

## “Maid Service in the Mountains” (1 Samuel 25:1–44)

Have you ever wanted revenge? Perhaps you’ve been slandered, betrayed, or abused? Have you ever stayed awake all night plotting your enemy’s demise? Well, apparently, you’re not alone. One website offers “revenge at its best” and advertises its services as follows: “The Payback.com is your home for all of your revenge needs. So, you never had a chance to get revenge on your ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend? Your current spouse lied to you when he said he would never cheat on you? Well, you know the saying, ‘Don’t get mad, get even.’ Get Revenge On People Who Have Done You Wrong! We stand ready to help you get revenge and let these individuals know exactly what you think of them! Join the thousands who have used our services to get revenge!”<sup>1</sup>

But does revenge really work? Is it worth it in the end? What does God expect of you and me when people sin against us? In 1 Samuel 25 we’ll study one of the greatest chapters in the Bible and find answers to these questions.

**1. David seeks to kill Nabal (25:1–13).** Our story begins in 25:1 with a historical note: **“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.”**<sup>2</sup> At first glance this verse seems rather anticlimactic immediately following David’s decision to preserve Saul’s life (1 Sam 24). Yet, the writer tells us something very important: David is already at wits end, and now he loses his mentor on top of everything else! In the last few chapters everyone is against David, so he needs Samuel’s guidance more than ever. Moreover, Samuel’s death weakens David’s claim to the throne since Samuel was God’s prophet and anointer of kings. In despair, David journeys farther into the desert and farther away from Saul.<sup>3</sup> Before leaving this introductory verse, it’s worth acknowledging what a great man of God Samuel was. His role as Israel’s judge, prophet, priest, and appointer of kings had been remarkable.<sup>4</sup> Also, Samuel’s most difficult and important work was done in his old age.<sup>5</sup> What a great reminder that God loves to use people of retirement age to accomplish great exploits for Him.

Our story begins in 25:2–4: **“Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel;<sup>6</sup> and the man was very rich [lit., “very great”], and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel . . . that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep”** (25:2, 4). Twice the narrator emphasizes that Nabal was “shearing his sheep.” Admittedly, this observation doesn’t mean a whole lot to those of us who live in cities or suburbs. However, sheep-shearing season was a celebratory time of hospitality and generosity.<sup>7</sup> There was a custom that at sheep-shearing time the land owner gave gifts to those who had protected his flocks. Payment for the service, like tips for waiters, was voluntary. No formal contracts were signed; no words exchanged. But it was understood that a rancher was to pay everyone who had protected his animals (see 25:21).<sup>8</sup> Only a tightfisted miser would refuse to pay. Why is this important? During their wilderness wandering, David and his men employed themselves as police, protecting Nabal’s herds.<sup>9</sup>

You may have noticed that I skipped 25:3. It’s a parenthetical verse that provides several pertinent details on the characters of the story: **“(now the man’s name was Nabal, and his wife’s name was Abigail.<sup>10</sup> And the woman was intelligent [lit., “good in understanding”<sup>11</sup>] and beautiful in appearance [lit., “lovely in form”<sup>12</sup>], but the man was harsh and evil<sup>13</sup> in his dealings, and he was a Calebite.)”** The name “Nabal” means “fool.” The Hebrew term *nabal* designates not a harmless idiot, but rather an ungodly jerk.<sup>14</sup> Nabal was both rich and ruthless—that’s not a good combination!<sup>15</sup> Nabal was also a descendant of Caleb, who had accompanied Joshua into the land of Canaan. However, Nabal was not a Calebite, like Caleb, who followed God wholeheartedly (Josh 14:13–4). Conversely, Abigail was a spiritual descendant of Caleb. Her name means, “My Father (God) was delighted.”<sup>16</sup> She was a physical and spiritual beauty!

How did two so obviously mismatched people wind up married? Their marriage was arranged by their parents when they were children. It's likely that Abigail's father arranged this marriage for financial reasons alone. It's possible that Abigail's parents were especially pleased that she was marrying a rich guy despite the fact that he was a fool. Parents always need to be cautious of encouraging their children to marry a spouse solely based upon his or her ability to make money and be successful. Many such young people are fools. As parents, we need to encourage our children to marry a Christlike spouse.

In 25:5–9 our story picks up some steam: **“So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, ‘Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; 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. Now I have heard that you have shearers; 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. ‘Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let *my* young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.’ When David’s young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David’s name; then they waited.”** David’s request was reasonable because it didn’t specify any amount Nabal was to give, but asked “whatever” he thought was appropriate, and David and his men had given Nabal a considerable amount of help (see 25:16). Also, David humbled himself, saying that he was Nabal’s servant and even his “son.”<sup>17</sup> You would think that this approach would win Nabal over.

So how did Nabal respond to David’s servants? In 25:10–11 he spews forth: **“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?”** Nabal’s response reveals his foolish arrogance—he lives up to his name “fool”! He uses the personal pronouns “I” or “my” eight times in the Hebrew text. Like the rich fool in Luke 12:13–21, Nabal is obsessed with me, myself, and I.<sup>18</sup> He is like a spoiled child who can only speak of what is his. Nabal makes two critical mistakes: (1) He pretends not to know who David is. Yet, David was the rock star who killed Goliath. He was the military leader, who had led the Israelites into victory over the Philistines. He was the king in waiting, enmeshed in a war with King Saul, as everyone knew. Here’s a basic principle to remember: Don’t mess around with a man who’s going to be king someday.<sup>19</sup> (2) Nabal insults David and his father Jesse.<sup>20</sup> This is a big mistake—don’t ever talk about someone’s daddy or momma! Nabal also labels David as a slave. Have you ever been lumped into a certain class by someone? Maybe your boss categorizes you a certain way. Perhaps your relatives do. This kind of categorizing reveals far more about the person who puts people into categories than it does about the people he or she labels.<sup>21</sup> Like Nabal, such people play the fool. Here, in 25:12 Nabal thinks nothing of snubbing the Lord’s anointed. He refuses to show kindness to David and his men because he’s a penny-pinching fool.<sup>22</sup>

How will David respond to Nabal’s flagrant disrespect? Undoubtedly, he will turn the other cheek and extend grace, mercy, and compassion, right? Let’s see in 25:12–13: **“So David’s young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words. 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”** When David heard from his servants how Nabal tried to fleece them out of their just due, he set out to do a little fleecing of his own—literally.<sup>23</sup> I love David’s response: “Put on your swords!” (NIV) David is interested in death, not discussion.<sup>24</sup> The word “sword” occurs three times in 25:13. A reliance upon a sword used to be out of character for David. Before he killed Goliath, he said, “It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves” (17:47 NIV). But here David has another mindset: the sword over the Lord. He vows to wipe out every male in the house for an insult!<sup>25</sup> This is a serious case of literal overkill. The odds are four hundred to one in David’s favor. This is akin to killing a roach with a shotgun or trying to drive a thumbtack with a sledgehammer. David doesn’t act, he reacts—to a fool no less!

What caused David to overreact? We cannot be sure.<sup>26</sup> But we do know that David was a person with a long history of mistreatment. His father had marginalized him; his brothers had ridiculed him; his king had stripped him of his wife, closest friend, position, reputation, and physical safety. So perhaps the disdain of Nabal was the straw that broke the camels back. After all, he hadn't only been insulted; he had been shamed in the presence of his men. To be dismissed as nobody was incredibly painful.<sup>27</sup> What is evident, though, is that David didn't "inquire" of the Lord (cf. 23:2). His desire to strike back was instinctual, not spiritual. In the process, he was in danger of becoming an even worse fool than Nabal.<sup>28</sup>

**2. Abigail intercedes on David's behalf (25:14–35).**<sup>29</sup> In 25:14–17 a new character enters the story: **"But one of the young men 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 is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him.'"** (Don't let this be said of you!) Nabal's servant wisely informs Abigail of Nabal's foolishness because she can potentially save his hide. Abigail has surely acted as peacemaker between her hot-headed husband and his neighbors before. This explains why the servant told her what had happened.<sup>30</sup>

What will Abigail do after hearing the servant's report? It must have been incredibly tempting to sit back and allow David's vengeance to run its course. After all, Nabal's death would release her from a miserable marriage. Abigail could have easily rationalized doing nothing. She could have made all kinds of justifications as to how Nabal's death at David's hand must be God's will. But 25:18–20 offers another outcome: **"Then Abigail hurried [key word, cf. 25:23, 34, 42] and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures [sixty quarts] of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys.** [Always remember that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.]<sup>31</sup> **She said to her young men, 'Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.'** [Abigail likely traveled alone so that she could pray and rehearse her speech.] **But she did not tell her husband Nabal. [Smart lady!]<sup>32</sup> It came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them.**"<sup>33</sup> Whew! Abigail possesses some serious courage! She is willing to go up against four hundred men! This is not a woman to be taken lightly! Her courage and trust in the Lord commands respect.

The narrator now gives us further insight into David's state of mind in 25:21–22: **"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<sup>34</sup> of any who belong to him.'"** David is saying, "I get no respect! Nabal is going to die for crossing me! I swear to it!" David is ready to head into Nabal's village and lop off every male head he sees.

Our story reaches its apex as Abigail approaches David: **"When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground." She fell at his feet and said, 'On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, 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'" (25:23–25).** Abigail's actions and speech demonstrate extraordinary humility. Her speech is the longest speech by a woman in the Old Testament (25:24–31).<sup>35</sup> The language oozes humility: Fourteen times Abigail refers to David as "lord,"<sup>36</sup> and she uses the term "maidservant" seven times. Abigail even takes responsibility for Nabal's sin. She is a woman of uncanny humility and brokenness—a model of what a godly woman should be.

Abigail also speaks the truth about her husband, who is a fool! Some assume that Abigail is being disrespectful, but nothing could be further from the truth. She is being completely loyal to him, acting decisively in his best interests, even as she put her own life at risk. After all, there is no guarantee that David wouldn't take out his anger on her. Now, if you are married to a lazy, no-good, fool, don't attempt to extract a general principle that allows you to verbally run your husband into the ground! In this particular context, Nabal's life hung in the balance. Even still, Abigail doesn't slander him, she simply explains his actions. If you're married to a Nabal, honor him as your husband. Seek to speak well of him where you can. Don't make him out to be more than he is, but don't publicly embarrass them either. Honor God in your marriage, and He will honor you, either in this life or in the next.

Abigail's speech continues in 25:26–31: **“Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant [cf. 25:24]; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil will not be found in you all your days. Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living [“the book of life,” Ps 69:28] with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. [This is an allusion to David's victory over Goliath.] And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.”** What a powerful, potentially life-changing speech! Four observations are worth noting: (1) Abigail uses the name Yahweh seven times to remind David that the Lord is in control. He alone will vindicate those who put their trust in Him.<sup>37</sup> (2) Abigail suggests that if David takes revenge on Nabal it will have an adverse effect upon his kingship. (3) Abigail speaks prophetically of David's divine destiny as God's future king.<sup>38</sup> (4) Abigail asks David to remember (*zakar*) her. She is saying, “Remember me when you come to your throne. Remember me in gratitude. Remember me as the one who talked sense to you.”<sup>39</sup>

How will David respond to Abigail's public rebuke? Before you answer, keep in mind David's men are pumped up with testosterone for vengeance. Furthermore, they are still unhappy with David for letting Saul out of their grasp. They want to extract a pound of flesh from someone! Nonetheless, in 25:32–36 David says to Abigail, **“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand.”**<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light *as much as one male.*<sup>41</sup> So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, **“Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request [lit., “lifted up your face”].”** David *first* blesses the Lord. He sees how God sovereignly lined up the encounter with Abigail. He also blesses Abigail as well because she saves him from a potentially devastating sin. One of David's greatest strengths is his humility and teachability. When he sins against God, he's not too proud to confess it. In this case, he has been lovingly confronted by the wife of his enemy after giving his men a rousing battle cry! It must have been embarrassing to have to cool his jets in front of his men because of Abigail. Nonetheless, David takes a loving rebuke from this courageous woman, and it shapes the course of his life. As a footnote, I have learned again and again that when I listen to my wife, I save myself immense grief. She is so wise and discerning. If I choose to ignore her or not seek her counsel, I usually make huge blunders. I have also benefited a great deal as a leader when I listen to women in our church. In doing so, I make better decisions and steer clear of potential landmines. God speaks powerfully through godly women.

**3. Nabal dies and Abigail marries David (25:36–44).** It appears that this account may have a happy ending. Abigail successfully turns away David’s wrath. What an incredible accomplishment! Now she turns for home, tired and emotionally spent. Abigail walks in the front door of her home and into the arms of a grateful husband. Nabal showers his wife with hugs and kisses and lavishes her with praise for going up against four hundred men and saving his skin. Do you think this is how the story goes? Not quite! **“Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.** [Think of King Saul’s tendencies.] **And Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal,<sup>42</sup> his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone.** [Nabal suffered a heart attack or a stroke. I prefer the latter. But the next verse makes the diagnosis irrelevant.<sup>43</sup>] **About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died”** (25:36–38). Sadly, Nabal failed to leave a godly legacy. The writer makes it clear that God terminated Nabal’s life prematurely. What a frightening reminder that sometimes people who fail to respond to God’s will die before their time. If you’re an insensitive husband like Nabal, wake up and change your ways. Love your wife, affirm her, and lead her spiritually. If you don’t there might be disastrous consequences.

The story closes in unusual fashion in 25:39–43: **“When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.’ Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife.<sup>44</sup> When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, ‘David has sent us to you to take you as his wife.’ She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, ‘Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.’ Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife. David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.”** A lot of ink has been spilled over these final verses because of David’s polygamy. Since David’s marital decisions are *not* the point of the story, I must be brief in my comments. David’s first wife, Michal, was Saul’s daughter. Unfortunately, while David was on the run, Saul married her off to someone else. David then married a second wife, Ahinoam, apparently without consulting the Lord. Finally, here, he marries Abigail.<sup>45</sup> We really can’t know what David’s motivation was in marrying Abigail. He may have married her because she was beautiful, courageous, and godly (not to mention a great cook). Yet, in biblical days, a woman without a husband or adult sons was in a very difficult position. It’s possible that David didn’t want Abigail to suffer as a widow, albeit a rich one!<sup>46</sup> A case can be made that David acted as a kinsman redeemer of sorts.<sup>47</sup> Regardless, polygamy is certainly not God’s desire. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman for one life. We must always promote and strive for God’s ideal.

Now the overall point of this story is clear: *When fools disrespect you, don’t get mad, let God get even.*<sup>48</sup> Don’t let the fools of this world cause you to act foolishly. Refuse to take matters into your own hands.<sup>49</sup> While “revenge is sweet,” it turns sour very quickly. Your revenge will be unsatisfying and temporal; only God’s judgment will prove satisfying and stand the test of time. So *when fools disrespect you, don’t get mad, let God get even.*

Now before you get too confident, please think back on the last two chapters of 1 Samuel. It helps to recall that just a few days earlier David had spared Saul in the cave near Engedi (1 Sam 24). David had a greater reason to kill Saul, and he had the *perfect* opportunity. But he didn’t. David knew that Saul wanted to kill him, so he wasn’t surprised when he tried. He also had plenty of time to deal with his own anger and frustration; he was ready when the moment came. I think David showed mercy in the cave because he had thought it all through many times and had decided beforehand that he wouldn’t lift up his hand against “the Lord’s anointed.” Now along comes Nabal and David is ready to snuff him out. Nabal is the lesser man—a nobody, really—but somehow he becomes the greater irritation. David, the merciful,

has become David, the vengeful. Why? David had every reason to expect better of Nabal, and therefore, he wasn't prepared for the hostile rejection. And because he wasn't prepared, he reacted in anger. Like David, we can often forgive the "big" hurts but struggle with the lesser offenses. We must always be aware of this propensity. We can be cool, calm, and collected in the big conflicts of life and then explode when our spouse dishonors us or one of our children spills milk at the dinner table. Yesterday's victories don't win today's battles. Just because we've forgiven someone yesterday doesn't mean that we'll forgive someone today. So always remember: *When fools disrespect you, don't get mad, let God get even.*

I'm confident that God wants to use you to fulfill His sovereign purposes. But He will not do so until you've been properly prepared. God wouldn't let David have the kingship until he was ready. David had to first learn advanced lessons of forgiveness. Likewise, if you're to be used by the Lord, you probably will have to get to an advanced level of graciousness, and God will put you through whatever it takes to bring you to that point.<sup>50</sup>

### **Scripture References**

1 Samuel 25:1–44

Luke 12:13–21

1 Corinthians 10:12

Ephesians 4:26–27

Titus 1:7

Romans 12:17–21

Proverbs 15:1; 16:24; 25:11

### **Study Questions**

1. What contrasts can be drawn from 1 Samuel 25 between wisdom and foolishness? Why is it wise to “overlook an offense”? Read Proverbs 19:11; cf. 14:29; 16:32. When have I recently been tempted to retaliate at something someone said? What specific steps could I take to avoid giving in to the temptation of seeking revenge?
2. How has God graciously restrained me when I have wanted vengeance? Do I sense God’s restraint as much as I sense His call to action? Can I think of incidents in my own life when God’s providential intervention has saved me from a wrong course of action? Do such interventions frequently figure into my thankful worship?
3. Do I minister to others with a certain set of expectations? Do I expect that sacrificial love and service should be reciprocated? How do I feel when my expectations for gratitude and appreciation aren’t met? Am I willing to love and serve others sacrificially without any reciprocation? How can I guard my heart and ensure that my motivation remains pure and pleasing to God?
4. How crucial is the servant’s speech in 1 Samuel 25:14–17? How does the servant play a small but essential role in this episode? In what way(s) is he the quiet servant of the Lord’s providence? In the course of my life, have I observed minor characters of major significance? How have such individuals impacted me and those around me? In what ways do I play a role that is small but essential?
5. What principles about a wife submitting to her husband can be gleaned from this passage? Did Abigail overstep her bounds in some areas? Where is she to be commended? In terms of progressive revelation, how much more accountable are we today for such doctrines that have been more fully developed in the New Testament? Read Ephesians 5:22–24 and 1 Peter 3:1–6.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gary Inrig, *Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2005), 169.

<sup>2</sup> Some English versions have “Maon” instead of “Paran” (e.g., NIV, NLT). Leithart explains: “There is a geographic difficulty. The Masoretic Text says that David was in the wilderness of Paran, while the Septuagint (LXX) says he was in ‘Maon.’ If David was truly in the wilderness of Paran, he was rather far away from the other areas associated with his wilderness period, since Paran was in the Sinai peninsula. Still, the MT should be followed rather than the LXX. ‘Paran’ included the Negev at the South and thus was located at the edge of the land, and therefore David could go there to avoid Saul. Also, this was the place where Israel wandered in the wilderness, and the mention of Paran connects David with Israel. Maon and Carmel are far enough south to be within the reach of the Negev.” Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 128 n. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*. New International Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 342. Arnold also writes: “But it is not insignificant that the reference to Samuel’s death follows immediately on the heels of Saul’s confession in 24:20–21, which was a public announcement accepting Samuel’s judgment on him. Saul has now come to see the truth of what Samuel predicted concerning him and his reign, though it is too late for Saul (chs. 13–15).”

<sup>4</sup> Samuel was such a valuable intercessor and counselor that Saul went to extraordinary lengths to consult him even after Samuel had died (28:8–19).

<sup>5</sup> John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*. Preaching the Word series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 472.

<sup>6</sup> The term “Carmel” means “Garden-land.” This is not Mount Carmel made famous later by the prophet Elijah. However, this is the site where Saul had earlier “set up a monument for himself” (1 Sam 15:12).

<sup>7</sup> Sheep shearing was done twice a year, most likely in the spring and early fall. Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 245. Waltke rightly states: “Nabal’s royal banquet should have included the young men that protected him.” Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 650.

<sup>8</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Old Testament Characters* (Fullerton: Insight for Living, 1986), 15–16.

<sup>9</sup> Inrig, *Forgiveness*, 175 remarks: “The Judean wilderness was wild country, home to animals that would prey on flocks and to bandits and desert people who would use it as a launching pad for frequent raids. The presence of David’s men had changed the dynamics. They have served as an unofficial police force, protecting the herders of the region from rustlers and controlling predatory animals. They had, in fact, enriched Nabal.” Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 246 notes: “The value of David’s protection is suggested by a previous narrative account, which noted that after the Philistines attack nearby Keilah, they were in possession of livestock (23:5).”

<sup>10</sup> Smith writes: “Some think that this Abigail was the half sister of David, the daughter of Nahash (2 Sam 17:25) who is the only other Abigail mentioned in the Bible (1 Chr 2:15–16). She was married to ‘Jithra’ or ‘Jether’ (2 Sam 17:25). ‘Jithra’ was Abigail’s first husband, or perhaps the given name of Nabal.” James E. Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*. College Press, NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 294 n. 3. However, this view is unlikely.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 2 Chron 30:22; Ps 111:10; Prov 13:15.

<sup>12</sup> The same expression is used to describe Rachel (Gen 29:17) and Esther (Esth 2:7).

<sup>13</sup> Each of the Hebrew terms “good” or “do good” and “evil” or “do evil” appear seven times in 1 Sam 25. The contrast between good and evil underscores one of the major themes of the chapter: good brings its own reward, while evil always backfires on the perpetrator. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement 14 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1980), 154, n. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 294 n. 2 notes: “Other passages present the *nabal* as an embarrassment to his father (Prov 17:21), a glutton (Prov 30:22), a hoarder (Jer 17:11), and even a practical atheist (Ps 14:1). Most significantly, a *nabal* was one who refused to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty (Isa 32:6).”

<sup>15</sup> The size of Nabal’s wealth is emphasized by being mentioned even before his name is given (see 1 Sam 25:2).

<sup>16</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 577. See also HALOT s.v. *Abigayil*.

<sup>17</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Growing Through Conflict* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1992), 60.

<sup>18</sup> It is possible that Jesus had Nabal in mind when he spoke Luke 12:13–21.

<sup>19</sup> Proverbs 20:2 says, “A king’s wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life” (NIV).

<sup>20</sup> On the use of “son of Jesse” in a disparaging way to refer to David, see 1 Sam 20:27, 30, 31; 22:7, 8, 13; 25:10; 2 Sam 20:1.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry Vines, *Pursuing God’s Own Heart* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 81.

<sup>22</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 249: “By withholding due payment for services, Nabal had violated the Torah (cf. Lev



---

19:13; Deut 24:15) and wronged David. Nevertheless, the Torah reserved for the Lord alone the right to avenge wrong in this case (cf. Lev 19:13; Deut 24:15; 32:35).”

<sup>23</sup> Swindoll, *Old Testament Characters*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 177.

<sup>25</sup> David is behaving just like Saul, who wiped out the priests at Nob. David was also in danger of acting the fool like Nabal. The wisdom of Proverbs would have been handy: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him” (26:4). “A fool’s anger is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor” (12:16).

<sup>26</sup> Constable aptly remarks: “This chapter opens with one disappointment for David, the death of his mentor, and it closes with another, the departure of his mate (v. 44). This suggests that the events of chapter 25 took place when David was at a low point in his life emotionally. This may account for the fact that David did not conduct himself completely honorably at this time.” Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Samuel,” 2012 ed.:

[www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1samuel.pdf](http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1samuel.pdf), 96; accessed 21 March 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Inrig, *Forgiveness*, 177.

<sup>28</sup> Inrig, *Forgiveness*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 130 insightfully writes: “With Samuel dead, David needed restraint, and Abigail came to fill that role. David was beginning to act like Saul, and he needed a ‘David’ to confront and bring him up short. Fortunately, a ‘David’ would soon be on her way.”

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 296.

<sup>31</sup> Abigail is fulfilling Prov 16:14: “The fury of a king is *like* messengers of death, but a wise man will appease it.”

<sup>32</sup> Abigail’s secretive behavior parallels that of Jonathan to Saul: “But he did not tell his father” (1 Sam 14:1).

Abigail understood the wisdom of Prov 27:22: “Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, *Yet* his foolishness will not depart from him.”

<sup>33</sup> Abigail’s actions are similar to those of Jacob when he returned to the land of Canaan and was confronted with the news that Esau was coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men (Gen 33:1).

<sup>34</sup> The term “male” (*shathan*) literally means “one who urinates against the wall.”

<sup>35</sup> See Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 249 who also clarifies: “The so-called Song of Deborah (Judg 5:2–31) is actually longer (352 Hb. words), but the words of the song were sung by Debra and Barak—not Deborah alone” (n. 249 n. 126).

<sup>36</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 251 insightfully remarks that Abigail’s fourteen uses of *adoni* “are both ironic and prophetic since the word also means ‘my husband.’”

<sup>37</sup> See esp. Deut 32:35: “Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them.”

<sup>38</sup> Abigail’s statement here is the reason Jewish rabbis later included her among the seven prophetesses of the OT.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 179.

<sup>40</sup> David’s words exemplify a godly response. Proverbs 15:31: “He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.” Proverbs 17:10: “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.”

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 302 n. 20 astutely remarks: “David broke his oath when he was shown the wickedness of it. Some years before, Saul, had he not been forcibly hindered by his army, would have murdered his own son Jonathan because of a foolish oath. See on 1 Sam 14:24, 25, 45. Cf. Judg 11:34, 40.”

<sup>42</sup> Constable, “Notes on 1 Samuel,” 100 observes: “The writer makes a clever play on words here. The Hebrew word for wineskin is *nebel*. It is as though he was suggesting that Nabal was a *nebel*. When the wine had gone out of him, he was nothing. The narrator may even be suggesting that all there was to Nabal was his bladder, his personal wineskin.”

<sup>43</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 252; Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 303; Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 593. Youngblood thinks it best not to diagnose “like a stone” with a specific illness but understand it figuratively as in Exod 15:16. See also Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, “The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (1 Samuel 25),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 401–27, who argues that a medical diagnosis is not necessary here. Instead, the passage makes a connection between the heart and the law; Nabal dies for his lawlessness.

<sup>44</sup> Constable, “Notes on 1 Samuel,” 100 writes: “David did not restrain himself in his relations with women, and this caused him major problems later in his life. The same words ‘sent’ and ‘took her’ appear both here (v. 40) and in the account of David’s affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:4). We see here the seed problem that bore bitter fruit in David’s adultery.”

<sup>45</sup> Some suggest that this marriage makes David easy prey when he later encounters Bathsheba.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 304 also allows for concern on David’s part.

<sup>47</sup> Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 252–53 offers up the possibility that David was acting as a kinsman-redeemer here.

---

<sup>48</sup> I appreciated the discussion on 1 Sam 25 in Michael Rydelnik, “Preaching Historical Narrative” in *The Moody Handbook of Preaching*, ed. John Koessler (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 127–41; see esp. 135–36.

<sup>49</sup> Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 341 writes: “Patience and restraint are the path to Yahweh’s best plan.”

<sup>50</sup> Michael Eaton, *1 Samuel*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent: Sovereign World, 1995), 100–1. Eaton also writes: “There is reason to think Abigail’s influence remained with him [David] the rest of his life. When he later shows great tolerance of Saul’s family and the highly offensive Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5–12; 19:16–23), he is standing by the lesson he had learnt from Abigail” (103–4).