FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 25

*David, Nabal and Abigail*

**Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. 2 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. 3 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. 4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. 5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, “Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. 6 Say to him: ‘Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! 7 “ ‘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.’ ” 9 When David’s men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David’s name. Then they waited. 10 Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?” 12 David’s men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. 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. 14 One of the servants told Nabal’s wife Abigail: “David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. 15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. 16 Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. 17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.” 18 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. 20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. 21 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!” 23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said: “My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 “Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the Lord’s battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. 30 When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant.” 32 David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 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.” 35 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.” 36 When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. 37 Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. 38 About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died. 39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.” Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. 40 His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, “David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.” 41 She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, “Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master’s servants.” 42 Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David’s messengers and became his wife. 43 David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. 44 But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.**

**25:1** *all Israel … mourned for him.* Samuel was recognized as a leader of national prominence who played a key role in the restructuring of the theocracy with the establishment of the monarchy (see chs. 8–12). The loss of his leadership was mourned much like that of other prominent figures in Israel’s past history, including Jacob (Ge 50:10), Aaron (Nu 20:29) and Moses (Dt 34:8). (CSB)

*Ramah.* See 7:17 and note on 1:1. (CSB)

**25:2–44** Nabal, the “fool” (see v. 25), lived near Carmel, where Saul had erected a monument in his own honor (see 15:12) and had committed the act that led to his rejection (see 15:26). The account of Nabal effectively serves the author’s purpose in a number of ways: 1. Nabal’s general character, his disdainful attitude toward David though David had guarded his flocks, and his sudden death at the Lord’s hand all parallel Saul (whose “flock” David had also protected). This allows the author indirectly to characterize Saul as a fool (see 13:13; 26:21) and to foreshadow his end. 2. David’s vengeful attitude toward Nabal displays his natural tendency and highlights his restraint toward Saul, the Lord’s anointed (this event is sandwiched between the two instances in which David spared Saul in spite of the urging of his men). 3. Abigail’s prudent action prevents David from using his power as leader for personal vengeance (the very thing Saul was doing). In this way the Lord (who avenged his servant) keeps David’s sword clean, teaching him a lesson he does not forget. 4. Abigail’s confident acknowledgment of David’s future accession to the throne foreshadows that event and even anticipates the Lord’s commitment to establish David’s house as a “lasting dynasty” (v. 28; cf. 2Sa 7:11–16). 5. Abigail’s marriage to David provides him with a wise and worthy wife, while Saul gives away David’s wife Michal to another, illustrating how the Lord counters every move Saul makes against David. (CSB)

**25:3** *Calebite.* A descendant of Caleb (see Nu 14:24), who settled at Hebron (see Jos 14:13) after the conquest of Canaan. Since Caleb’s name can mean “dog,” Nabal is subtly depicted as a dog as well as a fool. He would soon be a dead dog (see note on 2Sa 9:8), when the Lord would avenge his acts of contempt toward David. The hint is strong that, when the Lord avenges Saul’s sins against David (see 24:12, 15), the king will no longer pursue a dead dog (see 24:14) but will himself become one—a case of biting irony. (CSB)

**25:4** *shearing sheep.* A festive occasion (see v. 8; 2Sa 13:23–24). (CSB)

**25:8** *whatever you can find for them.* David and his men ask for some remuneration for their protection of Nabal’s shepherds and flocks against pillage (see vv. 15–16, 21). (CSB)

**25:17** *wicked man.* See note on Dt 13:13. (CSB)

*no one can talk to him.* In this way, too, Nabal is like Saul (cf., e.g., 20:27–33). (CSB)

**25:19** *did not tell her husband.* Cf. Michal’s treatment of Saul (19:11–14). (CSB)

**25:22** *May God deal with David, be it ever so severely.* See note on 3:17. David invokes a curse on himself if he should fail to kill every male in Nabal’s household and so obliterate Nabal’s family. (CSB)

**25:25** *wicked man.* See note on Dt 13:13. (CSB)

*He is just like his name.* In ancient times a person’s name was believed to reflect his nature and character. (CSB)

*his name is Fool.* In Hebrew the name Nabal means “fool.” (CSB)

**25:26** *as surely as the Lord lives.* See note on 14:39. (CSB)

**25:28** *the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty.* While the idea that David was destined to become king in place of Saul may have spread among the general populace, Abigail’s assessment of David contrasts sharply with that of her husband (see v. 10). (CSB)

*he fights the Lord’s battles.* Abigail is familiar with David’s victories over the Philistines, in which he sought to glorify the Lord rather than advance his own honor (see 17:26, 45–47; 18:16–17). (CSB)

*Let no wrongdoing be found in you.* Abigail shows concern for the preservation of David’s integrity in view of the office he was later to assume (see vv. 30–31, 39). (CSB)

**25:29** *bound securely in the bundle of the living.* Using the figure of placing a valuable possession in a carefully wrapped package for safekeeping, Abigail assures David that the Lord will preserve his life in the midst of danger. (CSB)

**25:30** *leader.* See note on 9:16. (CSB)

**25:31** *needless bloodshed.* See note on v. 28. (CSB)

**25:32** *who has sent you.* David recognizes the providential leading of the Lord in his encounter with Abigail (see v. 39). (CSB)

**25:36** *holding a banquet.* See Pr 30:21–22. (CSB)

*like that of a king.* Another clue that the author is using Nabal as a subtle portrayal of Saul. (CSB)

**25:37** *became like a stone.* Perhaps he suffered a stroke—he who was without moral sensitivity (was a *nabal*; see v. 25 and note) became as senseless as a stone. (CSB)

**25:43** *Ahinoam.* David’s first wife (see 27:3; 30:5; 2Sa 2:2) and mother of his first son, Amnon (see 2Sa 3:2). (CSB)

*Jezreel.* Located near Carmel (see v. 2; Jos 15:55) and not to be confused with the northern town of the same name, where Israel camped against the Philistines (see 29:1, 11) and where Ahab resided in later times (see 1Ki 18:45–46). (CSB)

**25:44** *Michal, David’s wife.* See 18:27. (CSB)