

BIBLE STUDIES



BIBLE CHARACTER STUDY: ABIGAIL

SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel, Chapters 25, 27, 30; 2 Samuel, Chapters 2, 3, 17; 1 Chronicles, Chapter 3

CONTEXT: The Prophet Samuel had died, and David was hiding from King Saul, who was jealous of David (1 Samuel 18:6-9). Many men, believed to have been six hundred, had joined David. "Had Saul's government been just and upright, David would have had no followers. The rate of usury (lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest) was so exorbitant that a loan was sure to end in not only the debtor, but his children might be made slaves to repay the debt" (commentary).

1 Samuel 25:2 And 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.

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

Abigail's husband, Nabal, was a wealthy man who lived "in Maon" (the mountains of Judah) and whose business was "in Carmel." The name *Nabal* means "fool." In ancient Israel, a man's character was often connected to his name. This account takes place at the time of sheep-shearing, which traditionally in Israel was a time of feasting and plenty due to the prosperous wool trade. It was a time of generous hospitality and to repay debts.

Notice the contrast between the descriptions of Abigail's and Nabal's characters: "good understanding" (Abigail) and "churlish and evil" (Nabal).

DAVID'S REQUEST

1 Samuel 25:6 And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and

peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast.

7 And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel.

8 Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.

David and his men provided a valuable service for Nabal, protecting his men and sheep from raids by the Philistines. It was not unreasonable to expect compensation for this. David waited to ask until the sheep shearing as this was when Nabal would have been most generous. David's words reminded Nabal his profit would not have been so great without the help of David and his men.

David sent ten men (not an intimidating number), who were to say, "We come in a good day" (feast day) and to ask, "Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand" (whatever Nabal determined was appropriate).

NABAL'S ANSWER

1 Samuel 25:10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.

11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

Nabal claimed to not know who David was; yet David was known throughout Israel (1 Samuel 18:5-7). If he did not know who David was, why did he call him "the son of Jesse"? Nabal was insulting David. It is possible that Nabal was a supporter of King Saul, for he described David as a rebellious servant ("many servants . . . break away . . . from his master"). Consider all the "I's" and "my's" in verse 11. What does this say about Nabal's character?

DAVID'S ANGER

1 Samuel 25:13 And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.

This was not David's finest moment. He failed to respond to Nabal's insult as God desired. Compare this response to David's long-suffering with

King Saul, who was doing more than insulting David. He was trying to kill him. Is it possible that David looked at Saul as his superior (king) and Nabal as his equal or inferior? Character can be determined not by how we treat people we consider our superiors, but by our treatment of those we consider equal or beneath us.

After eight years of being on the run and having lost his friend (the Prophet Samuel), David was no doubt weary and vulnerable when this took place. Yet, offenses are a part of life (Luke 17:1), and we must be careful to not be too consumed with ourselves lest we take a wrong attitude when offenses come.

David did not send ten men as before, but came with "four hundred men." They were armed, and the intention seemed to be to wipe out Nabal and his men. Was David thinking of the innocent people who were involved? Was David thinking of his high calling (to one day be Israel's king)? Proverbs 19:11 says, "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." It could be said that David had lowered himself to Nabal's level. Anger has great power!

ABIGAIL INTERCEDES (1 Samuel 25:14-17)

One of Nabal's servants told Abigail what had happened, saying, Nabal "is such a son of Belial [reckless, uncontrollable], that a man cannot speak to him." Was she the voice of reason in that household? Could it be that the servants had asked for her intervention before? What does this say about Abigail's character?

Abigail had discernment and quickly ("made haste") put together a plan. She took a gift: 200 loaves of bread, 2 skins of wine, 5 dressed sheep, 5 seahs of grain (approximately 15 gallons of dry measure), 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of figs. "The fact that Abigail was able to gather so much food so quickly shows how wealthy Nabal was. If this much food was on hand, it makes Nabal's ungenerous reply to David all the worse" (commentary).

ABIGAIL'S PLEA (1 Samuel 25:23-31)

This large gift must have required a large procession of animals, servants, and perhaps carts. What an impact this must have had on David. Upon arrival, Abigail humbly "bowed herself to the ground." She took the blame for the "iniquity" and asked permission to speak. She wisely understood many more lives than Nabal's were in danger.

Abigail suggested David was going to do the

right thing: "seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood" (verse 26). In verse 28, she asked for forgiveness and praised David, saying, "My lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days."

When Abigail said, "The LORD will certainly make my lord a sure [enduring] house," she was gently reminding David of his life's greater purpose. It was a reminder to not do something he would later regret: shedding blood without cause (verse 31). Abigail was encouraging David to let God take care of Nabal's insult.

Abigail's actions and words to David are a beautiful example of how to resolve conflict in a manner pleasing to God. David was clearly in the wrong, but Abigail did not stress that in her words to David. She was not negative or finger-pointing in her approach. She reminded David of his integrity, calling, and destiny.

This lesson on the character of Abigail can provide several things to remember when working to resolve conflict:

- **A gift** (kind words, actions, or a literal gift); keep in mind, Abigail's gift was generous.
- **Understanding** (realize the conflict often affects others).
- **Humility** (Abigail called David "my lord" and referred to herself as "your servant").
- **Take blame** ("perhaps I misunderstood," or "I am sorry for not handling this as I should have").
- **A soft answer** (words and tone matter); "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).
- **Praise** (compliment this person on what he or she has done well).

Consider Abigail's part in God's plan. If David succeeded in killing Nabal and his men, King Saul might have seemingly been validated in his desire to find and kill David. Also, it would have followed David the rest of his life, perhaps hindering him from becoming king over all of Israel.

The result of Abigail's wisdom and actions is found in 1 Samuel 25:32-35. Verse 32 says, "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." Verse 35 states, "So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

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