

1st Samuel

Lesson 50

(2) David Swears to Saul's Promise (24:22)

In David's nature, David swears to Saul's promise. Verse 22.

"David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold." (24:22)

Home for Saul was in Gibeah. Home for David was there, too, at least at this point in his life because that is where his first wife lived. It is interesting that David could not call Bethlehem home because his parents were in Moab for safety. In addition, David had over six hundred men and their families to care for in the meantime. So David and his men returned to live in the stronghold at the Rocks of the Wild Goats, at least for now. We have not said it thus far in this commentary, but a stronghold is almost always a cave, a natural place of protection from the elements of nature.

More music flowed from David at this time in his life. Worship in song with him.

For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time he fled from Saul and went into the cave. To be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy!" 1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. 2 I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. 3 He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me. Interlude My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness. 4 I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey—whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the earth. 6 My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress. They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it. Interlude 7 My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises! 8 Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song. 9 I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. 10 For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth. (Psalm 57).

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy!" 1 Justice—do you rulers know the meaning of the word? Do you judge the people fairly? 2 No! You plot injustice in your hearts. You spread violence throughout the land. 3 These wicked people are born sinners; even from birth they have lied and gone their own way. 4 They spit venom like deadly snakes; they are like cobras that refuse to listen, 5 ignoring the tunes of the snake charmers, no matter how skillfully they play. 6 Break off their fangs, O God! Smash the jaws of these lions, O LORD! 7 May they disappear like water into thirsty ground. Make their weapons useless in their hands. 8 May they be like snails that dissolve into slime, like a stillborn child who will never see the sun. 9 God will sweep them away, both young and old, faster than a pot heats over burning thorns. 10 The godly will rejoice when they see injustice avenged. They will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked. 11 Then at last everyone will say, "There truly is a reward for those who live for God; surely there is a God who judges justly here on earth." (Psalm 58)

A psalm of David, regarding a time when David was in the wilderness of Judah. 1 O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. 2 I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. 3 Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! 4 I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. 5 You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. 6 I lie awake thinking of you,

meditating on you through the night. 7 Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. 8 I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely. 9 But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin. They will go down into the depths of the earth. 10 They will die by the sword and become the food of jackals. 11 But the king will rejoice in God. All who swear to tell the truth will praise him, while liars will be silenced. (Psalm 63)

Chapter 25

C. The Story of the Memorial of the Prophet Samuel (25:1)

For the time, all was well between Saul and David. It was the perfect conclusion to the long personal conflict stirred wholly by Saul. With peace between the two, no doubt orchestrated by the LORD, it was time for a death to occur, the death of Samuel. We come to the story of the memorial of the prophet Samuel. Chapter 25, verse 1.

“Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.” (25:1)

The calm in the nation of Israel had to be designed by the LORD. If the conflict had continued, who would attend the memorial, Saul or David? Samuel was beyond instrumental in both their lives. But with the calm, both were able to attend. After the service was completed, the writer tells us that David *“went down to the wilderness of Paran.”* Why? We simply do not know. The one thing we do know is this, for Israel had remained safe from the surrounding nations for many decades as the nation of Israel with Samuel the Prophet. Now, things have changed with the death of one man, one father, one Levite, one priest, one judge, and one prophet, Samuel. It would now be the nation of Israel without Samuel the prophet.

II. The Nation of Israel Without Samuel the Prophet (25:2-31:13)

A. The Story of the Marriages of David (25:2-44)

1. David's Third Marriage

a) David Sends Men to Nabal to Ask for Help (25:2-8)

The nation of Israel is now without Samuel as their prophet, judge, and priest. How long will Israel continue without Samuel until David becomes king? The writer did not tell us when Samuel died in the timeline of Saul's reign as king; however, if all the remaining passages in this book happen just as written, and all the passages fill up the remaining time with all the major events in order, the writer gives us a clue in chapter 27. Let us set the scene and summarize what will occur in the rest of the book. After the funeral service for Samuel, Saul went home to Gibeah, and David went back to the stronghold south of Maon with his six hundred men. David has not seen his wife since she helped him out the window in Gibeah to run from Saul more than a year before. David has had events where he was joined by forces supporting him. First came four hundred men. Second, came two hundred men. They are still with him. Down south, where David and his men are camped, the men are hungry, and David will send men to a man named Nabal to ask for supplies. We will learn how that will go in the rest of this chapter. David will take two more wives during this time. Then, Saul will break his promise to David and travel with troops to where David is living in chapter 26. David will once again spare Saul's life, but in reality, he chastises Saul's guard for not protecting the king. Saul will return home, and David will move with his men to the Philistine area, specifically Gath, where Achish is still the king in chapter 27. The last time David was in the presence of Achish, to survive, he had to pretend to be a madman. This time, Achish will accept David. David will establish himself with Achish and go out to war at times against non-Israelites. Because of his kindness to Achish, David is awarded the town of Ziklag, and David and his men settle there to live. Then, the Philistines will plan an attack against Saul at Gilboa. As the Philistines move out, Achish wants David to go with him. Arriving near Gilboa, the rest of the

Philistines forbid David to fight with them. They are afraid he will attack them from behind when they are attacking Saul in front. David and his men are sent back home. Arriving at home, David will find a horrible scene as we will discover. Nevertheless, the writer tells us that from the time David arrived in Gath to be with Achish until he and his men were sent away from the camp near Gilboa was one year and four months (27:7). With that as the case, working backward, Samuel probably died about two years before the death of Saul and the crowning of David as king. Two years is an estimate, but it is surely not far off. It may have been three years, but that would be stretching it unless the writers have left out some major events. Two years is more plausible.

Continuing in this chapter, the writer tells us the story of the marriages of David. He begins with David's third marriage. We will not learn of David's second marriage until after the story of the third marriage is concluded. The encounter that leads to this third marriage begins when David sends men to Nabal to ask for help. Chapter 25, verse 2.

"Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel³ (~~now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite~~),⁴ that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.⁵ So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name;⁶ and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.'⁷ Now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel.⁸ Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.'⁹" (25:2-8)

David and his men were camped just south of Maon; Carmel was about a mile north of Maon. He raised sheep and goats. With three thousand sheep, he was wealthy because of the income he made from the wool sheared from his sheep each year. Carmel was larger than Maon and a place where he could shear the sheep and sell the wool. Only being a mile away, it was easier to drive the sheep one mile and shear them in Carmel than to shear them in Maon and transport the wool. Nabal allowed his sheep to carry the load on the hoof instead of transporting by cart and oxen.

Even though Nabal seemed to be a successful and wise businessman to become wealthy from his own business, his name does not indicate that he was wise. The name Nabal means *fool*. It was probably not his real name. As we have seen many times in the Scripture so far, the Israelites loved to give nicknames to people and places. He acted extremely foolish in his transaction with David and his men, and for that reason, he was forever recorded in the Word of God as a *fool*. As we continue to see Nabal's story, we should note not to be the same kind of fool as he.

David has sent ten of Nabal's own young shepherds to ask for Nabal's help. These men have fallen in with David in some way at some time. Perhaps they joined David with the rest of his men as they were returning from Samuel's funeral service. One note about that for which we might include here. Samuel would have been buried on the day he died before sunset. This tradition became the norm for health reasons, to protect the family and neighbors from the decaying body since embalming was not done in those days in Israel. However, a memorial service would have been announced, and a designated time of mourning would have been observed, usually thirty days. Even for the death of a wife or a husband, a time of mourning was held sacred (Genesis 38:12). For a public figure, during those thirty days, there was a limit on the distance a person could travel, the foods they could eat, and the work that they were allowed to do. The memorial of a ruler or great leader became the custom in Israel; however, it was not at the direction of the LORD; it was simply a developed custom of Israel that they brought back from Egypt. In Egypt, it was the law. Be that as it may, the shearing of the sheep may have been postponed until the memorial time was over, and the work of Nabal's sheep was limited to the required watch care to keep the sheep in the herd, but

little else. With that being a plausible possibility, Nabal's young men more than likely fell in with David's men in the downtime.

Notice that we are skipping over verse 3. Notice it is in parenthesis. The editors of our Bible are telling us using the parenthesis that this information is not in the oldest and most reliable copies of the Hebrew text. However, by using the parenthesis, the editors also tell us that this information is found somewhere else in the Scripture. Therefore, we will handle the information as it comes to us in the proper place.

In asking for help from Nabal, David told the men to say to him, "*now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel.*" Let us translate this information for ease of understanding. The ten shepherds whom David sent to Nabal at Carmel lived with David and his men in the strongholds south of Maon. However, every day they were faithfully going to work for Nabal, whether at the fields in Maon or at the shearing station in Carmel. They had not missed a moment of work and completed all that Nabal expected of his hired workforce. David even encourages the ten to ask Nabal to seek witnesses to their testimony among his other workers to verify their faithfulness to Nabal.

The day David sends them is a festive day, and the young men were instructed to remind Nabal of that fact. In other words, it was the last day of the shearing work, which brought great joy to Nabal and all the workers. Shearing in those days was extremely difficult work for the shepherds and herders, much harder than the routine of shepherding the flock. It was the most laborious and difficult part of the job.

Almost all the other scholars state that a festival day was always planned at the end of the shearing time, and the owner was always quite generous at the time. They use 2 Samuel 13:23-24 as their basis for that position. But reading that text, I cannot come to the same conclusion. My understanding of this passage is that the last day of the shearing was a day of great joy because the hardest work of the whole year of caring for sheep was done.

David sent the ten men who were employed by Nabal on the last day to ask for help. Most scholars also take the position that David felt that he was entitled to a share in Nabal's windfall. I do not see that in this passage. Here is why. When Samuel died, David and his men went to the funeral and then back to the camp at the Rocks of the Wild Goats. David had more than six hundred men to feed. One of the reasons he stayed at the Rocks of the Wild Goats was because of the goat meat available there. However, feeding six hundred men each day required an unbelievable amount of food. Take one goat, for example. The average goat weighs about eighty-eight pounds. However, once the hide was removed and the parts that were not edible, mainly the bones and bladder for ancient cultures, did not waste any of the rest, about seventy-five pounds of food was left. In David's day, it was common around the world that they ate only one meal per day and it was at the end of the afternoon before dark. However, in mid-morning, for a short break, roasted grain would be eaten to give a little energy boost. If, at mealtime, each man ate four ounces of meat along with bread and drink, which would have been the norm, seventy-five pounds of raw goats' meat would render down to about fifty pounds of meat when cooked. Each pound of cooked meat is sixteen ounces. At four ounces of meat per man as a ration, sixteen ounces would feed four men. Fifty pounds would feed about two hundred men. Therefore, it would take three average goats to feed six hundred men each day. Along with that, bread would need to be added to the meal. It took a pound of flour to make a pound of bread. Comparing the bread to our normal biscuits today, each biscuit is about two ounces of flour. If each man were rationed one biscuit, six hundred biscuits would be needed, twelve hundred ounces of bread per day, or seventy-five pounds of flour. Where did David store enough flour to feed six hundred men per day, month, and year? Let us just put it per month. Each month required nine hundred pounds of flour. In addition, each month required ninety goats. How many goats lived at the Rocks of the Wild Goats. My point in saying all of this is

that David and his men had to continue to move from place to place to find natural food sources for the six hundred men. They were not working the land as a farm, and unlike all the rest of the families in Israel, they were on the run. When David and his men went to the funeral of Samuel, the whole process of collecting and storing food stopped. Once stopped, it takes time to get the process going again. When David sent the ten men to Nabal, his men had to be starving. David only asked for help to feed the men. As we will see, the food resources at the Rocks of Wild Goats must have been running out because David will move his men to the land of the Philistines soon.

b) Nabal Rejects the Request of David and His Men (25:9-13)

The writer tells us next that Nabal rejects the request of David and his men. Verse 9.

"When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David's name; then they waited. ¹⁰ But Nabal answered David's servants and said, 'Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. ¹¹ Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?' ¹² So David's young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words. ¹³ David said to his men, 'Each of you gird on his sword.' So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage." (25:9-13)

I want you to notice that Nabal knew exactly who David was and accused him of breaking away from King Saul's service. Who is David to do such a thing and then expect help from someone who is not responsible for David and his men? Saul was the responsible person David should have gone to for help. Yes, at the end of the shearing day, Nabal fed his men. He probably fed them every day they were at the shearing station. No doubt Nabal knew how much food he needed to prepare each day to feed his men at the end of each day. By the last shearing day, Nabal would have had the menu down pat. He asks a good question of the ten men. Let us rephrase it. Why should Nabal take the food he prepared that day for his men and give it to David and his men? Why should he send his men home hungry, giving what he had prepared for them to others? He makes an excellent point.

Notice, if you will, that Nabal's menu for his men was water, bread, and meat. What is strange about that? Nabal did not offer his men wine as was most common with meals in those days. Wine would have had to be transported to the shearing site if it would be part of the meal, and it was not. This point also gives us a clue to the purpose of the meal that day. Had the meal been a festival day, wine would have been brought in. It is not a festival day; it is just a day of joy that the work was done and the men were fed before turning in for the day. The absence of wine signifies that this meal was just a regular, normal meal.