

I Samuel

Lesson 39 - Chapter 24 and 25

In 1st Samuel chapter 24 is one of the more famous Bible stories that speaks of the incident when David cut off a piece of King Saul's robe at a time when he could just as easily killed him, ended his status as a fugitive, and probably taken the throne of Israel for himself. But he chose otherwise.

Let me reiterate the significance of that choice: by deciding not to take matters into his own hands, and instead allowing God to carry out whatever His plan in regards to Israel's government and David's life, many future questions of royal succession and of the role of the divine in establishing Israel's kingly line were answered in the best possible way. This flies right over our modern Western heads because we are not a tribal-based society; but they were.

The longer I live, and the more I travel to other nations and get to know other cultures, the more I understand that God works within the realities and limitations of human existence including the diverse nature of the hundreds of cultures that our planet's population has divided itself into. It's been the Church's unwillingness to accept this attribute of Yehoveh that has caused so much dissention among Believers and driven many away from Christ and into the hands of false religion. Especially the Western Church (that has been the dominant portion of the Church for the past 1000 years or so) has come to inherently believe that the manifestations of God within our Western cultural norms are the ONLY legitimate manifestations and all else are to be ignored or outright rejected.

But the Scriptures show us that The Creator made humans for His own good reasons, divinely caused the human race to divide and form a myriad of isolated populations and societies, and in doing so automatically created constraints and complexities around HOW the redemptive process could even operate. The very nature of our humanity limits possibilities, and also elevates every probability that most of the time we'll actually be in opposition to the Lord. In some miraculous unfathomable way, however, the perfect Father works with the imperfections of humanity to achieve His will without steamrolling right over the top of us. But He does it differently within different cultures.

Talk to any missionary who has operated in the remotest reaches of this earth and they'll tell you stories of how the Lord worked within some primitive culture to demonstrate His truth and His glory in ways that those native to that culture could recognize; ways that seemed so strange, so alien, to anything that missionary knew (or that we know) up until they personally witnessed it. Ways that were at times more frightening than odd, ways that at first seemed almost wrong rather than merely different or unexpected.

Thus when we delve deeper into the historical books of the Bible, and especially the time of the Kings of Israel, realize that Yehoveh (at His own choice) is operating within a Middle Eastern

tribal culture in ways that they can understand and recognize, even if it seems troubling for us. So it was critically important that HOW David achieved the throne was accomplished in a manner that Israelites (and others) in David's day and later on could see as legitimate and God orchestrated rather than as the clever result of the plans of a powerful man.

Let's re-read a portion of chapter 24 to refresh our memories.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 24: 8 – end

Nothing could have been more normal and usual and considered utterly acceptable, than for a man to kill his enemy if given the opportunity. That David did NOT kill Saul and further ordered his men not to even bother this evil king, goes against all convention and logic. Thus when David, at a safe distance, reveals himself to Saul and waves the cut-off piece of the King's hem in the air, Saul is stupefied and almost speechless. David is allowed to offer quite a lengthy speech to the king and he listens in stunned silence. David really didn't have to say too much for the King to understand that as of this moment he ought to be dead.

David explains (pleads actually) for Saul to finally understand that David is not his enemy. In fact in verse 11 David calls Saul, "My father". We need to see that this is very Middle Eastern language and thought that is being expressed. But it also helps us in understanding the language of the New Testament as Yeshua speaks of Yehoveh as His **abba**, His father, and as the Father speaks of Yeshua as His **ben**, His son. David is in no way setting Saul on par with his true biological father Yishai. That Saul was also legally David's father-in-law also plays somewhat of a role.

The father-son relationship of Biblical Middle Easterners is very similar to how it still is today; the father holds supreme family authority and esteem and his son is on a lower level of status. Whatever measure of authority the son has is given to him by his father and it can be revoked at any time. The father's supreme authority never ends until the father's death. In the West for an older man to call a younger man his son (or vice versa) is mostly a statement of endearment, it's about affection. In the East for a younger man to call an older man his father involves equal parts affection and submission. In the East the younger man who is "as a son" is under the authority of the man who "is as a father" to him. It is understood that the father figure looks out for what he sees as the best interests of his son; but the father figure is also revered, wiser, holds more power, acts as judge, and generally lords over the son. This is what David was meaning when he yelled, "My father" to Saul.

In verse 12 is some more typical Oriental thought; David is calling on Yehoveh to be the judge, the **Shophet**, in the dispute between them (the judge in ancient thought was also the one who wrought the punishment). In other words David is saying that whatever wrong Saul **may** have done towards David that David is satisfied to leave it with God to determine if and how any wrong occurred, and if it did should it be avenged. But David also states that he would not be a participant in exacting revenge even if it was called for. It is a way of saying, "I forgive you" to Sha'ul; however by saying it in the manner he did it saves face for Saul to not be spoken to in terms of forgiveness (which would have automatically indicated that David judged the King of Israel as guilty). A "son" has no right to judge his "father", but the father does have the right to

judge the son. Thus David's insistence that YHWH be the judge between them.

Further David quotes what must have been an ancient proverb: "out of the wicked comes forth wickedness", and then he goes on to say that no matter what the situation that he would not lay a hand of harm upon Saul. This is not a Biblical proverb, but the point is well understood; it is that deeds express dispositions. If David was a wicked man then it is self-evident that Saul would have already been a dead man. Therefore that David didn't harm Saul is de facto proof that David was not the wicked man that Saul thought him to be.

To further make his point that he is more than willing to submit to Saul (based, of course, on the understanding that Saul recognizes David as a son and not an enemy); David wonders why the great king would lower himself to chase after a "dead dog" like David. This is merely an expression of ultimate self-debasement; David is holding himself up as insignificant in importance as compared to Saul.

After David's long speech, it's Saul's turn. Saul is genuinely affected by David's actions and words. So in verse 16 the king responds, "Is this your voice, **my son** David?" Again, while some amount of affection is being expressed by calling David "my son", it is done from a position of superiority and authority. It is a kind of acceptance to David's request for Saul to be David's "father". But one must also see that tears can flow as a result of self-pity as easily as from repentance. I think we can discern without much difficulty which of those two possible causes for Saul's weeping is relevant in this case. Yet even so the emotionally volatile king admits to David that David is more righteous than he. In Hebrew righteous is **tzaddik**, and surprisingly this is the first use of this term in the book of Samuel. We must see this as the impact it was on ancient readers. Samuel was the most revered holy man among all 12 tribes in this era. He was so revered that we'll find reference to him in the New Testament and even placed nearly on par with Moses. The term **tzaddik**, righteous, wasn't even applied to the great Samuel but here it is applied to David.

Remembering that David is the shadow and type of the future Messiah this is quite an interesting epithet to bestow on David, and especially from the mouth of the anti-King. It is truly a prophetic nugget. Then Saul continues by quoting an ancient proverb of his own: "If a man finds his enemy, will he let him go unharmed?" Only someone who truly fears the God of Israel would behave in such a manner.

Saul then admits what Jonathan had already told David about his father: Sha'ul knows that David is going to be king over Israel. The words also mean that David's dynasty will be established; his offspring (the house of David) will rule after David is gone. And because Saul understands this, and due to the bloody custom of a new king who gains the throne by deposing the former one of killing the former king and all of his family, Saul asks David to promise not to kill Saul's children. When Saul asks David to not blot out his name from his father's family it means to not bring a complete end to Saul's bloodlines. That was considered an absolute horror to the ancient mind (even to a Hebrew) because that meant that King Saul's spiritual essence would end if there were no blood descendants in whom it would carry forward.

David swears this to Saul (and we see David true to his word when after he is king he hunts for any of Saul's descendants to show mercy to and finds the disabled Mephibosheth whom he brings to his own home).

The two men parted. But in reality, nothing has changed. David removed himself and his men back to En Gedi and Saul to Gibeah. David knew all too well King Saul's up and down emotions and that his words could not be trusted. Given a little time to think things over, the King would soon revert to his paranoia and homicidal self interest.

Let's move on the chapter 25.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 25 all

This is a story about David being saved from himself by a very good and righteous woman named Avigayil. It is interesting to me how regularly the Bible elevates women; it is significant because in the typical Oriental society women were little more valuable than cattle. The God of Israel would tolerate no such attitude among His people.

The narrative begins by announcing the death of Samuel. This is important because first it establishes a time frame for when David moved from En Gedi to the wilderness of Paran. And second because with the passing of Samuel all hope for peace between David and Saul has passed with him. Samuel was a transformational character who also bridged the divide of loyalties among the various tribal coalitions. There was no other single man since Joshua's death who held the respect of all 12 tribes and whose authority was honored by all Israel. Even Saul feared him.

Samuel was buried in his hometown of Ramah; in fact you can go to visit Samuel's tomb to this day just minutes outside of Jerusalem.

Some of your Bibles may say that David went to Ma'on, not Paran. Paran is taken from the Hebrew texts, Ma'on from the Greek. There is no reason to alter Paran to Ma'on as some ancient editor apparently did. Paran is to the southeast side of the Dead Sea, on the Arabian Peninsula. En Gedi was too easily within reach of King Saul, thus the move.

The scene of this important story is set in verse 2. A fellow who was currently in Ma'on had a thriving business in Carmel. He was very wealthy and this is expressed by the 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats he possessed. This is not Mt. Carmel up in the north (the place where visitors go today). This Carmel was in the territory of Judah. It was here that Saul had erected a monument to himself to memorialize his victory over Amalek.

David had likely met this wealthy man while he and his 600 men were camped out on the outskirts of Ma'on some months earlier. That his flocks were so enormous meant that they were moved all over Judah in the constant search for fresh pasture and sufficient water. But it was in Carmel where the sheep were taken for sheering and where he would sell and trade the wool. This man's name was **Nabal** and his wife was **Avigayil**.

Now **Nabal** means fool, disgraceful, a person without godly wisdom. Obviously no parent would give their child such a name, and no man would allow himself to be addressed as such. Thus like so many other names we'll find in the Bible this was more an epithet given to that person well after the fact than the person's actual given name. The purpose was to describe this man's character, which of course also identifies his role in the story. His wife's name, **Avigayil**, means my father is joy, or my father is delighted. So the contrast is drawn; Nabal and Avigayil are opposites. The husband is everything that God detests, the woman everything that God values.

Then in verse 3 we learn that Nabal belonged to the clan of Kalev, Caleb. This is the same Caleb who, along with Joshua, scouted out the Promised Land when Moses was still leading Israel and came back with a good report about the land and urged Moses to take it. The other 10 men who accompanied them said that while the land was indeed wonderful in all respects it was populated with fierce people and that to try to take the land was suicidal. The result was that God cursed these refugees from Egypt and sent them back out into the desert until the 1st generation of the Exodus died off. The exceptions were Joshua and Caleb.

Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim; Caleb was of the tribe of Judah. However we also learned that Caleb's clan mixed itself with the Kennezeitites (a Canaanite tribe) and so there was always some friction between Caleb's and the several other clans that formed the tribe of Judah. The clan of Caleb was assigned the area in and around Hebron if they could capture it from the Canaanites who held it. The area was especially beautiful and fertile, perfect for growing crops and raising animals. This conquest wasn't accomplished until Kalev's younger half-brother Othniel led some men in battle and took the city of Hebron for the clan. After all these years (at least 3 centuries) we find here in Samuel that the clan of Caleb was still holding the area of Hebron, as Nabal was of this clan and this is the general area that is at the center of our story.

Verse 4 explains that David heard that the sheep sheering of Nabal's flocks had begun. David was in the Paran wilderness when word reached him. This wouldn't have been unexpected news for the former Shepherd; sheep sheering would have been going on pretty much throughout Canaan. So David dispatched 10 trusted men to go to Nabal at his sheering operation in Carmel. We'll talk about the significance of the number 10 in due time, but let me point out that a group of 10 men is generally called a **minyan**. It is a proper number, an ideal minimum, of men to form a congregation.

David sends a message with these men, and of course it contains typical Middle Eastern greetings and polite banter. Three times the men are to wish shalom over Nabal and his family. This is VERY friendly, an abundance of good will. But contained within the message is a request for supplies as a gift for David and his small community. It somewhat reminds us of the Godfather movie when the mobster would walk into a shop, be cordial and effusive in praise, and ask the business owner for something to be given to him. It may have sounded like a request for a favor or a blessing, but in reality it was a demand and all parties understood that. It was something that could not be refused without dire consequences. The mobster's view was that he was "protecting" the shopkeeper and so the shopkeeper "owed" his protectors something in return for their services. Nabal was being strong armed (despite all the courteous sounding flattery) and he knew it, and he didn't like it. He was a powerful man of a powerful

clan. He wasn't used to being treated in such a manner.

The Hebrew word for sheep sheering is **gozezim**; **gozezim** is the shepherd's equivalent of the harvest and threshing season. Thus we read in verse 8 that this was a "festive day". In Hebrew it is **yom tov** (a good day). So this wasn't a religious feast day (it wasn't one of the 7 Biblical Festivals), but it was a day of joy and partying and drinking wine that celebrated the "harvest" of wool. David's 10 men were essentially unwelcome party crashers.

After David's men delivered their message, they sat down and waited for the clan leader's response. It was not what they expected, to say the least. Nabal was offended by such a brazen demand, all the polite talk aside. "Who is this David, this son of Yishai?" he asks. This is a rhetorical question, of course, that basically means "how dare he make such a demand". Nabal is rich and important; Yishai is David's clan and is a rival clan to Nabal's, the clan of Caleb. Nabal's viewpoint is that even if David and his men had helped his shepherds in some way that it was certainly never asked for. Further he insults David personally by characterizing him as a slave who has escaped from his master.

David's men take Nabal's response to David and the result is predictable: David loses his temper. He tells his men to put on their swords and prepare for battle. David left their desert stronghold with 400 men, the remaining 200 left behind to guard their camp and belongings from the ever present marauders.

Nabal had signed his own death warrant, and his wife knew it. Although she wasn't present at her husband's tirade and impetuous response someone who was came to her and told her what happened. They explained that indeed David and his men had treated them very well out in the wilderness and made sure that the sheep were protected from both men and wild beasts. In fact, not one animal came up missing (which was unheard of). But rather than show gratitude Nabal insulted the men, and their master David, and essentially instigated a war. Avigayil knew that this was BIG trouble.

The man who came to Nabal's wife had no qualms in explaining to her what she already knew about her husband: he was mean, stubborn, and listened to nobody. So if Avigayil didn't do something a lot of people were going to die, including her husband. Actually in verse 17 the man who came to Abigail said the Nabal was a **ben-Belial** (a son of Belial). This was about as harsh and blunt a criticism that can be aimed at someone.

What we have here is the makings of a battle of honor. David was going to come to Carmel and murder Nabal and others in what we could call "honor killings". But thankfully Avigayil was a wise and virtuous woman who was not about to let a lot of innocent people die over a little food and some rash words if she could stop it. Quickly she takes action and, without her husband's knowledge, prepares a generous peace offering to David. Her concern was the continuation of her household; but at the same time she has the perception (should I say intuition?) to see that David is special in God's eyes and that he will hold a set-apart place in Israel's future.

She packs up 200 loaves of bread, two skins of wine, 5 butchered sheep, about a bushel of

dried grain, some raisins and fig cakes (fig cakes were pressed, dried figs) and places them on donkeys in hopes of intercepting David before he arrives. She knows that the two biggest kids on the block are about to face off; once Nabal sees David coming their damaged Middle Eastern sensibilities will take over and nothing will stop the torrent of blood that will follow. Naturally she did this in secret.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that this is a story about David being saved from himself. David is about to commit a ruinous act that had it been allowed might have altered history. The truth is that Nabal had committed no violation of Torah Laws unless we counted it as not loving his neighbor as himself. Nothing more had happened than David figured he was owed something and Nabal disagreed. All that had come between David and Nabal were words. No harm was done, no property stolen. But for this David was ready, in his violent anger, to commit murder.

It is so ironic that this story would appear immediately after we find David with a seemingly justifiable (if not compelling) reason to kill a man (Saul) because this man was intent on killing David. If ever there would have been a case for self defense that would have been one. But in paying attention to the Spirit of God, and refusing to take the advice of his men, David spared the life of King Saul.

Here, though, David was in an out of control rage and ready to kill anyone in his path for no other reason than a man had insulted him. So now we're going to see how the all-merciful God stopped this atrocity not so much for the sake of those who might die as for David's sake and the sake of God's redemptive plan. What a lesson there is for every man, especially for followers of Yeshua. Lest we think too highly of ourselves, no matter how godly our intents might be to us, our wicked natures lurk ready to pounce. How often our evil inclinations get in the way of our relationship with our God and our service to Him. Sometimes it's not as blatant as doing wrong; it's as subtle as choosing a way that is not the way that God's perfect will has for us. It may not be that we don't prosper from it; rather that the Kingdom of God was meant to prosper from it and didn't.

Without our even knowing it we are constantly invisibly guided; unaware the Lord intervenes in circumstance and deed. If He did not, we all would lose our way and destroy the very purpose for which we were born. You didn't get that job you coveted? Perhaps it was the Lord protecting you from failure. You never did amass the wealth you felt you needed to be happy? Perhaps the Father knew in His mercy that it was more than you could handle and still remain true to Him. That girl you wanted to marry so desperately broke your heart when she said "no"? Maybe the Lord has another, more perfect spouse for you that will help you fulfill your spiritual destiny (one that you aren't even aware of).

David was on his way to commit blood guilt. It would have been a terrible thing that could easily have destroyed his reputation and his witness. But even more it probably would have disqualified him from being God's anointed king.

We'll see what happens when next we meet.