And David recognised the wisdom of Abigail's words and changed his course to a godly path. Maybe some listeners today are on a wrong path. You're going against something God commands in His word. And maybe God will send an 'Abigail' along into your life. Maybe He already has. Someone who can gently point out the mistake you're making and point you back to the Lord and to a better course of action. Be like David and see God's kind provision to you in it all!

So we've seen three characters. They all faced circumstances in which the national picture was not good. And they each responded in different ways. Nabal chose to live for pleasure. Abigail was wise and saw God's hand at work in it all. David started off on a bad path but changed course when Abigail showed him a better way. Who will you be like today?

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on 1 Samuel chapter 25, "David and Abigail", talk T1364.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.