
1SAMUEL 25: 1 Samuel died; and all Israel gathered themselves together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

The death of Samuel, 1Sam 25:1. The history of Nabal, and his churlishness towards David and his men, 1Sam 25:2-12. David, determining to punish him, is appeased by Abigail, Nabal's wife, vv. 13-35. Abigail returns, and tells Nabal of the danger that he has escaped: who on hearing it is thunderstruck, and dies in ten days, 1Sam 25:36-38 David, hearing of this, sends and takes Abigail to wife, 1Sam 25:39-42. He marries also Ahinoam of Jezreel, Saul having given Michal, David's wife, to Phalti, the son of Laish, 1Sam 25:43, 1Sam 25:44.

Verse 1

And Samuel died - Samuel lived, as is supposed, about ninety-eight years; was in the government of Israel before Saul from sixteen to twenty years; and ceased to live, according to the Jews, about four months before the death of Saul; but according to Calmet and others, two years. But all this is very uncertain; how long he died before Saul, cannot be ascertained. For some account of his character, see the end of the chapter, 1Sam 25:44 (note).

Buried him in his house - Probably this means, not his dwelling-house, but the house or tomb he had made for his sepulture; and thus the Syriac and Arabic seem to have understood it.

David - went down to the wilderness of Paran - This was either on the confines of Judea, or in Arabia Petraea, between the mountains of Judah and Mount Sinai; it is evident from the history that it was not far from Carmel, on the south confines of Judah.

1SAMUEL 25: 2 There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

1SAMUEL 25: 3 Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail; and the woman was of good understanding, and of a beautiful face: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.

Verse 3

The name of the man was Nabal - The word נבל nabal signifies to be foolish, base, or villanous; and hence the Latin word nebulo, knave, is supposed to be derived.

The name of his wife Abigail - The joy or exultation of my father. A woman of sense and beauty, married to the boor mentioned above, probably because he was rich. Many women have been thus sacrificed.

Of the house of Caleb - והוא כלבי vehu Chalibbi, "he was a Calebite." But as the word caleb signifies a dog, the Septuagint have understood it as implying a man of a canine disposition, and translate it thus, καὶ ὁ ἀνθρώπος κυνικός, he was a doggish man. It is understood in the same way by the Syriac and Arabic.

1SAMUEL 25: 4 David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.

1SAMUEL 25: 5 David sent ten young men, and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name.

1SAMUEL 25: 6 You shall tell him, 'Long life to you! Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.

Verse 6

Peace be both to thee - This is the ancient form of sending greetings to a friend: Peace to Thee, peace to thy Household, and peace to all that Thou Hast. That is, May both thyself, thy family, and all that pertain unto thee, be in continual prosperity!

Perhaps David, by this salutation, wished Nabal to understand that he had acted so towards him and his property that nothing had been destroyed, and that all had been protected; see 1Sam 25:15-17.

1SAMUEL 25: 7 Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds have now been with us, and we didn't hurt them, neither was there anything missing from them, all the while they were in Carmel.

Verse 7

Thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not - It is most evident that David had a claim upon Nabal, for very essential services performed to his herdmen at Carmel. He not only did them no hurt, and took none of their flocks for the supply of his necessities, but he protected them from the rapacity of others; they were a Wall unto us, said Nabal's servants, both by night and day. In those times, and to the present day, wandering hordes of Arabs, under their several chiefs, think they have a right to exact contributions of provisions, etc., wherever they come; David had done nothing of this kind, but protected them against those who would.

1SAMUEL 25: 8 Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let the young men find favour in your eyes; for we come in a good day. Please give whatever comes to your hand, to your servants, and to your son David.'"

Verse 8

Whatsoever cometh to thine hand - As thou art making a great feast for thy servants, and I and my men, as having essentially served thee, would naturally come in for a share were we present; send a portion by my ten young men, for me and my men, that we also may rejoice with you. Certainly this was a very reasonable and a very modest request. This mode of address is not unfrequent among the Hindoos: "O father, fill the belly of thy son; he is in distress."

1SAMUEL 25: 9 When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.

1SAMUEL 25: 10 Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants who break away from their masters these days."

Verse 10

Who is David? - Nabal's answer shows the surliness of his disposition. It was unjust to refuse so reasonable a request; and the manner of the refusal was highly insulting. It is true what his own servants said of him, He is such a son of Belial that one cannot speak to him, 1Sam 25:17.

1SAMUEL 25: 11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who I don't know where they come from?"

1SAMUEL 25: 12 So David's young men turned on their way, and went back, and came and told him according to all these words.

1SAMUEL 25: 13 David said to his men, "Every man put on his sword!"

Every man put on his sword. David also put on his sword. About four hundred men followed David; and two hundred stayed by the baggage.

1SAMUEL 25: 14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to Greet our master; and he railed at them."

1SAMUEL 25: 15 But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we went with them, when we were in the fields.

1SAMUEL 25: 16 They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.

1SAMUEL 25: 17 Now therefore know and consider what you will do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his house; for he is such a worthless fellow that one can't speak to him."

1SAMUEL 25: 18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread, two bottles of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys.

Verse 18

Took two hundred loaves - The Eastern bread is ordinarily both thin and small; and answers to our cakes.

Two bottles of wine - That is, two goat-skins full. The hide is pulled off the animal without ripping up; the places where the legs, etc., were are sewed up, and then the skin appears one large bag. This is properly the Scripture and Eastern bottle. There is one such before me.

Five sheep - Not one sheep to one hundred men.

Clusters of raisins - Raisins dried in the sun.

Cakes of figs - Figs cured, and then pressed together. We receive the former in jars, and the latter in small barrels; and both articles answer the description here given.

Now all this provision was a matter of little worth, and, had it been granted in the first instance, it would have perfectly satisfied David, and secured the good offices of him and his men. Abigail showed both her wisdom and prudence in making this provision. Out of three thousand sheep Nabal could not have missed five; and as this claim was made only in the time of sheep-shearing, it could not have been made more than once in the year: and it certainly was a small price for such important services.

1SAMUEL 25: 19 She said to her young men, "Go on before me. Behold, I come after you." But she didn't tell her husband, Nabal.

1SAMUEL 25: 20 It was so, as she rode on her donkey, and came down by the covert of the mountain, that behold, David and his men came down toward her; and she met them.

Verse 20

She came down - and David - came down - David was coming down Mount Paran; Abigail was coming down from Carmel. - Calmet.

1SAMUEL 25: 21 Now David had said, "Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained to him. He has returned me evil for good.

1SAMUEL 25: 22 God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if I leave of all that belongs to him by the morning light so much as one who urinates on a wall."

Verse 22

So and more also do God - Nothing can justify this part of David's conduct. Whatever his provocation might have been, he had suffered, properly speaking, no wrongs; and his resolution to cut off a whole innocent family, because Nabal had acted ungenerously towards him, was abominable and cruel, not to say diabolic. He who attempts to vindicate this conduct of David is, at least constructively, a foe to God and truth. David himself condemns this most rash and unwarrantable conduct, and thanks God for having prevented him from doing this evil, 1Sam 25:32, etc.

Any that pisseth against the wall - This expression certainly means either men or dogs, and should be thus translated, if I leave, any male; and this will answer both to men and dogs, and the offensive mode of expression be avoided. I will not enter farther into the subject: Bochart and Calmet have done enough, and more than enough; and in the plainest language too.

1SAMUEL 25: 23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried, and alighted from her donkey, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.

1SAMUEL 25: 24 She fell at his feet, and said, "On me, my lord, on me be the iniquity; and please let your handmaid speak in your ears. Hear the words of your handmaid.

1SAMUEL 25: 25 Please don't let my lord regard this worthless fellow, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your handmaid, didn't see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.

1SAMUEL 25: 26 Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has withheld you from blood guiltiness, and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now therefore let your enemies, and those who seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.

1SAMUEL 25: 27 Now this present which your servant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord.

1SAMUEL 25: 28 Please forgive the trespass of your handmaid. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord fights the battles of the LORD; and evil shall not be found in you all your days.

Verse 28

And evil hath not been found in thee - Thou hast not committed any act of this kind hitherto.

1SAMUEL 25: 29 Though men may rise up to pursue you, and to seek your soul, yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD your God. He will sling out the souls of your enemies, as from the hollow of a sling.

Verse 29

Shall be bound in the bundle of life - Thy life shall be precious in the sight of the Lord: it shall be found in the bundle of life; it shall be supported by Him who is the Spring and Fountain of life, and ever be found united to those who are most favored by the Almighty.

Them shall he sling out - Far from being bound and kept together in union with the Fountain of life, he will cast them off from himself as a stone is cast out from a sling. This betokens both force and violence.

1SAMUEL 25: 30 It shall come to pass, when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and shall have appointed you prince over Israel,

1SAMUEL 25: 31 that this shall be no grief to you, nor offence of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. When the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your handmaid."

1SAMUEL 25: 32 David said to Abigail, "Blessed is the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!

1SAMUEL 25: 33 Blessed is your discretion, and blessed are you, that have kept me this day from blood guiltiness, and from avenging myself with my own hand.

1SAMUEL 25: 34 For indeed, as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has withheld me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely there wouldn't have been left to Nabal by the morning light so much as one who urinates on a wall."

1SAMUEL 25: 35 So David received of her hand that which she had brought him: and he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. Behold, I have listened to your voice, and have granted your request."

1SAMUEL 25: 36 Abigail came to Nabal; and behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken. Therefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light.

1SAMUEL 25: 37 In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

Verse 37

His heart died within him, and he became as a stone - He was thunderstruck, and was so terrified at the apprehension of what he had escaped, that the fear overcame his mind, he became insensible to all things around him, probably refused all kinds of nourishment, and died in ten days.

1SAMUEL 25: 38 About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal, so that he died.

1SAMUEL 25: 39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed is the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from evil. The LORD has returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head." David sent and spoke concerning Abigail, to take her to him as wife.

Verse 39

To take her to him to wife - It is likely that he had heard before this that Saul, to cut off all his pretensions to the throne, had married Michal to Phalti; and this justified David in taking Abigail or any other woman; and, according to the then custom, it was not unlawful for David to take several wives. By his marriage with Abigail, it is probable he became possessed of all Nabal's property in Carmel and Maon.

1SAMUEL 25: 40 When the servants of David had come to Abigail to Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you, to take you to him as wife."

1SAMUEL 25: 41 She arose, and bowed herself with her face to the earth, and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."

1SAMUEL 25: 42 Abigail hurried, and arose, and rode on a donkey, with five ladies of hers who followed her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife.

1SAMUEL 25: 43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they both became his wives.

Verse 43

David also took Ahinoam - Many think that this was his wife before he took Abigail; she is always mentioned first in the list of his wives, and she was the mother of his eldest son Ammon.

Of Jezreel - There were two places of this name; one in the tribe of Issachar, the other in the tribe of Judah.

1SAMUEL 25: 44 Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

Verse 44

Phalti - Called also Phaltiel, 2Sam 3:16.

Of Gallim - Probably a city or town in the tribe of Benjamin; see Isa 10:30. It is likely therefore that Saul chose this man because he was of his own tribe.

In this chapter we have the account of the death of Samuel, who from his infancy had been devoted to God and the service of his people. He was born at a time in which religion was at a very low ebb in Israel, as there were but very few prophets, and no open vision - scarcely any revelation from God. Those who might be called prophets had no regular ministry of God's word; they were extraordinary messengers sent for a particular purpose, and not continued in the work any longer than the time necessary to deliver their extraordinary message.

Samuel is supposed to have been the first who established academies or schools for prophets, at least we do not hear of them before his time; and it is granted that they continued till the Babylonish captivity. This was a wise institution, and no doubt contributed much to the maintenance of pure religion, and the prevention of idolatry among that people.

Samuel reformed many abuses in the Jewish state, and raised it to a pitch of political consequence to which it had been long a stranger. He was very zealous for the honor of God, and supported the rights of pure religion, of the king, and of the people, against all encroachments. He was chief magistrate in Israel before the appointment of a king, and afterwards he acted as prime minister to Saul, though without being chosen or formally appointed to that station. Indeed, he seems on the whole to have been the civil and ecclesiastical governor, Saul being little more than general of the Israelitish forces.

In his office of minister in the state, he gave the brightest example of zeal, diligence, inflexible integrity, and uncorruptedness. He reproved both the people and the king for their transgressions, with a boldness which nothing but his sense of the Divine authority could inspire, and yet he tempered it with a sweetness which showed the interest he felt in their welfare, and the deep and distressing concern he felt for their back-slidings and infidelities.

He was incorrupt; he received no man's bribe; he had no pension from the state; he enriched none of his relatives from the public purse; left no private debts to be discharged by his country. He was

among the Hebrews what Aristides is said to have been among the Greeks, so poor at his death, though a minister of state, that he did not leave property enough to bury him. Justice was by him duly and impartially administered, and oppression and wrong had no existence.

If there ever was a heaven-born minister, it was Samuel; in whose public and private conduct there was no blemish, and whose parallel cannot be found in the ancient or modern history of any country in the universe.

Let ministers of state who have sought for nothing but their own glory, and have increased the public burdens by their improvident expenditure; who have endeavored, by their wordy representations, to dazzle and elude the people, and impose false grandeur in the place of true greatness and solid prosperity; who have oppressed the many, and enriched the worthless few; fall down at the feet of This heaven-born man, and learn, from this immaculate judge of Israel, what a faithful servant to his king, and an incorruptible minister of state, means, and in retiring from their high station, or in going to appear before the judgment-seat of God, see whether, in the presence of their king, and in the face of the thousands of their people, they can boldly say, "Behold, here am I! Witness against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I seized? Whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, by the imposition of heavy taxes for the support of needless expenses, and the payment of venal men? Or of whose hand have I taken any bribe to blind my eyes? Scrutinize my conduct, examine the state of my family, compare their present circumstances with what they were previously to my administration, and see if you can find aught in my hands." See 1Sam 12:1, etc.

O, how seldom in the annals of the world, from the assembled heads of the great body politic, can the departing prime minister hear, "Thou hast not defrauded us, thou hast not oppressed us; neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand!" This voice can be heard from Gilgal; but of what other minister can this be spoken but of Samuel the seer, who was the gift of God's mercy to the people of Israel; whose memory was too precious to be intrusted to public monuments, but stands, and alas; almost unique in the Book of God? Of Daniel, and his administration, I shall have occasion to speak elsewhere.

A prime minister, deeply devoted to God and faithful to his king and to his country, is so rare a character in the world, that when he does occur, he should be held up to public admiration. But I have no parallel for Samuel. See the notes on 1 Samuel 12:1-25 (note) and on 1Sam 24:6 (note).