

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 14, 1 Samuel 24-25

© 2024 Robert Chisholm and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 14, 1 Samuel 24-25. David Spares Saul's Life, Chapter 24, and David Listens to the Voice of Wisdom, 1 Samuel chapter 25.

In this next lesson, we'll be looking at 1 Samuel chapter 24, where David spares Saul's life, and also 1 Samuel chapter 25, where, as we will see, David listens to the voice of wisdom. Let's begin with chapter 24. Saul is chasing David.

In chapter 23, he almost had him. He was hot on David's trail, ready to capture David and his men, and then a messenger came and informed Saul the Philistines were invading the land and that you needed to break off the pursuit of David and return and defend Israelite territory, and so Saul left. That brings us to chapter 24, verse 1. Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and he's told David is in the desert of En-Gedi.

So, Saul was ready to once again go after David, and he took 3,000 able young men from all of Israel, and he set out to look for David. And along the way, Saul decides, as we all need to do sometimes, to relieve himself. Nature called, and Saul had to answer that call, and so they didn't have public restrooms back at this time, so he decided to just go into a cave, a nearby cave, according to verse 3, and he went in to relieve himself.

Well, lo and behold, guess who's in the cave? David and his men were far back in the cave. You might wonder how would they know that Saul came in. I have a hunch that they probably had somebody guarding the entrance who saw from a distance that Saul was heading their way.

We have to assume that they knew that it was Saul who was in the cave because it would be dark in there. The men said to David, this is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, and we don't have these exact words anywhere else, but I think we can assume that the men are correct. The Lord must have said this to David in some context in the past.

I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish. Now, I think David's men are assuming that means the Lord is going to deliver your enemy into your hands so you can kill him, you can get rid of him. Those words, if accurately quoted, are a bit more vague than that.

To deal with as you wish. It's up to you. And David, as we'll see, is going to decide it's not right for me to kill Saul.

So, this delivering of the enemy into David's hands may be more of a test on God's part than anything else. Rather than an opportunity to get rid of your arch-enemy so you can be king, maybe it's more of a test to see if you're going to wait for God's good timing because it would be wrong for you to take this into your own hands and kill him. So, David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

So, Saul is relieving himself. And David creeps up, and you're reading it for the first time, you're wondering, crept up unnoticed and cut, what is he going to do? But no, he just cuts off a corner of Saul's robe. And we'll see why he did this here in a moment.

Afterward, and this may be kind of shooting forward to a future time, it's more of a parenthetical kind. Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He may have felt that right away.

At any rate, he said to his men, we have to assume he goes back to his men, and I guess we're also assuming that they're really whispering because sound reverberates in caves sometimes. So, the Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him, for he is the anointed of the Lord. So, his men are suggesting that he should kill Saul, I think.

The Lord has given him into your hands, and David is saying, no, the Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master. And the words were more vague than that. So, David's not buying into this.

Sometimes people can take something that God has said and twist it in such a way and give you the idea that you should do this in light of what God said. That's not always true. Sometimes it takes some discernment to see exactly what God's word means for me in a certain situation.

And David decides, no, one thing I know, he's the Lord's anointed, and it would be wrong for me to attack him and kill him. With these words, David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

But David is not finished here. He does have a strategy. He did not kill Saul, but he is going to confront Saul.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, my Lord, the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. This is a very important passage in the Davidic apology that we've talked about in earlier lessons.

As we read through this passage, just ask yourself, how is David showing loyalty to Saul? What is David's attitude towards Saul? And then how is Saul responding? If we're going to defend David as innocent and prove that Saul is guilty, this chapter is exhibit A when it comes to evidence. So, David bows down to him, and prostrates himself with his face to the ground. David is clear.

Saul is king, and David is showing him the respect that he deserves. And he said to Saul, why do you listen when men say David is bent on harming you? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you.

I said I will not lay my hand on my Lord because he is the Lord's anointed. See my father, even when he calls him father. I think that's more than just my father-in-law.

I think the father is being used here, as it sometimes is in the Old Testament, of someone who has authority and who is a protector. As David's Lord, Saul is obligated really to protect him as one of his loyal servants, and he's not doing that. See my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand.

I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.

So, David's argument is pretty clear. I cut off this portion of your robe. I obviously could have killed you.

The Lord gave me that opportunity. Some were even urging me to do that, but I refused to do it because you are the Lord's anointed. That would be wrong for me to do that.

So, he's basically appealing to Saul saying, I'm innocent. If I really wanted to kill you, I would have just now. I had a golden opportunity and I refused to take it.

And then he appeals to the Lord in verse 12. May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. In other words, I'm appealing to the Lord as the judge between us, and I'm asking the Lord for vindication and for justice for what you've done to me, but I am not going to take it into my own hands.

It's up to him. As the old saying goes, from evildoers come evil deeds. So my hand will not touch you.

It would be evil for me to kill you, and I'm not an evildoer. And so only an evildoer would do that. I'm not going to do it.

Against whom has the king of Israel come out? And now David sort of speaks of himself in a very negative kind of way. Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? I'm nothing. Why are you so obsessed with me? You're the king.

May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it. May he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.

And I think David is just a tremendous example for us because this is a theme that goes all the way through scripture. You do not seek vengeance for yourself. You put that into the Lord's hands because the Lord is the righteous judge.

He knows what's best. He knows what's right. He knows what's wrong.

We don't have that kind of knowledge, that omniscience that he has. We are not just like he is. He sees every situation perfectly, and he knows what justice is.

And that's why we are not to avenge ourselves against our enemies. We are to turn to the Lord and leave it in the Lord's hands and wait on his good timing with faith that his justice will prevail. And that's what David is doing.

He's a fantastic example of this. If anybody had the right to strike out against Saul, it was David. I mean, his life was at stake, but he has come to the place here where he has entrusted his life to the Lord and his just cause to the Lord.

And we would do well to follow his example. When David finished saying this, now we're wondering, if we're reading for the first time, how is Saul going to respond to all of this? How is he going to respond? He's been so bent on killing David. So, the first part of the defense of David is David's own words, David's actions.

David's clearly innocent in all of this. He's clearly loyal to Saul, and he is trusting in the Lord for justice. He's not taking it into his own hands.

He's innocent. Well, look what Saul says. Is that your voice, David, my son? That's significant because he's been calling him the son of Jesse.

That's the derogatory way he refers to him. But now, is that your voice, David? He calls him by name, my son. And David appealed to him as a father.

And he wept aloud. So, David's actions and words have impacted Saul. And this is a key statement in Exhibit A, the apology for David.

You are more righteous than I, he said. You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. This is quite a confession on Saul's part.

This is all you really need in the long run to prove that David is innocent and Saul is guilty. You get more in the story, but this is fundamental. You have just now told me about the good you did to me.

The Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. So, Saul realizes the Lord and his providence delivered me up to David. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? Obviously, not.

Saul's question leads us to the conclusion, that David must not really be his enemy. Because if David viewed Saul that way, he wouldn't have let him get away. May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today.

I know this is significant, that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. So, Saul acknowledges you deserve the Lord's reward for the way you've treated me today. And I know you're going to be the next king.

I know deep down that's the way it's going to be. The kingdom is going to be established in your hands. Swear to me by the Lord that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family.

And by the way, David later does his best to keep this oath that he makes to Saul. There are some complicating circumstances that come up in 2 Samuel 21. We'll get there eventually.

But David does his best in this regard. So, David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

It's interesting that even though there's been a reconciliation of sorts here, David doesn't hang around with Saul. So, in chapter 24, again David spares Saul's life and I think we could summarize the main theme as the Lord vindicates his chosen servants when they look to him for justice. That's what David did and there's a form of vindication here in Saul's confession.

To flesh out that main theme a little more, there are a couple of key principles here that I would develop in preaching and teaching this passage. When the fulfillment of God's promise is delayed, and it certainly has been delayed for David, God's chosen servants must resist the temptation to force the issue and instead do what is right and wait for God's timing. Don't force the issue.

Always commit to doing what's right and wait on God's timing for the promise to be fulfilled. That's what David did. And when enduring oppression, as one waits for God's promise to materialize, one must look to God for vindication.

And those are the primary lessons that we see in this particular chapter. I'd like to move to chapter 25 now. I call this David listens to the voice of wisdom.

The voice of wisdom is going to come to David in the form of a woman. It's interesting that in Proverbs we have lady wisdom. Wisdom is portrayed as a woman who speaks out with good wise words in contrast to lady folly.

But David is going to listen to the voice of wisdom in this chapter and he's going to embrace the wisdom that God provides through Abigail. And so once again we see David in a very positive light in this chapter, but there is some tension that develops. Chapter 25 verse 1 begins by noting that Samuel died.

We haven't seen Samuel a whole lot in recent chapters, but he was still out there and now he has died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him and they buried him at his home in Ramah. And then David moved down into the desert of Paran.

So, we have to ask, why are we being told this here? The focus is on Saul and David and so yes, Samuel is a prominent character, but what's the significance of it here? In some ways, it's a little concerning because Samuel was someone David could always turn to in times of trouble, although he hasn't really been near Samuel much recently. So, we're wondering, well, one of David's greatest allies is gone. But I think there's more to it than that.

In the books of Samuel, Samuel is the first major character. And then Saul takes that position, beginning I think in 1 Samuel chapter 9 where he is marked out as the one who is going to be the king and Saul becomes a prominent character, if we're thinking in terms of major characters. David in 1 Samuel 17, when David arrives, remember we talked about the formal introduction of David there in chapter 17.

So, Samuel, Saul, David. Samuel, main character number one, has now passed off the scene. He's died.

Well, we have main character two, Saul, and main character three, David. What's going to happen next? I think this may be a signal from the author. The main character has passed off the scene.

Main character two is about to. In chapter 28, Saul is going to visit Samuel by night on the eve of a battle and Samuel is going to tell him from the grave. Samuel's dead, but he's going to tell him from the grave.

When the witch conjures up the spirit of Samuel, you're going to die tomorrow. And then the text is going to tell us how Saul dies in battle. So, this may be a bit foreboding here at this point.

We then read that there is a certain man in Maon who had property there at Carmel and he's very wealthy. He has a lot of livestock and he has a thousand goats, three thousand sheep, and there's a shearing that is going on in Carmel where they're cutting off the coats of the animals. His name is Nabal or Nabal.

If you know your Hebrew, you know Nabal is a word for fool. I can't imagine a man's mother would name him a fool. And so, I think probably his name, there are homonyms sometimes in a language.

We could theorize that he was named Adept or something like that. There's a homonym Nabal that probably has that meaning. So, it probably had a positive connotation.

But there is this other word that sounds the same that means fool, but I don't think that was the intent of his mother when he was named. But that's his name and it's going to come into play. The other word Nabal, which means fool, is going to come into play in the story.

His wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent woman, a wise woman, and beautiful. But her husband was surly and mean in his feelings.

He was a Calebite. So, we have this mismatch. We have Nabal who's surly and mean married to Abigail who is intelligent, wise, and beautiful.

David is in the wilderness and he hears that Nabal was shearing sheep. So, he sent ten young men and said to them, go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. Say to him, long life to you, good health to you and your household, and good health to all that is yours.

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.

Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore, be favorable toward my men since we come at a festive time. Now, there's, hey, everybody's celebrating.

It's sheep shearing. Why don't you be generous? Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them. So, David is appealing to Nabal and he is saying, perhaps at this time of celebration you can show some generosity to us.

We try to make ends meet as we're wandering around the wilderness being chased by Saul. I mean, I certainly would have heard about this. So, whatever you can give us, we would appreciate it.

And I think there's implied in here is we're deserving of something because we came across your shepherds in our journeys. And if we wanted to be, we could have just been like an outlaw gang and we could have come in and stolen livestock from you. But we're not like that.

And basically, we did not mistreat your shepherds. In fact, we protected them. Some people have accused David here of running a protection racket, something like the mafia.

Well, hey, please pay us for protection. Protection from whom? Us. I don't think that's what David is doing.

I think at this point in time there were probably lots of different folks out there in the wilderness and some people were lawless. And what David has done, he has seen an opportunity, I think here, to get in good maybe with Nabal. And so, he decided, we're going to protect this man from outlaws.

And we're just going to do it and then we'll appeal. They don't come and get a contract first. It seems as if they do it and then they're hoping by coming to him that he will show appreciation for what they've done.

When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message, verse 9, in David's name. Then they waited. Now remember, Nabal is surly and mean.

And it would also seem that he is a pro-Saul fellow. Nabal answered David's servants, who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? That's reminiscent of the way Saul refers to him. Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.

In other words, you're just a rebellious servant. David is just a rebellious servant. He's broken away from his master, Saul.

Why should I take my bread and water and the meat I have slaughtered for my sheeps and give it to men coming from who knows where? This is very disrespectful. And you may think, well, he may not have known who David was. No, that's not true.

Abigail, his wife, knows all about David. As we'll see when she confronts David in a bit, she knows exactly who David is. She knows David as the one who has fought the battles of the Lord and has delivered the Lord's people.

And so, she understands who David is, and he should as well. And he has no appreciation for who David is as the Lord's chosen future king, and he has no appreciation for what David has done for Israel. He's ungrateful.

David's men turned around, verse 12, and went back. And when they arrived, they reported every word. Every word.

David said to his men, each of you strap on your sword. Uh-oh. So, they did.

And David strapped his on as well. About 400 men went up with David. 200 stayed with the supplies.

So, it looks as if David is very upset. He doesn't appreciate being treated with such disrespect, and he is ready to attack. Well, one of the servants tells Abigail, Nabal's wife, that David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master greetings, but he hurled insults at them.

Yet these men, and now we discover a bit more about what has gone on. 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. They never stole anything from us. All that livestock there, they could have easily stolen something.

Nothing was ever missing when these guys were around. Night and day, they were a wall around us. The whole time, we were herding our sheep.

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. If we were to go and try to convince him of the folly of what he has done, he wouldn't even listen.

You need to do something, Abigail. And so, we discover what David did. Yeah, he protected Nabal's men.

And I believe that there was a legitimate need for that, because in these times, in this place, there would have been people who would have wanted to steal from Nabal. David and his men were a wall around them. And you get the impression from the way the servants talk that they felt they needed this kind of defense.

And they viewed David and his men in a very positive light. If they had just been running a protection racket, I don't think they would have spoken in this way. So, Abigail needs to act quickly.

And so, notice what she does. She takes 200 loaves of bread, 2 skins of wine, 5 dressed sheep, 5 sieves of roasted grain, 100 cakes of raisins, 200 cakes of pressed figs, and loads them on donkeys. And then she tells her servants, go on ahead, I'll follow you.

But she doesn't say anything to Nabal at this point. And she comes riding her donkey into the mountain ravine, and there is David. And David, along with his men, descends toward her, and she meets him and them.

And David had just said, it's been useless. All my watching over this fellow's property in the wilderness, so that nothing of his was missing, and he has paid me back evil for good. In other words, we deserve something for what we did.

Instead, we just get a bunch of insults and we come away empty. And he says, and then David pronounced a curse upon himself. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him.

Now, we can understand why David is upset. At the same time, I'm feeling a bit uncomfortable about this. David is ready to murder Nabal and others who are innocent.

This would be a big, big mistake. But Abigail, remember, intelligent, wise, saw David. She quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground.

So, she shows David the kind of respect that Nabal should have. And she fell at his feet and said, pardon your servant, my lord. Notice, your servant, my lord.

And let me speak to you. Hear what your servant has to say. So she's going out of her way to show him respect.

Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He's just like his name. Now again, his name probably meant something else, a homonym.

But what she's doing, she's playing off the homonyms and she's saying, his name means fool. And folly goes with him. He's well-named.

Maybe they intended the name to mean something else, but what it really means in his case is a fool. He's well-named. Folly goes with him.

And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. I never saw your men arrive. I didn't know anything about this.

And now, my lord, as surely as the lord your God lives and as you live, since the lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. She's kind of assuming some things here. She's saying, you know, the lord has kept you from bloodshed.

David is on his way to shed blood, but she's basically saying to him, in his providence, I've intercepted you. And the lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself. And I know you're not going to follow through on this.

That seems to be what's implied here. Let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you. So, there are all the figs and all the things that she had collected, and she's basically doing what David wanted Nabal to do, and she's essentially saying, we respect you and we thank you for what you've done for us.

And here is a token of our gratitude. Please forgive your servant's presumption. The lord your god will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord.

See, it's obvious here. Abigail knows who David is. She knows all about him, and Nabal should have as well.

I have to assume that Nabal is on Saul's side at this point. We'll certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the lord's battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord 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. So, the lord is protecting you. He will defeat your enemies.

He will protect you. And when the lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him, and has appointed him ruler over Israel, that's your destiny. I know this.

My lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed, or of having avenged himself. And when the lord your god has brought my lord success, remember your servant. See, this is very similar to what's happening in chapter 24.

In chapter 24, David did not raise a hand against Saul because Saul was the lord's anointed. He talked about vengeance in the proper way. It's all in the hands of the lord, and he appealed to the lord.

Not so much in this chapter, when he is offended by Nabal. Nabal's not the anointed of the lord or anything like that. But nevertheless, his servants, his men, are innocent.

And so, David is struggling with the vengeance issue. He responded properly in chapter 24. Here in chapter 25, he's struggling with this.

He wants vengeance. He has been personally offended, but Abigail, wise Abigail, the voice of wisdom, it's almost as if lady wisdom has stepped out of the pages of Proverbs and has appeared in the flesh through Abigail to David. How is David going to respond? She's basically told him, the lord and his providence have kept you from doing something that you will really regret.

That might even compromise your position as the lord's servant. And David said to Abigail, praise be to the lord, the god of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. David understands that, yes, she is from God.

May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 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. So, David understands that the lord has helped her.

Now earlier, David took a vow. May the lord do this to me if I don't kill all of Nabal's people. So, you may be thinking, is he going to be held accountable for that? I don't think so.

I don't think the lord expects people when they make foolish vows, to complicate matters by fulfilling them. I think it's better, obedience is better than sacrifice, so to speak. Obedience is better than fulfilling a foolish vow just because it's a vow.

This explains Jephthah. Jephthah should never have followed through on his vow. I don't think the lord punished him, because he, it would have punished him if he hadn't followed through on that.

The lord didn't want a human sacrifice. He just compounded things by insisting on fulfilling his vow. So, I think David's off the hook here.

I think he does the right thing. 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.

So, all is well. Abigail goes home, and Nabal is holding a banquet like that of a king. He's in high spirits.

He's drunk. And so, she tells him nothing at this time. If you've ever tried to talk to someone who's drunk, you don't get very far.

It's hard to reason with them. Sometimes they just get angry. So she just waits.

Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things. Do you realize that you just about got slaughtered? I saved you. And his heart failed him.

And he became like a stone. Apparently, he had a stroke. And kind of went comatose.

And about ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal, and he died. So, it's pretty clear the Lord is the one who takes Nabal off the playing field. David hears that Nabal is dead.

And his attitude isn't, O, poor Nabal. He says, Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal. See, he's learned a lesson with Abigail's help.

That he himself articulated in chapter 24. In chapter 24, he says, I'm giving my just cause to the Lord. I'm trusting in him to vindicate me.

And he sees now in chapter 25, he didn't have to take matters into his own hands. Abigail intercepted him in the providence of God. And he realizes that the Lord is the one who vindicates you.

And the Lord has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. And he has kept his servant from doing wrong. And has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head.

David sees the justice in all of this. And he understands that the Lord has protected him. David then sends word to Abigail.

And asks her to become his wife. And his servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, David would like you to become his wife. And she is more than happy to do so.

She accepts and she becomes David's wife. We're told in verse 43 that David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. And they both were his wives.

So, David now has two wives. Well, what about Michael? When David had to run away. Well, Saul has given her away to someone else.

She's going to reappear in the story later. But she doesn't really count at this time. So, what do we do with this? You could view this as positive.

David has been saved, as it were, by the voice of wisdom. And now he marries the wise woman. He embraces her.

He wants this wise woman to be around him. So, he is attracted to her. He embraces the voice of wisdom.

And he marries Abigail, this wise woman. So, you could see it in a positive light. At the same time, there's always ambiguity swirling around David.

At the same time, is it a good thing to be adding another wife? And we'll talk about that more. Because as the story unfolds, and we get into 2 Samuel, we have what are called harem reports. Where we read about David's ever-growing number of wives.

So, we'll address that subject in more detail in a subsequent lesson. We'll stop here for now. Our next lesson will be 1 Samuel chapter 26. Interestingly enough, Saul's going to come after David again. And David is going to have to have another encounter with him.

This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 14, 1 Samuel 24-25. David Spares Saul's Life, Chapter 24, and David Listens to the Voice of Wisdom, 1 Samuel chapter 25.