

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



“What a Woman!”

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David and bowed herself to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant."

1 Samuel 25:23-24

Those who think the women of the Bible are only simpering, fragile waifs, barefoot and pregnant, whimpering under the lash of dominating men, afraid to raise their voice over a plea for mercy—anyone who thinks this is the female template in God's word should take a good long look at this woman.

All parents should want their daughters to grow up to be like David's wife Abigail.

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*the writings of
david s lampel*

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The First Wife

KING SAUL GAVE HIS YOUNGER DAUGHTER MICHAL to the youthful David as a reward for killing Goliath and in return for the remarkable price of one hundred Philistine foreskins. While David and his men were in exile and running from the king of Israel, however, Saul gave Michal to another man—Palti the son of Laish, from Gallim. Later, when Saul and David were at war with each other, David demanded the return of Michal, so she was taken from Palti and delivered to David. But the bloom was off the rose. Now she would be just one of several wives for David.

Michal fades into unwritten history immediately after she ridicules her husband for his public exhibition of joy and praise when the ark is finally brought into the city of David (the southern portion of what would become greater Jerusalem; taken from the Jebusites by David and renamed the “city of David”). She is disgusted by his exuberant praise, but the Lord God is not, so He closes her womb.

And so it was, that when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and the sound of the trumpet. Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

After placing the ark in its new tent home and making offerings, David the king distributes sweet offerings to all the people of Israel. Upon returning home, however, he is met by his scold of a wife.

But when David returned to bless his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself today in the eyes of his servants’ maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!” So David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; therefore I will celebrate before the LORD. I will be more lightly esteemed than this and will be humble in my own eyes, but with the maids of whom you have spoken, with them I will be distinguished.”

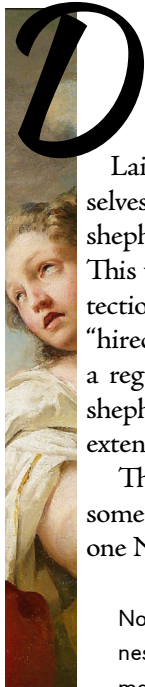
2 Samuel 6:13-16, 20-22

The last mention of her is, “Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.”



David dancing before the Ark, Rome about 1660-65 terracotta. Location: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photographed by Yair Haklai.

A Righteous Woman



DURING THEIR TIME OF EXILE, running from the pursuing Saul, and while David's wife Michal was with Palti son of Laish, David and his men supported themselves in part by offering armed protection to shepherds tending their flocks far from home. This was a culturally acceptable form of a protection racket in that time. They were not "hired" by the owner of the flocks, and thus due a regular wage, but they voluntarily kept the shepherds and flocks safe and then afterward extended their hand for suitable compensation. This they did with the wealthy owner of some of the flocks they had been protecting, one Nabal of Maon and Carmel.

Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel... that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.

1 Samuel 25:2-4

**For a fool speaks nonsense,
And his heart inclines toward wickedness:
To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the LORD,
To keep the hungry person unsatisfied
And to withhold drink from the thirsty.**

Isaiah 32:6

The writer of this account in First Samuel inserts into the middle of his narrative the important and revealing parenthetical information: "Now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite."

Since it is doubtful that parents would consciously name their son "Fool" (naw-bawl), it is supposed that this was a well-deserved nickname for this despicable man. Yet it is also possible that his pugnacious character was inherited from parents so mean as to name their offspring "Fool."

Here we are introduced to Abigail, the unfortunate wife of this "fool." Upon reading of

her character, in stark contrast to that of her husband, we by necessity ask, "How in the world would she have been married to *him*?" But that is just imposing our contemporary culture on the ancient. She would certainly have had no say in the selection of her husband. We know nothing of Nabal's appearance, only that he possessed an ugly temperament. We are told that his wife Abigail, however, was of good understanding and beautiful of form: Abigail was beautiful, shapely, and intelligent. And it will be her understanding, her discernment and good sense that will play such a critical role in the events that follow.

David sends a group of ten men to collect what is owed them for the work they had done in protecting Nabal's flocks. They are instructed, and so they do greet the man with diplomatic courtesy, humility, respect, and honor, concluding with the request that he, "Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David." Nabal's contemptuous response befits his name.

But Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David?

And who is the son of Jesse? There

are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?"

1 Samuel 25:10-11

When Abigail is informed of what had transpired between David's men and her husband, she immediately knows that this means trouble for all involved. Sure enough, when David receives the report from his returning emissaries, he assembles a force of four hundred men to do justice upon this unappreciative brute of a man.



Righteousness plays out in real life in myriad ways. It is not always tied to faith or “religion,” but shows itself from moment to moment in the mundane circumstances of temporal life.

The righteous pay their taxes and correct the clerk that returns too much change. The righteous give to the truly needy and swallow their pride when corrected. The righteous follow through on a promise and pay their bills. None of these responses need be associated directly with religion; they are just the right thing to do.

Although Abigail will reveal a keen diplomatic and politic mind in her dealings with David, she is not just being self-protectively clever. She is doing what is right.

Without hesitation or second thought, and without informing her husband, Abigail organizes a caravan of donkeys loaded down with food for David and his men. Beyond that, she follows the caravan on her own donkey; she will personally make amends to the offended leader. And sorely offended he certainly is. God’s word records the intentions of his heart.

Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him.”

1 Samuel 25:21-22

But then he meets Abigail. The future husband and wife meet each other out on the remote side of a mountain, in a hidden ravine—a reminder that David remains a hunted fugitive.

Abigail demonstrates remarkable courage. Without husband or champion at her side she bravely approaches a company of four hundred skilled warriors bent on violent revenge against her husband and household. Demonstrating the companion quality of wisdom, she immediately bows in submission before David and assumes the blame for everything that has transpired.

She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal,

for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.

1 Samuel 25:24-25

The woman’s discretion shines forth in her words regarding her husband. At first glance she would seem to be, as we might phrase it today, “throwing Nabal under the bus.” But in truth she is not. No matter how beautiful and intelligent she is, would David want to marry a woman so disloyal to her husband? He might, for the moment, be impressed that Abigail shares his opinion of Nabal, but no one wants a wife who can so quickly turn on her own husband. Thus she artfully walks the line between rationalization and disingenuous sophistry, be-



Antonio Molinari

tween excusing the behavior of her husband and siding with David’s position. Abigail readily presents Nabal as a fool—“...for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him”—because one cannot easily destroy the simple-minded.

Abigail, in the manner of the times, also offers herself as David’s servant, and acknowledges him as “lord”—a clever reversal of their respective fortunes: she the wife of a wealthy merchant and owner of vast flocks of sheep and goats, and he a roving outlaw. By this, however, she acknowledges David’s power over her life or death. Then she wisely brings in Yahweh as adjudicator.

“Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. Now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil will not be found in you all your days.”

1 Samuel 25:26-28

We are left to wonder if Abigail was prescient, or had prior knowledge of the man before her. In her mention of the Lord making “for my lord an enduring house,” and, a moment later, “And when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel,” is she passing along information she has gained sitting at the feet of Samuel or other prophets, or is she a prophetess herself, allowing the Spirit to speak through her? The rabbis of Talmudic times believed the latter; they held the position that Abigail should be counted “among seven women who they believed had been graced by the Holy Spirit, the source of prophecy.” Whatever her source, Abigail knows who David is and what he will become. Did this inform her final request? It would seem so, since it would play out just as she said.

“When the LORD deals well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.”

1 Samuel 25:31b

David is grateful to the wife of Nabal for restraining his urge for revenge and preventing his shedding blood that day. He turns his troops around and returns to camp, while Abigail returns to her husband.



Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

Romans 12:17-19

When left on our own we will invariably revert to type. Left on his own, a fool will always prove that he is. In his wife’s absence, of which he was probably not even aware, Nabal played the fool.

Pleased with what the shearing would accrue to his wealth, pleased with himself for stiffing David and his men and thus having benefit of their protection without charge, pleased with himself in all respects Nabal throws himself a feast—a feast befitting a king—which is, of course, how he sees himself.

No one can touch him. No one can tell *him* what to do.

Abigail returns home while the feasting and drinking are still going in full debauch. Seeing that her husband is “very drunk,” she wisely holds her news until the morrow. At first light the next morning she pays a visit to his bedchamber. The “wine has gone out of Nabal,” but not its lingering effects. Abigail contributes some bad news to his hangover; without telling him or seeking his permission, she has done what he would not, and paid the debt to David.

In his stupor the news hits Nabal like a sledgehammer.

But in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone.

1 Samuel 25:37

We haven’t evidence to ascertain the specific cause of the man’s stroke (for so it seems to the layman’s ears). What we do know is that Yahweh was at work in the life of the righteous Abigail. Through her He saved David’s life and reputation; through her wisdom and tact the Lord God prevented David from exacting his own vengeance. Through her, *He* then took that vengeance, for “About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.”

New Mates

PRAISE COMES EASILY TO THE RIGHTEOUS. Gratitude and humility come easily to those who know God is on His throne, yet still condescends to work in their lives.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head."

1 Samuel 25:39a

A man such as David, a man after God's own heart, will be drawn to a woman in kind. Abigail, by word and deed, had demonstrated to David her heart for the Lord. The truth is, she had revealed her heart and her righteousness to everyone with whom she came into contact: Nabal's hired help, David's men, Nabal himself, and now David's servants.

Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you to take you as his wife." She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants."

1 Samuel 25:39b-41

If David had been impressed with Abigail, no doubt she had been impressed with this man who would now be her new husband and lord. Back at their first meeting in the secluded ravine, he had graciously and honorably accepted her payment of sustenance for the work his men had performed and, like her, acknowledged the hand of Yahweh at work in their meeting.

Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to

meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand."

1 Samuel 25:32-33

We know little more about Abigail, except that she bore children to David, and was, for a time, taken captive by the Amalekites along with David's other wife at the time, Ahinoam of Jezreel. Both were rescued unharmed when David and his men attacked and wiped out the Amalekite camp.



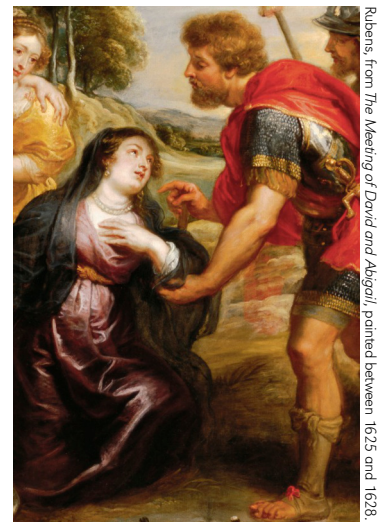
What if Abigail had been a constant nag at Nabal, always complaining about his behavior, his personality? Would she then have even been around when David's men showed up, or would she have already been discarded by her brutish husband?

What if, instead of being a nag, Abigail had not cared at all about what happened between Nabal and others, how he mistreated those who worked for him and cheated others? What if she just luxuriated in his wealth and forgot about everything and everyone else?

What if she had whined and played the helpless victim to David, ranting and raving about her miserable husband? Would David had then chosen her for his wife? Would he have continued on to take revenge upon Nabal and his men, thus failing to wait upon the Lord?

None of these events *did* happen, because that was not the character of Abigail. She was a woman of grit, of wisdom, of discretion, who just happened to be, on top of everything else, beautiful and intelligent.

What a woman!



Rubens, from *The Meeting of David and Abigail*, painted between 1625 and 1628.