

Today we are continuing with stories from the life of David. Today's story comes from 1 Samuel and is mostly based on the events of chapter 25, but I will be referring to things in chapters 21 through to 24 as well.

Prayer

I will pray.

David, was experiencing his time in the wilderness. As a young teenager, looking after sheep. David had been called, chosen by God to be king.

He had become famous, fighting and killing Goliath, becoming a commander in Saul's army. Being mentored, becoming a really close friend with King Saul's eldest son Jonathan. David had become famous throughout Israel. He was a real star.

But Saul was trying to kill him, not just once, but time and time again. And now David had fled for his life into the wilderness. That is not where we would expect a future king to be. But that was where he was, in the dry hill country of the Negev, that southern region of Israel. Sheep farming country. Less than 200 mm of rainfall a year. Dry, hilly, wilderness. Good for hiding, plenty of places to do that. You could survive there if you knew what you were doing. But survival seems a funny word to describe a future king.

David was destined to be king, that was his calling, that was what he would become. But now, he was having his wilderness years. God often trains leaders in the wilderness, God often provides unexpected blessing in the wilderness as well. Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus all spent time in the wilderness. And it was David's turn. God was training him in how to become a godly leader, God was going to provide him with a blessing as well.

David was not on his own. when he escaped from Saul, one of his first stops was the cave of Adullam, south of Bethlehem but north of where he was now. And when his brothers and his whanau heard he was there, they went down and joined him. Not only that, but David was also joined by all the people who were down on their luck. People who didn't fit in, people who were in debt or discontent. The vagrants and misfits, David became their leader. There were about four hundred of them to start out with. Four hundred people who didn't fit in. Now that was a real leadership challenge.

And it was a challenge that David had risen to. The years had gone by. David had learned to listen to God. He had fought the Philistines from time to time with his men. He had managed to hide from Saul when he had come with his men to try and catch him. And David had resisted killing Saul, even when he had a great opportunity to do that. David spared Saul's life. He was learning what it was like to become a good leader, and David's group was growing. Till now he had six hundred men with him.

David was near a place called Maon, which is close to Mount Carmel in that area of the wilderness. There was a really rich farmer who lived in the area. He had three thousand sheep and one thousand goats, even today we would say - that is quite a bit. Back then it meant he was loaded. And it happened to be shearing time. The time when the sheep are brought together, the wool clipped off for sale, and everyone has a party.

Now this rich farmer had an unfortunate name. Sometimes cars have unfortunate names, like General Motors calling one of their cars the Nova and then trying to sell it in Central America when "No va" in Spanish means, "It Doesn't Go".

Well this man's unfortunate name was Nabal, in some languages that meant noble, skilled, but in Hebrew, and Nabal was an Israelite, well it meant fool. And Nabal was a harsh man, he was a bully and was mean, he was a real fool.

His wife, Abigail on the other hand was his complete opposite. She was intelligent, very clever and very beautiful. How the two of them got together was a real mystery. In those days it might have been an arranged marriage, she may have married him for his money, but then regretted it afterwards. We will never know. All we know is that beautiful clever Abigail was married to rich foolish Nabal. Now David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep and was about to put on a party for his shearers and his shepherds to celebrate a really successful season.

So David sent ten of his young men off with these instructions: "Go and find approach Nabal. Greet him in my name, say to him 'Peace! Life and peace to you. Peace to your household, peace to everyone here! I heard that it's sheep-shearing time. Now when your shepherds were camped near us we didn't take advantage of them. We didn't take any sheep, even though we were living off the land. We stopped others from stealing sheep from them as well. They didn't lose a thing all the time they were with us. Talk to your shepherds, they'll confirm that I am telling you the truth. So what I'm asking is that you be generous with us—share the feast! Give whatever your heart tells you to your servants and to me, David your son.'"

Now Nabal didn't stop to think, he didn't consider what God had been doing through David, the ways that he Nabal had been blessed. Psalm 14 a psalm of David starts "The fool says in his heart, there is no God". It might have been written about Nabal, since Nabal the fool, did not think about God. He tore into those ten young men.

“Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? The country is full of runaway servants these days. Do you think I’m going to take good bread and wine and meat freshly butchered for my sheepshearers and give it to men I’ve never laid eyes on? Who knows where they’ve come from?”

David’s men went back and told David what Nabal had said. And David reacted immediately, he told his men to strap on their swords. And he headed out with four hundred men straight for Nabal's, just leaving two hundred men behind to guard his camp.

Meanwhile, back at Nabal's, one of the young shepherds had seen what had happened and he was really anxious about it, so he told Abigail, Nabal’s wife. He told her

- about David sending messengers to Nabal.

- About Nabal insulting them.

And he also told her about the way that David's men had helped them, protected them, guarded them when they were in the fields.

And that young shepherd said to Abigail. Do something quickly because big trouble is ahead for our master and all of us.

Abigail flew into action. She took a couple of hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep that had been butchered for the feast as well roasted

grain, raisin cakes, and fig cakes, and she had it all loaded on some donkeys. Then she said to her young servants, “Go ahead and pave the way for me. I’m right behind you.” But she said nothing to her husband.

As she was riding her donkey, she descending into a ravine, just as David and his men were descending from the other end. And they met there on the path in the middle. David had just been murmuring to himself, “That sure was a waste, guarding everything this man had out in the wild so that nothing he had was lost—and now he rewards me with insults. A real slap in the face! I will wipe him and his men off the face of the earth.”

As soon as Abigail saw David, she got off her donkey and fell on her knees at his feet, her face to the ground, she said, “My master, let me take the blame! Let me speak to you. Listen to what I have to say. Don’t dwell on what that brute Nabal did. He acts out the meaning of his name: Foolishness oozes from him. “I wasn’t there when the young men, you my master sent arrived. I didn’t see them. And now, you, my master, as God lives and as you live, God has kept you from this avenging murder. Now take this gift that I, your servant girl, have brought to you, my master, and give it to the young men who follow you.

“Forgive my presumption! But God is at work in you, developing a rule solid and dependable. You fight God’s battles! As long as you live no evil will stick to you.

If anyone stands in your way,
if anyone tries to get you out of the way,
Know this: Your God-honored life is tightly bound
in the bundle of God-protected life;
But the lives of your enemies will be hurled aside
as a stone is thrown from a sling.

“When God completes all the goodness he has promised you and sets you up as prince over Israel, you will not have this dead weight in your heart, the guilt of an avenging murder. And when God has worked things for good for you, my master, remember me.”

And David said, “Blessed be God, the God of Israel. He sent you to meet me! And blessed be your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and taking charge of looking out for me. A close call! As God lives, the God of Israel who kept me from hurting you, if you had not come as quickly as you did, stopping me in my tracks, by morning there would have been nothing left of Nabal but dead meat.”

Then David accepted the gift she brought him and said, “Return home in peace. I’ve heard what you’ve said and I’ll do what you’ve asked.”

When Abigail got home she found Nabal in the middle of a huge banquet, the tables were loaded with food, and the wine was flowing. There was so much food they hadn't even missed what Abigail had taken. Nabal was feasting like a king and he was in party mode. He was really drunk, totally wasted. So Abigail didn't bother trying to tell him anything about what she had done. In the morning, after Nabal had sobered up, that was when Abigail told him the whole story. Right then and there Nabal had a heart attack and fell into a coma. About ten days later God finished him off and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead he said, “Blessed be God who has stood up for me against Nabal’s insults, kept me from an evil act, and let Nabal’s evil rebound back on him.”

Then David sent for Abigail he courted her, and asked her to marry him.

Abigail was overcome, and replied, "I'm your servant, ready to do anything you want. I'll even wash the feet of my master's servants!" And she got on her donkey and, with her five maids with her, went with the messengers to David and became his wife.

What I find interesting in this story are the people and the choices they made. Nabal, he was a selfish, ungrateful rich fool. He feasted like a king himself, and he returned the good David had done with evil, denying the future king anything to eat. Nabal didn't deny David food because he was running short, he did it on principle. Because he was selfish and could only see what was in front of him. Nabal really knew how to insult people and get them worked up, and because of what he had said and how he had said it, Nabal nearly provoked David into crossing the line.

What would have happened to David becoming king if he had killed Nabal and all the people in his household, they were all Israelites as well. There would have been blood on David's hands.

But God kept David safe. And he did that through an unnamed shepherd, who kept Abigail in the loop, letting her know what was going on.

And God worked through Abigail herself. What a clever, astute, godly woman, even though she was married to an idiot and was spending her life in the wilderness.

God used her to save the lives of her entire household. God used her to be a blessing to David. God used her to keep David safe.

Then God took Nabal's life, and that meant that something unexpected happened. Abigail was released so she could marry David with a clear conscience.

For David, this story was a real lesson in trusting God. That God was out there looking after him. That he did not need to take revenge on those who insulted him. That God would give him wise advice through others, through women. And at that time and culture, that was unexpected.

Now none of us are likely to be like Nabal. The rich, selfish fool.

But we do come across people like him from time to time. People who just know how to press our buttons and insult us in ways that we find frustrating.

And this story advises us, that when we do come across people like him, we can do our bit to minimise the harm that they are causing. That is what that unnamed shepherd did, he wasn't in a position of power, but he knew Abigail was, so he let her know. He did his bit. it was essential - even though we don't know his name.

And then Abigail took action with what she had power and control over. Stopping a disaster from happening, but doing it with things we have control over, talking to people who can make a difference. That is a good path to follow.

And the story also advises us to keep our copybook clean. To not step over the line, and do something we will regret later. To listen to advice.

Since we might be in the wilderness, and feel like we are miles away from what God has called us to be.

But God is there in the wilderness with us. God is there looking out for us. God is helping us and giving us lessons to learn. God is active and at work in the wilderness.

David's response to what happened was to say

“Blessed be God who has stood up for me against Nabal’s insults, kept me from an evil act, and let Nabal’s evil rebound back on him.”

That is what God did. That is what God does.

Let us pray.