

## David, Nabal, and Abigail

### 1 Samuel 25

One of the things I love about the Bible is the fact that it contains different types of literature that work on our souls in different ways. Paul's letters, for example, are very dense and very direct; he'll say things like, "Be anxious for nothing." The Psalms are Hebrew poetry that sparks our imagination and expresses emotions and desires that we might never put into words: "As the deer pants for the water brook, so my soul thirsts for You, O God."

The historical writings work on us through plot and character development. We are drawn into the plot of the story to the point of identifying with the different characters (both godly and ungodly). I trust that is what will happen today as we consider 1 Samuel 25. I think that by the time we get to the end of the chapter, we will identify with each of the three main characters. Nabal serve as a warning against our tendency to be harsh and unreasonable. David will serve as a warning against our tendency to take revenge. Abigail will serve as a challenge to be a peacemaker. As we continue our study of the life of David, let's look at 1 Samuel 25 and allow it to warn and challenge us.

### **The Account of David, Nabal and Abigail (1 Samuel 25)**

***David asks Nabal for food. (25:1-9)*** We learn in verse 1 that after Samuel the prophet died David and his men went to the wilderness of Paran. In the nearby city of Carmel lived a very wealthy man named Nabal. We are told that he had 3,000 sheep and a thousand goats. In verse 3 we are given a character description of Nabal and his wife Abigail:

3 (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite),

I wish I knew why these two ever got married in the first place. Perhaps it was an arranged marriage (obviously common in that day); or perhaps there was an initial mutual attraction that led to their marriage. Whatever the case, we are told that Abigail was "intelligent and beautiful in appearance." The term translated intelligent doesn't merely mean that she had a high IQ; it is literally "good in understanding" (see also Proverbs 13:15, Psalm 111:10). Basically, she had wisdom. ***And*** she was beautiful (lit. "lovely in form"). By contrast, Nabal was "harsh and evil in his dealings." Whereas people were naturally drawn toward someone like Abigail, there was nothing attractive or appealing about the way Nabal related to people.

Verses 5 through 9 record how David sent some of his men to Nabal to ask for food. It was the time of year when they were shearing the sheep; this was a time of great celebration and feasting (so there would have been plenty of food). David's request was very reasonable because he and his men had provided protection for Nabal's flocks for a considerable length of time. David assumed that Nabal would readily give him food out of gratitude.

***Nabal responds harshly. (25:10-12)*** David's request was met with insults:

10 But Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master.

To Nabal, David symbolized everything wrong with Israel in that day. Nabal viewed David as the “servant” who had broken away from his master Saul. Ironically, Nabal’s own servants would soon break away from him. Notice how he continues:

11 "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?" 12 So David's young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words.

***David plans for revenge. (25:13)*** David’s response is one of revenge. We saw last week that David was in possession of the sword of Goliath. He was ready to use it on Nabal and his men.

13 David said to his men, "Each of you gird on his sword." So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage.

David now has 600 men travelling with him, 400 of which are armed and ready to exact revenge on Nabal. Things had quickly escalated; Nabal’s insults and disrespect were going to be met with full-out warfare. Sometimes (as we’ll see next week) David could be very forgiving. But not this time. Most of us can relate to David at this point. He was “a man with a heart after God’s own heart” – in the deepest part of his soul he wanted what God wanted. But he also had the potential of being vengeful and violent. To use Paul’s terminology in Romans 6:12, David still had the capacity to present the members of his body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.

***Abigail intervenes. (25:14-31)*** If you have a Nabal in your life, you need someone like Abigail to intervene. One of Nabal’s men goes to Abigail and explains that David and his men had provided protection to Nabal’s shepherds and flocks out in the fields. David and his men had been honorable in all their dealings with Nabal. But because of Nabal’s insults, David was planning evil against Nabal and his household. In verse 17 we read this young’s man’s evaluation of Nabal: he is “such a worthless man that no one can speak to him.” As soon as Abigail heard this report, she immediately went into action. Her beauty and intelligence will both figure prominently in her role as a peacemaker.

18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 She said to her young men, "Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

Not telling your husband that you’re completely contradicting his desires isn’t something the Scriptures advocate. But that’s what Abigail did because he was a worthless man who wouldn’t listen to anybody. [There are numerous things in these accounts that we probably shouldn’t

imitate but that aren't condemned in the text – things like lying, feigning insanity, taking multiply wives, etc.] Abigail has the servants prepare a feast to be taken to David and his men.

In verses 20 through 22 David repeats his intention of killing Nabal and all the men who belonged to him. Abigail's response to David reveals so clearly her intelligence, her wisdom, and her spiritual insight. Taking a huge personal risk, she asks David to ignore Nabal's insults.

23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. 24 She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. 25 "Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.

This is a classic scene. David and his 400 men halt their march before an intelligent, beautiful woman who is kneeling before them. She urges David not to pay attention to Nabal because he's only living out his name. "Nabal" literally means "fool." Commentators aren't sure if his mother named him this or if it was a nickname he earned later in life. But everything about Nabal shouted "fool."

26 "Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal.

Even though Abigail had intervened, she understood that the Lord had restrained David from taking revenge. That's the way it works: God uses peacemakers who intervene. Let's skip down to verses 30 and 31.

30 "And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel, 31 this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."

Abigail exhibits an amazing amount of discernment and spiritual insight. She appeals to David because she doesn't want him to have a troubled heart for "having shed blood without cause" and by taking revenge ("avenging himself"). She certainly had personal reasons for wanting David to put aside revenge, but she also understood that revenge would give David a troubled heart. She understood that God had appointed David as ruler over Israel, and that God would defend and protect him. Abigail was very discerning. Abigail sounds like Paul in Romans 12 when he wrote:

19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap

burning coals upon his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Abigail's mindset really foreshadows the ethics of the new covenant. The enemies of God were commonly (not always) defeated through bloodshed in the old covenant; in the new covenant the enemies of God are defeated with kindness and generosity. Abigail does a masterful job of drawing David back to the heart of God. Finally, she asks David to "remember" her when the Lord makes him ruler over Israel.

***David is persuaded by Abigail's appeal. (vv. 32-35)*** He pronounces a blessing upon God, upon Abigail's discernment, and upon Abigail herself. This blessing foreshadows the seventh beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9).

32 Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, 33 and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand. 34 "Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male." 35 So David received from her hand what she had brought him and said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request."

***God judges Nabal's wickedness. (vv. 36-38)*** These verses perfectly illustrate that "vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." The vengeance of God isn't always apparent in this life; that's why numerous Scriptures wrestle with the question of why the wicked prosper (e.g., Psalm 73). But in this case God's vengeance was swift and obvious.

36 Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. 37 But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. 38 About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

***David takes Abigail as his (third) wife. (vv. 39-44)*** Notice David's response when he learned about Nabal's death.

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be 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 also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head." Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife.

David was once again glad that he had allowed God to fight his battle with Nabal instead of taking his own revenge. We read in verse 42:

42 Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife. 43 David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. 44 Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

By giving David's first wife (his daughter Michal) to another man, Saul declared David as good as dead. (David will reclaim Michal as his wife after Saul's death (2 Samuel 3).)

**Application.** By way of application, I want us to examine our own lives in light of the dominant qualities we see in the lives of Nabal, David, and Abigail. We'll ask ourselves 3 questions:

***Are there situations in which I am like Nabal - harsh, ungracious, and unapproachable?*** I haven't met too many people who are like Nabal ***all the time***. We tend to be kind and gracious and approachable to most people. But sometimes some people in some situations push our buttons and we become like Nabal. It may be a family member (which is unfortunate for them) or it may be a coworker or some random person you encounter in a store or on the streets. My wife encountered a Nabal earlier this year. For some reason this man didn't like the fact that she was talking on her cell phone while walking our dog. He stopped and verbally berated Brenda (sweet Brenda!) right there on the street.

This is the kind of thing we need to watch out for in ourselves. If you tend to be a Nabal in certain situations, the only remedy I know is to walk with God and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the opposite of Nabal.

***When am I prone to be like David, unforgiving and eager to take revenge?*** Most of us can think of times when we are flat-out angry at what someone else has done. We (or someone we care about) have legitimately been wronged by some Nabal. The thought of revenge is so intoxicating that we contemplate doing things that seem crazy to everybody else. You've probably two dads getting into a fistfight at a Little League baseball game. You're thinking, "It's just a game. It's not about you not making your high school baseball team. It's about the kids." But at the time, they feel fully justified because they've been wronged.

David felt fully justified in strapping on Goliath's sword and going after Nabal. And you probably feel fully justified in telling off someone who has wronged or insulted or slighted you. Can you think of some Nabal you'd really, really like to give a piece of your mind? I wanted to get back at the Nabal who berated my wife when she was walking our dog (not by slashing his tires or poisoning his dogs . . . but I had a speech I wanted to give him when I saw him next). Revenge may feel good at the time, but we will live to regret it because we're stepping into a role that isn't ours when we take revenge. God delegates the role of executing justice (not revenge) to governing authorities. Ultimately every Nabal will have to answer to God directly. But we should never take our own revenge. When we studied the Sermon on the Mount last year we saw that non-retaliation (and even blessing our enemies) is a hallmark of discipleship. If we are apprenticed to Jesus, we will learn to be like Him in this way.

***How can I be like Abigail, employing everything at my disposal to be a peacemaker?*** Abigail is the shining star in this chapter. If you find yourself in between a Nabal and a David, God probably wants you to be Abigail. Maybe you can think of a time when a friend of yours started talking about some Nabal who had wronged him/her. The more your friend vented about how harsh and unreasonable that person had been, the more worked up your friend got. The most natural thing in the world to do is to join in the chorus and pile on and begin trashing that person yourself. But there is far too much at stake to take such an easy route. God calls us to be like Abigail in the sense of being a peacemaker.

Do you know what is at stake in a situation like that? If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, what's at stake is the demonstration of the gospel itself. The message of the gospel is that when we were enemies of God, fully deserving His wrath, He sent His one and only Son to die for our sins. Ephesians 2:15-16 tell us that Jesus' death on the cross brought about peace between God and humanity, putting to death the enmity. Like Abigail, Jesus came as a peacemaker at great personal cost and risk. As believers in Jesus Christ, how can we accept Him as our Peacemaker and not be peacemakers ourselves? Being a peacemaker isn't the role of a select few who are "into" that sort of thing. Every single follower of Jesus is called to be *passionate* about peacemaking.

Abigail employed her beauty and intelligence and her wealth as a peacemaker. You and I aren't required to employ things we don't have in this ministry of peacemaking, but we are called to employ what we do have. Some of you have amazing relational skills; you have the capacity to stay in relationship with people who are volatile and prone to revenge; I have no doubt God will use such relational skills for peacemaking. Others of you have wisdom to share at choice times. When the David in your life is venting about some Nabal, you can share a biblical perspective that s/he never considered. God can use your wisdom. Some of you employ your faith in peacemaking; you pray and trust God to bring peace where there's strife. Offer God whatever you have at your disposal for peacemaking.

During our response time, I would encourage you to consider each of these questions we've posed. Perhaps one of these is more relevant to you right now than the others. But allow God to scrutinize your life and show you what you need to see.

I also want to remind you that after the benediction (at the very end of the service), there will be people up front who are available to pray for you. Perhaps you want prayer in response to something God has impressed upon you here today. Perhaps you come here today with some other need. It doesn't have to be a huge issue or a crisis; if you want prayer, those at the front would love to pray for you.