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Nabal Offends David
First Samuel 25: 1-13

DIG: What do Nabal and Sha'ul have in common? How might this story be a "parable" of Sha'ul's relationship with David? Why did David respond so violently? What breach of diplomacy or oriental cultural values is he reacting to? Why did David seek to kill Nabal? Why did he react so differently with Sha'ul (First Samuel 24:4)? Why was Nabal's response so obtuse? What were David's motives in guarding Nabal's possessions?

REFLECT: What does it mean that God is the writer and producer of our life's play? When someone dies (like Samuel), how do people talk and act differently about that person compared to when the person was alive? Samuel put the concerns of YHVH ahead of the politics of the day. What are some of the politics in your workplace, your place of worship, or government? How can you put the concerns of ADONAI first?

1013 BC

The Death of Samuel: **Now Samuel died. His death** marked the end of an era. **A public mourning was held, the whole nation assembling to do honor to the one who had spent his life in the service of his people and guided them through one of the most critical transitions in their history. He** was the last judge in the book of **Judges** and a transitional character between the period of the judges and the period of the monarchy. **He** was between 92 and 96 years old when **he died**. **All Isra'el assembled and mourned for him. The people of Isra'el** didn't always obey **Samuel** when **he** was alive, but **they** were careful to honor **him** when **he died**. **And they buried him in** the modest courtyard of **his home in Ramah (First Samuel 25:1a).**

Nabal and Abigail: **David** was hold up in the stronghold of Masada when **Samuel died (First Samuel 24:22). He** knew it would be dangerous for **him** to attend the funeral at **Ramah** because **Sha'ul** would have **his** spies there so **he moved down into Ma'on,** a cone-shaped hill about seven miles south of Hebron, which was, and

still is, sheep-rearing country. **Carmel** was a village in the same area **(First Samuel 15:12)**. **David** had shown **his** love and respect for **Samuel** while **the prophet** was alive, so there was no need for **him** to make a public appearance. **A certain man in Ma'on, who had property there at Carmel** of **Y'hudah. Nabal was a very wealthy man,** but **he was** not a **very** generous **man (First Samuel 25:1b-2a).**[142]

Nabal had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, the way **wealth** was measured in those days, **which he was shearing in Carmel.** This was normally a time of feasting where **the wealthy** would show hospitality to the less fortunate. Common courtesy would certainly dictate that **Nabal** invite **David** and **his men** to share **his** food during the festive season. **His name was Nabal** (Hebrew: *foolish*, which indicates that it was not **his** given name, but an acquired name as a result of **his** lack of character)**. And his wife's name was Abigail** (Hebrew: *My divine Father is joy*)**.** Therefore, the contrast between **Nabal** and **Abigail** could scarcely be more stark. **She was a woman of good understanding and beautiful** besides**, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings – he was of the house of Caleb (First Samuel 25:2b-3). He** was of noble origin, but **he** was not of noble character.

David's Request of Nabal: While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. It wouldn't be easy to feed 600 men in the wilderness, **so he sent ten young men** (anticipating carrying back a large donation) **and** said: **Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him** with a three-fold **shalom in my name. Say to him, "Long life and shalom to you, shalom to your household and shalom to everything that is yours. Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us** (grazing in the very territory controlled by **David**)**, 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."** In short, **David** was a good neighbor. Instead of allowing **his men** to take liberties with the available livestock or to use their superior armed strength to intimidate and exploit the people nearby, **David's men** protected the innocent who were around **them**. **They** respected property. **They** lived out Rabbi Sha'ul's teaching to the believers in Galatia: **As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).** Far from the natural expectation that a certain amount of loss was inevitable from having a large roving band in the region, **Nabal's** property was unusually preserved so that **his** gain was increased.

Therefore be favorable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them. David's request was humble – even naming himself as **your son David** – and it was reasonable, asking for some provisions at a time when **Nabal** enjoyed enormous abundance. With all this in mind, **David** must have sent **his men** with the expectation of a friendly and generous response. After all, **he** was not dealing with Canaanites, but fellow Israelites, not only that, even fellow **Judeans**![143] **David** was even quite willing to accept whatever **Nabal** had to offer. **So when David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited** quietly, waiting for the invitation **(First Samuel 25:4-9).**



Nabal's Refusal: But **Nabal** had no intention of sharing **his** produce with the riff-raff commanded by **David**. **He** knew perfectly well who **David** was and had no time for runaway **servants**. **Nabal answered David's servants** and began with an insult: **Who is this David: Who is the son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.** This was not true of **David himself**, but it was true of some of **David's** men. This insult led to **Nabal's** refusal. **Why should *I* take *my* bread and water** (the most basic food and drink)**, and the meat *I* have slaughtered for *my* shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where (First Samuel 25:10-11). Nabal** didn't merely refuse to offer any hospitality, **he** also chose to insult **David**. Ironically, **Nabal** stubbornly refused to see what **his** own **servants** had accepted, namely, that **David** was on **his** way to becoming king.[144]

What led **Nabal** to be so stingy with **his** possessions? Look above and see how many times ***I*** and ***my*** occur. We are reminded of **the rich fool** in **Yeshua's** parable, who spoke so constantly in the first person that **he** only had **himself** to talk to: **Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build up bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain." And I'll say**

to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." The problem was, as **Messiah** pointed out, that **his** own life didn't even belong to **him**, much less **his** possessions: **But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."** The sting of the words lies, however, not in the announcement that **he** must die, but in the following question, which clearly shows the real poverty of **his** life. **He** is lonely and friendless in the midst of **his** vast wealth. **Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:18-21).** The phrase **rich toward God** is a synonym for **treasures in heaven. David** said: **The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1)**, therefore, in effect, that's what **Nabal** was saying. **He** had left **God** out of the picture.

David's Threat: David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. But **David** did not inquire of the Urim and the Thummim as **he** had done previously (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Gb – The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**). **His** immediate reaction to this rebuff was quick and harsh. **David said to his men, "Each of you strap on your sword!" So they did, and David strapped his on as well. David** was prepared to act forcibly and, if necessary, violently. **He** did not flinch from the prospect of shedding blood. **About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. They** were not considered inferior in any way and would expect to share in whatever plunder would be seized **(First Samuel 25:12-13).**

David was on the verge of committing a sin that would have cast a dark shadow upon his whole life. Nabal's reaction really got to him. Have you ever thought like that? Your kindness has been met by harshness, your service has been unrecognized, and your motives have been misrepresented. If truth be told, your patience has run out!

Can you picture **David's** blazing temper? Muttering to **himself, "It's been useless – all my watching over this fellow's property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good" (First Samuel 25:21). David! David!** What's wrong with **you**? One of the most wonderful things we have learned about **yo**u recently is your patience with **Sha'ul**. You learned to wait upon **the LORD**, you refused to lift your hand against **ADONAI's** anointed, although **he** had been your enemy for many, many years. But now, look at you! Your restraint has gone to pieces and a few insulting words from a

fool of a man like **Nabal** has made you see red! **David** . . . what's the matter?

"**I** am justified in doing this," **David** would reply. "There's no reason why **Nabal** should treat **me** like this. **He** has repaid all my kindness with insults. **I** will show **him** he can't mess with **me**. It is one thing to take it from **Sha'ul**, who is my superior at this point, but this sort of **man** – this arrogant individual must be taught a lesson!"

Has that ever been your reaction? Doesn't it expose something that ought to make us embarrassed in the presence of **Ha'Shem**? For this is the chronic sinfulness of the human heart, even when renewed by grace. Does it now show beyond a shadow of a doubt that I cannot stand against the Adversary unless **the Lord** upholds me moment by moment? This story tells me that however long I have been saved, no matter how often I may have overcome one temptation or another, no matter how many times I have defeated sin in one area of my life, it can strike in another area and crush me in a moment. I am not talking about salvation here (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**), but sanctification: **Being conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29b)**. The victories that I win, through the grace of **YHVH**, the blood of **Jesus** and the power of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, cannot give me strength in the future. No spiritual triumph in my life can give me the power to resist the devil the next time he comes calling. I must abide in **Messiah** moment by moment.[145]

Lord**, keep me, hold me, and let me abide in **You**. **Jesus**, I can't do it alone. It's not so much that I hold onto **You**, but that **You** hold on to me. Thank **You** for that. It seems like I fail all the time. **I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do . . . Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me . . . Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:19b-25).