

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY  
STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL  
LESSON 11

**"BEAUTY AND THE BEAST"**

1 Samuel 25 and 26

## **I. SAMUEL'S DEATH AND THE END OF THE ERA 25:1**

The chapter opens with the death and burial of Samuel at Ramah. Samuel was known for being a man of prayer. Yet he was no monkish mystic. As a prophet, priest and itinerant preacher he was highly involved with the life of the people. So it is no surprise when there is a national mourning at his death. Moreover it is clear that David, sorely beset by Saul, lost a pillar of strength in Samuel. According to Josephus, Samuel was contemporaneous with Saul's kingdom for eighteen years.

There is no age or time sequence given and perhaps the announcement is placed here as a comment on the fact that the acceptance of David's kingship by Saul no longer necessitated Samuel watching over the events.

## **II. NABAL'S FOOLISH REFUSAL 25:2-13**

### **A. The Area**

Paran was in the far south, almost to the Sinai, and the name should perhaps be corrected to "Maon" to provide a link with verse two. (The Septuagint has the name "Maon.") David probably went there, fearing that Saul would double his efforts to kill him. This Carmel was near Hebron to the south. David had the responsibility of feeding 600 men in that desert area. He could not afford to let them get disgruntled; discontent with one part of life will often lead to discontent in other areas.

In their dire circumstances David turned to a man of great wealth named Nabal, who had 1000 goats and 3000 sheep. Appealing to his past protective attitude toward Nabal's people (25:7; cf. 15-16, 21), David sent ten of his men to ask him for provisions. The large number of men sent also shows that he expected a liberal gift of food. Probably such missions were not uncommon, and the large sheep-masters were glad to supply the wants of one who guarded their flocks and defended them from the raids of the Amalekites and the Philistines or from occasional wild animals.

### **B. The Events**

Some commentaries think that David was running an extortion racket here, but that is not the case. Though David was an outlaw, he was no criminal. The people of Judah were his own fold, so the protection he offered them from raiders was freely given in the hope of a response in terms of food, not cash. Demands with menaces would have been quite fatal to his cause, alienating the only people who might offer any help. It is clear from the story that the Nabal episode was far from typical. It is also emphasized that Nabal was exceptionally rude and hostile.

They came to Nabal's ranch at a festive time -- sheep shearing. It would be comparable to our Christmas with a family gathering, gifts, generosity and hospitality (Luke 7:44-47). Nabal, however, with utter contempt refused to comply. The name Nabal means "fool" in the sense of one who does not have any appreciation of what is right and proper. The same word is used in Psalm 14:1, rendered "impious fool." Nabal, the fool, represents men who have no regard for God or man. The fool who says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1) is a "nabal" (same Hebrew word).

### **C. The Aggravating Circumstances**

There is not a single excuse that can be offered for Nabal's actions.

#### **1. The necessity of hospitality**

Hospitality was and is an accepted obligation in the East; Jesus, too, had sharp words for a man whose hospitality was cheap and grudging (Lk. 7:44-47).

#### **2. The festive occasion**

Sheep-shearing was a time when generosity and giving were the order of the day. Nabal was defying all the normal conventions.

#### **3. His political indifference**

## THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 11

In spite of his sneer at David in verse 10, he cannot be excused on the ground that he was a loyal supporter of Saul. He was no political enemy of David; he was simply a Scrooge -- a callous, insensitive, unreasonable, alcoholic dolt (17, 36).

### 4. His noble family background

Nabal was a Calebite, having as his ancestors the great and courageous Caleb of Joshua's time, and Othniel, the first judge of Israel. Caleb had large possessions assigned him in the neighborhood of Hebron (Jos. 15:13-19), which is only ten miles northwest of Carmel. This gave Nabal both prominence and responsibility in the Judean area.

### D. The Anger of David

Nabal's crude refusal was a slap in the face and it so angered David that he took 400 men with him to seize forcibly from Nabal what he wanted. Up to this time, David has been a perfect gentleman, but here he unfortunately was going to return a wrong with a wrong. David's oath is interesting in verse 22: he invoked a curse on his enemies (or on himself -- NIV) if he did not wipe out Nabal's name (destroy every male).

## III. ABIGAIL'S GRACIOUS INTERVENTION 25:14-35

### A. The Necessity of Her Intervention

Just one such violent (and morally wrong) attack on a well-known Judean citizen would almost certainly have cost David the throne. Wisdom suggested that David should have swallowed the insults. Anger, however justifiable, almost always leads to overreaction. Anger and murder are but a step apart (Mt. 5:21f).

### B. The Nature of Her Intervention

#### 1. She intervened with provisions. 25:14-22

At this point an unnamed hero really saves the day -- the young man who first reported all of this to Abigail, Nabal's wife (v.14). He reminded her of the very real protection David had given and told her of Nabal's rejection.

Why did the servant not go to Nabal? Nabal had already refused and shown himself to be incapable of being reasoned with (v. 17; cf. Prov. 9:7, 8). The whole passage is a study in appeals: David's men to Nabal, the servant to Abigail, Abigail to David. Were it not for the report of the servant and the intervention of Abigail, David would have surely slain Nabal. To stop the disaster she took with her enough food supplies to meet David's needs (25:14-19).

#### 2. She intervened with recognition. 25:23, 30

Abigail's representation of David as king may be described as prophetic. The recognition of David's kingship was a gradual process: first Samuel, some time later Jonathan recognized the fact, then even Saul himself. Now an intelligent citizen in Judah glimpses this truth (and the truth of his dynasty -- v. 28) and later on, after Saul's death, Judah as a whole accepted David as king. It took a longer time for the whole nation to bow before him. Abigail's assessment of David was a sharp contrast to that of her husband's.

#### 3. She intervened with reason. 25:26-29

David was on the point of brutally retaliating against an enemy. Abigail pointed out that a king should not dissipate his energies (as Saul was doing) in personal vendettas. A king should not fight citizens within his own realm but should defend his whole nation against external enemies. High-handed actions of a kind such as David was approaching are a sure sign of the corrupting ability of power.

#### 4. She intervened with accountability. 25:30-31

She took responsibility for her husband's actions and asked that she herself be held accountable. She also pointed out to David that such retaliation would cause him a troubled heart when he became king (v. 31). He would be accountable for Nabal's blood.

#### 5. She intervened with good wishes.

She predicted David's reign, dynasty and long, victorious life. Note the beautiful analogy of his life as "bound in the bundle of the living" (v. 29). The picture is perhaps of a carefully wrapped and protected package, or of a bundle in which silver or other precious objects may be tied together for safety; or it may be that this is a reference to a bag holding pebbles, used by the

## THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 11

shepherd to check the number of sheep and goats in a flock. This latter makes a good contrast with the picture of the enemies of David being thrown out like sling-stones.

### C. The Effectiveness of Her Intervention 25:32-35

Impressed by her wisdom, David followed her advice and gratefully accepted the food she had brought. Her pleading, aided no doubt by her beauty and charm, won David's heart and forgiveness.

### D. The Questions about Her Intervention

Some, such as Bill Gothard, believe Abigail to have done something wrong. He argues that she should have made her appeal to Nabal and if he still refused, she could have appealed to David without giving him food. He writes:

*She had the wrong attitude toward him. The first evidence of this is that she listened to a bad report and acted upon it. The second indication is the way she referred to her husband to David. "Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this son of Belial (son of the devil), even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he. Nabal (meaning fool) is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Samuel 25:25). Her appeal covers eight verses of Scripture, and it was effective. But it could have been just as effective with her husband if she had had the right attitudes.*

-- Bill Gothard, [The Key To Freedom Under Authority](#)

This argument is based on the concept of a chain of command and that the woman must never act apart from her husband's approval. I think the argument about Abigail is weak for seven reasons:

1. It assumes that Nabal was a reasonable person and that he refused David from a fear of Saul. But the text indicates that both the servant and Abigail knew him to be unreasonable, and there is no indication whatsoever that he cared anything about Saul.
2. It forgets the nature of Eastern hospitality. Nabal had committed the worst of offenses in refusing David food.
3. It misunderstands the nature of loyalty. Abigail is loyal to her husband in keeping him from getting killed. She could have allowed his death with the hope that she would attract David and become Queen. That would be disloyalty.
4. It misinterprets her attitude. She was there to help Nabal, not to be unsubmitive to him.
5. It misunderstands the place of the woman in a large, ancient eastern household. As can be seen from Proverbs 31 and 1 Tim. 5:14, the woman ran the affairs of the household.
6. It ignores the writer's purpose in telling of this incident. He is not teaching about the relationship of wife to husband but telling us how David through great difficulties was gradually recognized as king. The action is neither condemned nor condoned. It falls into the same category with David's and Jonathan's deceit and Ahimelech's concession in earlier chapters and demonstrates the desperate situation of David.
7. It makes the Pharisee's mistake of thinking that the letter of the law must always be carried out, rather than Jesus' attitude that human life is more sacred than ritual law (Mt. 12:3f.)

It must be kept in mind that these passages are not meant to give us a normative system of ethics. They tell us of David's plight, God's protection, man's responsibility, and of God's intervening providence.

## IV. NABAL'S DEATH 25:36-38

### A. The Party

When Abigail returned home, she found the holiday party in full swing, "like the feast of a king." Nabal was so drunk that she could not tell him what she had done until the next morning.

### B. The Shock

The news came as a great shock. Ten days later he was dead (apparently of a stroke). The death of Nabal was a proof of the truth of Abigail's words to David that God deals with the enemies of his chosen men. There was a physical cause for Nabal's death, such as a stroke or heart attack, but the biblical writer sees God's hand in life and death alike. Four reasons for this shock have been proposed:

## THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 11

1. That he was appalled at what Abigail had done and feared that if Saul had killed eighty-five priests for giving David bread, what would he do to him for giving him all the provisions that Abigail had given. (Gothard)
2. That he was so stunned by hearing how close to being killed by David he had come that he had a stroke.
3. That he was so angry with Abigail that he had a stroke.
4. That God struck him. There may be truth in all the above or a combination of them.

Note the contrasts between the ways Samuel died and Nabal died. Samuel died in peace and with great honor. Nabal came from a good home (descended from Caleb), had an excellent wife and was prosperous. Yet he was selfish (verse 11) and had no thought of God. He died in wretchedness.

## V. DAVID'S MARRIAGE TO ABIGAIL AND AHINOAM 25:39-44

### A. The Marriage to Abigail

A widow's legal mourning seems to have lasted only seven days. David, upon hearing of Nabal's death, saw in this turn of events a sign from God. Obviously struck by the beauty and character of Abigail, he proposed marriage to her, a proposal she gladly accepted. Thus David added another wife to Ahinoam and Michal, whom he had previously married. In his absence from Gibeah, Saul had given Michal to Paltiel (cf. 2 Sam. 3:15-16). Abigail expressed her willingness by saying she was ready to perform the most menial duties, even for his servants, and with five maidens joined him at once. This implies either that the families of the men traveled with them or that David now feels more secure so as to allow women to join the group. In 1 Samuel 27:3, the families are obviously with them.

### B. The Import of The Marriages

Since Abigail was a rich widow, we may surmise that Ahinoam was no less well-to-do. David was probably thus able to afford to maintain his six hundred men with less difficulty. Perhaps these marriages also helped David to forge closer links with the people of Judah. Nabal was a Calebite, a member of an important tribe of the south, closely associated with Judah; alliance by marriage with such a group could be vital for David's eventual position. (He was later to be made king at Hebron, the main town of the Calebite area (Jud. 1:20).) In almost every age, diplomatic marriages were an important method of establishing and strengthening bonds and alliances between families, clans, tribes and nations. The writer seems neither to condemn nor condone these marriages.

## VI. ABIGAIL'S CHARACTER AND WISDOM

### A. Her Character

Abigail means "cause for joy". In her you see a picture of the biblical idea of submission. She is beautiful but no airhead. What she did in verse eighteen took no small amount of administration. You could describe her this way:

1. Beautiful
2. Intelligent
3. Not spoiled by wealth
4. Loyal wife
5. Humble
6. Self-sacrificing
7. Speaking the truth in love
8. Grateful - kept from sin - rejoices in the right
9. Appreciative of David's true desire: to fight only the battles of the Lord
10. Faith in David
11. Persuasive
12. Appealed to David's conscience

### B. Her Wisdom

Abigail gives two reasons why no king (or anyone else) should act in vengeance:

## THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 11

### 1. Because you have no need to do so (vs. 28-29).

God will provide whatever you need. You never find in sin that for which you entered the sin to find. Whenever you sin, you assume you know more than God (Dt. 32:35; Ps. 16:11; Phil. 4:19; Mt. 5:39).

### 2. Because it will destroy your peace of mind (vs. 31).

A leader must not lose personal integrity. Power corrupts (Mt. 5:21-22; Prov. 15:1).

## VII. DAVID'S RESTRAINT 26:1-25

### A. The Danger from Saul 26:1-5

#### 1. The account itself

David had returned to his old quarters at Hachilah, in the hope that he would now be left in peace. But the Ziphites, who perhaps had been rewarded before, sent information of his position to Saul. Saul could not resist the opportunity. He had for many years kept with him a body of picked troops as a standing army which were called "the three thousand." With them he immediately marched to seek David. Arriving in the area of Ziph, he pitched his camp about six miles east of town, on the ridge of Hachilah (El Kolah).

David, who seemed now to have been sufficiently powerful to feel no great fear at the proximity of his enemy, was kept well-informed of Saul's movements, and having taken his post on higher ground, was able to watch all that went on below. He proposed to two of his most trusted followers, Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai his nephew, to make a closer reconnaissance of the Israelite camp. Ahimelech declined the hazardous enterprise but Abishai agreed to go. He and David at nightfall crept down the hill and approached the sleeping army. They easily penetrated to the center of the camp and found Saul himself fast asleep, with the spear, the symbol of his kingly authority, fixed in the ground at his head. David could have easily killed him, but refused.

#### 2. The question of similar events

Some believe that this story is the same event of Chapter 24 told by a different writer, but that is not the case. Whatever others may think, it is clear that the biblical writer was convinced that David twice spared Saul's life.

The Pulpit Commentary gives a good summary of the similarities and differences of the two events:

##### Similarities

- The treachery of the Ziphites
- David's position on the hill Hachilah
- Saul's march with 3000 men
- The speech of David's men
- David's refusal to lay hands on the anointed of Jehovah
- Saul's recognition of David's voice
- David's comparison of himself to a flea

##### Differences

- Cave vs. Encampment
- Saul is resting vs. David in pursuit
- Everyone awake vs. Saul and his men with a sound sleep from the Lord
- Saul alone and David with all his men vs. Saul with all his men and David with one man
- Cuts Saul's robe vs. takes Saul's spear and water jug

The most distinctive part of this story is the speech of David to Saul. By now David had come to realize that this cat-and-mouse game between him and Saul could not continue and he was on the point of leaving Israelite territory. He viewed such a move as a very serious and unhappy consequence. His attitude (and that of any Israelite) to this had a powerful religious dimension. To leave the land was to abandon God's sanctuary for there were no temples nor altars to Him outside the borders of Israel.

#### 3. Lessons from the two events

- a. Note the contrast between Saul and David.

## THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 11

Obviously Saul knew that David was God's choice, but he still sought to slay him. David recognized that Saul was the anointed king and he spared him.

### **b. God was giving David his protection.**

No matter how big Saul's army was, his pursuit of David was doomed to failure.

### **c. God had withdrawn his protection from Saul.**

If he was vulnerable to the little army of David, how much more vulnerable he must be to the Philistine armies. The whole army was unable to stay awake; not even Abner was capable of protecting the king.

### **d. David was completely innocent of even wishing Saul harm.**

The repeated emphasis in the books of Samuel may indicate that by the time of the writing of Samuel enemies of David inside Israel were trying to claim that David had been guilty of treason towards King Saul.

### **e. Saul had been chosen by God.**

Once again it is stressed that no man has the right to attack a leader chosen and anointed by God, however wrong or ill-advised that leader's actions. The New Testament too supports law and order (Rom. 13:1).

## **B. The Restraining of Abishai 26:6-12**

Abishai went with David to surprise Saul in his sleeping camp. Abishai urged killing him at once, but David again refused to lay a hand on the Lord's anointed, preferring to leave to God any vengeance on Saul. Instead they took the spear and jug of water which were beside Saul's head.

Abishai, who was probably about David's age, and his two brothers were high in rank among David's heroes (1 Chron. 11:6, 20, 26). He probably was one of the three captains who broke through the host of the Philistines to fetch him water from the well of Bethlehem. Abishai was the son of Zeruiah. Zeruiah is described in 1 Chronicles 2:16 as sister to Jesse's sons, and therefore sister to David. In 2 Samuel 17:25, however, she is described as the sister of an Abigail who was the daughter of Nahash. This may have been the Nahash who was king of Moab (1 Sam. 11:1; 1 Chron. 19:2). Perhaps Nahash was another name for Jesse, or maybe Jesse adopted Zeruiah, hence the absence of any direct reference to her father. The relationship to Nahash (if indeed the Moabite king) would also fit with him letting David's family take refuge in Moab.

## **C. The Challenge to Abner 26:13-16**

The whole event lies under God's control. The word for "sound sleep" is that used of the first man at the creation of woman (Gen. 2:21), and for Abraham at the making of the covenant in Genesis 15:12.

There must be a time lapse here between verses 12 and 13. The next scene seems to take place at dawn. After crossing the ravine opposite Saul, David shouted to Abner, who supposedly guarded Saul, and taunted him for his carelessness. Abner and his men could have been put to death for allowing the king to be so unguarded.

## **D. The Plea to Saul 26:17-20**

Saul then awoke and once more heard David's plea that he be left alone. David argued that if God had incited Saul against David, then he would appease His anger by the appropriate sacrifice; but if men, then they were to be cursed because they had intervened in God's purposes by driving David from both home and public worship of God.

Saul, realizing God's protection of David, once again had to confess that he was the one in the wrong (v. 21). Thus David's reputation was cleared even before he went over to the Philistines.

## **E. The Promise of Saul 26:21-25**

Saul confessed his sin (v. 21) and admitted fully that David was destined to be the leader of Israel. Saul never again interfered with David; they both went their own ways. Saul's words in verse 25 were the last words that David heard him say: "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail."

**QUESTIONS for LESSON 12**

READ LESSON 11:

1. What was new, challenging, or interesting to you?
2. What was the import of David's marriage to Abigail?

READ CHAPTER 27:

3. (a) Why did David and his men go to Gath? (b) Do you think this was a lapse of faith?
4. (a) What city did Achish give David and his entourage? (b) How long did they live there?
5. Summarize the story of David's raids and deception of Achish.

READ CHAPTER 28:

6. Why had Saul banned mediums and spiritists? (See Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Dt. 18:10-11; 1 Tim. 4:1)
7. By what three methods did God refuse to communicate with Saul?
8. Do you think Samuel came back from the dead, or was it a trick, or was it a demon impersonating Samuel? Why do you think so?
9. Why do you think God forbids us, or a medium, to try to communicate with the dead?
10. What two reasons did the apparition give for Saul's rejection by God? (v. 18)

READ CHAPTER 29:

11. Do you think David wanted to fight with Achish against Saul?
12. What kept David from having to fight against Israel?
13. What are the evidences of David's backslidden condition in these chapters?