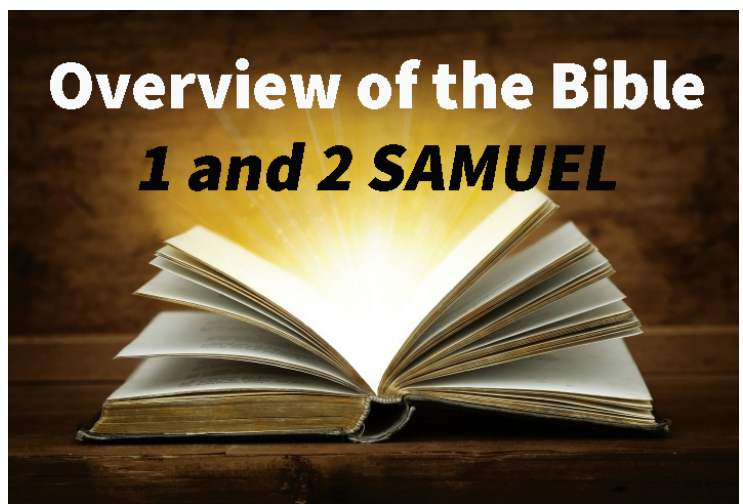


# DAVID LISTENS TO THE VOICE OF WISDOM

## 1 Samuel 25 Lesson 66

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

Pastor Blake Gideon



**Big Idea** *The Lord's chosen servants should embrace the wisdom that he provides.*

### The Text in Context

Chapter 24 ends with David's being vindicated as Saul acknowledged David's innocence, pronounced a blessing upon him, and assured him that he would someday be the king of Israel. However, he did not invite David to return to the royal court; Saul and David went their separate ways (v. 22). As we move to chapter 25, Saul remains backstage for a brief time as the narrator focuses on David's dealings with the wealthy but foolish Nabal, and his wise wife, Abigail. In chapter 24 David refused to take vengeance into his own hands; instead, he appealed to God for vindication. In chapter 25 this theme of vengeance emerges again. Nabal insults David, prompting David to seek vengeance against him. But wise Abigail intervenes and very diplomatically warns David that such a deed would be unworthy of Israel's future king. David recognizes her as God's messenger and praises the Lord for keeping him from doing something unwise. David instead waits on the Lord and is vindicated when the Lord mortally strikes down Nabal. David's restraint and reliance on God's intervention are fitting for one who will rule Israel. Once more David stands in contrast to Saul, who is obsessed with getting revenge on his enemies (14:24; 18:25), has been on a mission to take an innocent life (David's; cf. 1 Sam. 19:5), and has already killed the innocent priests of Nob and their families (1 Sam. 22). The voice of wisdom, embodied in Abigail (25:3, 33), reiterates what Saul himself has confessed (24:16–21): David is destined to be king. Only a fool (like Nabal—and Saul?) would resist God's purposes.

### Key Themes of 1 Samuel 25

- David embraces the wise advice that the Lord provides through Abigail.
- The Lord judges Nabal because of his foolish disdain for the Lord's chosen servant.

### Interpretive Insights

**25:1** *Now Samuel died.* Samuel anointed both Saul and David as king and announced the Lord's rejection of Saul and choice of David. The death of God's spokesman appears to seal Samuel's prophetic word and the destiny of Saul and David. Indeed, the death of Samuel, the first major character to appear in the book, does not bode well for the second major character to appear in the book: if literary order is preserved, it is now Saul's turn to die and leave the stage. Yet from the Davidic perspective, Samuel's death adds tension to the story, because David has lost his greatest supporter and is on his own, as it were.

**25:3** *She was an intelligent and beautiful woman.* The term translated "intelligent" (*sekel*) describes a moral quality, not just mental aptitude (cf. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 3:4; 12:8; 13:15; 16:22; 19:11; 23:9). Those who possess this characteristic are contrasted with perverse and faithless fools. In this chapter Abigail embodies wisdom and, in the providence of God, is sent to David as the voice of wisdom (see vv. 32–33).

**25:8** *Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.* Typical outlaws might have pounced on Nabal's men and robbed him of his sheep, but David's men show restraint and actually protect Nabal's workers (see vv. 15–16) from wandering outlaw groups and foreign raiders. How should we interpret David's motives and actions? David may be operating in accordance with the practices of his time. He and his men need to stay alive. To do so, they must creatively scrounge for provisions. To his credit, David refuses to become a bandit who robs and pillages. Instead, he offers his services, as it were, expecting to be rewarded for providing “protection,” when he has the power to simply take what he wants. In other words, as outlaws go, David is the more civilized type. From his perspective his actions are deserving of favor, and Nabal's response is deserving of death (cf. vv. 21–22). Here he probably simply reflects the code of the day.

**25:10** *Who is this son of Jesse?* Nabal calls David “this son of Jesse,” echoing the derogatory manner in which Saul and Doeg have referred to him (1 Sam. 20:27, 30–31; 22:7–9, 13).

*Many servants are breaking away from their masters.* Abigail knows a great deal about David, including his past victories and Saul's hostility (vv. 28–31). So, we can assume that Nabal also knows who David is. Consequently, his comment about servants' breaking away from their masters reveals his perspective. His attitude stands in stark contrast to that of his wise wife, who is well aware of David's destiny. Her words suggest that Nabal should have responded positively to David because of who David is: the Lord's chosen king and the protector of Israel.

**25:17** *Disaster is hanging over our master.* In verse 3 Nabal is characterized as “mean” (or “evil,” *ra'*) in his dealings. Here Nabal's servants recognize that “disaster” (*ra'ah*) is imminent because of Nabal's insulting response to David. The similarity in sound suggests that the disastrous consequences of Nabal's behavior mirror his evil character and are appropriate.

*Wicked man.* The phrase used here to characterize Nabal also describes Eli's sons (2:12) and the individuals who despised Saul after he was presented to Israel as their king (10:27). The narrator (v. 3), Nabal's servant (v. 17), and Nabal's wife (v. 25) all depict him as a wicked man.

**25:21** *He has paid me back evil for good.* Again the word *ra'ah*, “evil,” echoes the description of Nabal as evil (note *ra'* in v. 3; see the comment on v. 17 above). His actions are consistent with his character.

**25:22** *May God deal with David.* The Hebrew text reads, “May God deal with the *enemies* of David.” The Septuagint, which reads simply, “May God deal with *David*,” likely preserves the original reading here. As stated in the Hebrew text, the vow appears to be an attempt to avoid the implication that David has placed himself under a serious self-imprecation when he fails to fulfill the vow. However, since this is an inappropriate and rash vow (vv. 32–34), God will not and does not hold David accountable for failing to keep it. Obedience is better than adhering to ritual (cf. 15:22), so David would only compound matters by fulfilling it. His decision not to carry it out is wise and commendable.

**25:23** *Bowed down before David with her face to the ground.* Abigail's humble response to David mirrors David's earlier response to Saul (24:8). David has shown the king of Israel, the Lord's anointed, the proper respect by calling him “my master/lord” (*'adon*, 24:6, 8, 10). Abigail shows the same kind of respect to David, addressing him as “my lord/master” (*'adon*) fifteen times (vv. 24–31, 41) and referring to herself as his “servant/maidservant” (*'amah*) six times (vv. 24–25, 28, 31, 41). By way of contrast, Nabal rudely dismisses David's servants and suggests that David is merely a rebellious servant of Saul (25:10).

**25:25** *He is just like his name.* There is a Hebrew word *nabal*, “fool,” but surely Nabal's name did not have this meaning. It was probably derived from a homonym meaning “noble” or “adept.” But Abigail, playing off the homonym “fool,” suggests that his name matches his character, for he displays “folly” (*nebalah*, related to *nabal*, “fool”).

**25:28** *Lasting dynasty.* Abigail's statement anticipates the Lord's dynastic promise, in which he declares his intention to build an enduring “house” (royal dynasty) for David (2 Sam. 7:16).

*Wrongdoing.* Abigail prays that no “wrongdoing” (*ra'ah*) will be found in David. Such behavior is characteristic of Nabal (vv. 3, 21) but is inappropriate for the future king of Israel. The implication seems to be that Nabal's offensive response, while certainly wrong, is not worthy of death. The shedding of his blood would be unwarranted and equally wrong. David seems to concur with this (vv. 32–34).

**25:30** *Has appointed him ruler over Israel.* Abigail's words echo both the Lord's original announcement to Samuel that he has chosen a Benjamite to lead Israel (9:16; cf. 10:1) and his later decree that he has rejected Saul and chosen someone else to lead Israel (13:14). Her use of this term to refer to David confirms the decree and signals the change about to take place (see 2 Sam. 5:2; 6:21; 7:8), but it is also a reminder that David will serve under the Lord's authority.

**25:31** *Needless bloodshed.* Jonathan warned Saul not to kill David, for he had no reason to do so (19:5). But Saul has nevertheless persisted in his attempts to murder David. Here Abigail politely warns David that killing Nabal would constitute needless (*hinnam*, the same word used by Jonathan in 19:5) bloodshed. In contrast to Saul, David takes heed to this wise warning (v. 32).

**25:33** *Good judgment.* The relatively rare Hebrew word (*ta'am*) refers to discernment, in this case in the moral and ethical realm. Such discernment is a characteristic of the wise (Ps. 119:66; Prov. 26:16). According to Proverbs 11:22, a beautiful woman's attractiveness is negated if this quality is absent. But Abigail is both wise and beautiful (see v. 3).

**25:39** *Who has upheld my cause.* The language used here of God's judgment upon Nabal echoes the description of the demise of Abimelech (Judg. 9:56–57), another evildoer who acted as if he were a king (cf. 9:56).

*Asking her to become his wife.* David's marriage to Abigail, while not pleasing to our monogamous sensibilities, may have a positive function literarily, for it depicts him as embracing the voice of wisdom and as receiving an obvious blessing that a fool like Nabal never deserved. Abigail's lone son (Kileab = Daniel; 2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:1) is not presented in a negative light as a contender for the throne later in the story.

## Theological Insights

Nabal the fool and wise Abigail represent two contrasting responses to David—rejection (25:10–11) and submission (vv. 23–25, 42)—as well as two different destinies based on their responses. Nabal ends up dead, while Abigail ends up joining the royal court (vv. 38, 42). As such, they are, on the one hand, a reminder of how the covenant community should respond to God's chosen king, David, and, on the other hand, a warning of what will happen to those who reject his king. Obviously, this reminder and warning will be of the utmost importance in the time of David, as he tries to solidify his reign. Yet the message is also significant to the exiles as they consider the future of the covenant community and the role of the ancient Davidic dynasty in that community.

The theme of divine justice continues to be prominent in the account of David and Nabal. As in the case of Saul (see 24:15), David decides to leave his vindication in God's hands rather than seeking his own justice. Because David listens to Abigail's wise advice and waits for God to resolve his grievances against Nabal, the Lord does indeed vindicate him when he judges Nabal (25:39) and then gives Nabal's wife to David. Like the incident recorded in chapter 24, this episode encourages the exilic readers of the story, for it is another reminder that God does indeed vindicate his oppressed people when they turn to him for justice.

## Teaching the Text

1. *God's chosen servants should embrace the wise advice that he provides.* As Solomon acknowledges, God's chosen servants need divine wisdom (1 Kings 3), especially, as in the case of David, when their honor is offended and they are tempted to vindicate themselves. But attempts at self-vindication, even when one has a seemingly just cause, can compromise one's integrity and prove to be the antithesis of faith in God. Abigail reminds David that bloodshed will be unbecoming for the king of Israel and that his destiny is safe and secure within the Lord's promise (vv. 26–31). As the embodiment of wisdom (vv. 3, 33), she has been sent by the Lord to David (vv. 32, 39). To his credit, he listens to the voice of wisdom, correctly perceives her as God's messenger, and decides to trust in God's promise and timing, rather than in his sword. Violent retaliation for perceived wrongs is rarely, if ever, a wise response, for the wisdom that comes from God promotes peace, not strife (James 3:13–18; cf. Prov. 14:29).

2. *The Lord vindicates his chosen servants against those who oppose them.* The theme of divine vindication recurs in 1 Samuel (see 1:1–2:11; chap. 24). The timing of such vindication is in God’s hands. In this case, David does not need to wait long. The morning after Abigail returns home from her meeting with David, she informs Nabal of his narrow escape from David’s wrath. Nabal has a stroke, and ten days later the Lord strikes him dead (vv. 37–38). We cannot assume that vindication will always come so quickly; it may not. Yet God is just and will hold evildoers accountable for their misdeeds, bringing their “wrongdoing down on [their] own head” (v. 39; see Judg. 9:56–57; 1 Kings 2:32–33, 44; Joel 3:4; Obad. 15; Ps. 7:16). But we must patiently wait for God’s timing (Rom. 12:19; 2 Thess. 1:5–10).

## Illustrating the Text

### ***The believer must embrace divine wisdom, particularly when tempted to pursue self-vindication***

**Christian Autobiography: *Prison Letters*, by Corrie ten Boom.** The story of Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983) during World War II is well known. Corrie had suffered with a tremendous need for vengeance. After Corrie was released from prison following the war, she felt the need to write a letter to the man who had revealed her family’s rescue operations to the Germans. She writes about that: “I was free, and knew then as I know now it was my chance to take to the world God’s message of the victory of Jesus Christ in the midst of the deepest evil of man.” Written on June 19, 1945, part of the letter to her betrayer reads:

Today I heard that most probably you are the one who betrayed me. I went through 10 months of concentration camp. My father died after 9 days of imprisonment. My sister died in prison, too.

The harm you planned was turned into good for me by God. I came nearer to Him.... I have forgiven you everything. God will also forgive you everything, if you ask Him. He loves you and He Himself sent His Son to earth to reconcile your sins, which meant to suffer the punishment for you and me. You, on your part, have to give an answer to this.... Never doubt the Lord Jesus’ love. He is standing with His arms spread out to receive you. I hope that the path which you will now take may work for your eternal salvation.

### ***Divine justice will be delivered to those who treat God’s people with disdain and hostility***

**Quote: Martin Luther.** The reformer Luther (1483–1546) confidently wrote,

Our God will fulfill the promise of his word. He is on our side. No matter how the wicked strangle, imprison, and persecute, I am the more certain that God is my protection. Our doctrine must prevail: their doctrine must perish. God is our defense; he will see us through whether here or elsewhere. God is our refuge, to him we flee for safety.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 164–169.