

# Abigail

HER NAME MEANS

*“My Father Is Joy”*

**HER CHARACTER:** Generous, quick-witted, and wise, she is one of the Bible’s great peacemakers.

**HER SORROW:** To have been mismatched in marriage to her first husband.

**HER JOY:** That God used her to save lives, eventually making her the wife of David.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 25:2–42

## *Monday*

HER STORY

*B*lockhead, numskull, nincompoop—the words strike us as both harsh and humorous. But any woman married to a man worthy of such labels would have little to laugh about.

Abigail must have felt suffocated, having been paired with just such a husband. Her father may have thought the wealthy Nabal was a catch, little realizing the man’s domineering attitude might one day endanger his daughter’s future. But fools and ruin often keep close company, as Abigail discovered.

For some time Abigail had been hearing of David: his encounter with Goliath, his ruddy good looks, his prowess in battle, his rift with King Saul. Recently, he had become her near neighbor in the Desert of Maon, west of the Dead Sea, where he had taken refuge from

Saul. Since David had arrived with his six hundred men, marauders kept clear of her husband's livestock, and Nabal's flocks prospered as a result.

But when David sent ten of his men to ask Nabal for provisions, Nabal, who had grown richer by the day thanks to David, nearly spit in their faces. "Who is this David? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 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?" Rich though he was, Nabal had just foolishly insulted the region's most powerful man.

Aware of their danger, one of the servants ran quickly to Abigail, begging her to intervene. As Nabal's wife, she must have suffered his arrogance every day of her life. But this time his folly jeopardized the entire household. Wasting no time, and without a word to her husband, she loaded a caravan of donkeys with gifts for David and his men—freshly baked bread, skins of wine, red meat, and various delicacies—and took them to David's camp. As soon as she saw him, she fell to the ground at his feet, making one of the longest speeches by a woman recorded in the Bible:

"My lord," she pleaded, "let the blame be on me alone. 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. 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. Even though someone pursues you, your life will be held securely by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling."

Her well-chosen words, of course, reminded David of his success against Goliath, erasing his anger and enabling his gracious reply: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. If you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak." In addition to saving lives, Abigail's wisdom had spared David from sinning, reminding him that vengeance belongs only to God.

After her encounter with David, Abigail went to Carmel, where Nabal had been shearing his sheep and celebrating his good fortune. Once again, she found him playing the fool. Oblivious to danger, he was drunkenly presiding over a festival banquet, like a great king. She waited until morning, when he was sober, to tell him what had happened. As soon as Nabal heard the news, his heart failed. Ten days later he was dead.

Arrogance, greed, and selfishness had conspired to rob Nabal of any good sense he might once have possessed. Thinking himself a great man when he was only a small one, he lost everything. Abigail was Nabal's opposite, a woman whose humility, faith, generosity, intelligence, and honesty made her wise. Rather than putting others at risk by an ungoverned tongue, her gracious words saved lives.

When David heard the news of Nabal's death, he sent word to Abigail, asking her to be his wife. This time it was Abigail's choice whether or not to marry. She accepted, becoming David's third wife and eventually mother to his second son, Kileab.

Unlike Michal, who had been a mere pawn on a chessboard, Abigail was a woman who rose above her circumstances to change the course of events. Though Scripture doesn't offer details regarding her daily life, it is logical to suppose she was a good wife to Nabal. Even her entreaty to David was the act of a good wife. Perhaps her marriage was the catalyst for her character, helping her to cultivate contrasting virtues to Nabal's vices. Regardless, through her quick-witted action, she spared her husband's life and goods. It was God, not Abigail or David, who paid Nabal back for his arrogance and greed.

## FOOD

*T*wo hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs—what a feast! Abigail put together a marvelous meal for David and his men.

Even though famine was not unknown in the area, Palestine had the reputation of being a “land of milk and honey.” The most basic food of the land was bread. The bread of biblical times was coarse, dark, and rich. Field workers often brought two small hollow loaves of bread with them, one they filled with olives and the other with cheese. Abigail’s offering of two hundred loaves of such bread formed a bountiful beginning to the meal for David and his men.

Wine was the common drink in this hot land. Juices fermented quickly in bags of animal skins. Often wine was mixed with water to provide a refreshing drink with meals. Wine also was used as a disinfectant (Luke 10:34) and as a medicine (1 Timothy 5:23).

Next Abigail took five “dressed sheep.” No, this didn’t mean the sheep wore clothes appropriate for the trip; it meant they were killed and skinned and ready to be cooked. Because the sheep were dressed, David’s men merely had to build a fire and cook parts of the sheep to eat. Sheep, both young and old, formed a major part of the Israelites’ meat diet, as did calves, goats, and different types of birds. Hunters also brought in venison, antelope, and other wild animals, and fishermen provided many types of fish for eating, something the Israelites complained about missing while they were wandering in the desert.

The bushel of roasted grain was a food that could be eaten anywhere, anytime. Since David and his men were often pursued, such food would have been a helpful addition to their diet. Such roasted grain along with a bit of wine often formed a quick lunch for field laborers (Ruth 2:14).

Now for dessert—or at least something sweet. Abigail gathered one hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs. Palestine swelled with the produce from the vine and fig tree, so much so that the tree came to be known as a metaphor for safe, abundant living: “During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree” (1 Kings 4:25). Fresh fruit of many different kinds was available year round, but the first fresh figs of the year were considered a special delicacy. Dried figs and raisins also made excellent food for the traveler, perfect for David and his men.

The women in Israelite households (some things never change!) customarily prepared the meals. They usually prepared food in a mixed form; that is, small pieces of meat, vegetables, rice, grain, and sometimes fruits were mixed together to form the meal rather than being kept separate, as is common today. The Israelite diet could be almost as varied—depending on the season and the individual’s wealth—as many of today’s people have come to expect and enjoy.

New Testament writers used food as a metaphor for spiritual nourishment. Paul talks about the milk, rather than solid food, required by new Christians (1 Corinthians 3:2), and the writer to the Hebrews writes of those Christians whose spiritual growth is so slow that they still require milk rather than solid food (Hebrews 5:11–14). Jesus reminded his disciples that “life is more than food” (Luke 12:23–26), and that we shouldn’t worry so much about it.

## HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

### *I Samuel 25:1-42*

1. What do you imagine it was like for Abigail to be married to Nabal on a day-to-day basis?

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2. How would you have dealt with a husband like Nabal? What kind of person would you have become?\_\_\_\_\_

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3. How did Abigail deal with an arrogant man (Nabal) and an angry man (David)?\_\_\_\_\_

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4. How do you react when someone in authority over you make a bad choice? If the choice affects you, what should you do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. These verses reveal what a mismatched couple Nabal and Abigail were. How do women in position like Abigail's cope? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Compare the words of David with the words of Nabal. What does that tell you about each of man? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What does your words reveal about you? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Why was David's reaction the wrong reaction? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What does Luke 6:27-31 have to say about how you should react when you've been wronged? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Are you more like Abigail or more like Nabal to your coworkers? Your children? Your husband? Your family? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Compare David and Nabal's actions. How often do you respond like David? Like Nabal? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What Davids do you have in your life? What Nabal's? What can you learn from Abigail about living and working with each of these men? \_\_\_\_\_

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*A*bigail was a courageous woman, who made the best out of a difficult situation. She knew the cultural principles at work here: Nabal—out of just plain good hospitality and out of gratitude for the protection David’s men had provided—should have given David’s men what they asked for. Yet when David sought vengeance, Abigail interceded, realizing that vengeance wasn’t something that was up to David—or her—to give.

Years of living with Nabal did not seem to have made Abigail bitter, nor had the years caused her to look for ways to get back at him and seek revenge. The Lord honored Abigail for her consistency, her generosity, and her willingness to continue on the right path, no matter how difficult. In the same way, God continues to honor those who are faithful even when faithfulness brings difficulty and hardship and pain. He doesn’t promise to always deliver, as he delivered Abigail, but he does promise to go with us.

#### Promises in Scripture

*Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me;  
O LORD, be my help.”  
You turned my wailing into dancing;  
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,  
that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.*

—PSALM 30:10–12

*Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD;  
may your love and your truth always protect me.*

—PSALM 40:11

*So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

—ISAIAH 41:10

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HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands."*

— 1 SAMUEL 25:32–33

REFLECT ON: 1 Samuel 25:2–42.

PRAISE GOD: For calling you to be a peacemaker in your family, neighborhood, and world.

OFFER THANKS: That God knows every challenge facing your marriage.

CONFESS: Any bitterness you may have harbored about your marriage.

ASK GOD: To use your relationship with your husband to strengthen your character and increase your faith.

### Lift Your Heart

*I*f you haven't yet made a commitment to pray daily for your husband, do so today. Set aside a few minutes to surrender your marriage to God, specifically asking him to bless your spouse. Try to refrain from focusing on your laundry list of complaints and instead pray for the needs you know your husband has. Ask God to shape your marriage relationship and use it for his purposes. Relinquish any desire you may have to control your husband; instead, ask God to work in his life.

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*Father, I ask you to bless my husband in every facet of his life—*

*his health*

*his work*

*his relationship with our children*

*our relationship together*

*and his relationship to you.*

*Let nothing and no one, including myself, hinder your work in his life.*