

1 Samuel 25:1-44

David and Abigail

1 Samuel 25:1 - "And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran."

Samuel was the link or bridge which connected two very different periods - the times of the Judges and the new Israelite kingdom. Samuel was, so to speak, the John the Baptist who embodied the old, and initiated the new.

Some scholars see a parallel between the death of Samuel and David's withdrawal further into the wilderness, and the death of John the Baptist preceding Jesus' withdrawal:

- **Matthew 14:13** - "When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart..."

The wilderness of Paran was where Hagar and Ishmael were exiled and visited by an angel. Later the children of Israel spent part of their time in the wilderness there.

Even while David was being pursued and persecuted by Saul, David and his men protected Israelites from marauding desert tribes.

1 Samuel 25:2 - "And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb."

The name Nabal means "fool," a designation that describes a headstrong, self-willed person, impious, who followed his own course, as if there were "no God" alike in heaven and on earth.

The names Nabal, Balaam and Laban all contain the same initials with the same numerical value. Thus "NBL" = Nabal, Balaam, Laban

1 Samuel 25:4-5 - "And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name!"

Sheep shearing time was like a harvest - a time of celebration and feasting. David and his men had been watching out for Nabal's shepherds over the past months, never demanding anything in repayment. Now David sent a delegation to ask if there was anything to spare that Nabal could donate to his men out of his abundance.

Nabal answers insolently:

1 Samuel 25:10-11 - "And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"

The Midrash adds that Nabal meant, "David is relying on the two drops of anointing oil with which Samuel anointed him. But where is Samuel and where are those droplets?"

Rashi adds: "Of what importance is he that I should give him mine? Is he not descended from Ruth the Moabitess?"

The mention of his father cause David's anger to rise. Nabal insinuates that David is a rebel "rebelling from his master" Saul. From one point of view, as an anointed king, David might have viewed Nabal's response as treason against his claim to the throne.

The rabbis discuss whether David's kingdom had begun or not. They disagree on whether it began when he was anointed, or when Samuel died, or later when Saul died, etc. This is interesting considering similar obscurity concerns Messiah's kingdom - Jesus said it was already "at hand" or "among you" or "in you" and in some ways began with His entry into history, but in others fully only at his second coming.

David readies 400 men and intends to deliver vengeance on Nabal and his whole entourage.

One of Nabal's attendants rushes back to Nabal's home to tell Abigail the dire news:

1 Samuel 25:17 - "Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him."

Abigail is numbered among the seven prophetesses of Israel (Megillah 15a). The other six female prophets are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Huldah, and Esther. Because in her exchange with David, she predicts his kingship, and even foreshadows the Messiah.

She was also said to be one of history's most beautiful women. In traveling to meet David, Abigail accidentally uncovered her leg momentarily, which produced such a bright light that David saw it 7 1/2 miles away and was attracted to her by its light (Megillah 15a). Others say he was not guided by a light but rather by the heat of his passion for her.

1 Samuel 25:28 - "I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days."

"the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house" - predicting the Davidic dynasty and its future Messianic kingdom.

"my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD" - If David had attacked Nabal in anger about personal honor, this would be shown to be false.

"evil hath not been found in thee all thy days" - this is both past and future tense, and can only be describing the Messiah, the sinless Son of God.

1 Samuel 25:29 - "Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling."

The Rabbis and Maimonides (Moreh Nevochim, par. 1. c. 41.) refer this to eternal life in the world to come, and the safety and security of his soul hereafter.

The Targum has, "the soul of my lord shall be treasured up in the treasury of eternal life, before the Lord thy God"

A similar thought - **Revelation 6:9** - "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:"

In contrast, the souls of the enemies of Messiah "shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling"

By mentioning God "slinging his enemies" she turned David's mind to remember how God had used him to kill Goliath by depending on God without resorting to strength of flesh.

A similar expression in Jeremiah:

- **Jeremiah 10:18** - "For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find it so."

1 Samuel 25:30-31 - "And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."

She predicts David will become king. By this time it was probably widely known that Samuel had anointed him.

"remember thine handmaid" - the rabbis thought this referred to her wanting to marry

David once her husband Nabal had died, and thus she said it under a spirit of prophecy.

David thanks her for preventing him from acting on his rash vow of vengeance against Nabal. Instead she had persuaded him to wait on God.

When Abigail went to her husband, he was drunk at his feasting, so she waited until the next morning to tell him what had transpired.

1 Samuel 25:37-38 - "But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died."

The rabbis interpret this to mean that like on the high holy days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, 10 days are appointed to allow for repentance. Nabal didn't repent, so God took his life.

Also, "The Holy One Blessed be He suspended his sentence until after Samuel's mourning period, lest the mourning period of this wicked man coincide with his mourning period."

The Character of Abigail

Abigail represents a view of a proper submissive wife. She didn't submit to her husband's stupidity; rather she protected her husband and his interests. Healthy submission is characterized by loyalty, humility and consideration, and it seeks the greater good. Ideally, it should be mutual and reciprocal.

Abigail is described as being of "good understanding" (*tobat sekel* - **1 Samuel 25:3**), a term later used to describe Solomon. This is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where this term is used in relation to a woman.

Abigail was also brave. Like Esther approaching King Ahasuerus unbidden, it took courage to intervene as she did. "If I perish I perish."

Like Abigail, Rebekah (wife of Isaac) and Jael (wife of Heber) also went behind their husband's backs and are praised for it. Rebekah went against her husband's wishes and even tricked him when she secured the birthright for Jacob instead of Esau, and there is no hint of censure against her in the Bible. Jael's husband Heber had made a covenant with the Jabin king of Hazor, a Canaanite (**Judges 4:17**), but Jael sided with Israel and killed Jabin's general Sisera.

Her intervention saved not only her husband but everyone in her household as well as Nabal's men.

(See <https://margmowczko.com/abigail-1-samuel-25/>)

In fact, in some ways, Abigail is a type of Christ:

- Abigail comes in humility riding a donkey
- She presents an offering for Nabal's trespass (a sin sacrifice)
- She asks David to let the blame for the offense fall on her alone (substitutionary guilt) and intercedes for her husband
- She prophesies about David's reign (declaring the kingdom)
- She is a peacemaker
- She washes the feet of David's servants

(See <https://seedbed.com/abigail-old-testament-type-christ/>)

This story is placed between two incidents of David sparing Saul's life. Nabal is sort of a stand-in for Saul, who also acts foolishly. Abigail - with her calm, wise actions and words - keeps David from carrying through his rash vow of vengeance that would have been out of character for a future king.

(See 'The Role of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25' by Ken Mulzac
<https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/AUSS/2003-1/2003-1-04.pdf>)

Once Abigail was a widow and out from under the toxic and unbearable relationship with Nabal, David "communed" with Abigail "to take her to him to wife."

But the end of the chapter mentions David's other wives.

Polygamy Among the Patriarchs

Israel's kings were warned not to "multiply wives."

Deuteronomy 17:17 - "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself."

Solomon was the greatest offender - he had 700 wives plus 300 concubines. (**1 Kings 11:3**)

David had at least 8 wives - Michal, Abigail, Ahinoam of Jezreel, Eglah, Maacah, Abital, Haggith, and Bathsheba, and "10 women/concubines" (**2 Samuel 15:16**)

In fact, after David has Uriah murdered and takes Bathsheba, Nathan represents God as saying to David, "And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things." (**2 Samuel 12:7-8**)

Does that mean God approved and personally provided David with Saul's wives?

This is murky. No where else does it mention David marrying Saul's wives. Rashi

interprets this only as referring to Michal, Saul's *daughter*, who David did marry.

But other rabbis interpret the phrase "such and such things" to mean "I would give you twice as much over," meaning David's existing wives could be tripled: from six to 18. They say Eglah is another name for Michal, and so David comes in under the total 18 allowed.

Later, when David was almost 70 years old, he apparently took a pre-pubescent 12 1/2 year old maiden, Abishag, as a concubine:

1 Kings 1-3 - "Now when King David was old, and stricken in years, they covered him with clothes, but no heat came unto him. 2 Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a YOUNG (*NA'ARAH*) virgin, and let her stand before the king, and cherish him: and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the King may get heat. 3 So they sought for a fair YOUNG (*NA'ARAH*) maid throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found one Abishag a Shunammite, and BROUGHT HER TO THE KING."

<https://www.logos.com/grow/does-jesus-contradict-the-old-testament-on-polygamy/>

If David is a type of Christ, and there's only one Bride of Christ, why does he have several wives?

And why did God allow polygamy at all, if monogamy was the ideal?

Apparently the first man recorded as having more than one wife was Lamech.

- **Genesis 4:19** - "And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah."

The rabbis - already beginning to be conflicted over polygamy - explained in Genesis Rabbah:

"Rabbi Azariah said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah bar Simon: This is what the men of the generation of the Flood would do: each of them would take two wives, one for procreation and one for pleasure. The one who was for procreation would sit as if she was a widow in her lifetime, and the one that was for pleasure would drink a cup for sterility so that she did not bear [children] and would sit by him adorned like a prostitute."

(This is also an early negative reference to abortifacients)

The patriarchs had several wives and concubines. But even after the Law was given, allowance is made for marrying more than one wife at a time.

One kind of plural marriage was the Levirate Marriage

If a married man died without leaving a male heir, his brother was required to offer to

marry his widow regardless of whether he already had a wife. This was so that the widow would have support during her old age (either from her new husband or from her son) and so that the family name and land might be passed on through any children they might have (**Deuteronomy 25:5–6**). But the widow could refuse this arrangement.

Like many of the Torah commands, this one moderated an excessive Near Eastern custom. Hittite law, for instance, said a widow could be married against her will to any male relative — even to her husband's elderly grandfather or infant nephew.

(See https://www.academia.edu/1329711/Three_Weddings_and_a_Divorce_Gods_marriage_to_Judah_Israel_and_the_Church)

In the Torah

Exodus 21:10-11 - "If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money""

This is embedded in a section about a man who sells his daughter to be a maidservant.

A female slave "maidservant" was, as a rule, her master's concubine; she stood consequently to her master in a relation that could not suitably be terminated at the end of six years. So these statutes gave her the status of a wife.

If they were betrothed as a concubine, they were to be entitled to the status of wives during their whole lifetime, even though their husbands contracted further marriages (**Exodus 21:10**). If, instead of becoming the wife of her purchaser, a woman was made over by him to his son, she was to enjoy all the rights of a daughter (**Exodus 21:9**). If the purchaser declined to act in either of these two ways, he was compelled to take one of two other courses. Either he must get another Hebrew to discharge his obligation of marriage (**Exodus 21:8**), or he must return the maid intact to her father, without making any demand for the restitution of the purchase-money (**Exodus 21:11**). These provisions afforded a considerable protection to the slave-concubine, who might otherwise have been liable to grievous wrong and oppression.

The salient fact here is that the Torah is proposing a situation in which an Israelite would be taking a second wife.

- **Deuteronomy 21:15-17** - "If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated, then it shall be when he makes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."

This recalls the situation of Jacob, Rachel and Leah:

- **Genesis 29:31** - "And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren."

In Jesus' Day

Polygamy continued up through the first century and beyond.

In 1961 a bag of papyrus scrolls were found in the Cave of Letters near En-Gedi. They included a marriage certificate of a widow named Babatha, who married for a second to a man who already had a living wife. So we know that at least around 100 A.D. plural marriages were still taking place among the Jews.

Both Greek and Roman law and custom called strictly for monogamy. Egyptian marriages were monogamous, although the Pharaohs married their sisters. Even the Philistines (descended from Mediterranean sea raiders) were probably monogamous. **Genesis 20:17-18** says God healed the Philistine king Abimeech and his wife and maidservants, "For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife." - only one wife is mentioned although the maidservants could have been his concubines.

The Romans allowed Jews to continue practicing polygamy in Palestine, but elsewhere in the empire monogamy was strictly enforced. (Jews did not actually outlaw polygamy until the eleventh century).

Because of this, most Jews outside Palestine adopted the Roman view of one man and one woman marriage. The Qumran Essenes also regarded polygamy as one of the three great sins of mainstream Judaism. They called these sins "the nets of the devil" by which the "smooth-speaking" Pharisees entrapped the people.

They combined the **Genesis 1:27** verse about Adam and Eve - "male and female he created them," with the **Genesis 7:9** description of "two and two, male and female, went into the ark" they concluded that only two people should marry.

Jews in the Diaspora used a different exegetical method - they added a word to the **Genesis 2:24** statement, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." They added the word "two" to make the phrase "and those two shall become one flesh." The Greek Septuagint and the Aramaic and Samaritan translations also included the word "two" which is not in the Hebrew.

Jesus referred to both sets of these arguments.

He quoted the key verse used by Qumran Jews (**Genesis 1:27**) and even said this was what happened "at the beginning of creation" (**Mark 10:6**), which presumably reminded his listeners that Qumran Jews called this "the foundation of creation." Then he quoted the verse preferred by Jews outside Palestine—**Genesis 2:24**—including the additional

word "two" (**Mark 10:8; Matt 19:5**). By deliberately using both arguments, Jesus emphasized that he agreed with those Jews who taught monogamy, contrary to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees hoping to catch Jesus in a contradiction, asked if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, citing Moses allowing a bill of divorcement.

- **Mark 10:5-9** - "And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

And in fact, this view was already expressed in Malachi:

- **Malachi 2:16** - "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Paul continued this change of interpretation. He reversed the command for a widow with no offspring to marry her dead husband's brother. Instead, Paul said a widow can marry whomever she wishes, as long as he is a believer.

- **1 Corinthians 7:39** - "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord"

The Bride of Christ

The scriptures use several metaphors to describe God's relationship to Israel. In some places Israel is referred to as a son. Other places describe Israel a "the children of Israel," i.e. the descendants of Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel).

But in the Torah, God mainly considers Israel as his wife, and their idolatry was tantamount to adultery and whoredom, which provokes Him to jealousy:

- **Exodus 34:15-16** - to "...go a whoring after their gods"
- **Leviticus 17:7** - "And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring."
- **Deuteronomy 32:16** - "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods..."

The Old Testament prophets compared Israel to God's wife, an unfaithful one at that, always seeking after other gods to worship, a relationship they portrayed as spiritual adultery.

God even had the prophet Hosea marry a whore to illustrate His complaint against Israel's idolatry:

- **Hosea 1:2** - "... And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord."

Here's the definitive expression of the relationship:

- **Isaiah 54:5** - "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called."

The positive view of this relationship of love is seen in the **Song of Solomon**, a love poem that was interpreted to not only reflect the relationship of two lovers but also the love of God and Israel for one another. Also in the story of **Ruth** and Boaz.

The image of God as a jealous husband could still refer to someone who has multiple wives. But when Israel crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites became one nation rather than just 12 separate tribes. Up until the kingdoms divided, God addresses Israel as His singular wife, not one among others.

But there were some things deemed more important than even the sanctity of marriage.

To preserve Jewish identity and prevent idolatry, the prophet Malachi pronounces judgment on the people because they divorced Jewish wives in order to marry pagan wives. If a foreign woman like Rahab or Ruth converted and followed Yahweh, the marriage was acceptable. But if the foreign wife retained her idolatry, Ezra said God demanded they put away their wives by divorcing them (**Ezra 10**).

Paul gives a different guide for believers under the new covenant:

- **1 Corinthians 7:15** - "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace."

1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and **Titus 1:6** give 'the husband of one wife' in a list of qualifications for spiritual leadership.

"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. (**1 Corinthians 7:2-4**)

Jesus as Bridegroom

Jesus spoke of himself as the Bridegroom many times, and that implies a Bride.

- **John 3:29** - "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: thus my joy therefore is fulfilled."

That is the only place in the Gospels that the bride is mentioned. But Jesus' parables and sayings often depict a wedding feast and incidents like the Ten Virgins.

An Unfolding Revelation Kept Hidden

I believe the bride is not specifically identified in the Gospels because the full identity of the bride was a mystery, concealed until it was shown to the Apostle Paul.

The Bride would be not only the faithful among the Jews but would include Gentiles and all believers anywhere, from any nation or people.

This was hinted at in the Old Testament, i.e. that Israel would be a light to the Gentiles, etc. But Paul said this mystery was now fully revealed to him by revelation:

- **Ephesians 3:5** - "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel!"

A few chapters later, Paul specifically compares the relationship of husband and wife as a reflection of the relationship of Christ and His church. A parallel metaphor is Christ and His body. And both these are merged in the picture of husband and wife becoming "one flesh."

- **Ephesians 5:31-32** - "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Elsewhere (**1 Corinthians 11:2-4**) Paul warns against false teachers "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Further, **Romans 7:4** - "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

This image of the Bride of Christ is emphasized in the Book of Revelation:

- **Revelation 22:17** - "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

- **Revelation 22:17** - "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.'"

So the metaphor of Christ and the Bride, His church - which is also His body, as well as the New Jerusalem - is a picture that only works as a monogamous union. It will not fit into a polygamous relationship.

The multiple wives of the Patriarchs - like divorce - were allowed because of their hard hearts, but also because of the need to provide for women in a time when warfare decimated populations, and because of the unfolding of the mystery of the Bride over time.

Like divorce and slavery, God's law regulated and usually restricted in some way these customs, to give more protection to women, for instance, as revelation unfolded to be fulfilled in Jesus and the New Covenant.

In the Bible, God makes allowance for polygamy, but doesn't affirm it or recommend it.

Perhaps this is one of those things we will not fully understand in this life.

Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."