

A COOL HAND ON A HOT HEAD

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is set against the background of two great losses and disappointments which David sustained around this time. It opens with the record of the death of Samuel, David's counsellor and guide, and closes with the statement that David's wife Michal had been given to another man. That is, about this period, David suffered the loss both of his spiritual mentor and of his spouse.

The main point of the chapter focuses on how the Lord in His timely providence restrained His chosen king from his own folly and impulsive action. No less than four times the text draws attention to the Lord's restraining action – once on the lips of Abigail, v. 26, and three times on the lips of David, vv. 33, 34, 39.

The chapter is dominated by people's *words* rather than by actions. We have four statements or speeches from David, together with one speech each from Nabal and from one of Nabal's young men – but it is undoubtedly the speech of Abigail in verses 24 to 31 which occupies centre stage and provides the hinge and turning point of the chapter. And this because the man whose words had stopped others from killing Saul in chapter 24, now needs the words of a woman to stop him from killing Nabal.¹

Perhaps we should note also that, in one sense, *the three-fold 'peace'-greeting expressed by David to Nabal at the beginning of the chapter, v. 6, is balanced by the three-fold blessing expressed by David to Abigail towards the end, vv. 32-33.*

CHAPTER DIVISION

I have headed each section of the chapter with words taken from Ecclesiastes 3. 1-8 for no more profound reason than that the words seem to fit remarkably well in each case.

Verse 1.	A time to mourn.	Eccles. 3. 4
Verses 2-9.	A time of peace.	Eccles. 3. 8
Verses 10-12.	A time to keep, and a time to cast away.	Eccles. 3. 6
Verse 13.	A time to kill.	Eccles. 3. 3
Verses 14-35.	A time to speak : (a) A young man, vv. 14-17; (b) Abigail, vv. 18-31; (c) David, vv. 32-35	Eccles. 3. 7
Verse 36.	A time to keep silence.	Eccles. 3. 7
Verses 37-38.	A time to die.	Eccles. 3. 2
Verses 39-44.	A time to embrace, and a time to refrain.	Eccles. 3. 5

EXPOSITION

Verse 1.	A time to mourn.	Eccles. 3. 4
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'*And Samuel died*'. Samuel must have been of a great age when he died for he had described himself as 'old and greyheaded' as far back in chapter 12 (v. 2). His death marked the end of an era. Although Samuel died before David actually became king, Saul had now openly recognized that it was inevitable that David would rule; 'Behold, I know well that *thou shalt surely be king*, and that *the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand*', 24. 20. This was the cue for Samuel to leave – his work was done. His function had been to appoint *God's chosen* king. Saul had been *the people's* premature *choice*, and now that Saul has acknowledged that David is to reign Samuel passes off the scene.

Samuel had been a remarkable man. At one point, he had himself been God's instrument in delivering Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, 1 Sam. 7. 3-14, and had dedicated the spoils towards the maintenance of the house of God, 1 Chron. 26. 27-28. He was long remembered for the way in which he led Israel in the celebration of the annual Passover, putting Israel in mind of God's great deliverance at the exodus, 2 Chron. 35. 18.

But Samuel left behind him more than a memory; he left a lasting heritage.

It is clear from Acts 3 that Samuel's ministry marked the beginning of the prophetic era. Peter declared there that, 'all the prophets *from Samuel* and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days', Acts 3. 24.

Samuel also helped lay the foundation for the organization of the Levites engaged in the service of the sanctuary – which organisation was later to be completed by David – and in particular that of the role of the gatekeepers – for which he was well-qualified. 1 Chronicles 9 says that, 'all these which were chosen to be porters in the gates ... were reckoned by their genealogy in their villages, whom David *and Samuel the seer* did ordain in their set office. So they and their children had the oversight of the gates of the house of the Lord, namely, the house of the tabernacle, by wards', 1 Chron. 9. 22-23. I say 'for which he was well-qualified' because 1 Samuel 3 speaks of how 'Samuel lay until the morning, and *opened the doors* of the house of the Lord', v. 15. It may not therefore be a coincidence that the statement, 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness' is found in Psalm 84 (v. 10), the title of which informs us that it was 'A Psalm ... of the sons of Korah', from whom we learn in 1 Chronicles 6 that Samuel himself was descended, 1 Chron. 6. 33-38.

But no doubt the lasting heritage left by Samuel lay chiefly in that to him had been given the honour of anointing both of Israel's first two kings.

On a *personal* level, Samuel was clearly characterised by *faith* and *prayer*. As to the first, the writer to the Hebrews specifically names him among the men and women whose lives were marked by great exploits and achievements of *faith*, Heb. 11. 33. But Samuel was also proverbial for his *prayers*. Psalm 99 cites, 'Moses and Aaron among his (God's) priests, and *Samuel among them that call upon his name*; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them', v. 6. The Lord's words to Jeremiah many years later – 'Though Moses and *Samuel* stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people', Jer. 15. 1 – clearly distinguish Samuel as a man of very powerful and effective intercession.

But now Israel – and David – were bereft of Samuel's faith, influence and prayers. The great man was dead! '*All the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him*'. Is it possible, I wonder, that Samuel's funeral took place during the temporary reconciliation achieved between Saul and David at the close of chapter 24, thereby enabling David to be present and to pay tribute to the man who had been God's instrument in identifying and anointing him as Israel's future king? We do not know.

'*Buried him in his house at Ramah*'. A similar statement is made in 1 Kings 2 concerning the burying place of Joab: 'Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him (Joab), and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness', v. 34. As far as we know, ancient Israel never followed the Egyptian custom of building elaborate shrines around the tombs of its great men. But what does it mean that these men were 'buried in their houses'? I note that the similar statement of 2 Chronicles 33 that 'Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him *in his own house*: and Amon his son reigned in his stead', 2 Chron. 33.20, is amplified in the parallel account in 2 Kings 21 to 'Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried *in the garden of his own house*, in the garden of Uzza: and Amon his son reigned in his stead', 2 Kings 21.18. It seems reasonable to assume therefore that both Samuel and Joab were also buried in the courts or gardens attached to their houses, rather than in the kitchen or lounge!

'*David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran*'. The area of Paran was far from fertile but it had sufficient grazing land to make the rendering 'wilderness' perhaps a little misleading.

Verses 2-9. A time of peace.

Eccles. 3. 8

Verse 2. '*There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel*'. The Holy Spirit now turns our attention from the *well-deserved honour paid to one who was dead* – Samuel – to the *uncalled-for insult* leveled at *one who was living* – David.

The home of the 'man' in our verse was in Maon, which lay only a short distance northwest of the wilderness of Paran to which David had gone, and his 'possessions' – his 'work, business, occupation'² – were in nearby Carmel.³ Both Maon and Carmel⁴ were located in the Judean wilderness about 14 miles west of Engedi. Although forming part of the tribal area of Judah – and to that extent having some links with David – it seems that the region had been liberated from the Amalekites by Saul back in chapter 15 (v. 12), and it's therefore perhaps not surprising that some at least of the inhabitants there were loyal to Saul – as may be suggested by Nabal's response to David's servants in verse 10–11.

'*The man was very great*'. This is a reference to his great wealth – something he had in common with one of David's later close friends and supporters, Barzillai – of whom 2 Samuel 19 says that he 'was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man', 2 Sam 19. 32. But what a contrast scripture draws between these two men, and how these two men regarded their riches. In marked contrast to the man of 1 Samuel 25 who refused to give David and his men even basic supplies out of his plenty, according to 2 Samuel 17. 27-29, the man of 2 Samuel 19 'provided' very liberally out of his 'substance'. And I suspect that, if our Lord Jesus was to comment on these two cases, He would tell us that, by the *foolish and selfish abuse* of his riches, Nabal secured for himself only 'eternal fire', Luke 16. 22-28, but that, by the *wise and unselfish use* of his riches, Barzillai made 'friends' and was received into 'eternal tabernacles', Luke 16. 9.

Nabal was rich only in worldly goods – and not, as his wife, in wisdom and discernment, and certainly not, as she, in true godliness and spirituality. He was not, in the words of the Lord Jesus, 'rich towards God'. But the question is – am I?

'He was shearing his sheep'. The authorities tell us that 'plucking by hand and/or with the help of bronze combs sufficed for shearing sheep until the Iron Age, when iron shears came into use'.⁵ Although the Philistines had been using iron for many purposes for some time, I suspect that, being in Israel, Nabal's men still did their shearing the old way.

Verse 3. 'Now the name of the man was Nabal'. I note that the Holy Spirit introduced us to Nabal's possessions before He introduces us to Nabal himself. It is only after being told of the man's great wealth that we are even told his name. In itself this speaks volumes about the man. As far as Nabal was concerned, a man's life is defined in terms of what he owns. Nabal lived only to acquire and to retain his property, and he died following a drunken orgy, indulging his appetites to the full.

'The name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance (that is, 'appearance')'. Abigail was clearly an exceptional woman – first 'good in understanding' literally, not only in being intelligent and good with words, but, as we will see, in being spiritually alert, in tune with God's will and purpose, vv. 28-31.⁶

And Abigail was not only 'good in understanding'; she was also extremely good-looking. She was, we are told, 'beautiful in form ('in appearance')', the same expression used to describe both Rachel in Gen 29. 17 and Esther in Esth 2. 7. In summary then, Abigail was blessed with both good sense and good looks.⁷

'Churlish and evil'. But Nabal was an entirely different kettle of fish! The basic meaning of the word translated 'churlish' is 'to be hard'⁸, and the Septuagint renders the word by that used by the Lord Jesus in His parable of the talents in Matthew 25; 'he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an *hard* man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed', v. 24. When the Holy Spirit tells us – as He does – that Nabal was 'rough, severe, cruel and ill-natured', He isn't being uncharitable toward Nabal. He is simply telling it as it was. Nabal's servant (v. 17), Nabal's would-be slayer, David (v. 21), and Nabal's wife, Abigail (v. 25) all confirm the assessment. And Nabal's own words in verses 10-11 fully support it.

'He was of the house of Caleb'. There is some uncertainty among scholars about the meaning of the text here. Some point out that, according to one version of the Massoretic Hebrew text,⁹ Nabal was a 'Calebite', a word from the same root as one of the Hebrew words for 'dog' – and conclude that we are being told he was in some sense 'doglike' – not, I suppose, the most complimentary of descriptions.¹⁰ Others point to another version of the Massoretic text,¹¹ which says that Nabal 'was like his heart', and suggest a possible allusion to Psalm 14. 1, 'The fool [*nabal*] has said in his heart, There is no God'.

For my part, I have no problem accepting the KJV rendering; that Nabal was, that is, descended from 'Caleb the son of Jephunneh'. And I observe that Hebron, where Caleb had been assigned large possessions, Josh. 15. 13-19, was less than 10 miles north west of both Maon and Carmel where Nabal lived and worked, Josh. 14. 6-15; 21. 9-12.¹²

If Nabal was descended from Caleb, he would certainly have been of the house of Judah – the same tribe as David – and would therefore have had at least a tribal motive for providing aid to David when asked.

But, if descended from Caleb, Nabal had clearly inherited none of the better qualities of his illustrious ancestor! Caleb 'followed the Lord wholly' (a point made six times by the Holy Spirit¹³), devoted himself to fulfilling God's purpose for Israel, and lived to a great old age. By way of contrast, Nabal followed his own natural appetites, opposed God's purpose and died prematurely.

Nor did Nabal possess any of the enterprise and courage of another biblical character with close family connections to Caleb. I refer to Caleb's near relative (either nephew, or, more likely, younger brother¹⁴), Othniel, who not only, according to Judges chapter 1, captured the well-fortified Canaanite city of Debir, to gain the hand of Achsah, Caleb's daughter, in marriage¹⁵, Judg. 1. 11-13, but also, according to Judges chapter 3, as the first of the Judges, when the 'Spirit of the Lord' came on him, delivered Israel from Chushan-rishathaim, king of Upper Mesopotamia, 3. 8-11. The name 'Chushan-rishathaim' apparently means 'Chushan of double wickedness'¹⁶, and was probably intended as a deliberately intimidating name. But if so, it utterly failed to intimidate Othniel!

But if Nabal did enjoy a blood relationship with such worthy warriors, he clearly shared none of their better and spiritual qualities.

There may well be a contrast intended between Nabal and Abigail at this point in that the word 'evil' is used to describe Nabal – 'evil in his doings' – and the word 'good' to describe Abigail – 'good in understanding'. Interestingly, both of the terms ('good/do good', and 'evil/do evil') appears seven times in the chapter.¹⁷ And these two words draw attention to one of the underlying themes of the whole story; namely, that 'good' brings its own reward to the righteous, but that 'evil' recoils on the head of the wicked.¹⁸ Certainly the contrast between Nabal and Abigail could hardly be more stark. He was foolish; she was wise. He was evil; she was good. He was repulsive; she was attractive. He was arrogant; she was humble. He was *ungodly*; she was godly. He was aggressive; she was peacemaking.

Abigail's later words to David show her to be spiritually aware, vv. 30-31 – and very much a supporter of David. Whereas Nabal's words to David through David's servants, vv. 10-11, reveal him as a man whose sympathies lay, if anywhere, with Saul. I guess that in some ways it isn't really surprising that, as the rift between Saul and David became more widely known, ordinary people began to take sides. But the situation under Nabal's roof hardly made for marital peace! And it was all on account of God's chosen king and to differing attitudes to him! We may well compare the words of *the Son of David* a thousand years later, 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law', Matt. 10. 34-35.

Verse 4. 'And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep'. Sheep-shearing took place at the end of the summer grazing and was a time for great celebration, when the profits were distributed, and therefore a time

when men were generally disposed to be hospitable and kind. That it was an occasion of great festivity and merrymaking we learn from the histories of both Jacob's son Judah in Genesis 38 (vv. 12-13), and David's son Absalom in 2 Samuel 13. The latter chapter tells us that 'Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor ...and Absalom invited all the king's sons. And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant. And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, *lest we be chargeable unto thee*', 2 Sam. 13. 23-24. We learn later in our chapter that Nabal himself ate extremely well at this time; 'behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king', v. 36. And yet Nabal had no intention whatever of being 'hospitable and kind', as was the norm on such occasions! Ironically, though Nabal may dine 'like a king', he steadfastly refuses to donate any of his abundance to Israel's future real king!

Verses 5-6. '*David sent out ten young men*'. The large number – ten – showing that David was expecting a reasonably liberal gift of food.

'*Greet him in my name*'. 'Ask him in my name of his peace', literally. That is, 'ask him in my name of his *shalom*' – a rich word signifying, not only 'peace' in the sense of absence of conflict, but 'good health, and well-being in general'. In every way, the request made of Nabal was respectful and tactful, friendly and courteous.

'*Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast*'. We may compare with David's salutation of peace the words of Jesus both (i) to His apostles, 'When ye come into an house, salute (greet) it. And if the house be worthy, *let your peace come upon it*: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you (that is, don't stay)', Matt. 10. 13, and (ii) to the 70 (or 72) whom the Lord sent out in twos to prepare the way before Him, 'into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, *your peace shall rest upon it*: if not, it shall turn to you again', Luke 10. 5-6. Both the apostles and the 70 were the emissaries and representatives of Jesus – so the rejection of their peace-greeting meant therefore the loss, not only of their presence, but the loss of Jesus Himself. And events soon proved that Nabal was not interested in David's peace-greeting!

Verse 7. '*Thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel*'. David's young men pointed out to Nabal that, in the past, David had not only restrained them from molesting and plundering Nabal's flocks, but that he and his men had in fact sheltered both Nabal's flocks and his shepherds. And there were no shortage of potential intruders. As we know from other chapters in 1 Samuel, both Philistine and Amalekite raiding parties posed no small threat, 23. 1; 30. 1 – apart from any wild animals which might have harassed Nabal's flocks. Clearly then David's armed followers had been patrolling the wilderness of Paran where Nabal's shepherds had been tending his flocks, and, as David saw it, Nabal would have had fewer sheep to shear if he and his men had not actively protected them. And we learn later from one of Nabal's young men that the protection which they provided had continued around the clock – 'by night and day', v. 16.

Verse 8. '*Ask thy young men, and they will shew (tell) thee*'. 'Ask'? That word was not a winner with Nabal. Nabal's young man in verse 17 makes it clear that Nabal never listened to anybody!

'*Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David*'. Consistent with the good manners of their day, David's servants held back David's name to the end. 'Your son' was both an expression of respect due from youthful David to a senior, and an acknowledgement of Nabal's superiority over someone who was insignificant in comparison. And for David to ask Nabal for a gift was not unreasonable in the circumstances. To our modern ears, it might sound as if David was running some kind of 'protection racket', but that wasn't really the case. It was true that Nabal had never asked for David's assistance, but it was only common courtesy for a very wealthy man like Nabal to have provided some supplies for David's men in appreciation and recognition of services rendered. For the fact that his sheep were *well cared for*, he could thank his shepherds – but for the fact that both his sheep and shepherds were *safe*, he could thank – and should have thanked – David and his men!

No doubt there were other farmers in Judah who, unlike Nabal, were only too glad to help David in his time of need. The close of chapter 30 tells of gifts of appreciation which David later sent to the elders of many cities in Judah 'where David himself and his men' had roamed while fleeing from Saul, 30. 26, 31.

Verse 9. '*They spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David*'. This use of the expression 'in the name of' may help us to understand a little of its use in the New Testament. When David's young men spoke in David's name, they spoke as David's accredited representatives and with his full authority. To receive them was therefore to receive him; to reject them was therefore to reject him. We can compare the words of James in chapter 5 of his letter, 'Take, my brethren', wrote James, 'the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord' – that is, with the Lord's full authority, v. 10. We might think also of the time, recorded in Acts 4, when the Jewish supreme council 'called' the apostles, 'and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach *in the name of Jesus*', v. 18, and when, in Acts 9, Paul 'preached boldly at Damascus *in the name of Jesus*', v. 27. And that is our business too – and, because we preach in the name of the Lord Jesus, for men to receive or reject the gospel we preach is for them *to receive or reject Him in whose name we preach*. We say then with Paul, 'we are ambassadors for Christ ('on Christ's behalf'), as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead ('on Christ's behalf'), be ye reconciled to God', 2 Cor. 5. 20. And what a tremendous privilege we have to speak, not in the name of David, but in the name of the Lord of glory!

'*They ... ceased*'. They 'rested', that is, waiting for a response to David's request.

Verses 10-12. A time to keep, and a time to cast away. Eccles. 3. 6

Verse 10. '*Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?*' The Septuagint expands this to read, 'Nabal sprang up, and answered'. And that was probably not far off the mark. As we shall see, one of Nabal's young men later told Abigail 'he flew on them', v. 14 literal translation.

It goes without saying that by his words, 'Who is David?', Nabal didn't mean that he was ignorant of who David was. We know this, not only because, ever since his victory over Goliath and his following exploits, David was famous throughout all Israel, 18. 5-7, but because Nabal immediately adds 'who is the son of Jesse?'

Nabal speaks in this deliberately disparaging way to insult David – knowing full well who he was, but refusing to recognize him as having any status or right to make the request which he had. In other words, Nabal was saying, 'And who exactly does this David think he is?' The double 'Who?' was uttered in scorn – spoken in similar tone to Gaal in Judges 9, 'Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *is* not *he* the son of Jerubbaal (Gideon)? and Zebul his officer?', Judg. 9. 28, and, indeed, to David's own words to some men of Israel about Goliath back in chapter 17, 'who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?', 17.26.

And Nabal no doubt used the description 'son of Jesse' in a deliberately insulting and belittling way, as Saul had before him on many occasions. I almost imagine he was rejecting David's courteous reference to himself as Nabal's 'son' in verse 8 – 'My son indeed! He is no son of mine! He's only the son of Jesse'.

According to 2 Samuel 20, the rebel Sheba would later dismiss David as the 'son of Jesse' with similar contempt; 'there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba ... a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in *the son of Jesse*: every man to his tents, O Israel', v. 1. But, although like Sheba, Nabal was, as we will see, 'a man of Belial', 1 Sam. 25. 25, unlike Sheba, Nabal wasn't of the tribe of Benjamin – he belonged to Judah, the same tribe as David – and so had far less excuse than Sheba for speaking as he did.

'*There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master*'. We will learn later that Abigail regarded David as the one designated to reign in Saul's place, but Nabal deliberately intensifies his insult to David by claiming that, in his eyes, David was no more than a rebellious servant – than a mere runaway slave. Ironically Nabal was speaking better than he knew – because soon *one of his own servants* would 'break away from him' in the sense of going behind his back to inform Abigail of his – Nabal's – outrageous behaviour!

Verses 11-12. '*Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and (shall I) give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?*' Although I have no reason to doubt that Nabal had heard of what had happened to Ahimelech and the priests of Nob when Saul discovered that they had provided David and his men with a few supplies, I don't believe that it was fear of reprisals from Saul which motivated him to refuse David's request.

As I read the narrative, his response to David wasn't one of fear, but one of pure selfishness and tight-fistedness. To me, Nabal dismissed David as a vagrant who had run away from his master simply to justify his own greed, and the truth was that he had no intention of sharing with David and his men – or anyone else – so much as one crumb of that which he regarded as his!¹⁹ Indeed, the Hebrew text of verse 11 uses the words 'I' and 'my' four times each – that's a total of no less than eight personal references in one reasonably short sentence! To Nabal, it may be '*shearing* time' but it certainly isn't '*sharing* time'.

We are all familiar with our Lord's parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12. I regard it as highly likely that Nabal had sat for the portrait of that 'Rich Fool'.²⁰ Consider the following fascinating points of correspondence, several of which we will refer to again as we make our way through our chapter.

	Nabal 1 Sam. 25	Rich Fool Luke 12
Foolishness	'As his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and <i>folly</i> is with him', v. 25	'God said unto him, <i>Fool</i> ', v. 20 (the word 'fool' being closely related to the word rendered 'folly' in the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 25. 25).
Wealth	'The man was <i>very great</i> , and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats', v. 2	'The ground of a certain <i>rich man</i> brought forth plentifully', v. 16
Selfishness	'Shall <i>I</i> then take <i>my</i> bread, and <i>my</i> water, and <i>my</i> flesh that <i>I</i> have killed for <i>my</i> shearers, and shall <i>I</i> give it unto men, when <i>I</i> do not know where they are from?', v. 11 literal - emphasis all mine, but probably Nabal's too.	What shall <i>I</i> do, because <i>I</i> have no room where to bestow <i>my</i> fruits? And he said, This will <i>I</i> do: <i>I</i> will pull down <i>my</i> barns, and build greater; and there will <i>I</i> bestow all <i>my</i> fruits and <i>my</i> goods. And <i>I</i> will say to <i>my</i> soul ... ', vv. 17-19
Merriment	'Nabal's heart was <i>merry</i> within him, for he was very drunken', v. 36	'Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be <i>merry</i> ', v. 19
Sudden end	'His heart died within him, and he became as a stone ... about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died', vv. 37-38	'God said unto him, ... this night thy soul shall be required of thee', v. 20
Beneficiaries	'Abigail hasted ... and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife', v. 42	'Whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?', v. 20

As we will see when we come to consider verse 25, in the Old Testament the words 'fool' and 'folly' normally signify 'a godless person' and 'godlessness' respectively. In common with the Rich Fool of Luke 12, Nabal was also

therefore a man who, in the words of the Lord Jesus at the close of His story, 'lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God', Luke 12. 21.

Note that the eight-fold use of the words 'I' and 'my' by the rich sheep-farmer Nabal is more than matched by the eleven-fold use of the same words by the rich land-farmer in our Lord's story. Both 'fools' lived for themselves alone and both used their wealth for themselves alone.

And Nabal revealed just how stingy he was by refusing to give to David and his men so much as 'bread' and 'water', the most basic food and drink, much less any of the meat (the 'flesh') he had slaughtered, v. 11, and the large supply of wine he had stored, v. 36.²¹

It is helpful to contrast Nabal's attitude to *his* possessions with David's attitude to *his*, when later making preparation for Solomon's building of the temple. 'Who am I', David prayed, 'and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of *thine own* have we given thee ... O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and *is all thine own*', 1 Chron. 29. 14, 16.²² And true spiritual generosity doesn't say, 'This is *mine* and I am willing to share it with you', but, 'I am only a steward of my goods. All I have belongs ultimately to the Lord, and I know He would have me give some of it to you'.

'So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings'. David's men got the message – Nabal meant 'No!' – he just had a *long* way of saying it.

Verse 13.

A time to kill.

Eccles. 3. 3

'David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword'. When Nabal's response was relayed to David, it went down like a pork pie in a synagogue. David had asked for bread and Nabal had given him stones. I suspect that Nabal's retort caught David completely off guard – that he had not anticipated such selfishness and insolence – and, frankly, with 600 men and their families to feed, he was in no mood to stand for such nonsense. To David at that moment there was only one way to deal with obnoxious characters like Nabal!

And David's reaction was both impulsive and violent. No time is spent here either inquiring of God, as in chapters 23 and 30,²³ or even reflecting calmly on what he ought to do. 'Every one of you, strap on your swords!', he barked to his men, 'it's time for some action!'

I am reminded of the treatment which Gideon had once meted out to the men of Succoth in rather similar circumstances. We read in Judges 8 that 'Gideon came to Jordan ... he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing (pursuing, that is, some 15,000 Midianites along with their two kings). And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they are faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? ... And Gideon ... returned from battle before the sun was up, and caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth ... and he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth', Judg. 8. 4-6, 13-16. We know from a comment of Joab in 2 Samuel 11 that David was familiar with that very section of Israel's history.²⁴ But David has no intention of teaching Nabal with 'thorns and briers'! Verse 13 underlines the one and only word in David's mind – three times we read it – it was the word 'sword'.

We noted earlier that the word '*shalom*' – peace, well-being, good health – occurred three times in verse 6, 'Peace be to you, peace be to your house, and peace be to all you have'. But David's desire for Nabal's three-fold 'peace' has now become a three-fold reference to the word 'sword'!

And by the time we reach the end of verse 13, I suppose we could put into David's mouth the words of the Lord Jesus, 'I did not come to bring peace, but a sword', Matt. 10. 34. But David's meaning would have been very different to the Saviour's meaning! For it had been Nabal's foolish rejection of David's three-fold best wishes which had occasioned this threefold threat of a very literal 'sword'.

Four hundred men strapped on their swords as ordered, and David strapped on *his* sword – presumably the sword of Goliath – the very sword with which David had once hacked off the head of the loud-mouthed Philistine champion, and with which soon, if everything went according to plan, he would be lopping of the head of another loud-mouthed braggard! But from where, pray, had David collected this sword in chapter 21 (v. 9)? Why, from the sanctuary at Nob – where soon after David's victory over Goliath, Saul, the king rejected by God, had mercilessly wiped out almost the entire priestly population. And now, with equal ferocity and cruelty, David stands poised to follow in Saul's steps and to wipe out Nabal's entire male population.

Not that it is difficult to follow David's reasoning – he had done only good to Nabal and his shepherds, expecting Nabal to respond appropriately, but instead had been repaid with only an insult. And now he feels wholly justified in his intention to slaughter Nabal and every other male in his household. Yet his response to King Saul had been – and continued to be – so very different. David had also done nothing but good to Saul, faithfully serving him, and in exchange had received only evil at his hand – not only insults, as in the case of Nabal, but actual physical attacks and concerted attempts on his life. And yet David is able to handle the treatment which Saul meted out to him, but not the insults of Nabal – refusing to show the sheep-farmer any of the forbearance and longsuffering he had extended to the king. And so now, although the trial he faced was much milder, instead of overcoming evil with good, 24. 17, David was in very real danger of being overcome with evil. But then Nabal didn't happen to be the Lord's anointed, and David was in no mood for self-control! But, leaving aside for a moment Saul's unique status as

the Lord's anointed, in applying this to ourselves we need to remember that the measure of *our* Christian character is as much, if not more, the way in which we respond to and treat our equals or those in some sense 'beneath' us as the way we respond to and treat our superiors or those in some sense 'above' us.

Back then to the text. David had said in effect, 'Mount up, men', and Nabal and his male servants were all shortly to bite the dust. Boy, did *he* have a problem! And I don't mean *Nabal* – I mean *David*! And it is a problem which he had created for himself. For, if I can put it this way, David had enrolled himself in the school of *the zeal of the sons of Boanerges* – of James and John – the 'sons of thunder', who 'rumbled' with an ambition to call down lightning from heaven on those who, rather like Nabal, had rejected the messengers of their Lord and, in so doing, had insulted their Lord ... David had enrolled himself in that school, I say, rather than in the school of *the meekness of 'the Son of David'* – who let the insult *pass*, and simply Himself *passed* on to another village of the Samaritans, Luke 9. 54-56. David did not, that is, in the words of Jesus, 'know what spirit he was of'. And, for our part, when we are insulted, the Lord expects – yea, commands – us also to bear it with love and forbearance, returning evil with good. This is high ground to walk, but it is the law of His kingdom: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also', Matt. 5. 38-39. We can squirm and attempt to rationalise this all we like – but in the end this *is* the law of the kingdom!

I guess that none of us would question that 2 Samuel 11 (which records David's sins in connection with Bathsheba and Uriah) ranks as David's darkest hour by far in the whole of 2 Samuel. And, as I see it, in reality David's darkest hour in the whole of 1 Samuel was not in chapter 23, when he was compassed about by Saul and his 3,000 men with no natural hope of escape, 23. 26, nor is it in chapter 30, when his own 600 men speak of stoning him, 30. 6, but here in chapter 25, when he overreacted to Nabal's rebuff and rode off at the head of 400 men to eliminate Nabal and every male in his household before dawn.

'Answer not a fool according to his folly', says the proverb, 'lest thou also be like unto him', Prov. 26. 4. In losing his cool and reacting as he did, David was certainly answering the fool ['Nabal', the fool] according to his folly, v. 25 – but in so doing showing himself to be a fool also.

'*There went up after David about four hundred men*'. Every reader knows what the four hundred men with swords had in mind – even though we are not told this explicitly until verses 21-22; 'Now David had said, 'May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave of all who belong to him one that urinates against the wall by morning light'. It seems clear that David spoke those words now in verse 13, but the Holy Spirit holds back from relating them until verses 21-22 to stress there just how much rested on the success of Abigail's mission – that, if she failed, every male in Nabal's household would be slain. We may recall Jacob's understandable apprehension at the news of Esau's seemingly hostile approach, also at the head of 400 men. Genesis 32 tells us that when 'the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed', Gen. 32. 6-7. And Nabal, though he didn't know it, had far more reason for 'great fear and distress' than Jacob had ever had.

'*Two hundred abode by the stuff*'. These two hundred wouldn't have been considered in any way inferior to the four hundred who rode off and would no doubt have shared fully in any plunder they brought back with them; compare 30. 9-10, 24.

Verses 14-35. A time to speak. Eccles. 3. 7

(a) A young man, vv. 14-17.

Verse 14. '*One of the young men*'. Although he didn't know it, Nabal's two most valuable assets were not numbered among his 3,000 sheep or 1,000 goats. For Nabal's two most valuable assets consisted of a perceptive servant and a resourceful wife. And the wise servant – 'a young man of the youths', literally – was quick to inform his mistress of the impending danger, and she, for her part, was quick to remove it. And how crucial this servant's speech was – because, naturally speaking, everything depended on his having overheard what had been said and then having told all he had heard to Abigail – because her timely intervention was wholly dependent on that information. In other words, this young man appears in the sacred history as 'a *minor* character of *major* importance', whose role is small but absolutely essential. And we read of many such in scripture – for example, Naaman's little maid in 2 Kings 5. 1-18, and Paul's nephew in Acts 23. 12-24. Truly we ought to stand in awe at the wonderful workings of our God, who brings about His purpose through whatever and whoever He pleases – whether small or great.

'*To salute our master*'. Lit 'to bless our master' – the word which figures later several times in verses 32, 33 and 39.

'*He railed on them*'. Nabal's servant graphically described the shoddy treatment David's men had received at Nabal's hands. Literally, 'he flew upon them', a violent verb, used elsewhere only of 'flying on spoil' in chapters 14 and 15 – 'the people *flew upon* the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves ... did eat them with the blood', 14. 32, and the word of Samuel, 'Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst *fly upon* the spoil?', 15. 19. The verb is closely related to the common Hebrew word for a bird of prey, as, for example, in the statement in Genesis 15 that 'when the *fowls* came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away', Gen. 15.11, and in the word of God to Gog in Ezekiel 39, 'I will give thee unto the *ravenous* birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured', Ezek. 39. 4. We might almost translate the servant's report, 'he flew on them like a bird of prey'!

Verses 15-16. '*They were a wall unto us*'. That is, David's men gave them solid protection – and that continually, 'both by night and day'.

Verse 17. *'He is such a son of Belial'*. 'Belial' is a Hebrew word signifying 'without use or profit, worthless'. It later became used as a proper name for Satan; 'what concord hath Christ with Belial?', 2 Cor. 6. 15. 'A son of Belial' indicates 'one who by character is worthless, godless, lawless and wicked'.²⁵ Even Abigail, his wife, described Nabal as 'a man of Belial', v. 25.

'That a man cannot speak to him'. Nabal wasn't a good listener. Fools don't listen! The servant knows that there isn't likely to be any use in even Abigail talking to Nabal, but he is confident nevertheless that she will be able to deal with the situation if anyone can. He probably didn't realise it at the time, but, as a male servant, his waking up tomorrow morning actually depended on her being able to do so.

A time to speak : (b) Abigail, vv. 18-31.

Verse 18. *Then Abigail made haste, and took...*. If David's reaction to Nabal's scorn caused the problem; Abigail's response to Nabal's servant solved it.

Ultimately, of course, the Lord was working behind the scenes to prevent David from committing a sinful deed which would have left a lasting blot on his record. But, on this occasion, the agent and instrument through whom God chose to make known His will to David was neither Gad the prophet, 22. 5, nor Abiathar the priest with his ephod, 23. 9, but the wife of the very man whom David had in his sights.

At this point in the story, speed was of the essence; David was already on his way. But Abigail could certainly move when she wanted to! And we will see further instances of her 'haste' in verses 23, 42. No grass would grow under this woman's feet! Bread, wine, sheep, grain, raisin-cakes, fig-cakes – all loaded onto asses – and, quickly mounting an ass herself, *she was off*. And it was just as well that she was. Listen to David's words to her in verse 34, 'in very deed, as the Lord God of Israel lives ... *except you had hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left to Nabal by the morning light one that urinates against the wall*'.

'Two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins (raisin-cakes), and two hundred cakes of figs'. Nabal's meanness in verses 10-11 is fully counterbalanced by his wife's liberality. And I note that Abigail's itemized list of foodstuffs for David and his men surpasses even the list of the goods which Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth brought to him when David fled from Absalom – when, in 2 Samuel 16, Ziba 'met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine', v. 1. The 'raisin-cakes' and the 'cakes of pressed figs' which Abigail brought were especially valued, not only on account of their sweetness and nutritional worth, but also because they could be kept for some time without going rotten. We will find later that when David and his men were in hot pursuit of the Amalekites in chapter 30, and came across an abandoned sick Egyptian slave 'they gave him a piece of fig-cake, and two raisin-cakes, and he ate, and his spirit came again to him', 30. 12.

David had earlier asked Ahimelech the priest for 'five loaves of bread or whatever you can find', 21. 3, and Ahimelech had responded – somewhat reluctantly – by giving him consecrated bread, the only food then available, 21. 6. When David's servants had asked Nabal for 'whatever comes to your hand', 1 Sam. 25. 8 (similar though not identical to the Hebrew of 21. 3), he had refused to give them any 'bread' at all, v. 11. But now Abigail supplies David with no less than 'two hundred loaves of bread', in addition to large quantities of other provisions.

Nabal had listed (a) bread, (b) water and (c) meat as payment for his shearers, v. 11; and here Abigail includes (a) two hundred loaves, (b) two skins of wine (which could have been skins of kids, goats or oxen according to the quantity required; even the skin of a kid would hold a considerable quantity) and (c) five butchered sheep as *just part* of her gift.

Verse 19. *'She said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you'*. It seems that, as Jacob in Gen. 33, who was also going to meet four hundred men, Abigail sent her gift (her 'blessing', literally v. 27 – interestingly, the same word as was used by Jacob, Gen. 33. 11) on ahead. In which case, when Abigail's young men reached David, no doubt he asked himself, as Esau had long before, Gen. 33. 8, what the convoy meant.

'But she told not her husband Nabal'. Later we will read that, because 'he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light', v. 36. I see no grounds for criticising Abigail's silence on either occasion. In this case, her knowledge of Nabal's stubbornness surely justified her secrecy. What she did was altogether necessary for the safety and protection of her household. As far as I am aware, she had no way of knowing at this stage that David's intention was to kill only the males.

Verse 20. *'She rode on her ass'*. Having sent her servants ahead with the provisions for David and his men, Abigail follows on a donkey – a very common means of transportation in ancient times.²⁶

'She came down by the covert of the hill, and, behold, David and his men came down against her'. Riding down a covert or hollow between two peaks of a mountain, and concealed therefore from observation to the last moment, Abigail suddenly found herself facing a small army of four hundred armed men bent on slaughter. We know, of course, that David was already well on his way to massacre Nabal and all the males of his household when she met him – yet another example of God's perfect timing; compare 23. 19.

Verse 21. *'Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness'*. 'In vain' is literally 'for deception'. That is to say, 'I have done all this to no other purpose than to be deceived and disappointed in my expectation'. 'Yes, but it was only "in vain", David, if you leave God out of everything'. As Christians, we have the word of Paul to the Ephesians – 'Knowing that *whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of (receive back from) the Lord*, whether he be bond or free', Eph. 6. 8.

'He hath requited me evil for good'. Solomon later noted, 'Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house', Prov. 17. 13. But David should have left it with God to visit 'evil' on the house of Nabal if He saw fit, and not to have taken matters into his own hands.²⁷

Verse 22. 'So and more also do God unto the enemies of David'. If this oath followed the common format, we would have expected David to have said, 'so and more also do God to David' – which is indeed how the Septuagint renders the text.²⁸ Assuming the existing Hebrew text (which underlies the KJV) to be correct, we can compare the words of Abigail in verse 26, 'now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal'.

'If I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light'. I suspect that mass killings of the kind which David had in mind usually took place at night.

Verses 23-24a. Abigail's approach to David was a model both of tact and of courage.

'When Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet'. The double reference to Abigail 'falling' suggests that she prostrated herself and did obeisance as soon as saw David, and then, having risen and approached nearer to him, knelt at his feet in the posture of a suppliant, just as David had done before Saul in the previous chapter.²⁹

Verse 24b. 'And said ...'. And Abigail certainly knew how to make an appeal!

Before considering some of the details of her speech, which takes us down to verse 31, we ought to note :

(1) That the contrast between *her* attitude toward David and that of *Nabal* could hardly be more striking. Nabal spoke insolently; Abigail spoke respectfully. Nabal asked scornfully, 'who is David?'; Abigail fell at David's feet. Nabal sent David's men away with nothing; Abigail brought them lavish provisions. To Nabal, David was a 'servant' – one who had 'broken away from his master'; to Abigail, David was her 'lord', and she spoke of him as such ('my lord') at least once in every verse of her speech – a total of no less than 14 times.³⁰

(2) That everything which Abigail did and said expressed an attitude of submission. Not only did she prostrate herself at David's feet and speak to him 14 times as 'my lord', but she referred to herself throughout as David's 'handmaid' – using this description six times.³¹

(3) The constant tone of courtesy and politeness, evidenced by her use of the word translated 'I pray thee' ('please', that is) in verses 24, 25 and 28.

(4) The remarkable parallel between the intercession made by this 'woman of good understanding' to David in 1 Samuel 25 and the intercession made by the 'wise woman' of Tekoa to David in 2 Samuel 14. In terms of *substance*, both passages focus on an astute woman pleading with David for herself and for her household/family, against a background of blood-guiltiness and revenge. In terms of *content and detail*, I note the following points of similarity :

1 Samuel 25

She '*fell* before David on her face, and *bowed* herself to the ground', v. 23.

'Upon me, *my lord*, upon me let this *iniquity be*', v. 24.

'Let thine *handmaid* speak in thine audience, and hear the *words* of thine *handmaid*', v. 24.

'David ... *said* unto her, Go up in peace to *thine house*; see, I have hearkened to thy voice', v. 35.

2 Samuel 14

'She *fell on her face* to the ground, and did obeisance (lit. 'and *bowed*' – the same word as in 1 Sam. 23)', v. 4.

'My lord ... *the iniquity be on me*', v. 9.

'Let thine *handmaid* speak one word ... it may be that the king will perform the request (lit. '*the word*') of his *handmaid*', vv. 12, 15.

'And the king *said* unto the woman, 'Go to thine *house*, and I will give charge concerning you', v. 8.

Given the emphasis in 2 Samuel 14 on the 'wisdom' of the woman from Tekoa, these points in common between the two speeches serve to underline for me the statement in verse 3 that Abigail was a 'woman of good understanding'.

(5) An outline of Abigail's speech.

First, Abigail offered to take on herself the consequences of Nabal's 'iniquity', v. 24;

Second, Abigail assured David that Nabal's rebuff was entirely in character – that Nabal was a rude and selfish oaf, and that David should not therefore take it as a personal insult, v. 25a;

Third, Abigail pleaded her own ignorance of all that had happened, with the implication no doubt that, had she been aware of the arrival of David's young men, they would not have returned empty-handed, v. 25b;

Fourth, Abigail pointed out that the Lord Himself had, in His providence, so far stopped David from avenging himself – having sent her to him in the nick of time, v. 26;

Fifth, Abigail presented to David the provisions she had brought, but, with great tact and diplomacy, offered them, not as a gift worthy of David himself, but as a gift for his men, v. 27;

Sixth, Abigail expressed her confidence that, in God's time, David would have an enduring house, v. 28a. In the light of a kingdom and a lasting dynasty, what were a few provisions and a cheap insult?

Seventh, Abigail made known her conviction that David fought 'the Lord's battles', v.28b. Was it not then altogether beneath him to expend his time and effort taking petty and personal revenge?

Eighth, Abigail made clear her confidence that the Lord would preserve David – that his soul was bound up as some treasure in the bundle of God's life, care and protection, v. 29, and that David need therefore have no fear that he or his men would ever starve. And,

Ninth, Abigail counselled David that, if he wiped out Nabal and all his men, he would come to regret this later – that it would weigh on his conscience and come back to haunt him when he was king, vv. 30-31.

It was in every way a brilliant speech. Returning then to the details ...

'Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be'. Abigail made no attempt to excuse or defend Nabal's action, but rather offered to bear herself any punishment which David felt was merited. And I note how that, consistent with her accepted role as scapegoat, she pleads in verse 28, 'forgive the trespass (transgression) of thine handmaid'.

'Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience'. Literally, 'in your ears'. Abigail implores David to listen to her – something she knew her own husband never did, v. 17.

Verse 25. *'Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him'*. Abigail probably didn't realize it but her argument here was particularly calculated to appeal to David, because it was very much in line with the argument he had himself used with Saul outside the cave in chapter 24 – namely, that the person in question really wasn't worth the notice or the effort of the person being addressed.

'As his name is, so is he'. In scripture a man's name is often far more than a mere label with no particular significance – often being connected with his character and/or actions.³² We might compare, for instance, the manner in which the writer to the Hebrews draws attention to the meaning of the name 'Melchizedek' – 'King of righteousness', Heb. 7. 2, signifying his righteous rule, a virtue brought to ultimate fulfilment in Him who is the Priest-King 'according to the order of Melchizedek', even Jesus. And the supreme example of a name suiting a person is, of course, that of our Lord Himself; 'thou shalt call his name Jesus ('the Lord is *salvation*): for he shall save his people from their sins', Matt. 1. 21. Of particular relevance perhaps to the case of Nabal, we should also note Solomon's proverb, '*Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth (or, 'acts') in proud wrath*', Prov. 21. 24.³³

'Nabal' is one of several Hebrew words for 'fool' or 'foolish', and Abigail's word 'folly' translates the related Hebrew word '*Nebalah*'. Frankly, I find it hard to imagine any parents in their right mind giving their little baby son the name 'Fool'. Not, I suppose, that we can altogether rule this out because some parents choose mighty 'strange' names for their offspring. I think it far more likely, however, that 'Nabal' was in fact a derogatory nickname given to him by others in later life, as being an accurate description of his known character and conduct.

We should note that, in biblical terminology, the word 'fool' indicates – not a person who is stupid, ignorant or naïve – but a person who is godless, self-willed and who in some way acts disgracefully.³⁴ That is, in scripture 'foolishness' is not an intellectual issue, but a moral and spiritual issue. This is the word used, for example, by David in the opening of both Psalms 14 and Psa. 53; 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good', 14. 1; 53. 1. In other words, the 'fool' denies that there is a God both in word and in action – he is a practical as well as a professed atheist – someone who shuts God out of his mind and life and who walks in his own way. Remember the Rich Fool, who was not rich towards God! In scripture then, a 'fool' is a spiritual, moral, and social disaster.³⁵ By the world's standards, Nabal was certainly not foolish – in the sense of being stupid, that is. He was a very successful sheep-farmer. But in God's book he was a 'fool'!

In chapter 32 of his prophecy, literally translated, Isaiah wrote, 'The fool speaks folly (the two Hebrew words 'Nabal' and 'folly' in 1 Sam. 25. 25), and his mind plots iniquity: to practice ungodliness ... to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink', Isa. 32. 6. Hmm - the fool who 'leaves the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and deprives the thirsty of drink' – I cannot imagine a more apt description of Nabal!

As I read it, Abigail here turns Nabal's well-known character into an argument why David should not 'regard' (not 'set his heart toward', literally) him, and why David should suppress his anger. She was implying that Nabal had intended no *personal* affront to David. Nabal had only spoken in his normal manner – he was that kind of disgusting man. She was insinuating that it was beneath a person of David's character to notice the rudeness of such a man. 'David, there is no honour in slaying fools'.

But was Abigail justified in speaking of her own husband this way, behind his back and to a complete stranger? I suspect that, in the circumstances, she probably was. Apart from the fact that she was telling David only what *she* knew *he* already knew, her very uncomplimentary description may, in her mind, yet help to save Nabal's life. When David had earlier sought refuge from Saul in Gath, he had acted the fool, and, because Achish was convinced that David was crazy, he didn't have him killed, but only driven out of town. Pretending to be a fool (in one sense of the word) then saved David's skin. Calling Nabal a fool (in another sense of the word), to Abigail's thinking, may now save Nabal's.

'But I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send'. With the implication that, had she – and not Nabal – done so, she would have seen that they would have been provided with adequate supplies.

Verse 26. *'Seeing the Lord hath withholden (translated 'kept me back', v. 34) thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand'*. The word translated 'avenging' occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament but is rendered 'avenging/avenged' only in this section.³⁶ The word means properly 'to save/to deliver', and both Abigail and David seemingly use an idiom 'to save/deliver oneself', which carries the sense 'to take the law into one's own hands', 'to mete out justice properly executed by someone else'.³⁷

The only real question here is whether Abigail was referring to the way in which the Lord had kept David from avenging himself against Saul in the previous chapter, or whether she was speaking of David's present circumstances and to her own timely intervention? My impression is that she has her own present involvement in mind. And I note that in verse 33 David attributes to Abigail exactly what Abigail does to God here, 'Blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and *from avenging myself with mine own hand*'. This suggests to me that Abigail is here viewing *her own actions* as God's provision for David – that it was the Lord who stood behind her coming to restrain David from hasty bloodshed and vengeance.

'Now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal'. 'As Nabal', who Abigail clearly considers as utterly impotent to inflict any real hurt on David – 'let them be as totally ineffective as Nabal'. Although, with our knowledge of the sequel, her words have an almost prophetic ring about them – as certainly do her words in vv. 28-30.

Verse 27. *'This blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord'*. As we noted earlier, Abigail's word 'blessing' was used to describe a gift of goods – a concrete benefit – as when Jacob spoke to Esau, 'Take, I pray thee, my *blessing* that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough', Gen. 33.11. We might also compare Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 9, where he uses the same Greek word as is found in the Septuagint rendering of our verse, 'Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty (*blessing*), whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty (*of blessing*), and not as *of covetousness*. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully (*for blessings*) shall reap also bountifully (*blessings*)', 2 Cor. 9. 5-6. That is, Paul says, as far as giving financially to help meet the needs of poor saints, scanty sowing leads to scanty harvest, and plentiful sowing to plentiful harvest³⁸ – if not in this world certainly in the next. Abigail ventured to ask David to accept her gift, but made it clear that she offered it, as if unworthy of David himself, to his men rather than to him. That is, she diplomatically dismissed her substantial gift as fit only for David's men.

Verse 28. *'The Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord'*. As Jonathan back in chapter 23 (vv. 16-17), Abigail encouraged David to lift his eyes and to look beyond the immediate adverse circumstances to the Lord's promise and word – reminding him in effect that he could surely count on the God who had anointed him to be king to protect him and to care for his needs in the meantime.³⁹ David had no need, therefore, Abigail was saying, to be violent and vengeful.

'A sure house'. The word 'sure' signifies 'reliable, stable, firm, certain, dependable, faithful' – being closely related to the word 'Amen' ('surely'). This is the word used, not only by the Lord to Solomon in 1 Kings 11, 'if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways ... I will be with thee, and build thee a *sure house*, as I built⁴⁰ for David', 1 Kings 11.38, but by the Lord through the prophet Nathan to David himself in 2 Samuel 7, 'thine house and thy kingdom shall be established (*'made sure'*) for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever', 2 Sam. 7.16.⁴¹ The remarkable thing is that Abigail's words go beyond any revelation made to David up to this point and come some long time before God reveals His promise of a 'sure house' to David directly in 2 Samuel 7. One scholar has pointed out that Abigail's statement was so clearly a foreshadowing of Nathan's prophecy that the rabbis (of Talmudic times) reckoned Abigail 'among seven women who they believed had been graced by the Holy Spirit, the source of prophecy'.⁴²

Abigail may have been implying that, with such a promise, David not only didn't *need* to do anything rash, but he should be *careful not to* – lest he endanger, or even destroy, this 'lasting dynasty'.

'My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord'. This was exactly how David regarded it, as witness his words to Goliath, 'the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for *the battle is the Lord's*, and he will give you into our hands', 17. 47 – and I already have my eye on Abigail's obvious allusion to David's battle with Goliath in verse 29. Unlike Saul, the king who the people had demanded back in chapter 8, and who would, they then said, 'fight *our battles*', 8. 20, David is the man who 'fights the battles *of the Lord*' – which is, ironically, exactly what Saul had once insincerely and hypocritically asked him to do, 'be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles', 18. 17.

But if David was engaged in fighting the Lord's battles, Abigail reasons, it ill behoved him to stoop to avenging a mere insult which had done him no real harm.

'Evil hath not been found in thee all thy days'. So why start now, David?⁴³

Verse 29. *'A man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul'*. A sideways glance at Saul – king of Israel, he may be, but still only a 'man'.⁴⁴ To Abigail, David was God's appointed 'ruler' and king over Israel, v. 30.

'The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God'. Abigail is confident that neither Saul nor anyone else would be able to snatch David from the protection of the Lord his God, who safely preserves him in, what she calls, the 'bundle' of the living. The word translated 'bundle' occurs elsewhere in the sense of a 'purse' containing money. We read for example in Genesis 42 of Joseph's brethren that when they 'emptied their sacks ... behold, every man's *bundle* of money was in his sack', v. 35, and in Proverbs 7, 'the goodman ... is gone a long journey: he hath taken a *bag* of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed', vv.19-20. The word is also used of a 'pouch' in which something precious is kept, as in chapter 1 of the Song of Solomon, 'a bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me', v. 13. That is to say, Abigail sees David as kept totally secure – as something of great value to the Lord – and kept under His personal care and protection.

'And the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling'. Conversely, the same Lord who holds David safe and sound will 'sling out' (will 'hurl away') his enemies into oblivion as though from the pocket of a 'sling'.⁴⁵

The word-picture Abigail painted of a stone being hurled out of a sling should have reminded David *forcibly* of the time when he had trusted God to give him the victory over the formidable Philistine champion – which the Lord most

certainly had!⁴⁶ Could David not now trust God to protect him and bring him through to kingship – with or without the assistance of the likes of Nabal? By means of her wise words, Abigail aims to redirect David's attention from Nabal back onto the Lord.

It has been suggested that Abigail's references to the 'bundle' and the 'sling' may have reminded David of two very different pouches with which he would have been familiar in his days as a young shepherd – on the one hand, the 'bundle of the living', a possible reference to the pouch or bag which held the shepherd's food (the symbol and means of sustaining life)⁴⁷ and, on the other hand, the 'pocket of the sling', the pouch which held the stone (the instrument of death).⁴⁸ That is, the one pouch spelt life for the sheep's shepherd and the other spelt death for the sheep's enemies. In any case, Abigail's figurative description of David as one kept by God rather than thrown out by Him as from a sling would have appealed greatly to David.

Verse 30. *'When the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed ('commanded') thee ruler over Israel'*. To Abigail, there is no doubt about it, God's promise to David would be fulfilled – no-one could resist God's 'command' – David would assuredly be Israel's next king.

Verse 31. *'That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence (stumbling) of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself'*. If Abigail has so far attempted to persuade David that killing Nabal was both unnecessary and not worth the effort, she now sets out to convince him that taking vengeance would in fact be detrimental to him. She believes that it is David and not Saul who is God's appointed king, and for him to take petty revenge against a fool like Nabal would therefore demean both him and his cause.

David ought not, Abigail counselled him, to do anything which he would have reason to regret later – anything which would come back to haunt him when wearing the crown.

True, Nabal *had* insulted David – but in no way did that justify the slaughter of the man and his entire male household. The Law, with which David was familiar and in which he found his constant delight,⁴⁹ was clear on the matter – 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe', Exod 21. 24-25 (// Lev. 24.20; Deut. 19.21; cf. Matt. 5.38). And the intention behind this law of retaliation (the '*lex talionis*' as it is known) was to *limit* punishment. It aimed to restrain someone who had suffered a minor injury from taking any revenge out of proportion to the offence. That is, God forbade excessive vengeance among His people, and restricted them to exacting equal payment for offences committed against them – and no more.

Yes, Nabal *had* slighted David. Yes, Nabal had refused him provisions for his men. But that, and *that only*, was his crime – and it was *his crime only*. The males of his household had done no wrong whatever to either David or his men. To slaughter Nabal and all the males of his household because one man had been selfish and insulting – the more so now that Abigail had brought ample supplies for David's men – would be therefore to transgress the very Law of God and to shed innocent blood, because the punishment would be out of all proportion to the crime. How tragic, Abigail reasoned, it would be for David to have such a dark cloud over his kingdom, a cloud created for himself by his own hot-headed action in seeking vengeance and shedding innocent blood in this way.

It is impossible to miss the stark contrast between the David of chapter 24 and the David of chapter 25. In chapter 24, David *was the restrainer* – when he would neither harm Saul himself nor permit his men to do so. But, in chapter 25, David *needed himself to be restrained* – when he was bent on spilling Nabal's blood and that of his men. In chapter 24, he had refused to let anyone harm the anointed king. But now, in chapter 25, he stood ready to liquidate a private Israelite. In chapter 24, David recognized that he mustn't take personal vengeance against the Lord's anointed. But, in chapter 25, he didn't make the same connection when it comes to Abigail's husband.

In the event, no king in the Ancient Near East ascended a throne with cleaner hands than David. And how glad he must have been then that there were no haunting memories – no skeletons in the cupboard – and he owed this in no small measure to the wisdom and courage of the wife of Nabal! For my part, I find it is always a healthy exercise to stop and ask myself how any given course of action will appear to me when I enter into the fullness of that which God has promised – when I am heaven ... to ask how it will appear from the vantage point of glory.

'Not avenged himself'. The rules *for us* could not be clearer. 'Dearly beloved', Paul wrote⁵⁰ to the Romans, 'avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto (God's) wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord', Rom. 12. 19. Vengeance is *God's* right, and His right *alone*. It is not for us to execute it. For us to take vengeance is to invade God's domain and usurp God's prerogative. What appalling presumption!⁵¹ Note Paul's '*give place to (God's) wrath*'. This is the flipside of what he says in Ephesians 4, where he pictures the devil as lurking around angry people, all set to pounce and exploit the opportunity they have so kindly given him; 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither *give place to the devil*', vv. 26-27. In Romans 12, Paul teaches us that to *restrain* our anger '*gives place*' to God to act and execute vengeance if He will – in Ephesians he teaches us that to *retain* our anger '*gives place*', not to God, but to the devil!⁵² Satan is just waiting for the opportunity to get his foot in the door – and, Paul warns us, uncontrolled anger opens the door wide for him. 'David, don't give place to the devil – give place to God and His wrath!' In Romans 12, Paul quoted verse 35 from Deuteronomy 32, the context of which indicates that the Lord will intervene to vindicate his people when their enemies abuse them and gloat over them. But, David, that quote is in your Bible too!

'When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid'. Her words 'remember thine handmaid' are reminiscent of the words of Joseph, spoken long before to Pharaoh's cupbearer in Genesis 40 (vv.14-15). Just as Joseph had concluded his conversation with the cupbearer by requesting that the cupbearer 'remember me when it shall be well with thee', Gen. 40. 14 lit., so also Abigail ends her plea by requesting that David 'remember' her when the Lord has 'dealt well' with him – being the same Hebrew verbs in both verses.

There have been few occasions when anyone has given more timely, sound and shrewd advice. Or when a cooler hand has been placed on a hotter head.

A time to speak : (c) David, vv. 32-35

Verses 32-34. *'And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou'.* First, David blessed the Lord. We might compare how, immediately following his answered prayer, Abraham's servant had taken the time to bless Him too; 'the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren', Gen. 24. 26-27. David, as we would expect, blesses 'the Lord God of Israel'.⁵³ The fact that David first blessed the Lord before expressing his appreciation either of Abigail's advice or her person may well be a testimony to the effectiveness of her speech. It is by no means impossible that it was, in part at least, her sevenfold use of the Lord's name⁵⁴ that had restored David's spiritual focus and perspective – turning his eyes off himself and his sense of grievance, and back onto the Lord. Maybe David's 'As the Lord liveth' in verse 34, was an echo of Abigail's 'As the Lord liveth' of verse 26.

It was, I guess, a mark of David's spirituality that he could discern the Lord's hand in his deliverance and go on to thank Him for it. But David didn't stop there. He went on to express his appreciation to Abigail for her advice – for her discernment, for her 'judgement' (as the word is translated in Psa. 119. 66). And we too should always be ready to thank the human instruments through whom the Lord chooses to bless us.

The proverb says, 'As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear', Prov. 25.12. Abigail had been a wise reprover, and David had given an obedient ear to her reproof. And so Abigail found David to be a very different kind of man to her husband Nabal, who wouldn't listen to anyone, v. 17. David was willing to be corrected – recognising and accepting sound advice when it was given.

It is possible I guess that some men wouldn't have been willing even to give Abigail a hearing simply because she was a woman. But David was man enough and wise enough to know that the issue wasn't Abigail's gender – the issue was that the Lord was using her as His 'stop sign', mercifully placed in David's path to keep him from sin. And how often the Lord often graciously intercepts us on our highway of foolishness – not only at times, in the language of Hosea 2, hedging up our way with thorns, v. 6, but choosing and using another's loving hands to construct a roadblock to keep us back from some silliness! How grateful we should be both *for* and *to* them.

'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that urinate against the wall'. The word 'hurting' is the same as rendered 'harming' in Saul's words in the next chapter, 'return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm', 26. 21, and David recognized that the Lord had not only restrained him, through Abigail, from shedding the blood of Nabal and all the males in his household, but had restrained him from 'hurting' and harming Abigail herself in his hot anger. He knew full well that the Lord could have said to him, as He once had to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, concerning Sarah, '*I withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her*', Gen. 20. 6. And we too will likely one day be surprised to learn just how much we owe to God's restraining hand on us.

Verse 35. *'Go up in peace to thine house'.* And so a chapter which began with David's 'peace'-greeting sent to Nabal, vv. 5-6, more or less ends with David's 'peace'-blessing pronounced on Abigail.

'I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person'. David's final words to Abigail must have been music to her ears – not even a song composed and sung by 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' himself, 2 Sam. 23. 1, could have sounded more tuneful.

Verse 36. A time to keep silence.

Eccles. 3.7

'Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king'. Oblivious yet to all that had happened, Nabal was presiding at a banquet fit for a king at the very time that his wife had been declaring her allegiance to David, as Israel's future king.

'Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken'. Like the Rich Fool in our Lord's parable, Nabal was 'taking his ease, eating, *drinking* and *making merry*', Luke 12. 19. In some respects, Nabal reminds me of David's firstborn Amnon at the time of sheep-shearing. 2 Samuel 13 tells us 'that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor ... and Absalom invited all the king's sons ... Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is *merry with wine*, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon, then kill him', 2 Sam. 13. 23, 28⁵⁵ – which they did. But here in 1 Samuel 25, it wasn't David who would smite the godless man at sheep-shearing time!

'Wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light'. Recognizing that Nabal was in no condition to understand whatever she said to him then, Abigail decided to tell him 'nothing small or great' (literally) until daybreak, by which time, had it not been for her secret excursion, Nabal and all his men would have been dead!

Verses 37-38. A time to die.

Eccles. 3.2

Verse 37. *'It came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things* (literally, 'all these words'), *that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone'.* The expression 'all these words' has occurred twice before in our chapter. When, in verse 9, David's men had earlier spoken to Nabal 'all these words', he had insulted David. When, in verse 12, David's men returned to David and reported to him 'all

these words', he had ordered them to arm themselves and had ridden off to deal with Nabal. Now, when Nabal hears 'all these words' from his wife, the shock proved too much for him and he 'became as a stone'.

But our verse throws up at least two questions: (a) first, what information was it which precipitated Nabal's attack? And, (b) second, what was the nature of that attack? And scripture gives us the answer to neither question.

(a) As far as the devastating information is concerned, I suspect that Abigail may have (i) put Nabal in the picture about what she now knew had been David's expressed design, v. 21, (ii) conveyed to him just how narrow an escape he and all his men had had, (iii) reported the substance of what she had said to David, including her confidence that David was Israel's future king, and (iv) provided Nabal with the list of provisions which she had taken from his cherished store to pacify David's wrath. Whatever the exact details which she gave to Nabal, the shock proved too much for him!

(b) As far as his attack is concerned, his becoming 'as a stone' does not *necessarily* point to any specific illness – such as a heart attack or a stroke. It is possible that the expression was used figuratively, as it had been in connection with God's enemies in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15, 'Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be *as still as a stone*', Exod. 15. 16.⁵⁶ But, on the other hand, Nabal's violent temper and excessive drinking meant that he was a prime candidate for a stroke, and it would have been hardly surprising therefore, if, hearing of his very close shave – that, courtesy of David's sword, he could very easily have been dead that morning – and/or hearing of the generous contribution his wife had made from his own hoarded possessions, he *had* suffered a massive stroke.

'*When the wine was gone out of Nabal*'. It is possible that there is a mild play on words here. The Hebrew word for a wineskin is '*nebel*'. And it is suggested by some that the text implies that, in effect, 'Nabal' was just a '*nebel*', and that, when the wine had gone out of him, he was just an empty wineskin – that he was nothing!

And all this 'came to pass in the morning' – that is, by the time David had determined Nabal would be dead – and, as it was, Nabal was as good as dead for it seems he never recovered consciousness from his attack.

Verse 38. '*About ten days after ... the Lord smote Nabal, that he died*'. The reader can hardly miss the brevity of the verse. It is as if God would say to David, 'David, I want you to note the simplicity, to note the ease with which I took care of everything in the end. How unnecessary then all your violent intentions and human efforts. Surely you can trust Me to deal with Saul also in my own good time'.

Verses 39-44. A time to embrace, and a time to refrain. Eccles. 3.5

Verse 39a. '*When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the Lord*'. David greets the news of Nabal's death with an outburst of praise. In marked contrast to the national mourning for Samuel at the beginning of the chapter, v.1, we know of no-one who lamented the death of Nabal at the close – not even, it seems, his own wife.

'*The Lord ... hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the Lord hath returned the wickedness (lit. evil) of Nabal upon his own head*'. David's words 'pleaded the cause' link us back to what he had said to Saul in the previous chapter, 'The Lord ... *plead my cause*, and deliver me out of thine hand', 24.15. What an encouragement his recent experience must have been to David to trust the Lord to remove Saul when He saw fit.

There is a nice twist in the Hebrew text of verse 39 which many translations miss – 'the Lord ... has kept his servant from *evil*; the Lord has returned the *evil* of Nabal on his own head', literally.

And so David came to acknowledge that the same God who, throughout chapters 18 to 23, had preserved him *from death and danger*, had more recently preserved him also from *sin*.⁵⁷ As one commentator wrote – and it is well worth us noting – 'It is a mark of sincere and genuine godliness to be not less thankful for being kept from sinning than from being rescued from suffering'.⁵⁸

And it was to the Lord, who, in 1 Samuel 25, '*had kept back*' David from sinning against both Abigail, v. 34, and Nabal, v. 39, that David prayed in Psalm 19, '*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me*', v. 13.

But has the Lord never saved *us* also from some wrong course of action – from some premeditated evil? I suspect that, if I reviewed the details of each day more carefully, I should also find more reason by far than I do to praise God for His gracious, sin-preventing providences.

Verses 39b-40. '*And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife*'. David did more than 'remember' Abigail as she had asked, v. 31 – and that before he was appointed ruler over Israel, v. 30. He proposed marriage to her. The proverb says, 'Good understanding (the word of 1 Sam. 25. 3) giveth favour', Prov. 13.15. Well, Abigail's 'good understanding' certainly gave her favour in the eyes of David.

Verse 41. '*She arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth*'. Abigail 'bowed herself ... to the earth' before David's servants, just as earlier she had before David himself, when, in verse 23, 'she fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground (the same Hebrew word as rendered 'earth' in verse 41) – regarding his messengers as representing him and paying them the same respect as if David had been there in person. Back in verses 5-11, Nabal had 'despised' both David's young men and David himself; here in verse 41, Abigail 'hears' and receives both David's servants and David himself. Again, I say, that, in the gospel preaching, it is in reality God who speaks to men *through* men. The gospel is preached in His name and on His authority, and is to be received with the respect which is due to a message which is sourced ultimately in Him. I think of the testimony which Paul paid to the Thessalonians in chapter 2 of his first letter, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God', v. 13.

'Let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'. In scripture, it was normal for a person to wash his or her own feet.⁵⁹ In New Testament days, however, the task was often performed by a slave – although to the Jews of those days, foot-washing was regarded as such a menial and demeaning task that no Jewish slave could be required to wash the feet of his master. That duty was reserved for gentile slaves.⁶⁰ For wealthy Abigail to express her willingness to wash the feet, not even of David himself, but of his servants, was for her to assume the very lowest of positions – in the words of the Lord Jesus, to become 'bondslave of all', Mark 10. 44 lit. But, if we marvel at *her* self-abasement, how much the more ought we to marvel at the infinitely greater stoop and humility of the disciples' own 'Lord and Master', when, in the upper room, He dressed Himself with a slave's towel⁶¹ and proceeded to wash *their* feet, John 13. 4-5, 12-14!

At the time, David was, of course, an outlawed, homeless wanderer. And yet Abigail was willing to throw in her lot with him – to endure trial, hardship and danger for his sake.⁶² But Abigail knew it would be for only a brief season – that David was God's appointed king. And so she married in faith, confident of the fulfilment of God's promises, and assured that, by sharing David's lot in the present, in due time she would 'reign with him'.

Verse 42. *'And Abigail ... became his wife'*. By his marriage to Abigail, it is likely, I suppose, that David became the legal possessor of all Nabal's property in Carmel and Maon – although, given the current circumstances, he would not be able to take advantage of this for some time yet. You are probably familiar with the words attributed to the late President Gerald Ford (mid-70s), 'If Lincoln were alive today, he'd roll over in his grave'. Well, I guess that, if Nabal had still been alive, he would certainly have turned over in his grave!

More seriously, in our Lord's parable of the Rich Fool, God asked him, 'whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?', Luke 12. 20. In the case of the 'rich fool' in our chapter, by title at least, all 'those things' became David's! Every one of Nabal's 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats became the property of the despised 'son of Jesse'!

At some point in the future, David had one son by Abigail, which son they named both Chileab ('like his father'), 2 Sam. 3. 3, and Daniel (meaning, with great significance no doubt for David in all the circumstances, 'God is (my) judge'), 1 Chron. 3. 1. In that we hear no more of this son, it is seems likely that he died in childhood.

But I don't suppose I can duck the question whether David was right to marry Abigail. First, there is the issue of his earlier marriage to Michal, 18. 27. True, it could be argued that, in one sense, he was no longer married to Michal because her father Saul had more recently given her to another man, v. 44. And yet ... I note that, in the context of David later reclaiming Michal as his wife, when speaking to Abner, he refers to Michal as 'Saul's daughter', 2 Sam. 3. 13, thereby making it clear to Abner that, if he agreed to bring her with him, he would be turning his back on Ishbosheth for good, and agreeing to David's succession to Saul's throne. But, when speaking to Ishbosheth, David calls Michal 'my wife', v. 14, thereby reminding Ishbosheth that, in his eyes, and in spite of Saul's action, *she is still his wife*, not Paltiel's, and that the responsibility for her being then with Paltiel was Ishbosheth's, since he was now the son and heir of Saul.⁶³ As far as the text of scripture goes therefore, Michal remained David's wife – at least in his eyes – at the time he married Abigail. And then there is always David's marriage to 'Ahinoam of Jezreel', which takes us to verse 43.

Verse 43. *'David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives'*. I note, first, that the literal translation is 'David *had* also *taken* Ahinoam'.⁶⁴ I observe also that, whenever the names of Ahinoam and Abigail are found together, Ahinoam is always mentioned first, 1 Sam. 27. 3; 30. 5; 2 Sam 2. 2; 3. 2-3 (// 1 Chron. 3. 1-4). And I note, finally, that it was Ahinoam who bore David's *first* son, Amnon, 2 Sam. 3.2. There must be a strong presumption therefore that David was already married to Ahinoam before he took Abigail as his wife.⁶⁵

It has been pointed out that, prior to becoming king of Israel, David entered into several marriages which *had the effect* of strengthening his political position. Apart from his marriage to Saul's daughter Michal, which gave him a direct connection with the royal family, his marriage to Abigail provided him with links to the area around Hebron, and his marriage to Ahinoam of Jezreel established connections with the north of Israel. And I wouldn't deny that, as a result of these marriages, when the time came for David to be made king, he may well have had contacts with some of the elders from key areas in the country.

But I see no reason to believe that David ever thought or planned that way. All the evidence points rather to David having put his trust in the Lord to secure the crown for him – and that in the Lord's own time. As I read the history, David would have seen no need to make political marriages at this stage. We know also that he was married to Michal only as a result of Saul's own suggestion and scheming. It seems clear also that he married Abigail because of the virtuous and spiritual qualities which he found in this outstanding woman. Nor is it difficult to see why David found her attractive. Not only was she both intelligent and beautiful but she was also a true soul-mate for him, sharing his outlook on life and his commitment to God. We have no information about why David married Ahinoam, but I see no more grounds for attributing any more political motivation to David in her case than in the cases of Michal and Abigail.

Well, *was* David right to marry Abigail – or Ahinoam for that matter?

We know that polygamy⁶⁶ had been practised as far back as Lamech, the seventh from Adam through Cain, Gen. 4. 19-24, and that, within the Messianic line, it reached back as far as Abraham, Gen. 16. 3, and Jacob, Gen. 29. 21-30. In the more recent past, it had been practised by Gideon, Elkanah, and Saul, Judg. 8. 8-30; 1 Sam. 1. 2; 2 Sam. 12. 8. In the Law of God, the Lord Himself had acknowledged that a man might have 'two wives', requiring only that, in such circumstances, the rights of the firstborn son had to be maintained, Deut. 21. 15-17. But, although God at no time condemned polygamy in the Old Testament, at no time did He commend it. And His ideal for marriage – of one man and one woman – was made clear from 'the beginning', when the Lord God not only *formed* only one wife for Adam, but said, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh', Gen. 2 24; Matt. 19. 4-6. It seems clear therefore that polygamy, in the same way as divorce, was only tolerated by God on account of the hardness of the people's hearts; see Matt. 19. 8.⁶⁷

Apart from which, in one sense, David was not a *private* individual. He was – and knew he was – the man destined to be king over God’s people. It was customary in the Ancient Near East for great warriors and monarchs to have many wives and concubines (effectively, mistresses). And we know that, at one time or another, David himself had at least ten wives; Michal, 18.27, Ahinoam, Abigail, Maachah, Haggith, Abital, Eglah, Bathsheba, 1 Chron. 3.1-8, together with Saul’s wives, 2 Sam. 12. 8 – not to mention his own concubines, 1 Chron. 3. 9.

But concerning kings over His people, God had said explicitly in Deuteronomy 17, ‘Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose ... *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself*, that his heart turn not away’, vv. 14, 17. And yet even here the evidence is not as straightforward as it may seem. The text of Deuteronomy 17 clearly specifies the reason for God’s condemnation of multiple marriages in the case of a king – namely, the danger that his wives (evidently foreign wives) would lead the king astray into idolatrous ways – of which David’s own son Solomon was to prove a classic example; ‘King Solomon loved many strange (foreign) women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods’, 1 Kings 11. 1-2.

I conclude therefore that, in marrying both Ahinoam and Abigail, David probably wasn’t *directly* infringing any of God’s laws. And yet, because it fell far short of God’s *ideal* for marriage – of one man and one woman – by doing so, David was sowing seeds of trouble into his home from the start. And as we know from later events, David’s later family problems furnished David with some of the greatest trials of his life – although I acknowledge that many of these came in the form of God’s discipline following David’s great sins in connection with Bathseba and Uriah.⁶⁸

Verse 44. ‘Saul had given Michal his daughter, David’s wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim’. In many ways, this was hardly surprising. After all, Saul had only given Michal to David in the first place in the hope that David would be slain by the Philistines, 18. 17-21. In now giving her to another man, Saul was making a public statement that David no longer had any bond of kinship with the royal family and therefore had no legitimate claim to the crown.

In the event, as detailed in 2 Samuel 3, David later reclaimed Michal from Phalti (Phaltiel), 2 Sam. 3. 13-16 – although it seems from her later despising of David when he danced ‘with all his might’ before the Lord and the ark of the Lord, 2 Sam. 6. 16-23, that Michal never really shared David’s spiritual outlook. I suspect that her reaction then revealed that Michal had a lot of her father’s blood in her, for it seems that the ark wasn’t held in particularly high esteem in Saul’s day. I observe that David said to the people later, ‘let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul’, 1 Chron. 13. 3.

To conclude, and still on the subject of David’s wives, I note that David acquired several of his wives only because other men first died: (a) for Michal became David’s wife only because of the death of 200 uncircumcised Philistine troops – this at David’s own hand; (b) Abigail became David’s wife only because of the death of a wealthy Israelite sheep-farmer – this at God’s hand; and (c) Bathsheba became David’s wife only because of the death of a noble Hittite warrior – this by the hand of the Ammonites, albeit engineered by David himself.

Pick up the lessons :

Verses 1 and 38. Both Samuel and Nabal are said to have ‘died’. We are told that ‘all Israel’ lamented Samuel, but as far as we know, no-one mourned over the death of Nabal – not even his wife. Let us make the effort so to live that, if we die, men may have cause to remember us with affection and respect.

Verse 2. We ventured the thought that, by the *foolish and selfish abuse* of his riches, Nabal secured for himself only ‘eternal fire’, Luke 16. 22-28, but that, by the *wise and unselfish use* of his riches, Barzillai made ‘friends’ and was received into ‘eternal tabernacles’, Luke 16. 9. We noted that Nabal was rich only in worldly substance – not, as his wife, in wisdom and godliness – that he was not, in the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘rich towards God’. In what do my riches consist?

Verse 3. We noted the many stark contrasts between Nabal and Abigail. Yet they were bound together as husband and wife. We need to be aware that there are occasions when a Christian finds himself or herself married to an ungodly spouse – even though that spouse may masquerade as one of God’s people. There are occasion when a godly wife in particular can be held in the grip of lifelong humiliation and sorrow. We should be alert to such cases and bring to them our prayer, sympathy and understanding. And those of us who have the untold blessing of a happy Christian marriage, how thankful we should be to the Lord.

Verse 5. We considered a man who lived only for himself and who used his wealth only for himself. We need to be constantly on our guard against covetousness and greed. I was struck some time ago by ‘Toddler’s Creed’, written by Elisa Morgan, president of Mothers of Preschoolers : ‘If I want it, its mine. If I give it to you, and change my mind later, it’s mine. If I can take it away from you, it’s mine. If I had it before, it’s mine. If it’s mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what. If we are building something together; all the pieces are mine. If it looks just like mine, it *is* mine’. And that philosophy isn’t confined to toddlers by any means. But how different the example and teaching of the Lord Jesus!

Verse 13. We noted that the measure of our Christian character is as much, if not more, the way in which we treat our equals or those in some sense 'beneath' us as the way we treat our superiors or those who are in some sense 'under' us.

We noted also that, in his determination to slaughter Nabal for his meanness and intentional insult, David had enrolled himself in what we called 'the school of *the zeal of the sons of Boanerges*' rather than the school of *the meekness of the Son of David*' – that David did not 'know what spirit he was of'. The Lord Jesus has made our duty clear to us, 'whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also'. This is the law of the kingdom! Yes, but do I obey it?

Verse 14. We noted the all-important role played by Nabal's young servant who acquainted Abigail with all that had happened. He was simply a link in a chain. Not a very big link – but a necessary link for all that. We compared his role to that of Namaan's little maid and Paul's nephew and invited ourselves to stand in awe at the wonderful workings of our God, who can bring about His purpose through whoever He pleases.

Verse 25. We noted that a man with great possessions, who would be judged hugely successful by the world, in God's book was a fool. Remember that the worth of a man consists, not in what he has, but in what he is.

Verse 31. We noted that Abigail helped David to imagine how his present planned action would look to him when he eventually became king. It would be a healthy exercise for all of us to stop and imagine how any given course of action will appear to us when we reach heaven.

Verse 32. We noted that David was prepared to listen to the counsel and advice of someone else – and when he knew it to be right to act on it. He was prepared to get the egg on his face of admitting he had been wrong – and that in the eyes of his own men – having earlier told them to put on their swords. Are my ears open to advice from others? Am I prepared to admit my errors of judgement?

We noted also that David blessed the Lord before he blessed Abigail and her advice. That is, David looked beyond the instrument the Lord had used to the Lord Himself. Do I? And thank Him accordingly?

Verse 33. We noted that David then went on to express his appreciation to the one who the Lord had used. We too should always be ready to thank the human instruments through whom the Lord chooses to bless us.

Verse 34. We noted David's recognition that Abigail had arrived only just in time to avert the massacre of Nabal and his men. Our God is a God of perfect timing. Surely with His track record, we can afford to trust Him!

Verses 34 and 39. We noted that David recognized that the Lord had restrained him both from hurting Abigail and from shedding the blood of Nabal and all the males in his household, and suggested that one day we may be surprised to learn just how much we have owed to God's restraining hand on us. There can be little doubt that if, meanwhile, we reviewed the details of each day more carefully, we should find more reasons to praise God for His gracious, sin-preventing providences.

Verse 38. Nabal died. And he left every one of his 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats behind him. When alive, he loved to gloat that all these things – and everything else with which he had been blessed – were his, and his only. But when he died he took nothing with him – not so much as a single sheep. We need to take to heart the words of Paul, 'godliness (and Nabal, as a biblical 'fool', was an ungodly man) with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out', 1 Tim. 6. 6-7.

Verse 41. We noted that, though, at the time, David was an outlawed, homeless wanderer, Abigail was willing to throw in her lot with him and to endure hardship and danger for his sake because she knew that it would be for only a brief season. We too now have the privilege of associating ourselves with 'the rejected King', knowing that in due time we shall 'reign with him'. 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach'.

End-notes

- ¹ God not infrequently used women to avert a tragedy in Israel's history. Compare Exod. 2. 5-10; Judg. 4-5; 2 Sam. 14.2-20; 20. 16-22; 2 Kings 11.2; the book of Esther.
- ² See Gen. 47. 3; Eccles. 4. 3 – where the word is translated 'work'.
- ³ That Maon was near to Carmel is clear from Josh. 15. 55.
- ⁴ Meaning 'Garden Spot'.
- ⁵ Nina Hyde, 'Wool—Fabric of History', *National Geographic* 173, 5 [1988]: 557.
- ⁶ I can see no evidence that she had any contact with Samuel personally. She lived some way from Samuel's 'circuit', 7. 16 – and even further from Samuel's home and base in Ramah, 15. 34. I don't know where she learnt what she had about David.
- ⁷ It has been suggested that Abigail was one of David's two sisters on the grounds that his sister was the only other Abigail mentioned in the Bible, 1 Chron. 2. 15-16. According to 2 Samuel 17. 25, David's sister Abigail was the daughter of Nahash, just possibly the Ammonite ruler of 2 Sam. 11. 1-2 and 12. 12. This identification would help to explain the friendship between Nahash and David, 2 Sam. 10. 2. At the same time, since David was the son of Jesse, Abigail could have been only his half-sister. See Keil/Delitzsch, *The Book of Chronicles*, pages 62-63. If the Abigail of 1 Sam. 25 was David's half-sister, her first husband would have been Jether – just possibly Nabal's real name, 2 Sam 17. 25; 1 Chron. 2. 17. Personally, I find nothing in the text of 1 Samuel 25 to support this theory.
- ⁸ See 2 Sam. 3. 39; Exod. 1. 14; Deut. 26. 6.
- ⁹ The Massoretic *vocalized* Hebrew text.
- ¹⁰ The Septuagint translators understood it as implying a man of a canine disposition, rendering it, 'he was a doggish man'.
- ¹¹ The Massoretic *consonantal* text.
- ¹² Hebron was also one of the cities of refuge, Josh. 20. 7.
- ¹³ Num. 14. 24; 32. 12; Deut. 1. 36; Josh. 14. 8, 9, 14.
- ¹⁴ From 'the point of view of strict grammar', it is possible that Judges 1. 13 and 3. 9 indicate that Othniel was the son of Kenaz, who was the (younger) brother of Caleb – that is, that Othniel was Caleb's nephew. Caleb, however, is referred to as 'the Kenezite', Num. 32. 13, which may well suggest that he, as Othniel, was a 'son' (viz. 'descendant') of Kenaz. Indeed, the statement that Othniel was a 'younger brother' has little relevance if applied to Kenaz, but, if applied to Caleb, may well have been included to explain (a) that the age discrepancy between the uncle (Othniel) and the niece (Achsah, daughter of Caleb) was not as great as might be thought, and (b) how it was that Othniel long outlived Caleb. (Largely based on the note on 'Othniel' in Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible*, volume 3, pages 635-636.) See also 1 Chronicles 4.13, and the note to that verse and the next in the Commentary of Keil/Delitzsch.
- ¹⁵ Compare the military exploit which Saul asked of David as a bride-price for his daughter Michal, 1 Sam. 18. 25-27.
- ¹⁶ See D. R. Davis on Judges 3. 7-11 (page 51), and the Expositor's Bible Commentary on Judges 3. 8.
- ¹⁷ 'Good' in vv. 3, 8, 15, 21, 30-31, 36; and 'evil' in vv. 3, 17, 21, 26, 34, 39.
- ¹⁸ See *'The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story'*, G. M. Gunn, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* 14, page 96 and note 7 on page 154.
- ¹⁹ I say, 'regarded as his' because, although in one sense it was his, Acts 5. 4, in a higher sense it had been given him by God and as such was really Gods, 1 Chron. 29. 14, 16.
- ²⁰ It is by no means impossible that in the parable of Nathan, 2 Sam. 12. 1-4, the Lord so portrayed the bad man as to remind David of Nabal. Note the reference to the man's riches, his 'exceeding many flocks and herds', and his fundamental selfishness which expressed itself in refusing to part with 'his own flock and of his own herd' for the benefit of someone else – for a 'traveller' ('one who dropped in'). This association of thought – together with David's shepherd-feelings for the 'one little ewe lamb' (for the like of which he would onetime have gladly risked his life in tackling lion and bear, 17. 34-36) and his inbuilt feelings of justice – may well account for David's anger being 'greatly kindled against the man' and David's decision that the wretched man would 'surely die' (that he was 'a son of death', literally), 2 Sam. 12. 5 – just as had Nabal at God's hand. It was, for David, an extremely pointed and stirring story! And did David come to see the striking contrast between the 'Nabal/Abigail' situation and the 'Uriah/Bathsheba' situation? That he obtained each woman as his wife following the death of her husband – but that the hands which were clean of 'blood' in the case of Abigail, 1 Sam. 25. 26, 31, 33, ran red with blood in the case of Bathsheba?
- ²¹ For the association of 'bread' and 'water', see, for example, 'the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water', Num. 21. 5, and compare Deut. 9. 9, 18; 1 Kings 13. 8-9, 16-17.
- ²² There is another sense, of course, in which our possessions *are* our own. Peter expressed it well to Ananias in Acts 5, 'Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?', v. 4.
- ²³ See 1 Sam. 23. 2, 4, 9-12; 30. 7-8.
- ²⁴ Joab was confident that David was well versed in the events recorded in Judges 9. Compare 2 Sam. 11. 18-21 with Judg. 9. 50-56.

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- ²⁵ The same Hebrew expression is used of Sheba, who also referred disparagingly to David as 'son of Jesse', 2 Sam. 10. 1.
- ²⁶ See Exod. 4. 20; Josh. 15. 18; Judg. 1. 14; 2 Chron. 28. 15.
- ²⁷ David often took note of occasions when men repaid him evil for good; Psa. 35. 12; 38. 20; 109. 5. For the theme of rewarding/requiting evil for good, see 1 Sam. 24. 17; 25. 21; 29. 6; Rom. 3.8; 7.19, 21; 9.11; 12. 17, 21; 13. 3; 14. 16; 1 Thess. 5. 15; 1 Pet. 3. 9, 11, 17.
- ²⁸ One commentator suggests that, since, following Abigail's intervention, David's threat was never carried out, 'a scribe has changed David's words [in the Massoretic Hebrew Text] to protect him (or his descendants!) from the consequences of the oath'; Mc Carthy, *I Samuel*, page 394, note 22.
- ²⁹ See too 1 Sam. 28. 14, 20 – together with the note on 1 Sam. 28. 14.
- ³⁰ Verses 24, 25(2), 26(2), 27(2), 28(2), 29, 30, 31(3).
- ³¹ Verses 24 (2), 25, 27, 28, 31; see also v. 41.
- ³² Indeed, in some cases, 'name' effectively equals 'person' – as in 'Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger', Isa. 30. 27.
- ³³ Note also the significance attached to the name of Isaiah's two sons, Shear-jashub ('a remnant shall return'; cf. 6. 13), Isa. 7.3, and Maher-shalal-hash-baz ('swift to spoil; haste to prey'); 8. 1- 4, 18.
- ³⁴ 'One who acts foolishly in a moral or religious sense, breaking social orders or behaving treacherously towards God', NIDOTTE, number 5576. One 'who is impious and acts disgracefully', TWOT, number 1285, Vol. 2, page 547. 'In the OT several Hebrew words denote "folly", "fool", etc. They do not usually imply mere stupidity or actual insanity ... there is generally a religious and ethical content in them', Alan Richardson, *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, page 84.
- ³⁵ Compare David's lament over Abner, 'Died Abner as a fool dieth?', 2 Sam. 3. 3.
- ³⁶ The word translated 'avenging' occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament and means properly 'to save, to deliver' – as, for instance, in 23. 2, 5, where David 'saved' the men of Keilah.
- ³⁷ NIDOTTE number 3828, vol. 2, page 557.
- ³⁸ Based on the paraphrase in the *Twentieth Century New Testament*.
- ³⁹ Abigail was as confident of David's rise to kingship, v.30, as Rahab had been confident of Israel's conquest of Canaan, Josh. 2. 9-13. Both women bore testimony to God's revelation and, in doing so, to their own faith.
- ⁴⁰ The word of 2 Sam. 7. 5, 7.
- ⁴¹ 2 Samuel 7 contains a pun; David had wanted to build a 'house' (that is, a temple) for God, vv. 5-7, but God said that He would make David a 'house' (that is, a dynasty), v. 11. The Lord assured David in 2 Sam. 7. 11-16 that his dynasty would not be cut off like that of Saul – which, in the light of recent history, David may well have feared; see especially v. 15. The promise that David's kingdom and throne would last 'for ever', v. 16, necessitated either that (a) his dynasty would be perpetually renewed by the kingship passing from father to son, to son, to son ad infinitum, or (b) at some time one King would come of David's line – of his 'seed' – who would Himself reign for ever. 1 Samuel had spoken earlier of 'a sure house', but then in the context of 'a faithful priest'; 'I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever', 1 Sam. 2.35 – in all probability, with immediate reference to Samuel, but, looking beyond him, to the house of Zadok, and ultimately to its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus. Note the reference in both passages, not only to 'a sure house' but to that which would be 'for ever'.
- ⁴² Levenson, *I Samuel 25 as Literature and History*, page 231.
- ⁴³ Compare verses 31 and 39.
- ⁴⁴ Compare the way in which Nehemiah spoke to God about the mighty king of Persia, 'Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of *this man*. For I was the king's cupbearer', Neh. 1. 11.
- ⁴⁵ Compare the words of Jeremiah, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land', Jer. 10.18.
- ⁴⁶ In the record of which we find the only other occurrence of the Hebrew verb in the Piel, rendered 'sling', 17. 49; compare the cognate noun 'sling', 17. 40, 50.
- ⁴⁷ I note that the 'scrip', 1 Sam. 17.40, was a leather bag 'thrown over the shoulder, and used by shepherds and travellers to carry provision', *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, James M. Freeman, Logos, 1972.
- ⁴⁸ See G. M. Mackie, *Bible Manners and Customs*, page 33.
- ⁴⁹ Psa. 119. 70, 77, 174; cf. Psa. 119.16, 24, 35, 47.
- ⁵⁰ Pedantically speaking, Tertius wrote the epistle and Paul dictated it; Rom .16. 22; cf. 1 Cor. 16. 21; 2 Thess. 3.17.
- ⁵¹ Also note, 'we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people', Heb. 10.30. The emphasis there is *not* on the fact that men should not exercise vengeance – which is the meaning of the quote from Deut. 32. 35-36 in context. The emphasis is rather on the certainty that the Lord will act. The wrongdoer cannot hope to go unpunished because avenging wrong is in the hands of no-one less than God. The verb 'to judge' can mean 'to give a favorable judgment' as well as 'to condemn'. In Deut. 32.36, it is deliverance that is in mind. But God does not vindicate his people if they have sinned; vindication implies that they have been faithful in their service. But where they have not been faithful, that same principle of impartial and righteous judgment demands punishment. It is this which the writer to the Hebrews has primarily in mind. That a man *claims* to be one of the people of God does not exempt him from judgement. God judges all – so don't let the apostate think that he will escape.
- ⁵² Not 'yield room to him', as in Luke 14. 9.

⁵³ Note David's second 'Blessed be the Lord' in verse 39. It seems that it was his habit of life to bless the Lord for all things; see also Psa. 28. 6; 31. 21; 41. 13; 144. 1. Compare, in the New Testament, Eph. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.3; and 1 Pet. 1.3 – spanning the past, present and future.

⁵⁴ 1 Sam. 25. 26 (2), 28 (2), 29, 30 and 31.

⁵⁵ A case of repaying evil for evil.

⁵⁶ The expression 'they shall be as still as a stone' in Exod 15. 16 may well signify their 'stone-cold' silence.

⁵⁷ David learned his lesson. When sorely provoked by Shimei later, he exhibited remarkable patience, 2 Sam. 16. 10-12.

⁵⁸ W. G. Blaikie, *The First Book of Samuel*, The Expositor's Bible.

⁵⁹ See Gen. 18. 4; 19. 2; 24. 32; 43. 24; Judg. 19. 21; 2 Sam 11. 8; Song of Songs 5. 3; Luke 7. 44.

⁶⁰ See G. R. Beasley-Murray's comment on John 13. 4-5 in the Word Biblical Commentary.

⁶¹ Greek 'λεντιον' – the equivalent of the Latin 'lentium', which word Suetonius used of a slave's garment.

⁶² Although there was no way she could have foreseen the close call she would have in chapter 30 – when she, with all the other womenfolk and children, would be taken captive and bound for a life of slavery. I guess that, at that moment, she may not have found being David's wife so attractive!

⁶³ Personally, I regard it as an open question whether David's repossession of Michal violated the terms of Deut 24. 1-4. On the one hand, his separation from his wife certainly hadn't been voluntary and he had not served her with 'a bill of divorcement'. But, on the other hand, she 'had become another man's wife' (note that Phaltiel is called 'her husband' several times, 2 Sam. 3. 15-16) and had therefore been 'defiled'. I note that 'the right of a husband to reclaim his wife ... is well entrenched in Mesopotamian law'⁶³, and I guess this may well have applied in Israel also.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Mr Darby's New Translation.

⁶⁵ The only other Ahinoam mentioned in the Bible is the wife of Saul, 1 Sam. 14. 50, and it has been suggested that, before David took Ahinoam or Abigail to be his wives, he had already asserted his right to the throne of Israel by marrying Queen Ahinoam. Personally, I think this scarcely credible – partly because of David's willingness to leave his accession to the throne in God's hands, partly because Saul was still very much alive at this point, and partly because such an action would have made a farce of David's later protests to Saul about his own innocence, 26. 18, 23! It does seem, however, that David later did take Saul's widow Ahinoam into his harem – along with any other of Saul's widows, 2 Sam. 12. 8.

⁶⁶ I use the word 'polygamy' rather loosely – as shorthand to cover bigamy also.

⁶⁷ Herod the Great had nine wives at one time, Jos., *Ant.* XVII. 19. One of the qualifications of an elder is that he must be the husband of only one wife, 1 Tim. 3. 12; Tit. 1. 6, which *may* be a prohibition on polygamy. Compare 'wife of one husband', 1 Tim. 5. 9, where note the difference in tense – in 1 Tim. 5. 9 it is the widow's condition *before* her present consideration for inclusion, whereas in 1 Tim. 3. 2 it is the man's condition *at the time* of his consideration for inclusion.

⁶⁸ I note that the same words 'sent' and 'took her' are found both here and in the account of David's adultery with Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11. 4. Perhaps we see here the seed of a trait in David which bore its bitter fruit there – namely David's failure to restrain himself in relationships with women.