**Abigail and David - Abigail Was King David's Wisest Wife**

Abigail Was the Comrade David Needed to Succeed

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The story of Abigail and David ranks almost as exciting and deceitful as that of David and his most famous wife, Bathsheba. The wife of a rich man when she met David, Abigail possessed beauty, intelligence, political shrewdness, and material wealth that helped David at a critical moment when he could have thrown away his chance at success.

**David Was on the Run from Saul**

When Abigail and David encounter one another in 1 Samuel 25, David is on the run from King Saul, who has rightly discerned that David is a threat to his throne. This makes David an outlaw, camping out in the wilderness while trying to build up some following among the people.

In contrast, Abigail lived in Carmel in the north of Israel as the wife of a rich man named Nabal. Her marriage gave her considerable social standing, judging by the fact that she had five maidservants (1 Samuel 25:42). However, Abigail's husband is described in scripture as "a hard man and an evildoer," making us wonder why such a paragon of virtue as Abigail would have married him in the first place. Yet it's Nabal's rude and intemperate actions that bring Abigail and David together.

According to 1 Samuel 25:4-12, David, in need of supplies, sends 10 men to seek provisions from Nabal. He tells the messengers to remind Nabal that David's band had protected Nabal's shepherds in the wilderness. Some scholars say this reference implies that David was merely seeking a *quid pro quo* from Nabal, but others argue that David was really trying to extort the ancient Israelite equivalent of "protection money" from Nabal.

Nabal appears to think David's request falls into the latter category, for he sneers at their message. "Who is this David?" Nabal says, meaning essentially "who is this upstart?" Nabal then accuses David of disloyalty to Saul by saying, "There are many slaves nowadays who run away from their masters. Should I then take my bread and my water, and the meat that I slaughtered for my own shearers, and give them to men [who come] from I don't know where?"

In other words, Nabal gave David the ancient Israelite version of "Buzz off, kid."

**Abigail Gets the Word and Acts**

When the messengers report this unhappy exchange, David orders his men to "gird on your swords" to take provisions from Nabal by force. The phrase "gird on your swords" is key here, says the book Women in Scripture. That's because in ancient Israelite warfare, girding involved wrapping a sword belt around the waist 3 times to make it secure in battle. In short, violence was about to ensue.

However, a servant brought word of David's request and Nabal's rejection to Nabal's wife, Abigail. Fearing that David and his army would take what they wanted by force, Abigail was prompted to act.

The fact that Abigail would gather supplies in defiance of her husband's wishes and ride out to meet David herself implies that she was not a woman oppressed by her culture's patriarchy. Carol Meyers, in her book Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context, writes this of gender relationships in pre-state Israel: "When a household occupies the preeminent place in society, women have a strong role in decision making and consequently exercise considerable power in the household. This is especially true for complex households such as the extended or multiple-family units that made up a significant number of domestic compounds in Israelite villages."

Abigail was clearly one of these women, according to 1 Samuel 25. She not only has five women servants of her own, but her husband's male servants also do her bidding, as seen when she sent them out with provisions for David.

**Abigail Used Courtesy and Diplomacy**

Riding a donkey, Abigail was just coming into view of David when she heard him cursing Nabal for his stinginess, and swearing vengeance against all of Nabal's extended family. Abigail prostrated herself before David and begged him to take his anger at Nabal out on her instead, because she didn't see the messengers he sent and therefore didn't know of his needs.

Then she apologized for Nabal's behavior, telling David that her husband's name means "boor" and that Nabal had acted like a boor toward David. Far more polite and diplomatic than a woman of her standing needed to be with an outlaw like David, Abigail assured him that he has God's favor, which will keep him from harm and give him both the throne of Israel and a noble house of many descendents.

By diverting David from vengeance against Nabal, Abigail not only saved her family and its wealth, she also saved David from committing murders that could have brought retribution upon him. For his part, David was captivated by Abigail's beauty and apparent wisdom. He accepted the food she brought and sent her home with a promise that he would remember her good counsel and her kindness.

**Nabal Is Literally Scared to Death**

After placating David with sweet words and stores of food, Abigail returned to her home with Nabal. There she found her boorish husband enjoying a feast fit for a king, utterly clueless to the danger he was in from David's wrath (1 Samuel 25:36-38). Nabal got so drunk that Abigail didn't tell him what she had done until the next morning when he sobered up. A boor he might be, but Nabal was no fool; he realized that his wife's intervention saved him and their family from slaughter. Nonetheless, scripture says that at this point, "his courage failed him, and he became like a stone. About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died" (1 Samuel 25: 37-38). His wife Abigail inherited Nabal's fortune.

As soon as David heard that Nabal had died, he shouted praises to God and immediately sent a proposal of marriage to wise, beautiful and rich Abigail. The implication of scripture is that David recognized what an asset Abigail would be to him as a wife, since she was clearly someone who managed well, protected her husband's interests, and could recognize dangers in time to avert disaster.

**Was Abigail a Model Wife or a Betrayer?**

Abigail is often held up as a model spouse among King David's wives, the epitome of the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31. However, Jewish studies scholar Sandra S. Williams has proposed another possible motivation for Abigail's actions.

In her paper published online, "David and Abigail: A Non-Traditional View," Williams argues that Abigail actually betrayed her husband Nabal by siding with the outlaw David. Since scripture describes both David and Abigail as good-looking people in their sexual prime, it's entirely possible that some undercurrent of sexual attraction pulled Abigail toward David. After all, as Waylon Jennings wrote in his classic country song, "Ladies Love Outlaws."

Given their respective physical beauty and characters described in scripture, Williams theorizes that David found in Abigail the kind of comrade he needed to achieve the kingship of a unified Israel. Williams cites David and Abigail's common characteristics: both were intelligent, attractive people, charismatic leaders with good diplomatic and communicating skills, masters of diplomacy who knew how to play situations to their advantage, yet deceptive creatures who could feign victimhood while betraying the trust of others.

In short, Williams says that David and Abigail recognized in one another their mutual strengths and weaknesses, a realization that probably made their union, although ethically ambiguous, inevitable and successful.