

David is protected from falling into sin

1 Samuel 25

One Bible commentary refers to this chapter as containing the most beautiful story of the book of 1 Samuel. It is true that this chapter contains a story that can truly captivate the reader. However, we are presented here with something different than simply a dramatic story with a happy ending. Also in this chapter we are confronted with historical facts. We are confronted here with the history of the LORD's salvation. When you realize that the LORD carries out his plan of salvation in opposition to the work of the Devil, you really will be *spiritually* captivated by this 'story' (or rather, history).

In this chapter, the account of David's flight has progressed significantly. In chapters preceding the current chapter, one is able to discern a spiritual division in Israel. There are Israelites who chose David's side and there are those who chose against him. (See especially 23:9-12, 13 and ch.22:2, 19, 20.) In 1 Samuel 25 we see that spiritual division again. In this case the spiritual division runs straight through a marriage. Nabal chooses against David; his wife chooses in favour of the future king.

And yet, that is not the main point of this account. Instead, what is essential in this chapter is how David is influenced by these choices. Through Nabal's attitude David almost plunges himself into ruin. Through Abigail's action he is prevented from stumbling.

1. Verses 1-11

Nabal makes it clear what kind of a man he is. He is a materialist who lives for his possessions and is not willing to do anything for others. Notice the words 'my' and 'I' in verse 11! However, more is at hand. When Nabal chooses for his possessions he at the same time chooses against the God-anointed king, and thereby chooses against God Himself. Notice how he speaks with contempt about David. He pretends he doesn't know anything about him, even though he could have known better. After all, his wife Abigail knows better (see vv. 28,30). The stand that Nabal takes is at the core a stand against the coming Christ.

***Question 1:** What is the correlation between this stand of Nabal and what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 6:24: 'You cannot serve both God and money'?*

2. Verses 12-23

The anger of David may in itself be understandable (see vv. 16, 21). Gratitude is not to be expected from those who belong to the world. (Mind you, some of those in the church are capable of dishing out similar treatment.) David receives no thanks for his pains. The fact that David wants to 'put things straight' is a common human reaction. However, David really threatens to fall into a very serious sin at this point! Later, David describes this sin as an incurring of 'bloodguilt' and as 'avenging myself with my own hand' (v. 33).

At this moment it is useful to realize the context of this account. Before and after this chapter you can read two similar events. On two occasions David is induced by his own men to kill Saul, his great enemy. In both situations he flatly refuses. He is determined not to take the right in his own hand. That right belongs in the hand of the LORD (24:16). In chapter 25

David does not stand opposed to Saul but to Nabal. In fact, however, the same temptation overwhelms him. He is tempted to take revenge with his own hand. This time, he threatens to succumb to the temptation. David doesn't even need the encouragement of his men to take this drastic action!

***Question 2:** Can you think of a reason why David is in danger of succumbing to the temptation now, while he stands firm when it comes to Saul?*

***Question 3:** When and to what extent is David allowed to stand up for what is right? Or should he passively allow all sorts of injustice to happen when he sees it?*

Read verse 21. Notice how readily the offence is regarded as a personal matter. In David's reaction there is no hint of him warning Nabal concerning the stand that he takes against the LORD. In addition, David's reaction is completely out of proportion. As long as it depends on him he is not going to leave any man who lives in Nabal's house alive. That has absolutely nothing to do with justice. That is why Abigail will soon refer to this intention as "**needless** bloodshed"(v. 31).

***Question 4:** David confirms his intention with an oath. To what extent does this increase his guilt?*

Abigail acted very wisely in realizing what she ought to do, but she acted courageously also. Just imagine standing in the way of an important man like David. Her action is not without risk. However, if God calls you to a certain task, you must dare to speak up, especially within the communion of saints. God Himself gives her courage to do this.

3. Verses 23-31

Abigail does not act like an emancipated woman who will teach David a lesson. Her attitude is characterized by submission. However, in a subservient manner she freely tells David what she ought to say.

Also in her manner of speaking, Abigail appears to be a wise woman. In the first place, she assumes responsibility for what has happened. She didn't see David's servants. It doesn't matter to her that it was something beyond her control. It doesn't matter to her if others think that she has failed, as long as David will pay attention to her words. Her confession of 'guilt' must have affected David. She is not assuming responsibility in order to take her husband under her wing. In the second place, she is trying to make David look at her husband from a different angle. She is not trying to acquit her husband. That would only have irritated David. However, she does not shrink back from calling him a fool. Concerning a fool one would say, 'You know who's speaking', or 'Don't answer a fool according to his folly.'

***Question 5:** To what extent are Abigail's words about her husband Nabal in line with God's commandments? How could Matthew 10:37 be applied to this situation?*

Abigail speaks with wisdom while speaking from the **heart** at the same time. Her heart is concerned about the LORD's cause. For that reason David takes her words to heart. It is important to her that David will become a king after God's will.

God's promises to David represent an important element in her speech (v. 30). She starts with the premise that these promises will be fulfilled ("for the LORD will **certainly** make a lasting dynasty for my master"). After all, David does fulfill the obligation that the LORD connects to his promises (end of v. 28). That is a fact that Abigail is able to ascertain.

Question 6: *Does Abigail really intend to say that absolutely no wrong can be found in David? If not, how then are we to understand the conclusion of verse 28?*

The previous paragraph mentions the basis for Abigail's urgent appeal to David. She reasons as follows: If David is fighting the LORD's battle, then he should not start his own battles. If he has received the promise of a secure kingdom, then he should not render his kingship powerless before it has even started. A deed such as he is about to commit will always be a hindrance to him (v. 31). If he thinks he can act as his own judge, how will it be possible for his subjects to regard him as a ruler who administers the judgments of the LORD?

Abigail appeals to David to leave Nabal's judgment to the LORD. He should be able to do that, fully trusting in him. "Surely there is a God who judges the earth" (Ps.58:11). Have a good look at verse 29. The wife of the shepherd uses examples from the life of a shepherd. This must have made quite an impression on David, who was a shepherd himself. The future shepherd of Israel may entrust the Great Shepherd with the protection of his rights. For what reason, then, would he still want to take the right in his own hand?

Question 7: *What exactly does it mean to 'leave the protection of your rights up to the LORD'? In the course of history many children of God have been killed by their enemies (e.g. burned at the stake). Did the LORD not protect their rights? Explain your answer.*

4. Verses 32-35

David is receptive to the 'sisterly admonishment' of Abigail. This is precisely the intention within the communion of saints. He praises her for her wise action and for her discretion. But before he does that, he first praises the LORD. It is clear to him that God has placed this woman on his path.

Question 8: *Especially considering the Eastern practices during that time, do you think that it speaks for itself that David allows this woman to tell him what to do? To what extent do you recognize a 'Messianic style' in this?*

David suddenly realizes the ruin he has just been protected from. You can do yourself an enormous amount of harm if you let yourself be guided by fits of anger.

5. Verses 36-44

In the death of Nabal, David recognizes the hand of the heavenly judge. The words of Abigail are fulfilled: "the lives of your enemies he shall hurl away as from the pocket of a sling."

Question 9: *Isn't it rude of David to praise the LORD in reaction to Nabal's death? How can David say this, realizing that he had intended to commit crimes himself?*

Naturally, human feelings from both sides play a role in the marriage of David with Abigail. What is most important here, however, is that David receives a companion who has proven that she is able to help him to be a king after God's will. She forms a deeper spiritual unity with David than Michal does (see outline 3).

6. The work of the LORD in this account

If Satan had his way, David would not portray the image of the coming Christ. You can read in 1 Peter 2:23 how Christ reacted to the injustice that was done to him: "he trusted him who judges justly". He suffered injustice, even if that meant that he would end up hanging on the cross. He knew that it was God's way to redeem us and free us of our sins. If David does not portray the image of the Christ, then his people would not gain insight in the Christ through David. If he himself loses track, how can he lead his people on the path that leads to Christ? However, Satan's intentions fail. The LORD uses a woman to whom he, in his providence, gave the necessary capabilities (v. 3) and courage. In addition, he blesses her deed. He keeps David from committing a great sin, which would have greatly blemished his kingship.

At the same time we see that the LORD encourages David through the death of Nabal. There is a God who rules the earth with justice. David may count on that, not only now, but also in connection to his other enemies (v. 26), including Saul. God maintains his plan of salvation. All his enemies will have to yield. Knowing this, we may also be assured that one day on earth all things will be put right. This will happen when David's great Son will again appear on the earth. A straight line runs from this account to what we confess in Lord's Day 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 52. Just read it for yourself. And as long as things are not put right yet, we may be assured that we are safe with the great Shepherd of the sheep (v. 29).

For the introduction

1. The report about Samuel's death in verse 1 can be found in chapter 28:3 as well. This is, of course, not an excessive repetition, but an introduction to what follows. At Endor Saul wants to bring up from the dead the man who had died and was buried at Ramah in order to consult him. Here, in chapter 25, it is possible that the report about Samuel's death is not linked to the account that follows. If that is the case then Samuel's death is mentioned here only because it happened at that time. However, there appears to be an obvious connection: all of Israel mourned over Samuel. Still, in the rest of the chapter it (again) becomes clear that not everyone in Israel maintains the honour of their leader. Not everyone keeps Samuel's words in high esteem. Samuel was given the privilege to appoint David as the future king, but there were Israelites who did not take this appointment seriously. One of them was Nabal.
2. You could point out that Nabal's accusation regarding 'servants running away from their masters' would have greatly offended David. After all, he had bent over backwards to try to remain in Saul's service (see section 2).
3. Concerning David's reaction to Nabal's selfishness, you can elaborate on the difficulty of putting up with injustice instead of leaving the punishment up to God.
4. It is important to point out that David's greatest misery is not the injustice that he suffered at the hands of Nabal. The catechism (HC, LD 1, Q&A 2 and 3) teaches us that our sins are the primary source of our misery. This is true for David also.

5. You may want to elaborate on the comment made in section 2: ‘if God calls you to a certain task you must dare to speak up, especially within the communion of saints’. In the church it should be a standard practice to admonish each other, to speak to each other in order to warn. It is of primary importance, of course, in what manner you address the other person (see e.g. Gal 6:1). The manner in which Abigail addresses David is instructive. You also notice that Abigail completely trusts that the LORD will bless her action with the desired result. In verse 26 she uses the past tense when she says to David, “since the LORD **has kept** you...from bloodshed...” You could say that it was very wise of Abigail to put it that way, because David would have been very stubborn now if he had insisted. However, it is also correct to state that Abigail’s words manifested a complete trust in the LORD.
6. Regarding the marriage of David with Abigail, not much attention has been paid to the phenomenon of polygamy in Israel. It is possible to pay so much attention to this topic that the meaning of this marriage becomes ‘camouflaged’. The meaning of this marriage is that in Abigail David receives a wife who can help him. She can help him to be a king who remains on the right track, the track that Christ has put him on.

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