

Lessons from Bible Women 6 – Abigail

Reading: 1 Peter 3:3-4 “.... *let it be the hidden person of the heart* ¹....”

Introduction:

This lesson is the final lesson in the current series where we are looking at various women recorded in the scriptures, with the aim of learning some biblical lessons from either the women themselves, or events that occurred during their lives.

These days, it is not unusual for us to hear about people in court who, when being charged with a crime, use their life circumstances as a defence. For example, their defence lawyer might say that their client stole because that is the normal thing where the accused grew up. Or it may be that the accused was somehow mistreated as a child, and so that explains why they commit crimes as an adult.

Now I am aware that how we were raised, or the culture or circumstances under which we live can have an influence on our behaviour. But at the end of the day, if something is right, then it is right, and if something is wrong, then it is wrong – period. The danger for us as Christians is that we can sometimes follow the above mentioned defence process to justify attitudes or actions that we know from the scriptures are sinful. For example, we may say things like, “*Well he/she does it, so why can't I?*”. Or, “*Well, they're rude to me, so I'm going to be rude back to them.*” When we do that, we are following the ways of the world, rather than the ways of Christ.

In this lesson, we will be looking a woman who most likely lived under very trying conditions. She was married to a harsh man, a man the Bible describes as “*evil in his doings*” (**1 Samuel 25:3**). But living in that environment did not stop her from acting in a godly manner. What we will see in this lesson is that she was a generous woman. She was also a peacemaker who offered sound advice to those who were looking for trouble. And she was also a humble woman. She is a woman from whom all of us can learn the lesson of living right for God in spite of any adverse circumstances. The woman's name was Abigail.

LESSON

1) Background

Let me start by introducing the three main characters in this lesson.

a) David – who was on the run from Saul

The timeframe is during the latter part of King Saul's reign over Israel (roughly 1000BC). After David had killed Goliath, he became a successful warrior in Saul's army (**1 Samuel 18:5-7**). But rather than be pleased about this, Saul was angry because David received more praise from the people than he (Saul) did. This made Saul angry to the point where he wanted to kill David (**1 Samuel 18:8-11, 25**). So David had to go on the run, and eventually, he had a small army of men with him – **1 Samuel 22:2** tells us that there were 400 men with him, and later in **1 Samuel 25:13**, we read that he has around 600.

As we go into **1 Samuel 25**, David is in the Wilderness of Paran (or, according to some versions, Maon – see **1 Samuel 23:24**), an area south of Judah towards the Sinai peninsula.

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

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b) The rich man – Nabal, and his wife - Abigail

In **1 Samuel 25:2-3**, we read of a man called Nabal, a descendant of Caleb², who lived in Maon – a town located in southern Judah. This town was several miles north of where David was camped. Nabal was very rich – he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, a measure of a man’s wealth in those days. But he is also described as a “... *harsh and evil in his doings*”.

The name of his wife was Abigail. In contrast to Nabal, she is described in verse **3** as “... *a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance* ...”.

- other translations describe “*good understanding*” as “wise” and “intelligent”.

c) David’s request and Nabal’s response

In **1 Samuel 25:2**, we read that it was shearing time, and the flocks were being shorn at Carmel - a place in the general area of Maon³. Now in those days, shearing time was a period of celebration and feasting⁴. It wasn’t a case of just a few men going out to shear the sheep. It was an event where all the labourers came together both to work and join in the festivities.

While David had been camped in southern Judah, he and his men had provided protection for Nabal’s flocks. And so, while ever David and his men were around, none of the sheep or goats belonging to Nabal had ever gone missing, and no harm had come to the shepherds (vs.**7, 15, 16**).

So when David heard about the shearing, he sent ten of his young men to Carmel to greet Nabal, to offer him peace, and to ask him for whatever he may choose to give to David and his men (vs. **4-9**).

Note: This was not an unusual request by David. Because he and his men had protected Nabal’s flocks, they were entitled to share in the shearing festivities.

But Nabal was indignant. As far as he was concerned, David was just another runaway servant (from Saul) who had no right to share in the festivities with the shearers (vs.**10-11**). The ten young men returned to David and told him what happened (vs.**12**). David responded by telling his men to put on their swords, and they headed off to confront Nabal (vs.**13, 21-22**).

2) The actions of Abigail

a) Abigail prepared food for David and his men

Word got back to Abigail about how David’s men had provided protection for the flocks and shepherds, and how Nabal had treated them when they had come in peace. The concern now was that David would seek vengeance on Nabal and all his household. (vs.**14-17**).

Abigail could have simply fled the area to save herself, and let David take his vengeance out on Nabal. After all, if Nabal was killed, she would be free of

² Caleb was one of the two faithful spies – the other was Joshua (**Numbers 14:1-10, 26-30**). He eventually settled in Hebron, which is in the hill country of Judah (**Joshua 15:13**).

³ Refer **Joshua 15:48, 55** for Maon and Carmel being in the mountain area of Judah. The town Carmel is not to be confused with Mount Carmel located on the north coast of Israel.

⁴ Ref The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 4 M-P, Page 347, Nabal.

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him. But that was not the mindset of Abigail. She wanted to ensure the safety of all in her household, even if that included her harsh husband. So she prepared a large quantity of food and wine, loaded them onto donkeys, and sent them on ahead of her with servants to meet David (vs.18-19). When you consider that David had at least 600 men with him (vs.13), you can understand why she sent so much food, *i.e.*;

- 200 loaves of bread
- 2 skins of wine (*i.e.* goatskins were usually used as the container)
- 5 sheep already dressed (*i.e.* cooked)
- 5 seahs of roasted grain (a seah = 7 litres, therefore 5 seahs = 35 litres)
- 100 clusters of raisins
- 200 cakes of figs

Note: The quantity of the food indicates how wealthy Nabal was.

However, she did not tell Nabal at this point what she had done.

b) Abigail calmed the spirit of David

When Abigail met David, he (David) was already “fired up” and seeking vengeance on Nabal’s household (vs.21-22). So Abigail bowed down in front of him and pleaded that the guilt be on her (vs.23-24). Note that she was not in denial about her husband’s attitude. Sometimes people with good intentions can turn a blind eye to the sins of others, but this is not the case with Abigail - she acknowledged that Nabal was a scoundrel, but she wanted peace to reign.

So Abigail then continued to defuse the situation - she had already started by bringing food for David’s men;

- she acknowledged that the Lord’s providence has allowed her to meet David before he did something rash (vs.26)
- she told him of the blessings he would receive because of his faithfulness to the Lord (vs.28)
- she said that the Lord would cast aside his enemies (vs.29), and that he (David) would one day be ruler over Israel (vs.30)
- and then she finished by pleading with him not to shed blood in this instance, because it would only cause him grief later on (vs.31).

3) David’s response

David recognised that the Lord’s providence was behind Abigail’s coming to him. Having had a chance to stop and consider what he was about to do, he was thankful for this turn of events, for he would otherwise have killed all the males in Nabal’s household (vs.32-34). He blessed the Lord, and he blessed Abigail for her advice.

After David accepted her gift of food (vs.35), Abigail then returned home to her husband. Given that he was drunk when she returned home, she waited until the morning before telling him what she had done (vs.36). When she did tell him, his heart “.... *died within him*” (vs.37) – possibly some sort of heart attack. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died (vs.38).

When David heard that Nabal had died, he asked Abigail to become his wife. And even here, we see another noteworthy quality of Abigail – her humility. Although she would be David’s wife, she would be ready to wash the feet of his servants (vs.39-42).

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4) Lessons for us

Of the various lessons that we can learn from Abigail, I just want to point out one.

Abigail's integrity shone through adversity.

The scriptures describe Nabal as being “*harsh and evil in his doings*” (**1 Samuel 25:3**), and we can see this in the way that he treated David's men when they came in peace. Living with such a man would not have been easy for Abigail. She probably had to endure his harshness and evil manner every single day. Now we don't know how long she had been married (to Nabal), but we can see that living in such adverse conditions did not embitter her. She still retained her noble and honourable qualities, being an example to all of us on how to let our lights shine for God (**Matthew 5:16**).

Sometimes, people say that, “*I could be a better person (or Christian) if only things were different.*” I accept that some people do live in difficult circumstances, and I don't want to minimise whatever hardship that they must endure. But our faithfulness to Christ is not to be based on our worldly circumstances. It is to be based on the Word of God (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**). It is to be based on the truth of the gospel (**John 17:17b**). It is to be based on the fact that God loves us, and He wants us to be holy like Him (**Matthew 5:48**). It is to be based on the reality that we are spiritual beings who must one day stand before the Lord our God and be accountable (**2 Corinthians 5:10**).

We are to live godly lives in spite of our circumstances.

Trials and adversity usually do one of two things – they can either make us, or they can break us. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said that some of His followers would fall away when things became difficult (**Matthew 13:20-21**), and we have an example of that as early as **John 6:60-66**.

But we also read in **1 Peter 1:6-7** that trials and hardship can also be opportunities to strengthen and refine our faith.

- how can we grow in patience if we are never in a position where longsuffering and patience is required?
- how can we learn to be forgiving if no-one ever sins against us?
- how can we learn to grow in self-control if we are never in a position where self-control is required?

In **Hebrews 12:7-11** we read about the chastening of the Lord. No-one likes chastening (or discipline), but from this passage, it seems that when we find ourselves in “trying” situations, it provides us with the opportunity to “... *yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness ...*” (vs.11). God loves us, and He wants us to grow in the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16, 22-25**). He wants us to share in His holiness (**Hebrews 12:10**). He wants us to spend eternity in heaven with Him (**2 Peter 3:9**).

Jesus is our greatest example (**1 Peter 2:21-24**). Under the greatest of trials, He remained obedient to the Father, and “... *committed Himself to Him who judges righteously ...*” (vs.23). But we also have examples, such as Abigail. What-ever our lot in life, let us learn the lesson from Abigail, and let our lives display Christ-like qualities, regardless of our circumstances.