

Married to a Fool: Abigail & Nabal

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The Text

1 Samuel 25:1-44

Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared . . . When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face . . . She fell at his feet and said ... “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 shall live.”

(25:18, 23, 24, 28) 9

There have been times when a counselor has told the wife of a foolish husband to simply be quiet and trust the Lord. Certainly there are situations in which a wife should seek to win her husband without a word. But there are exceptional situations in which a godly wife may need to take action, even if her husband doesn't agree. Abigail does not fit the preconceived ideal of a Christian wife. She is a strong, wise, and discerning woman and she takes decisive action to deliver her family from disaster. She does so in spite of the fact that it means going against the wishes of her husband. Abigail is a woman of great faith. Abigail was married to Nabal, a rich but foolish man (25:1-3). We do not know how this situation came about. (By cultural custom their marriage may have been arranged.) There are many women today who find themselves in similarly difficult positions. They may be suffering in marriages to men who are selfish, proud, and overtly sinful. Their marriages may have started with two professing believers, however now the husband is hostile to Christianity. Or perhaps the wife was converted after marriage, so her life with her unbelieving husband is now a daily clash of values. Nabal puts his family in grave danger when he insults David's emissaries (25:4- 13).² His refusal to help them is foolish for multiple reasons. First, David's request for provision is reasonable in light of the protection he and his men gave Nabal. Showing hospitality, especially during a feast, was customary. Second, David has the power to do Nabal harm. Third, David, whom he insults, is no ordinary visitor; he is the Lord's anointed king. The way Nabal treats David is a reflection of his attitude towards God and thus invites judgment, a judgment that the Lord ultimately carries out (25:37-38). Sadly, David responds to Nabal sinfully by devising a plan to take revenge and wipe out all the men from his household.

When Abigail hears of her husband's folly she springs into action. She gathers ample provisions and rushes out to meet David (25:14-22). Then, in one of the longest speeches by a woman in Scripture, Abigail appeals to David to turn from his plan to destroy Nabal's household (25:23- 31). She expresses godly wisdom, humility, and confidence that the Lord will protect, exalt, and avenge David. In contrast to her husband's belittling of David, Abigail expresses faith that David is the Lord's anointed who will one day rule Israel (25:28- 31). David gratefully receives her counsel and relents from his plan to punish Nabal (25:32-35). Abigail not only rescues her family from slaughter, she delivers David from the folly of murderous revenge. The Lord brings justice to Nabal and blessing to Abigail.

There are many practical counseling lessons we can learn from Abigail's example:

1. God uses strong women. From biblical times to the present day, God has used wise women to shape history. Abigail's words to David reflect her strong faith and a knowledge of God's Word. Our churches and our families still need strong, wise women of faith.
2. Occasionally, it is necessary for a wife to disregard her husband's wishes. Biblical commands to submit to one's leaders (home, civil, work and church) are broad, however they are not absolute. When the civil authorities commanded the apostles to stop preaching the gospel, Peter and the others rightly declared that they must obey God rather than men. Those in authority do not have permission to compel others to sin. They are not allowed to threaten the safety of those to whom they provide oversight. Abigail's decision was wise; she spared her entire family. If a husband places the lives of his wife and/or children in danger, a woman may find that she must take firm and decisive action.
3. Abigail's approach is a biblical model of how to confront sinful authority. She is the embodiment of Proverbs 25:15, "With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone." A person in authority is not exempt from rebuke if they are in sin. Abigail sets an example as she approaches David with meekness and persuades him to turn from his sin by putting his focus back upon the Lord's character and promises (25:26-31). She convinces David to repent of his vengeful spirit and to entrust Nabal's judgment to the Lord. Abigail successfully rescues one who has wandered from the truth.¹
4. The crucial test in life is one's response to the Lord's anointed. Nabal foolishly despised and cursed God's chosen king and perished. Abigail honored and blessed David and was blessed. Jesus, the Son of David, is the Anointed One of God. Jesus, like David, sends his servants offering peace. Those who acknowledge and honor Him will be as richly blessed as Abigail was. Those who foolishly and pridefully refuse to give the honor that is due to the heavenly Father will perish like Nabal.