

Background Characters in the Old Testament

Abigail: No Victim of Circumstances

Lesson #5 for October 30, 2010

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 25; Isaiah 28:23; 53:12; Daniel 9:15-19; Matthew 15:10; Romans 8:34.

1. This lesson is about Abigail, a courteous, intelligent, beautiful young woman married to a rich fool. Her story might remind us of the stories of Esther and even of Judith in the apocrypha.
2. It is very likely that the marriage of Abigail and Nabal was arranged—probably by her parents. A large dowry was probably paid for her. It is doubtful that she had a choice in this marriage. One wonders what kind of relationship existed between Nabal and Abigail. We know her as a young, beautiful, and presumably healthy woman; but she and Nabal never had any children.
3. We know basically one story about Abigail and Nabal. It is found in 1 Samuel 25. In brief, the story is as follows: Nabal was a rich man who owned large flocks which were probably scattered over a fairly large area in southern Judah. Such large flocks scattered over a large area with no fences and no property laws to speak of would be easy prey for marauding bands of Moabites, Amalekites, or Philistines.
4. Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, a man of faith; and thus, he was of the tribe of Judah, as was David. Saul recognized that if David continued to live, he would be the next king and Saul's descendants would not be. David and his men—some 600 of them, many of whom were also fleeing from the government of Saul—were hiding in southern Judah to avoid conflicts with Saul in his mad determination to destroy David. While there, they helped police the area and protect the flocks of men like Nabal from being stolen by those marauding bands. When the shearing season came in late spring, David sent 10 of his men to Nabal to ask for a gift from him in payment for the protection that his men had provided Nabal's flocks over the winter. Wasn't this a reasonable request? How many people did David have to feed daily?
5. Nabal's reply to David's men suggested that he considered David and his men to be no better than the marauding bands that they were trying to protect him from. He even suggested that David and his men might be runaway slaves. (1 Samuel 25:10,11) When David's men returned empty-handed, he summoned 400 of the 600 men and said, "We are going to destroy this evil, worthless, good-for-nothing man."
6. But when the servants of Nabal heard about what happened, they went straight to Abigail and told her how David's men had protected them through the winter. Abigail listened carefully and immediately took action. Abigail was a good listener! (Isaiah 28:23; Matthew 15:10; James 1:19) What makes a good listener? How often do we listen carefully before acting? When hearing of some problem, are we prepared to act? Or do we just sit back and hope it will resolve itself? In our day, aren't we suffering from information overload? Isn't the basic problem with listening that we are so selfish that we really do not care what someone else is saying? Are we as a church so certain that we "have the truth" that we really do not need to listen to anyone else?
7. Think of what happens when a young couple is courting. Each one wants to know as much

as he/she can possibly learn about the other. So, they are very good listeners. Unfortunately, after the marriage there is a tendency to slip back into one's old selfish ways where he/she really does not care what the other person has to say! In terms of spreading the gospel, we need to understand where people are coming from. Do they really know what they believe? Has evolution become the national religion in the United States? Do we tend to look for areas of similarity in belief in order to reach out to people? Does listening imply that we will compromise? If you do not speak up, will others assume that you are in agreement with what they are saying?

8. It is very likely that Nabal's servants had come to depend upon Abigail in all such circumstances. Abigail not only sent generous gifts to David but also followed behind on her own donkey. When she approached David, she was thoughtful, courteous, and respectful as well as beautiful. David was very impressed not only by the gifts but also by the beauty and courteous manner of Abigail.
9. But while Abigail was calming David's anger, Nabal was at home feasting and reveling with his friends. Like the rich man in the New Testament, he was rejoicing in his riches. (Luke 12:16-21) He drank so much that he collapsed in a stupor. When Abigail returned home, she realized his condition and waited until he sobered up. When he had sobered up sufficiently, she told him that David had been intent on killing him. He was so terrified and petrified by this news that his system suffered some kind of shock, and we are told that he died 10 days later.

Although Nabal had refused the needy company of David and his men, yet that very night he made an extravagant feast for himself and his riotous friends, and indulged in eating and drinking till he sunk in drunken stupor. The next day after the effects of his drunken debauch had somewhat passed away, his wife told him of how near he had been to death, and of how the calamity had been averted. As he listened, he realized what a course of evil would have resulted but for Abigail's discretion, and terror filled his heart. Palsied with horror, he sat down and never recovered from the shock. (*21MR* 214.3; *CTr* 145.3; *DG* 43.2; *CC* 170.2)

When David learned that Nabal was dead, he probably waited for the passing of a period of mourning and then sent his soldiers with the proposal of marriage to Abigail. David had been married to Saul's daughter, Michal, who was taken away from him probably after he fled from Saul, and then he was married to Ahinoam of Jezreel. (1 Samuel 25:43) But, David proposed to take on a third wife, Abigail. Later, he demanded to have Michal back again.

10. So, what should we learn from this story about Abigail? And what should we learn about God from this story?
11. What can we learn from Abigail's speech to David? (1 Samuel 25:23-31) Although Abigail was a beautiful and intelligent young woman married—probably without her consent—to a rich fool, nevertheless, she interceded on his behalf when he was in danger because of David's anger.
12. The Bible speaks at some length about interceding. What can we learn about interceding from the experiences of Moses, (Exodus 32:32) Esther, (Esther 7:12 2-4) and Daniel.

(Daniel 9:15-19) Notice what Daniel's main point was. We need to remember that we have at least two members of the Godhead pleading on our behalf, and the Third Member of the Godhead loves us so much that He sent His Son. (Romans 8:26-39; 1 John 2:1; but contrast John 16:25-29) If Jesus is pleading on our behalf, with whom is He pleading? (Zechariah 3:1-5; Daniel 7:9,10) Notice that the one who is accusing us is Satan! (Revelation 12:10-12) Jesus identifies Himself with us and is always ready to speak on our behalf, but this is never with the intent to change the Father's mind about us. He is presenting our cases before the rest of the universe, trying to convince them that it will be safe to live next door to us for the rest of eternity.

13. Does the Father need Someone to plead with Him before He will forgive and accept us? Why are so many Christians so concerned about this pleading? Doesn't the whole priestly system in the Old Testament suggest that we need someone to speak to God on our behalf? When is intercession first mentioned in the Bible? (Exodus 20:18-20) Notice that these verses come immediately after the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Was the idea of an intercessor God's idea? Or was it the people's idea? They were the ones who wanted it!
14. Is the intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit essential for our salvation? For what is Christ actually pleading? (Zechariah 3:1-5) If Christ is pleading on our behalf, with whom is He pleading? Who is accusing us?
15. Words can be very powerful weapons. Near the end of his life, even Napoleon suggested that the pen is more powerful than the sword. Consider the following passages about words and their use: Ecclesiastes 10:12,13; Proverbs 12:18; James 3:6; Proverbs 16:24; and Proverbs 25:11.
16. Notice in Abigail's appeal—as in the cases of Moses, Esther, and Daniel—that the one who pleads on behalf of another must himself be identified with that person or persons. Jesus has so identified Himself with us that He has taken on human form for the rest of eternity. What does that say to us?
17. Was Abigail in any danger from Nabal's wrath when she returned and told him that she had acted contrary to his wishes? Did Nabal recognize the wisdom of his wife? We must remember that in Abigail's day, the option of divorce or separation initiated by the woman was not possible.
18. Later, Abigail had a son born in Hebron named either Chileab or Daniel. (1 Chronicles 3:1; 2 Samuel 3:3) We have no idea what happened to her or to her son thereafter. It is possible that in the violent times of David's sons, they may even have been killed.
19. What do you think caused Nabal's death? Did he have a stroke? Did he have a heart attack? Did he die from liver failure? Did he die from alcohol poisoning? Why does the Bible say that the Lord killed him? (1 Samuel 25:38) Does God use heart attacks or strokes to get rid of people who are not wanted?
20. Read 1 Samuel 31:1-4 and 1 Chronicles 10:3,4,13,14. What was the cause of death in each of these cases? Why does the Bible in both cases say that God slew them? What does this tell us about the Old Testament understanding of God? How many things had Saul done to disobey God? What had God said about consulting mediums?

21. To the ancient Hebrew mind, there was only one God. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29) They were monotheists. While the nations around them had many “gods,” some of those were considered to be good gods and others to be evil gods. When something unexpected happened—especially if it was also unexplainable—they attributed it to one or more of their gods. If it was something good, it was attributed to a good god. If it was something bad, it was attributed to an evil god.
22. But Israel claimed to serve only one God. So, everything that happened was considered to be His activity—especially if it seemed beyond human ability to accomplish. Thus, everything that was not obviously caused by some known action, was attributed to the one God. Today, we might say that whatever God does not cause, He at least permits. If God did not exercise His constant restraint on the Devil, the Devil would immediately destroy anyone who even pretended to be a follower of God!
23. So, when Saul committed suicide, it was considered to be an act of God because Saul had fought many previous battles and had not been killed. Why this time? If he had not turned away from God and had not disobeyed God’s directions repeatedly, no doubt, God would have continued to protect him and his sons. Thus, it was thought that in a large sense, God killed Saul.
24. We know nothing about why Nabal died except what we read in 1 Samuel 25 and the comments from Ellen White. It may have been a stroke or some disease caused by his drinking. But in any case, since the exact cause was not known, it was attributed to God.
25. Do we ever attribute things to God which are not His doing? Does it matter what we think of God?

We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God’s character. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 5, 1887 (RH 126:1:2); *Our High Calling* 176; *That I May Know Him* 262

Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. (*Prophets and Kings* 177.1)

26. To those of us who espouse the larger-view, trust-healing model of the plan of salvation, our picture of God is absolutely central to our whole understanding of salvation. In this lesson we have seen that Abigail was an intelligent young woman who was also beautiful and wise. Her husband was so foolish that “the LORD struck Nabal and he died.” (1 Samuel 25:38) Should we just pass over this statement and pretend as if we had not read it? In what ways should we want to be like Abigail? In what ways should we avoid being like Nabal?

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