

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

Taught in Ambassador's Class of Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, California

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by

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1 Samuel 25:1-22 Lesson #14 July 15, 1979

This morning we will be looking at 1 Samuel 25. As we closed last week we were talking about the streak of vindictiveness in David. He had a very strong and violent temper and a revengeful spirit. As king he could not reign over Israel if he could not reign over his own passions. This spirit was so obvious that Jonathan, his dearest friend, made him swear that as king he would neither deal out nor destroy Jonathan's family [Chapter 20]. In chapter 24 Saul made David promise that when he became king he would not destroy Saul's family either. Later on in this chapter we will see that even one of the shepherds, just from living with David, understood his vindictiveness. Both the Old and New Testaments indicate God must deal with this. God laid down a principle for Christians which is seen all through the Bible. In Romans 12:17ff, Paul quotes that principle right out of the Old Testament. Writing by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he says this:

Romans 12:17ff:

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God for it is written, [Here he quotes right out of Deuteronomy 32, which is available to both Abigail and David] "Vengeance [or retribution] is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So David, being a man of the Word, knew this principle was one of the requirements for a King of Israel [Deut. 17:18-20]. Obviously Abigail also knew this commandment, so both of them knew that retribution, or vengeance, was the work of the Lord. When a man steps in to seek vengeance, he is usurping God's prerogative, and God is very jealous of his prerogatives. Only He is able to judge rightly.

So, beginning in I Samuel 25, watch how God deals with David's vindictiveness and, interestingly enough, how he deals with it through a woman. If you ladies want to know how to deal with your helpmates who may have problems with anger, temper, violence, etc. see the beautiful way it happens here.

Let me caution you not to judge Abigail by the New Testament truths found in I Peter 3. She lived 1,000 years before they were written. Instead look at what she really desired for her husband and David. Remember God did not expect her to understand Ephesians 5:33 or I Peter 3:1-7.

I Samuel 25:1:

Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

Samuel, of course, was David's champion. He was the one friend in court who had the stature to do something about Saul, and he had tremendous power in Israel. The king, the priests and the prophets all had

equal standing, so Samuel was not subservient to Saul. He reigned as God's man, as God's mouthpiece. He anointed David as king. So, in a sense, there was a prophet, and a whole school of prophets, praying for David and, to some degree, keeping restraint on the works of Saul. When Samuel died, David figured everything was lost. [Ramah is just north of Gibeah where Saul had his headquarters.] So David left Engedi [which is on the western side of the middle of the Dead Sea], and headed down to the wilderness of Paran on the Sinai peninsula [the wilderness where the Israelites wandered for 38 years because they disobeyed God] David, fleeing from Saul, left Judea, where the Lord wanted him to be, and scurried to the wilderness of Paran which is a howling wilderness. There is nothing there, and David had 600 hungry men who needed "man-handler" soup not gruel and broth.

God, using circumstances, is going to bring David back to Judea where he will be harassed by Saul and will have to trust in the work of the Lord and not his own wisdom or force of men.

Let us see how the Lord brings him back.

I Samuel 25:2:

Now there was a man in Maon [Remember that is the wilderness where in Chapter 24 Saul almost trapped David until the Philistines invaded Israel and Saul had to go back] whose business was in Carmel; [which is about half an hour's journey north of Maon in another wilderness area, the wilderness of Ziph where the Ziphites previously betrayed David. It is all dangerous enemy territory where nobody is loyal to David, but this fellow Nabal should be.] and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite), that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.

Here we have a very rich man in Carmel, which is between two wildernesses and which to David is enemy territory. When Nabal's shepherds tended his huge flocks, they had to go great distances into the wildernesses and were wide open to marauding bands of bedouins who could sweep up out of the Paran wilderness, grab animals from the flock and race back to cover. Because David and his crew stayed with these shepherds and provided a wall around them and protected them from the marauding enemy while never touching a sheep or giving the shepherds any trouble, naturally he expected some kind of recompense. Unfortunately Nabal's name meant "fool," and he was said to be "a harsh man and evil in his dealings." Harsh has the idea of hard, unbending, unyielding, unteachable, irascible. He was also evil and a wicked business man. However, he was not stupid. The biblical definition of "fool" is not stupidity. According to the Bible, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'; in other words, 'I shall be my own God. I shall set up my own laws. There is no future only the present, so I am going to make it big and enjoy it now.'" That is a fool. He can be a brilliant fool, and Nabal was. He had made it big. Like the rich man in Luke 12 whose barn overflowed with grain and who said, "I'll tear down my barn and build bigger ones. With them full I can sit back, take it easy, rest and relax. I've got it made" (Free translation). But what did God say? "You, fool, this night your soul shall be required of you, then whose shall all these things be?" The answer to God's question is, of course, "The IRS and your heirs." That is a fool.

How do you think an intelligent, beautiful woman like Abigail, whose name meant "joy of her father," ever got paired with a fellow like Nabal? The daughter of a Hebrew did not choose a husband for herself. She was placed by her father. So, her father, to get the best possible deal for her, chose a man who materially had it all. Apparently her father did not consult the Lord about these things. He took the "joy of his heart" and married her to Nabal, the fool. Sure, she lived in a rambling ranch-style tent with "four-on-the-floor" camels parked outside, but look at what she had for a husband. Remember, she was an intelligent woman

What does "intelligent" in Scripture mean? If a "fool" is one who says there is no God, what denotes an intelligent person? What is "wisdom" according to Scripture? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" [Psalm 111:10]. Wisdom is belief in God, belief that he is in charge, that there is a day of reckoning. A wise man orders his life by God's standards, by God's revelation, by the Word of God. Abigail knew

Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay says YHWH." That was written about 1400 B.C., 500 years before Abigail. It had been around a long time, and she undoubtedly knew it well.

A good question was just asked: "Might it also be that Nabal thought everything had to be good because he was of the house of Caleb?" That might well be right. Caleb was a giant of a Hebrew. He and Joshua were the only two men of the twelve who spied out the land of Canaan who did not go against the Lord. When God turned the nation loose in the wilderness he said, "I am going to destroy every single male that is over the age of 20, [mustered males, the army that could vote with their weapons and who refused to go in and take the land God had given them]; only Joshua and Caleb will I allow in the land because they believed me." Nabal is a Calebite. The word can mean "capable" or it can also mean "dog." I think it means both in the case of Nabal. He is a capable dog. The word "dog," is Hebrew for the cur that roams the streets and eats garbage; a vicious, ugly, mangy beast. Nabal is a capable mangy beast. He has acted like it. He has proven it.

Getting back to the text, David expected something. "He [Nabal] was shearing his sheep in the wilderness." That was harvest time for a shepherd, a time of great festivity and a great harvest festival. Everybody pitched in. The traveling professional shearers came and there was a tremendous banquet. Half the tally was the law of the bedouin, and they were to give freely and liberally because God had given freely and liberally. Nabal had a tremendous harvest because David had been protecting Nabal's flocks. Therefore, David naturally believed Nabal should respond generously.

I Samuel 25: 5:

So David sent ten young men [He expected to bring a lot back], and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel. visit Nabal and greet him in my name; [David was the hero of Israel, even though he was in flight at this time, and it was his men who had guarded Nabal's flocks, so David said, 'I want you to tell him it is David who sends you.' That will open the door. We'll get so much I'll need to send ten of you.] and thus you shall say, "Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. [Interesting how wonderfully David can bless you when he is feeling good about you. Very shortly though, he will be planning not only a short life for Nabal, and all the males in his household, but also to abscond with a number of Nabal's sheep. When you behave yourself with David, you get this wonderful blessing. When you cross David you get just the opposite] And now I have heard that you have shearers [It is harvest time, in other words, festive time]; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel. [While we were there nothing happened to them, neither in the wilderness of Ziph nor the wilderness of Maon] Ask your young men [your shepherds] and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. [A harvest festival where you are to be hospitable and generous] Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David. [He puts his request on a personal relationship basis]

Now, let's see what happens when we go on to verse 9:

When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David's name; then they waited. [To see if the doors would open because of David's name] But Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?" So David's young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words.

Nabal is no fool, humanly speaking. He knows the winning side. He lives in Carmel which is only 30 miles south of Gibeah where Saul has his headquarters. Saul has been going back and forth through the wilderness of Maon and the wilderness of Ziph looking for David. If Nabal crosses Saul, he is in big trouble. With Nabal friendship ceases when it costs something, and if you want to insult a Mideasterner just question his heritage, his parentage. Nabal not only turns David down saying, "Who is David?" (a national hero a few years back),

but also "'Who is this son of Jesse?,' this poor family with no background? He is just a slave running away from his master, and there are a bunch of those all over the place." In fact, a lot of David's men may well be exactly that. If you remember, his force is made up of "discontents," men in debt, those who are "bitter of soul." So Nabal may even be making an allusion to the kind of people David is running around with. Nabal deliberately is going out of his way to insult David. Why? Because it will ingratiate him with Saul. He chooses sides. He takes the expedient way, but unfortunately he runs into a redheaded Jew. You just don't do that to redheads.

I Samuel 25: 13:

And David said to his men, "Each of you gird on his sword." So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage.

David now gets ready to go up into enemy territory with four hundred men where he is going to run into trouble. He knows this. He is not taking just a few men; he is taking an army just to kill one family, all the males in one family. What has he not done here that he has almost always done before when undertaking such a large expedition? He has not inquired of the Lord. Why? What is David's problem? His name has been questioned. His parentage has been questioned. He has been humiliated in front of his men and in front of all the Nabalites. You just do not do that to David. Now he is angry. He is hostile. He has one thing in mind and that is to save face, and he fails completely to inquire of the Lord. This is typical of David. Interestingly enough, he will not touch Saul who is trying to kill him. He twice lets Saul go. Why? Because Saul is God's anointed. But Nabal is a nobody. David is what the Epistle of James calls "One who holds his faith in the Lord with an attitude of personal favoritism" at this point in time. Human life only has value to him in reference to how it relates to YHWH and his own future. See where David is now? He is on the same level as Nabal. Since David is running and Saul is not only in the ascendancy but also closer, Nabal sticks with Saul. He plays the expedient card. David does the same. If he kills Saul, God's anointed, he is in trouble with YHWH, but if he kills the fool Nabal and all his males, he figures that won't have much of an impact on YHWH. So he also judges by the circumstances. He has now reduced himself to the same level as the man he plans to kill.

This is a basic principle. Have you ever noticed it? If you return evil for evil, it puts you on the same level as the person who did you evil. I am supposed to be a representative of Jesus Christ, and He says I am to love mankind because He loves mankind. I am to have a totally different standard of conduct from the world around me. Besides, only God understands the motivation of the one who "did me evil." I have no idea of the circumstances leading to what he did to me. Only God is able to judge and to give adequate retribution if necessary. Judgement is the work of God.

So, we have David heading right back up into Ziph where he almost got killed. It is the worst possible tactical error for him, but sin always blinds reason. When we are angry and hostile and want to get even, we do not think about consequences of our act. God says in the Psalms he takes the wrath of man and uses it to do His will. What can He possibly accomplish with David's wrath here? Well, where does God want David? Does He want him in the wilderness of Paran with no threat from anyone except wandering bedouins? Why did He kick David out of Moab and where did David return? Why did He kick David out of Gath, and where did David return? He wants David right back in Judea where the danger is greatest, right where David will have to trust Him. And He is going to get him back there.

I Samuel 25: 14:

But one of the young men [of Nabal] told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he [Nabal] is such a worthless [also means "lawless"] man that no one can speak to him."

Here is an interesting commentary on the character of David. This shepherd way up in Carmel, did not know anything about what David had said to his men down in Paran about putting on swords and getting revenge, but he had been living in the wilderness with David for some months, and he had observed the character of David. When Nabal insulted David's messengers and questioned David's heritage and parentage, this shepherd was sure what David would do. He knew David's temper, and said, "I know this guy. I lived with him, and I have seen him in action, and he is going to come up here and not only kill Nabal but also Nabal's whole household." Do you see why God wants to deal with this particular problem in David? How can David reign over Israel if David cannot reign over David? He has to learn to be God's man. Here is where Abigail makes her move.

Remember, there is a huge feast now with all kind of goodies, but Nabal does not want any of those goodies given away. In fact he said he wouldn't even give David meat, bread or water much less roast lamb or fig cakes. But, with the large supply of food available, Abigail moves. Don't judge her actions by Ephesians 5 and I Peter 3. She is disobeying those principles. She is moving behind her husband's back and knowingly disobeying him. Judge her on her motives in the light of her knowledge of God back then, nearly 3000 years ago.

I Samuel 25: 18:

Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine [literally "skins of wine" a whole animal full of wine] and five sheep already prepared [they had probably already been butchered, dressed and roasted on the spit, ready to eat, smelling delicious, just what young men would love to have] and five measures [60 quarts] of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins [They used to pack them together, so this is a huge amount of raisins] and two hundred cakes of figs [packed the same way], and loaded them on donkeys. And she said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

Remember, Abigail is a woman of the Word. Remember also a man named Jacob who stole both his brother's blessing and his brother's birthright. As a result, his brother Esau said, "When our father Isaac dies, I am going to kill Jacob," and Jacob fled. He was away for many years and, by the hand of the Lord, became very wealthy. When he came back into the land, he had to get on good terms with Esau, and Esau was a violent man. Remember what Jacob did? He took a group of sheep and put them in one drove, a group of goats in another drove, a group of camels in another drove, a group of cattle in another drove and a group of donkeys in another drove. Then he said, "Now, each drove go ahead of me by itself [Jacob had sent word to Esau that he was coming back, and had received notice that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. This news undoubtedly made Jacob feel like, "I'm a dead man."] As each drove arrived, Esau said, "Whose are these?" And Jacob's messengers said, "They are from Jacob, and they are a present for you." Then here came another drove, and another present, and another drove and another present. Five enormous presents before Esau could get near Jacob. Well, Esau had four hundred men who had made a very long, and probably a very fast, journey. Thus they were probably short on rations and very hungry. They were husky young men with no Campbell's Manhandler soup around. How do you get yourself a hearing on the best terms you can find? You just send a feast. With the smell of roast lamb on the minds of Esau's men and the availability of all that food, Jacob undoubtedly figured he had the battle half won. After all, some years before when Esau was very hungry, he sold his birthright to Jacob for a big helping of lentil stew. Abigail, being a woman of the Word, knew Genesis 32 like the back of her hand. She was a wise, intelligent woman. What worked for Jacob was going to work for her.

I Samuel 25: 20:

And it came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain [down some narrow pass in the mountains which was very hidden], that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them. Now David had said, "Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any

who belong to him [This is what David had been mumbling all these many miles].

Do you see David's problem in this passage? Let me read it again with slight emphasis. "David had said, 'Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has return ME evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of DAVID, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him.'"

What is David's problem? Ego. His pride has been injured. It is not the welfare of his men that bothers him, although he is undoubtedly going to take care of them by taking a number of Nabal's sheep. The trouble is David's ego has been crushed, and you just do not shaft David especially in front of others. All his life he has been the runt of the litter. All his life people have stepped on him. All his life he has had this resentment, this hostility, building up in him. Someday he is going to get even, and here he has four hundred skilled guerilla warriors armed with iron weapons which they have taken from the Philistines at Keilah. Nabal only has a household with a few weapons and relatively few servants. It is going to be a total slaughter. David is going to get even for all the things that have happened to him down through the years. All the way up toward Nabal's home he has been turning revenge over and over in his mind, fueling the flames of his passion. How on earth can you deal with somebody like that? But God has an instrument. In this particular story, who also acts like David is presently acting; who always looks after number one; who is a hard, unteachable, unreasonable, perverse person? Nabal. Who has learned the skill of dealing with a hard, unreasonable, unteachable male in his anger? Abigail. She has had years of experience as Nabal's wife. Do you see how God takes his chosen instruments and, over the years, trains them for a ministry. Her father thought he was doing Abigail a big favor. He married her to a wealthy man who turned out to be impossible to live with. Yet, through all those years, she hung in there as God's woman and served that impossible man. I'll bet she even loved him, as far as she could. She learned how to deal with him for the time when God's king, David, who also needed dealing with, would come into her life. God does not mind spending years to train a person for a single, short ministry. As far as we can tell, dealing with David was all the ministry Abigail ever had, but it lasted a lifetime.

We'll pick up here next week. I won't tell you how it ends. We've got God's man, God's woman and a poor fool who is going to learn about God the hard way. Next week we will find out what happens.

Prayer:

Father, thank you so much for your Word and for the way it makes us see ourselves as we really are and opens us up to the truth; how it shows us how gracious and loving and kind you are, how long suffering. Father, you will spend years to train a woman to minister to the man of your own heart, to make him finally want to behave like a man after your own heart. Thank you, Father, for faithful women who quietly serve by hanging in there, while they trust you to turn their husbands around. Thank you for my wife who led me to Christ and helped me to grow up in Him. Thank you, Father in Jesus' name. Amen

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