

A Wise Heart

1 Samuel 25

Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. (1 Samuel 25:1)

With the death of Samuel, Israel once again is without spiritual leadership until David eventually takes the throne. Saul is still king and he has slaughtered the priesthood, with the exception of Abiathar, the son of the former high-priest Ahimelech (1 Sam 23: 6), who managed to escape with an ephod containing the Urim and Thummim. Samuel had been the Prophet of the Lord. The Bible records in 1 Samuel 3:19-21:

"The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word."

In his life time Samuel served as their Judge leading Israel against their enemies. 1 Samuel 7 records Israel's defeat of the Philistines and finishes with the statement:

"Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD." (1 Samuel 7:15-17)

Samuel also served as a priest of the Lord throughout his life. He mediated between Israel and the Lord, offering sacrifices and praying on behalf of all Israel. He did not forsake or abandon his role. He was feared and respected by the people of Israel up until his death, and is memorialized in Psalm 99: 6. *"Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the LORD and he answered them."* (Composer unknown.)

Samuel stood before Israel as essentially the presence of the Lord. With his death Israel enters into a period where God's word is not made known among Israel. There is no prophet. The only priest, Abiathar, has joined David beyond the borders of Israel. For the rest of Saul's reign there is no one in the kingdom to provide a single word of the Lord. Saul is utterly without godly counsel. There is no one to provide it, even if he wanted it.

The Story of David, Nabal and Abigail

Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings. (1 Samuel 25:1-3)



1 Samuel 25:1-13

The name Nabal means fool. In scripture fool doesn't mean some who is lacking in intelligence. In fact, for Nabal to have amassed his wealth he couldn't have been less than intelligent. A fool is someone who says "there is no God" and lives accordingly. The Hebrew name Nabal means "stupid, wicked, vile, foolish"¹. In fact, Psalm 14:1 reads,

*"The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.*

The word translate "fool" in the psalm is the same root word from which the name Nabal is derived. Notice what the psalm says of the one who is a fool: *"they are corrupt, their deeds are vile, there is no one who does good."* His ways are evil, not godly. Next Nabal is described as "churlish" or "surly" from the Hebrew word

¹ Strong's Talking Hebrew and Greek Dictionary

qasheh (kaw-sheh') meaning: "stiff-necked, severe, hard, stubborn, and belligerent"². Furthermore, he is described as "evil in his doings" which means immoral, up to mischief, wicked³ and criminal⁴.

Abigail is quite the opposite of her husband. The description of Abigail is that "*she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance*"(v3). The King James Version gives us a closer meaning to the original Hebrew in verse 3 where it describes Abigail as possessing "*good understanding*", meaning to have prudence, insight, understanding, and wisdom.⁵

In describing Abigail as having "*good understanding*", the writer of the story employs the same word, *sākal*, for Abigail as he used in describing David back in 1 Samuel 18:5, "*Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.*" Again in 18:14 it says, "*In everything he [David] did he had great success, because the LORD was with him.*" In both of these verses where the English word "*success*" is used, it is translated from the Hebrew, *sākal*. We studied previously that David was wise in his decision making. He sought not only the advice of men, but the counsel of the Lord, and did only what was good in the eyes of God. Wisdom, prudence, discretion, knowledge and understanding are all words used to explain *sākal*. David's ways were not the ways of Nabal, or the foolish man of Psalm 14. Proverbs 2:1-8 describe what *sākal* is, it is a gift from God. Both Abigail and David are gifted with righteous wisdom as defined by *sākal*.

*My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
2 turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
3 and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
4 and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the LORD gives wisdom,
and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
7 He holds victory in store for the upright,*

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

⁵ Strong's Talking Hebrew and Greek Dictionary

*he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
8 for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.
(Proverbs 2:1-8)*

Abigail is also described as a beautiful woman or having a beautiful countenance; which means, a beautiful shape, form, outline, figure, appearance⁶. This is a feature, aside from her wise ways, that will arrest David and give him time to consider his actions. This will not be the first time that David is moved by a pretty face, but in this instance, it might seem to be a good thing.

Returning to our scripture passage in 1 Samuel 25, The NIV tells us that David went into the Desert of Maon, some translations say the “Wilderness of Paran”. Paran is a wilderness south of Judah, west of Edom and north of Sinai.⁷ It is a tract of land forming the north-eastern division of the peninsula of Sinai between Arabah on the east and the desert of Shur to the West.⁸

David and his 600 men had been in the country-side fighting various wild tribes, defending towns and protecting the people of Israel in the region of Paran in the desert of Moan. One of the things they had been doing was guarding and protecting the local shepherds and their animals as they were grazing in the country-side. According to the customs of the times, it was common for the owner of the flocks to set aside a portion of his profits to give to whoever had been protecting his shepherds and flocks in the field. This portion would have been given at the time of shearing. There was no written law mandating this payment, but it was the customary way of showing gratitude for a job well done. So at the customary time, David sent a message with his men to Nabal:

“Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. 8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.”

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Holman Bible Dictionary

⁸ Easton's Illustrated Dictionary

Notice Nabal's response to David in verse 10. First, he feigned ignorance of David – He surely had heard of David and his military exploits. Not only that, but Abigail certainly seems to know a lot about David. Next, he accuses David of having broken faith with the king (*"servants are breaking away from their master's these days"*) excusing himself from supporting renegade fugitives and rebels. Finally, he denies that David's men had protected his shepherds and flocks; and therefore, he shouldn't have to give payment for such services.

David responds in verses 12-13: *"David said to his men, 'Put on your swords!' So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies."* His initial response is one of anger, and it is no wonder that David responded in fury. Unfortunately his anger got the better of him. He had done good and fair work treating, Nabal's servants kindly and protecting them. His good work was answered with evil (see v. 21). His anger led to him seeking vengeance. He tells his men to strap on their swords and takes 400 men with him. He's not going to negotiate with words, he's planning an attack. Look ahead to verse 22: *"May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"*

David is so fired up and furious, he's not thinking clearly at all! Chapter 24 was all about David refusing to take advantage of an opportunity to kill Saul because he is God's anointed. He shows patience and obedience allowing God to handle Saul in his time and his way. We also just finished discussing David's wisdom seen through his actions in Chapter 18. But here in Chapter 25, Nabal has caused a lesser offense (at least he wasn't out to kill David; he just didn't want to give David his earned share in his profits!) David loses his temper and goes off to kill every male in Nabal's household! David, where is your patience, wisdom and obedience? Where is your submission to God's judgment in this matter? Anyone can fly into a rage if provoked enough. I have a feeling Saul has provoked David until his nerves are on edge and Nabal unfortunately pricked David's very last nerve!



1 Samuel 25:14-25

Thankfully someone in Nabal's household knew Abigail well enough to go to her with this problem. In facing this life threatening situation, Abigail's nature shines through. We have already established that she is intelligent and her actions in this crisis bear it out. Abigail acts quickly and decisively. When she hears about Nabal's response to David, she doesn't go and argue with Nabal. She doesn't start a

fight or nag her husband, instead she protects him. She knows his nature. She acts without his knowledge:

Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. ¹⁹ Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. (V 18-19)

She doesn't act against her husband, she acts on his behalf. She addresses David with courtesy, tact and humility. She speaks with honesty. She didn't try and cover up or excuse her husband's behavior. She was very forthright about her husband's failings. She offers no excuses; she willingly accepts the blame and consequences of her husband's dishonesty and wickedness.

Finally, she takes responsibility for the situation. She took on the role of mediator and the voice of reason between David and her husband. With wisdom, tact and reason she was able to steer David away from a course of action that would have a devastating impact his future.



Read 1 Samuel 25:26-35

"David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."

Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request." (1 Sam 25:32-35)

Look what a change Abigail was able to bring about in David in the space of a few minutes. (I'm sure the *beautiful countenance* and the donkey loads of provisions helped cause David to pause and hear her out, as well!) When Abigail first encountered David he was full of fury and vengeance, and likely not in the mood to listen to anyone. Look back at his words when they first encountered each other in verses 20-22: *"David had just said, 'It's been useless--all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back*

evil for good. ²² May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" Abigail's calm, reasoned speech not only arrested him physically – he didn't push past her on his mission to annihilate Nabal's household– but he stopped and listened to what she had to say, and all without interrupting her! Abigail's words changed David's demeanor. He was willing to listen to another point of view and accept it as the right course of action. David's spirit remained flexible and teachable to the Lord's will. He gave up his demand for retaliation. He turned around and went home.

David Takes a Wife

Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife. (1 Samuel 25:42)



1 Samuel 25:36-44

Abigail becomes David's wife. We can understand why David would want to take Abigail as his wife. After all *"... she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance"* (v.3). Her wisdom prevented David from taking a disastrous course of action. By this time Saul had given away Michal to another man. But what is this about Ahinoam. David had taken her as wife as well.

Back in the Books of Moses, the Lord had something to say about the kings who would come to rule Israel, and specifically about how they ought to be chosen and how they ought to comport themselves.

¹⁴ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. ¹⁶ The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A Study of King David
Session 3 Notes*

¹⁸ When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. ¹⁹ It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ²⁰ and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. (Deut 17:14-20)

According to verses 18 and 19 the Lord made a provision to ensure that each king would know His specific commands. David knew that God intended for him to be king of Israel one day. David has already disobeyed one of the Lord's specific commands for kings in taking both Ahinoam and Abigail to wife. God's commands are for our sake, not for his. Kings had been commanded not to take "many wives". The word translated "many" is from the Hebrew word *rabah*, meaning to increase, multiply, have more⁹. Genesis Chapter 2 makes it very clear that two wives is "more" than what God planned for any man. God did not create Eve and another woman to be Adam's helpmates. God created one woman to be Adam's partner in life. God makes his reason very clear in verse 17:

"He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray."

⁹ Strong's Talking Hebrew and Greek Dictionary