
A Stunning Woman

1 Samuel 25²⁴

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Many are the stories of lovely women married to loutish men...

Prologue – All at Home

(24:2-25:1)

Everyone is returned to their resting places

²² And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

¹ Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah. Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

Saul returned to his home in Gibeah. Oh that he would return to the Lord. But it seems that he simply returned to his old ways, his old worries, his old wounds.

David returns to his stronghold in Engedi. There he is sheltered. There he is safe. There David is a shield and a support to all who come under his protection.

Samuel goes home to be with God (25:1). Yes, at this time he is in Paradise until Jesus is resurrected. But Samuel is laid to rest and buried in his home. One last time Israel gathers around this great prophet. And he is mourned.

And now, the rest of the story...

The Foolish Beast

(v. 1–13)

David has dealt generously with the unjust Saul. He has humbled himself under the Lord's hand and recognized that he must not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. But how will David respond to one who sins against him who is not protected by the God's anointing?

As this text unfolds, it is quite evident that some time has passed between chapters 24-25. Once again, we are going to have an unexpected reversal.

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A Wealthy Family**(v. 2-3)**

We are introduced to a wealthy family.

² And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. ³ Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite.

The narrator reports on the wealth and wife of a man under David's protection. But unlike his charming and wise wife, he is proud, arrogant and churlish. Curiously, his name means "fool". He is fabulously wealthy. His wife is his opposite, beautiful, wise and discerning. Ironically, Nabal was in the line from Caleb, that great warrior from Israel's conquest.

A Humble Request**(v. 4-9)**

⁴ David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. ⁵ So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. ⁶ And thus you shall greet him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. ⁷ I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. ⁸ Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.' " ⁹ When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited

David asks Nabal to repay past kindness toward him by giving David's men some provisions. Nabal and his herdsman are shearing the sheep. We find out that David has been the protector of Nabal's flocks and herdsman. Their prosperity has come partially through David's protection.

David sends his men to ask with humility for some provision. His six hundred and their camp followers are soon to celebrate one of the feast days. They need extra provision to do so. Would Nabal please meet this need out of his abundant wealth?

We should not overlook the emphasis on "in the name of David." The young men represented David. Their greeting was David's greeting. Their message was David's message; Their request was David's request.

An Arrogant Refusal

(v. 10–12)

Nabal sharply denies this request.

¹⁰ And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. ¹¹ Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" ¹² So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this.

Now we know whose Nabal's sympathies are with. The reference here is to David breaking away from Saul. His answer is sarcastic, accusing full of ill will and venom. Does he not know that David has shielded his flocks from harm? He accepted David's protection. But he will not support what he thinks is David's rebellion.

An Intended Retaliation

(v. 13)

David becomes angry and plans to punish Nabal.

¹³ And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

There is almost a deadly calm in David's response. He stands. He orders them to arm themselves even as he straps on his sword. The very pointed brevity amplifies the dangerous and deadly ferocity.

The Faithful Beauty

(v. 14–38)

The scene swiftly changes to follow a young man who who breathlessly reports to Abigail, Nabal's wife.

A Frightened Report

(v. 14-17)

Nabal's servants tell his wife, Abigail, about the incident and warn her that David is coming.

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. ¹⁷ Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him."

This young man is one who saw and heard Nabal's terrible response to the request. He knew all the good that David had done. He himself had been safe because of David's powerful protection. But he fears for what David will do. Abigail needs to do something. No one else can get through to Nabal.

The young man describes Nabal as one of the “worthless fellows”. This term was used to describe the sons of Eli (1 Samuel 2:12) and those who despised the kingship of Saul. So Nabal is numbered among those who scorn the Lord’s ways and the Lord’s appointments.

A Courageous Appeal

(v. 18–31)

Now the wisdom and discretion of Abigail move her to action.

Her Preparation

(v. 18-22)

Abigail prepares a large supply of food and rides out to meet David, pleading with him not to kill her husband.

¹⁸ Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. ¹⁹ And she said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I come after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. ²⁰ And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. ²¹ Now David had said, “Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good. ²² God do so to the enemies of David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him.”

She prepares substantial provision to take to David. She knows David at least by reputation. She knows what he needs. Notice that what she provides is much more than just feast food – this is a larder of daily sustenance. But for a camp including six hundred men it would not go so far. It is intended to be a symbol of her desire to meet David’s need and a way of expressing her good will and hope in David’s grace.

She does not tell Nabal of her plans. Abigail well knows he will not even respond to her. So she keeps her silence even while she moves to protect Nabal and his men. Abigail is the wife of a foolish and sinful man. Her keeping this from Nabal is seen as act of her wisdom and discretion. He might have tried to prevent her. But God was testing David and protecting the household of Nabal.

She situates herself to intercept David on his way to destroy Nabal. As David descends the mountain into the valley, Abigail’s entourage is in the path. One woman stands between her lord and benefactor and the death of her husband.

We are now told what David has sworn. His actions now have words. His protection is now turned into retaliation. He has been slighted. He has been sinned against by this man he has spent time and energy and maybe even blood to defend. He is in a dangerous anger. How different he is now to the man in the cave by the sheepfolds. He was trembling, plaintive and humble. Now David is furious and ready to kill. The straw of Nabal’s scorn has broken the back of David’s patience.

Her Presentation

(v. 23-31)

And there she is this lovely lady and her provision laden beasts standing in the path of the Destroyer.

²³ When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. ²⁵ Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ²⁶ Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. ²⁷ And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ²⁸ Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. ²⁹ If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. ³⁰ And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, ³¹ my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

Abigail bows before David. This is not the posture of a man before a woman, but of a subject before her king. She refers to David as her lord and herself as his servant. She also grounds her appeal in both of them being the Lord God's servants, both of them bowing before Yahweh.

Not only is Abigail beautiful in heart and in form, she is eloquent in speech. Her words are expressed in the language of prayer-praise. Though not in poetic form, they are lovely and appealing; they pull at the soul of a godly man. Her appeal comes in four parts.

Please treat Nabal as his name, his character and his actions are – that is, as a fool. Give him no regard. You, David should simply disregard this *fool*.

Look at how God has placed me, Abigail, in your path to prevent you from an act you will deeply regret later. Don't do now against Nabal what you would not do against Saul.

David, please receive from my hand what Nabal would not give. Accept me, Abigail, and my gift as you requested.

Please forgive. Forgive any offense I have given. God will bless you. God has preserved you. God has elevated you. You have lived and served without blemish; do not change that now.

Here are her closing words as rendered by the New Living Translation:

Then your conscience won't have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the LORD has done these great things for you, please remember me, your servant!"

In the words of John Woodhouse, "Since he [David] would reign as God's king, he must not be one who sheds blood needlessly or takes vengeance into his own hands. David must be a man who trusts God. Vengeance is for God to take (Deuteronomy 32:35; cf. Romans 12:19; cf. also Deuteronomy 20:4; Judges 7:2). David must be one who entrusts his life "to a faithful Creator while doing good" (1 Peter 4:19). And Abigail, with her prophetic word, had been placed in David's path that day for that very purpose." (Woodhouse, p. 481)

A Humbled Acceptance

(v. 32–35)

David praises God for sending Abigail to him.

³² And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! ³³ Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand! ³⁴ For as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." ³⁵ Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition."

But for Abigail's intercession, David would have covered himself in blood guilt. He would have killed Nabal and all his men out of personal revenge. But God has restrained his furious wrath and frightful plans through the gracious appeal of a wise lady. So David accepts her petition and her provision. David sends her home in peace.

A Divine Intervention

(v. 36–38)

But she does not come home to peace.

³⁶ And 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 told him nothing at all until the morning light. ³⁷ In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. ³⁸ And about ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

Make no mistake, when this gets back to Nabal it is not going to be easy for Abigail. Everything we have seen in Nabal's character indicates Abigail will be in real difficulty and danger.

Well, Abigail returns home to find an extravagant feast in progress. He won't give provision for a religious feast for his protector, David. But he turns instead and throws a lavish, drunken party for his household. He has done so without Abigail there. All this has happened in a very short time.

After a night of heavy drinking, Nabal is drunk. It is an ugly scene. Foolish, coarse men usually become worse when intoxicated. In the moment, Abigail tells Nabal about the terrible danger he had been in. His emotions explode and so does his brain: he suffers a stroke. Incapacitated, he can neither act on the foolishness of his heart nor harm Abigail. Ten days later the Lord strikes him and he dies.

Epilogue – All at Home

(v. 39-44)

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head." Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. ⁴⁰ When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife." ⁴¹ And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

⁴³ David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

David Vindicated

(v. 39)

It is a sweet thing to wait on God and to have God move. He had trusted that God would do what is right. Oh it took a winsome and wise lady to stay the sword hand. David blesses God who has avenged him. The wicked Nabal has fallen to the slaying hand of God. God's man and God's people will be avenged. May all the Nabal's of the world who scorn God's great King Jesus be brought the final end of the wrath of God.

David Married

(v. 40-42)

David's heart is taken by the grace and beauty, the wisdom and discretion of Abigail. He sends his messengers once again the shearing floors of Carmel. Instead of asking for a feast's provision, they are asking for the lady's hand in marriage.

⁴¹ She bowed low to the ground and responded, "I, your servant, would be happy to marry David. I would even be willing to become a slave, washing the feet of his servants!" ⁴² Quickly getting ready, she took along five of her servant girls as attendants, mounted her donkey, and went with David's messengers. And so she became his wife. [NLT]

No hesitancy. No pondering. She is happy to go. She was willing to be a servant; now she will become a bride.

David's Wives

(v. 43-44)

But what of David's other wife? Saul has given Michal, his daughter and David's first wife to another. David also weds Ahinoam of Jezrel.

Most of the Old Testament saints whose lives are recorded in the Scriptures had multiple wives. Though there is much trouble that comes with polygamy, the Mosaic Law did not forbid it. The New Testament makes being a "one woman kind of man" a qualification for office bearing in the church. While it would suit our conventions to say that David was wrong in having four wives, the Bible simply does not condemn him for it.

Reflect and Respond

Samuel, a marvelous birth, a sacrificial family, a decaying mentor, an amazing ministry, God-speaker, king-maker, kingdom-tearer, David's friend. He dies; he is buried; he is mourned. But he is remembered. This is the way of God's true prophets. Travail, struggle, preaching, admonishing, mentoring and sometimes dying before the dream is fulfilled. He did not see David on the throne. But he has seen the greater David on His.

How often great wealth turns people into ungrateful fools...

Abigail is portrayed here as woman of grace, wisdom and courage.

She seeks to protect her home when her husband has acted foolishly, rashly and dangerously.

She responds to David's request with the provisions he desires and requires.

She appeals to David to spare her husband and the men who serve them.

She pleases God by desiring God's will, submitting to God's king,

It is like Christ to withhold anger and wait on God's justice. In this day mercy and grace are extended in the kindness of the gospel. But not forever. There will be a day when the High King comes. The wicked will come to judgment. They will be swept away in His wrath. God will vindicate His people. Great will be the rejoicing of universe on the day of victory of the King. And like David we are waiting. Oh there are sorrows and struggles. There joys and delights. But one day the King's servants will be gathered up and taken in and made His Bride. And all will be well, all will be well.