

1 Samuel 25
March 12, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Imagine a beautiful, intelligent woman who is married to a very wealthy man who happens to be evil in his doings, mean and oppressive. What do you think it would be like for her to live with a husband like this? [Let people engage]

Transition: Today's text describes this very scenario. We are introduced to Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, at the time when Saul was king. Samuel the prophet had just died, and David and his men had traveled down into the Desert of Maon. It was there the conflict began. The Bible describes Abigail as being "*an intelligent and beautiful woman,*" but sadly, her marriage was hard (1 Samuel 25:3).

To say she married into a toxic situation would likely be an understatement. Nabal was a very wealthy man, but is also described as "*surlly and mean in his dealings*" (1 Samuel 25:3). Let's read the text and discover what happens to people who don't follow God's standards and how intelligent women like Abigail navigates the latest difficult situation brought on by her husband Nabal. Let's begin.

BOOK:

David, Nabal and Abigail

25 Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. (Hebrew Paran) ² A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. ³ His name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.

⁴ While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. ⁵ So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. ⁶ Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!

⁷ " 'Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. ⁸ Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore, be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.' "

⁹ When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited.

¹⁰ Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. ¹¹ Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"

¹² David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word.
¹³ David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

¹⁴ One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. ¹⁵ Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. ¹⁶ Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. ¹⁷ Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

¹⁸ Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs (bushel or 37 liters) of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. ¹⁹ Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

²⁰ As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. ²¹ David had just said, "It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. ²² May God deal with David, (or David's enemies) be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

²³ When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. ²⁵ May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent.

²⁶ "Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. ²⁷ And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. ²⁸ Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹ Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. ³⁰ When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, ³¹ my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant."

³² David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. ³³ May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. ³⁴ Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."

³⁵ Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request."

³⁶ When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak. ³⁷ Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. ³⁸ About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.”

Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. ⁴⁰ His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, “David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.”

⁴¹ She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, “Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master’s servants.” ⁴² Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David’s messengers and became his wife. ⁴³ David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. ⁴⁴ But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We never have to stay stuck in fear or defeat, thinking that our situation will never change. As we are faithful to His word and His leadership, God can do in just a moment what may take years to work through by ourselves. Abigail’s story reminds us again that God sees the heart, and He works powerfully on behalf of those who choose to follow Him.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Henry, M., & Scott, T. (1997). Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary (1 Sa 25:1–39). Logos Research Systems.

Verse 1

All Israel lamented Samuel, and they had reason. He prayed daily for them. Those have hard hearts, who can bury faithful ministers without grief; who do not feel their loss of those who have prayed for them, and taught them the way of the Lord.

Verses 2–11

We should not have heard of Nabal, if nothing had passed between him and David. Observe his name, Nabal, “A fool;” so it signifies. Riches make men look great in the eye of the world; but to one that takes right views, Nabal looked very mean. He had no honor or honesty; he was churlish, cross, and ill-humored; evil in his doings, hard and oppressive; a man that cared not what fraud and violence he used in getting and saving. What little reason have we to value the wealth of this world, when so great a churl as Nabal abounds, and so good a man as David suffers want! David pleaded the kindness Nabal’s shepherds had received. Considering that David’s men were in distress and debt, and discontented, and the scarcity of provisions, it was by good management that they were kept from plundering. Nabal went into a passion, as covetous men are apt to do, when asked for anything, thinking thus to cover one sin with another; and, by abusing the poor, to excuse themselves from relieving them. But God will not thus be mocked. Let this help us to bear reproaches and misrepresentations with patience and cheerfulness, and make us easy under them; it has often been the lot of the excellent ones of the earth. Nabal insists much on the property he had in the provisions of his table. May he not do what he will with his own? We mistake, if we think we are absolute lords of what we have, and may do what we please with it. No; we are but stewards, and must use it as we are directed, remembering it is not our own, but His who entrusted us with it.

Verses 12–17

God is kind to the evil and unthankful, and why may not we be so? David determined to destroy Nabal, and all that belonged to him. Is this thy voice, O David? Has he been so long in the school of affliction, where he should have learned patience, and yet is so passionate? He at other times was calm and considerate, but is put into such a heat by a few hard words, that he seeks to destroy a whole family. What are the best of men, when God leaves them to themselves, that they may know what is in their hearts? What need to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation!

Verses 18–31

By a present Abigail atoned for Nabal’s denial of David’s request. Her behavior was very submissive. Yielding pacifies great offences. She puts herself in the place of a penitent, and of a petitioner. She could not excuse her husband’s conduct. She depends not upon her own reasonings, but on God’s grace, to soften David, and expects that grace would work powerfully. She says that it was below him to take vengeance on so weak and despicable an enemy as Nabal, who, as he would do him no kindness, so he could do him no hurt. She foretells the glorious end of David’s present troubles. God will preserve thy life; therefore it becomes not thee unjustly and unnecessarily to take away the lives of any, especially of the people of thy God and Savior. Abigail keeps this argument for the last, as very powerful with so good a man; that the less he indulged his passion, the more he consulted his peace and the repose of his own conscience. Many have done that in a heat, which they have a thousand times wished undone again. The sweetness of revenge is soon turned into bitterness. When tempted to sin, we should consider how it will appear when we think upon it afterwards.

Verses 32–39

David gives God thanks for sending him this happy check in a sinful way. Whoever meet us with counsel, direction, comfort, caution, or seasonable reproof, we must see God sending them. We ought to be very thankful for those happy providences which are the means of keeping us from sinning. Most people think it enough, if they take reproof patiently; but few will take it thankfully, and commend those who give it, and accept it as a favor. The nearer we are to committing sin, the greater is the mercy of a seasonable restraint. Sinners are often most secure

when most in danger. He was very drunk. A sign he was Nabal, a fool, that could not use plenty without abusing it; who could not be pleasant with his friends without making a beast of himself. There is not a surer sign that a man has but little wisdom, nor a surer way to destroy the little he has, than drinking to excess. Next morning, how he is changed! His heart overnight merry with wine, next morning heavy as a stone; so deceitful are carnal pleasures, so soon passes the laughter of the fool; the end of that mirth is heaviness. Drunkards are sad, when they reflect upon their own folly. About ten days after, the Lord smote Nabal, that he died. David blessed God that he had been kept from killing Nabal. Worldly sorrow, mortified pride, and an affrighted conscience, sometimes end the joys of the sensualist, and separate the covetous man from his wealth; but, whatever the weapon, the Lord smites men with death when it pleases him.

Verses 39–44

Abigail believed that David would be king over Israel, and greatly esteemed his pious and excellent character. She deemed his proposal of marriage honorable, and advantageous to her, notwithstanding his present difficulties. With great humility, and doubtless agreeably to the customs of those times, she consented, being willing to share his trials. Thus, those who join themselves to Christ, must be willing now to suffer with him, believing that hereafter they shall reign with him.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 452) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

Chapter 25. The chapter opens with the death and burial of **Samuel** at **Ramah**. Then **David** moved to the **Desert of Maon** (v. 1; cf. 23:24). There in dire circumstances David thought of a **certain man** named **Nabal**, who **had 1,000 goats and 3,000 sheep**, indicative of his great wealth (25:2–3). Appealing to his past protective attitude toward Nabal (v. 7; cf. vv. 15–16, 21), **David** asked him for provisions to sustain him and his men in the wilderness.

Nabal, however, with utter contempt, refused to comply (vv. 4–11). This so angered **David** that he took **about 400 men** with him to take forcibly from Nabal what he wanted. Were it not for the intervention of **Abigail** Nabal's wife, Nabal surely would have been slain. She learned about **Nabal's** foolish reply from **one of the servants**. To avert **disaster** she **took** with her food supplies in sufficient abundance to meet David's requirements (vv. 14–19). When **she met him**, she begged him not to punish her husband for, she said, **He is just like his name**—a **fool** (*nābāl*, “foolish”). Instead, she continued, God would bless David and would eventually make him king (v. 28). For him to kill the senseless **Nabal** would only burden **his conscience** needlessly (v. 31). Impressed by her wisdom, **David** followed her advice and gratefully **accepted** the food **she had brought** (vv. 32–35).

Abigail's judgment was vindicated shortly thereafter when **Nabal**, after a drunken night, found out how narrow an escape he had had from **David**. The news so shocked him that he had a **heart** attack and died in **about 10 days** (vv. 36–38). **David** saw in this turn of events a sign from God. Obviously struck by the beauty and character of **Abigail**, he proposed marriage to her, a proposal she gladly accepted. Thus David added another wife to **Ahinoam** and **Michal**, whom he had previously **married**, though in his absence from Gibeah, **Saul had given** the latter to **Paltiel** (vv. 43–44; cf. 2 Sam. 3:15–16).

(5) Saul's final pursuit of David.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 117–118). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

David Spares Nabal (25:1–44). The notice of Samuel’s death is not incidental to the author. He shows how the people’s love for Samuel’s godly leadership continued with David as well.

David kindly protected the flocks of a wealthy herdsman named Nabal (*fool*). As a result, none of his flocks were stolen or lost to wild animals. It was not unreasonable then for David to ask Nabal to respond kindly to him. But Nabal angrily refused, and David threatened to kill him. The shepherds of Nabal, who had benefited from David’s protection, entreated Abigail, Nabal’s wife, to intercede. Abigail pleaded with David that the Lord’s anointed had no need to avenge himself since the Lord would do so. David gratefully agreed and resisted the evil deed. Later, God struck Nabal dead. This event exemplifies the Old Testament understanding of God’s sovereignty over all things. Everything happens as part of the outworking of God’s will.

This famous incident involving Abigail led the author to list David’s wives. He married Abigail from Carmel and Ahinoam from Jezreel. His first wife, Saul’s daughter Michal, was given to another man (see 18:27).

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). *1 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (pp. 176–177). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

David Marries Abigail (1 Sam. 25:1–44)

The passage—To many modern readers, David’s means of supporting his troops appears to be a form of illegal extortion. Life in the ancient wilderness, however, was vastly different from our own. While some property owners obviously objected to David’s demands, his expectations do not appear to have been excessive by the standards of his own day. Apparently Nabal’s servants and even his own wife felt that David was due some compensation for the protection he afforded Nabal’s shepherds in the wilderness.

Although it is nowhere explicit, our author seems to imply that Nabal’s rebuff to David was politically motivated. Nabal, like the Ziphites (23:19) and the inhabitants of Keilah (23:12), remained loyal to Saul. Abigail, on the other hand, took provisions to David, not just because he was a powerful warlord, but because the Lord had appointed him prince over Israel (25:30). The struggle for Israel’s throne had become a bitterly contested issue which even divided many families.

David’s understanding of his role as Israel’s future ruler also seems to have matured during this period. He had decided in the cave at En Gedi that he would not raise up his hand against the lawful king. Now in Carmel he is led to see that he should not use his power to ride roughshod over his opponents among the common people either (25:26, 33).

David, therefore, decided to forego his brutal retaliation for Nabal’s insult (v. 22). Instead, he left his judgment in God’s hands. Within a week Nabal was dead, and his winsome spouse was soon to become David’s wife.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.