

FIRST SHMUEL 25 The King, the Fool and Their Lady!

In biblical narrative, an example of such a person is David. His life reads like a Cinderella story -- so much success! For one man to have it all...to be everything and have everything...to be an "undefeated athlete, musician, warrior, popular hero, crafty politician, tireless lover, founder of his dynasty...and Father of his country, impulsive sinner and saint...never to make an unforgivable error. When David sins he receives a slap on the wrist from an indulgent God who has obviously decided beforehand to cherish him no matter what...though the same God punishes poor Saul with madness for a trivial misstep."¹

From the Bible we know that David was born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, and that he was the youngest of eight sons. We know almost nothing about his father, Jesse, except that he perhaps was a man of influence, since he owned flocks and herds. In his youth, David was a shepherd of these flocks, but evidently he was quite known for his musical ability, since it was his music that opened doors for him. His introduction into the royal household came when he was summoned to play his music to alleviate Saul's disturbed feelings. Soon after, he is made "armor bearer" to King Saul and is then catapulted into fame when he is victorious against the Philistine giant, Goliath. In the process of these events, David ingratiates himself into the royal family and wins the friendship of Saul's son, Jonathan, heir apparent to the throne, and the hand of Saul's daughter, Michal, in marriage. Thus he becomes Saul's son-in-law and part of the royal family.

Saul has had a falling out in his relationship with Samuel, the aging prophet, judge, and king maker. David has somehow befriended Samuel while Saul is growing more and more intense with his insane jealousy of David. Samuel has already put the knife to Saul and twisted it by telling him that God hates him and has chosen another. Saul is immediately suspicious of who that might be, after all, who else in the kingdom does everyone love? After every battle, the women dance in the streets and sing to each other, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." It is little wonder that Saul's nerves are on edge and frazzled. After two failed attempts by Saul to kill him, David is forced to flee for his life.

David then goes forth into the mountains and becomes a fugitive and an outlaw. He gathers together his own band of about 400 soldiers. I Samuel 22:2 describes them as "the poor, the discontented, the distressed, and those in debt." Of such was the rag-tag group of loyal followers that joined David's army and of whom he became leader and captain.

The wars against the Philistines continue while David is on the lam from Saul. At the same time, David is leading a civil war of sorts -- the guerrillas against the larger conventional army of Saul. David and his small army live at large in the mountains, hills, forests, and caves. They raid foes in border towns and they take tribute from the populace. In general, they stay one step or two ahead of Saul. According to Saul, they are criminals and he hunts them between battles with the Philistines. David remains safe in God's hands, the people cheer him on, and he remains blameless.

This brings us to the *sitz im leben* of this paper -- I Samuel Chapter 25. David hears of Nabal, a man in Maon whose possessions are in Carmel. The biblical text states he was very wealthy (verse 2); he owned three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. David sends ten young men up to see Nabal, instructing them to greet him and requests that Nabal give them what he can, since his men have protected his shearers and haven't stolen from them. Nabal is appalled and refuses. David then becomes very angry and insulted and seeks revenge. The servants go to Nabal's "beautiful and intelligent" wife Abigail (verse 3). She responds by packing up provisions and takes them to David. David and Abigail have an encounter on the road, she persuades him not to go to war against Nabal. The next morning she tells Nabal of her deed. He "becomes like a stone" (verse 37). "About 10 days later the Lord struck Nabal and he died" (verse 38). David immediately sends for Abigail and she immediately leaves and becomes his wife.

The biblical editors depict David as magnanimous toward the people in the countryside. Abigail is depicted as beautiful, intelligent, eloquent and wise, and Nabal is foolish and mean and a worthless individual. The traditional interpretation has been that Abigail by her actions showed great skill and wisdom in handling David and in saving her foolish husband's life. I believe that if we look more closely at the personal behavior of the three, along with an

analysis of their moral character and psychological profiles (from the information that is available to us in the biblical text), that we begin to see an entirely different picture emerging than the traditional point of view.

The subject of this paper concerns a more indepth analysis of the principle characters of the account in I Samuel Chapter 25. The moral character of David, Nabal and Abigail will be examined within the context of the story, along with an analysis of their relationship to each other, in an attempt to discover the real story that perhaps lies buried beneath the surface of the biblical narrative.

What the text doesn't say can be as important as what it does say. The *sitz im leben* of the time is important, along with the cultural milieu. Although the biblical account is short and sparse, this story is extraordinarily complex. This is not only a story of crime and passion, but is also a feminist story of a bold woman who seemingly has quite a lot of power in her patriarchal household. As Carol Meyers points out, Abigail is "hardly the exploited, subservient creature imagined by those who have been influenced by the androcentricity of the biblical cannon and by the misogyny of much of the post-biblical tradition."² This is a text that is begging to be studied. The story evolves around David, Abigail and Nabal and the decisions they make.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger has this to say concerning personal behavior in the context of moral choices and I believe it is as applicable to human behavior in ancient times as it is today: "We are the sum total of all that we do, i.e. what we 'do' is who we 'are'. This is true because as adults we make deliberate choices in our actions. Therefore, our actions describe our inner selves, what sacrifices we're willing to make, what evil we're willing to perpetrate [or tolerate]. Our actions are the blueprint of our character."³ With this in mind, I shall begin with a character analysis of David.

David

Of the three characters to be discussed, David is the most well known protagonist. His is the most complex and elaborately presented of any of the biblical characters. Volumes have been written about him, his fame transcends time to the point that even a star was named after him. David is so versatile that it is difficult to decide which of his qualities deserve the most admiration. Where is the man who could claim equal fame as a soldier, statesman, poet and musician? Novek writes that it is David who is remembered and who is credited for "molding the Jewish people into a nation; giving it a capital, a court, and a government that could make itself felt. He was also the royal champion of Israel's religion. He made the city of Jerusalem the fortress of a faith, the sanctuary, and the home of Israel's God. He has emerged as Israel's ideal king who lived and ruled in Israel's Golden Age."⁴

In biblical narrative, David is depicted as a man of supreme courage and strength. A description is given of him by a servant reporting to King Saul in I Samuel 16:18:

"I have observed a son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite who is skilled in music, he is a stalwart fellow and a warrior, sensible in speech, and handsome in appearance."

Additionally, I Samuel 16:12 describes David as "ruddy cheeked, bright-eyed and handsome." Apparently, according to biblical text, he was richly endowed with many diverse qualities that would make the people think of him as king material. He was good looking, intelligent (bright-eyed), he was a warrior, was eloquent and displayed common sense (sensible speaker), he had a capacity for making and holding loyal friends, and he had an inexhaustible supply of energy. Not to mention that the Lord was with him. He couldn't do a single thing wrong or make a bad impression if he tried.

"If I am not for myself", asks an ancient Jewish proverb, "who will be? But if I am only for myself, who am I?" These are the questions we must ask concerning David in light of his life history. "We can easily think of three or four capital crimes that David committed: extortion and robbery with violence, conspiracy with intent to murder, high treason and consorting with the enemy."⁵ There can be no doubt that self-advancement and self-indulgence are powerful innate drives for personal status and pleasures. In view of David's record, we must look at I Samuel Chapter 25 carefully. Is this story believable and is the evidence strong enough to support the claims of this story? How do we know a person if not by the consistent nature of that person's deeds? When we look at the situation of David's request

to Nabal, we see a captain and his rag-tag army who are living off the land, or rather we should say living off the land owners.

When David sends his greeting party to Nabal with requests for assistance, it is obvious from Nabal's reply (verse 10) that he is unappreciative of David's reputation and presence in the area. In fact, the behavior of David and his army is really that of an extortion ring or protection racket. Nabal's shearers and shepherds could vouch for the fact that David's men had steadfastly protected them from David's men. David dispatched ten young men and instructed them to:

"Go up to Carmel. When you come to Nabal, greet him in my name. Say as follows: To life! Greetings to you and to your household and to all that is yours! I hear that you are now doing your shearing. As you know, your shepherds have been with us; we did not harm them and nothing of theirs was missing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. So receive these young men graciously, for we have come on a festive occasion." (I Samuel 25: 5-8)

Not all the courteous phrasing in the world can change what this is. This is an attempt by a warlord to claim his levy or protection money. Nabal had a case to refuse and to be appalled. We must remember that it is their behaviors that tell us who they are, not our fantasies, and the idealization that are coming through in the courteous phrasing of the narrative. Nabal was challenged to act with exceptional courage and conscience, and he rose to the occasion. Nabal's reply:

"Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many slaves now days who run away from their masters. Should I then take my bread and my water and the meat that I slaughter for my own shearers and give them to men who come from I don't know where?" (I Samuel 25: 10-11)

When David's men returned with Nabal's reply, David was incensed with the rude fashion in which his modest proposal had been dismissed. There was not a moment's hesitation from him. He instructs his men to "gird their swords." (verse 13) He takes 400 men and they set out to kill every male in Nabal's household by daybreak (verse 34). This behavior is nothing but the exercise of raw power. It is the behavior of a ruthless, violent, merciless tyrant who is determined to let nothing stand in the way of getting what he wants. In fact, he believes that Nabal owes him:

"Now David had been saying 'It was all for nothing that I protected this fellows possessions in the wilderness, and that nothing he owned is missing. He has paid me back evil for good.'" (I Samuel 25:21)

When David meets Abigail on the path "tradition says that David was as deeply moved by her beauty as by her wisdom and she had to call on the latter to temper the effects of the former. She had to, tradition reports, hold David off."⁶ Because of the haste in which they married, it is obvious that there is mutual infatuation between the two of them. And that is as far as I will go. I would not call it love. At their encounter on the path, one has the impression that David upon seeing her, becomes totally sexually driven and totally ruled by lust and hormones. David's behavior through out his life, is of a man who always does what he wants and then justifies his actions after the fact to himself and others.

It must also be remembered that Nabal and Abigail are wealthy people. The biblical narrative makes no mention of children. And Abigail was certainly free to take off to meet David without the constraints and worries of young children. If this was the case, then Nabal's wealth, assuming there were no other male children, would be passed down to Abigail. Rosenberg believes that "Abigail was a political necessity. She was the wife of a rich and powerful man and could also be seen as a financial necessity, if she inherits Nabal's wealth. This does not seem so out of character when we consider David's first wife Michal and David's friendship with her brother, Jonathan."⁷ At this point, I can't help but think that David is now in violation of the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbors wife" or his property (Exodus 20:17).

When we put this story in context of the other biblical accounts concerning David's behavior, both prior to this event and beyond into the monarchy, it is obvious that this is a man who is morally bankrupt. A machiavellian gaining power and wealth by conniving and cheating. His behavior comes down to getting his needs met at almost any cost. If we look beyond the polemics of the text at just his behavior, we see a man who is constantly doing wrong, and compounding his wrongs by doing more wrongs. All the while scape goating and denying his contributions to wrong.

He expects no judgment and no negative consequences. It's always someone else who is at fault -- Saul, Nabal, Michal, Joab, Abner.....never David.

Nabal

Nabal needs to be considered for both the light he sheds on Abigail and for his own unique self. The biblical narrative depicts Nabal as a harsh and mean man, yet I find no evidence to support this, other than the biblical text saying that this was the case. The story is very critical of Nabal, yet if we look only at his behaviors and not the adjectives describing him, there isn't enough supporting evidence to justify calling him mean and harsh. From the beginning one has the feeling that the text is being polemicised in favor of David, and is cloaking the true situation and the true character of Nabal.

When David's men approach Nabal with their courteous request that he share with them just a small amount of the prosperity they so earnestly wish him to continue to enjoy for the protection they had given his shearers and shepherds, Nabal was well within his rights to be outraged. "Who is David [that I owe him anything]?" (verse 10) is his reply. "Who is this son of Jesse?" [Is he the King or even the servant of the King?]

No doubt Nabal also had the welfare of his household to consider as well. Meyers points out that in ancient Israel the ecological layout of the land often posed challenges to subsistence. "Only the individual farmers, knowing intimately the conditions of their own land (e.g. soils, rainfall, temperature ranges), can make the minute yet essential adjustments in agricultural techniques that can mean the difference between want and plenty. Plowing and seeding times, the layout of fields, the pruning or plucking, and many other aspects of agricultural life called for the daily decisions that affected the economic viability of a household."⁸

We have to believe that Nabal was also well aware of what he could and could not afford and still protect the viability of his household. But this is overshadowed by the attempt at extortion and Nabal reacted to this threat with courage, conviction and tenacity of spirit in his refusal.

"Weakness and evil are natural bed mates, the two give support to each other."⁹ Nabal was obviously not a weak man. To give into David would be to give aid and comfort to an extortionist. Nabal took a stand in the face of this threat and fear of possible reprisal. He displayed exceptional courage, conviction and conscience by not giving in. There can be no doubt that David and 400-600 men traveling the countryside was a presence that did not go unnoticed by Nabal. David's methods were probably well known among the land owners. Nabal's refusal under these difficult conditions, speaks as much to who he was and his character and what he was like, as it does to anyone else who is challenged to act with the courage of their convictions. "Throughout history, special people have felt compelled to do what they objectively saw as right and good, even in the face of humiliation, or rejection, or expulsion, or torture, or death. This is because they believed that certain ideas were more important than individual well being."¹⁰ I immediately think of Schindler, Raul Wallenberg, and other righteous gentiles during the Holocaust. Honor most often brings with it a price. Nabal stood firm. To shrink from his conviction would have been cowardly and dishonorable.

Additionally, it must be remembered that Saul was the anointed King and the reigning Monarch. David and his men were outlaws and fugitives. For Nabal to give aid and comfort to David and his army could be interpreted as treason. No doubt it must have crossed Nabal's mind the fate of the Priests of Nob, when Saul had ordered their massacre after they had given aid to David. Also the northern part of the kingdom was much more loyal to Saul than the south. This would be seen in a few years when the kingdom actually divided after David became King in Judah and the north was actually ruled for a short time by Saul's son Ishbosheth.

In the biblical narrative, we next hear of Nabal in verse 36. When Abigail returned home, Nabal is having a party and feast fit for a King. I am reminded of President George Bush who was playing golf while Saddam Hussein was rallying his troops in Iraq and preparing for war against the United States and the rest of the western world. George Bush refused to be intimidated by an international thug. Nabal refused to be intimidated by a local thug. He had a sense of order and peace. The party speaks of a man who behaves kindly and generously towards his household and his hired help. That he was drunk is not necessarily a negative. We need to know the cultural milieu of the time and

what was normal. This is not the behavior of an aloof, mean miserly man. He was celebrating the end of the season, he treated his people well and he had pride in honorable work.

The next morning, Abigail tells Nabal about her meeting with David and her gifts to him. The text states "he became like a stone" (verse 37). One can imagine his reaction. First of all, shock -- then anger. He has the sudden realization that honor and trust have been broken. Abigail has totally betrayed him. He must wonder what else has she betrayed him on? He can't count on her to do what is right, and he can't count on her to honor her commitments to him. She not only betrayed him, but she told him and everyone else how she felt about her husband by her actions. I can only imagine the devastation and loss Nabal felt at her betrayal. Shortly thereafter, Nabal dies and David appropriates his wife.

In biblical narrative, Abigail is given as a reward to David for not attacking Nabal and as a punishment for Nabal's crime of not paying David protection money, God strikes him dead. It is implied in the biblical narrative that it is Abigail's words to him that are responsible for his death. David, who is righteous and has the hand of God upon him, is once again avenged by God.

Nabal's death itself, I find very suspicious. I can think of no other instance where some one has died from hearing just the spoken word. In view of what we know about David's later behavior toward Urriah, I can't help but be suspicious of David's possible involvement in Nabal's death as well.

Abigail

Maurice Samuel suggests that "on the one side stands Michal, the mistake of David's adolescence; on the other, Bathsheba, the crime of his middle age; and between them is Abigail, the comrade of his manhood."¹¹

Abigail is described in the biblical text as "beautiful and intelligent" (verse 3). David I have already described as "bright-eyed and handsome."¹² One can just imagine these two beautiful people foot loose and care free, living off banditry and extortion in the wilds of southern Judea and the mountains of northern Israel.

In the account of David and Abigail, she is portrayed as a bold woman, a woman who has self-confidence and who has the respect of the household help. She knows how to take charge of a situation. This image of Abigail is further supported by Meyers in her description 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."¹³ No doubt this was true of Nabal's household. Because of his wealth, his home was most likely quite complex, probably more like a compound. The fact that Abigail had 5 women attending her, and the long list of provisions she took, along with the mention of other servants who approached Abigail, supports the conclusion that this was indeed a complex household. Furthermore, Meyers gives additional support to the image of women in domestic households in ancient Israel accorded positions of power and prestige. "In the self-sufficient Israelite household, the women's participation and expertise in crucial matters of domestic function gave her the ability and right to control key aspects of family life. Israelite women performed manifold tasks every day, and these tasks involved decisions about economic resources. Further more, the technical skills of these women made them "wise women and thus technical instructors of those less skilled."¹⁴

Abigail is not only beautiful and intelligent, but she is also wise in understanding (verse 33). David blesses her prudence. She is an Eshet Khayil -- a virtuous woman. She is eloquent and has a certain class about her. Her virtues are contrasted in verse 3 with her husband's lack thereof. The account of Nabal (his name means 'fool') contains a definite counter position between the wise Abigail and the fool. How Abigail came to marry him we don't know.

After the initial description of Abigail's physical and mental status, we hear of her again in verses 14-17 where the servant is informing her of the possible danger the household is in. She immediately reacts as she does with everything else (verse 18). She quickly put two hundred loaves (just baked and lying around?), two bottles of wine (probably wine skins), and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, a hundred clusters of raisins,

and two hundred cakes of figs" (verse 18). These supplies read like a grocery list. One wonders why the text doesn't simply say, "she took provisions."

In verse 19 we are told that "she did not tell her husband, Nabal." She chose to hide her gift to David from her husband. There is an obvious element of deception that causes us to raise our eyebrows. At this point, I am wondering where is her honor, her integrity, and her ethics?

This decision to support David was a turning point in Abigail's life. She knew that David was making extortion threats against Nabal. Instead of standing loyally next to her husband, she gave aid and comfort, and supported illegal and immoral activities of an outlaw. She sold out and chose the easier way, rather than rising to the occasion, standing with Nabal, and refusing to be intimidated. Because of the haste with which Abigail put together the provisions, there is no allusion to any struggle Abigail may have had with the morality of the situation. She immediately leaves with the provisions to see David. Apparently she feels that standing by her husband has too large a price tag. This was a situation that called for her to respect and honor her obligations to her home and husband. Nabal's feelings obviously didn't matter to her, didn't make sense to her, and had no validity to her. Instead of being open and honest and courageous, and talking openly with Nabal, she takes the situation into her own hands. She shows Nabal and the rest of her household that her commitment and obligation to her husband meant nothing to her.

As Abigail rode off behind the provision to meet David, did she feel a thrill and a pull at doing something a little on the wild side? Did she feel that doing this might be the magic she needed to give her life meaning? There is also the suspicion that she had an interest in making an acquaintance with David -- such a famous and fascinating outlaw. Was Abigail simply applying her abilities to this opportunity?

When Abigail and David meet (verse 24-31), Abigail is sympathetic toward his situation. She treats David as an honorable man. Nabal is there to serve David's needs. When he doesn't he is mean and harsh. She speaks most derogatorily towards her husband. She tells David that Nabal is exactly what his name means. I can't help but wonder whether any woman should speak this way concerning her husband. She goes on to tell David that she hopes that all of David's enemies fare terribly like Nabal. She further tells him that he is "fighting the battles of the Lord" and "no wrong is ever to be found in you." Then she begins her central theme: her desire to save David from staining his record with a crime. She makes a detailed and powerful argument, mixed with good salesmanship:

"Prostrate at his feet, she pleaded, 'Let the blame be mine, my Lord, but let your hand maid speak to you, hear your maid's plea. Please, my Lord, pay no attention to that wretched fellow Nabal. For he is just what his name says: His name means boor and he is a boor. Your hand maid did not see the young men whom my Lord sent. I swear, my Lord, as the Lord lives and as you live - the Lord who has kept you from seeking redress by blood with your own hands - let your enemies and all who harm you fare like Nabal! Here is the present that your maid servant has brought to my Lord. Please pardon your maid's boldness. For the Lord will grant my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battle of the Lord, and no wrong is ever to be found in you. And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my Lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the Lord, but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling. And when my Lord has accomplished for my lord all the good He has promised you, and has appointed you ruler of Israel, do not let this be a curse of stumbling and of faltering courage to my lord that you have shed blood needlessly and that my lord sought redress with his own hands. And when the Lord has prospered my lord, remember your maid.'" (I Samuel 25:24-31)

Abigail's closing remarks requesting David to remember her, are distracting and I am immediately suspicious that she has ulterior motives. David accepts Abigail's argument, but there are undertones in the text that something more is going on between them than the text is telling us. "It is a winning and a gallant picture, the warrior and the woman, the noble words, the outlaws, and the wild mountain scenery, to this day as enchanting as any in the world."¹⁵ It is obvious from the haste with which they married that there is strong infatuation between them. David is bewitched by her and she is sexually turned on by an outlaw and a criminal.

Abigail returns safely from her meeting with David. The next morning she tells Nabal of her trip. According to Biale, she becomes "God's agent of death"¹⁶ and Nabal dies about 10 days later. The death of Nabal is just too convenient for me to believe that everything is on the up and up. David, we know, was a very charismatic person. No doubt he could convince anyone to do anything. Did he convince her to poison Nabal? His death is just too timely.

Suddenly Abigail finds herself released from a marriage that was supposedly odious. She is free, rich and respected. "It is a general rule that those widows hasten to remarry whose married lives have been the happiest."¹⁷ As soon as David hears the news of Nabal's death, he shouts praises to God and immediately sends for Abigail with a marriage proposal. Abigail loses no time in racing to be by his side. One can imagine the scene of Abigail galloping into the distance with her five maids in hot pursuit. The biblical text makes no mention of a period of shiva, a kinsman redeemer, a shidduch, or a Bride Price.

It is hard to believe, but it seems they were married about two weeks after they met. "The land, the orchards, the three thousand sheep, the thousand goats were forgotten as if she had been a harebrained girl, she joined the outlaw and shared the outlaw's life."¹⁸ One wonders if Abigail understood the kind of life she was letting herself in for. Did she understand the kind of man she was marrying? When she and David's other wife Ahinoam and all the other women of the little town of Ziklag were carried off by the Amalakites, did she regret her decision?

The text is silent, but I have to believe she had regrets. I don't believe Abigail saw the future in the present. Did Abigail think that by tolerating wrong, bad and evil that this would give her protection against it? How could she rationalize David's track record away? Abigail didn't look at David in the context of his past behaviors. Was he worth the price she paid? David was a man she barely knew and he had serious character problems.

Specialness and love evolve over time. It takes time to get from the fantasy of infatuation to reality. Her relationship with David began on Nabal's betrayal. For Abigail it wasn't for better or worse, it was until a better offer came along. She got a better offer. Eventually so did David -- he moved on to Bathsheba.

Conclusion

There can be no question that the biblical account recorded in I Samuel 25 is slanted in favor of David. As we consider this story, it must be remembered that "it was in David's reign that the exact recording of Old Testament history began."¹⁹ These scribes or recorders were most likely priests appointed by David, and their political agenda was to paint him as a great King. Since the account was written during the Davidic monarchy, no doubt the writers knew the truth of what really happened.

In the biblical narrative, except for the Bathsheba affair, and even here he is forgiven, David is continually sainted. He is painted as a hero in his battles and a victim in his personal life. When we look at David's behavior as presented in the text, we could conclude that his personal history has been rewritten or simply erased with an overlay of editing that has whitewashed his true behavior with a narrative that is antiseptic and acceptable as the behavior of a great King.

As ancient Israel receded into the memory of time, the biblical accounts became our predominate source on the life of David. He is remembered for having fought a civil war against the house of Saul, having achieved undisputed sovereignty over the twelve tribes, conquering Jerusalem, becoming Israel's greatest King, founding a dynasty and creating a small empire. The typical approach of theologians has been to focus on David's call and to gloss over all the unseemly behavior as benign and unimportant. After all, he had a heart after God and the people loved him. With the approval of both, his personal behavior couldn't have been all that bad.

But if we psychoanalyze the behavior of David, we have no trouble defining his behavior as sociopathic. He is a man who has no guilt; who is vengeful, vindictive, blood thirsty and without remorse. He will stop at nothing to get what he wants. In the I Samuel 25 account of his interaction with Nabal and Abigail, although he is portrayed as a victim, David's behavior is self-centered and ruthless. His defense is to assign external blame and to put it all on Nabal. Nabal is there to serve David's needs. When he doesn't, he is foolish, mean and evil. The truth is that both Nabal and Saul know David's true colors. Nabal's angry response to David was valid and justified. Instead his actions have been vilified, exaggerated, distorted and misinterpreted. The attitude and intent of the biblical narrative has been to diminish, punish, humiliate and finally destroy a man of courage and character.

Additionally, the redactors suggest that not only David, but Abigail was a victim as well. Nothing is mentioned of her covenant with Nabal; that it was immoral to actively support David's extortion methods on her husband and that her behavior could be interpreted as treason against the anointed King.

Suggesting that David and Abigail were victims of Nabal, and that their meeting was destiny as they met on the path with Abigail bringing provisions and David and his men approaching Nabal's household with murder on their hearts, is to never hold either one of them accountable for their actions. The support and sympathy both have received has distracted from the acknowledgment of their behavior and inappropriateness of their choices.

One has the image that David and Abigail were star crossed lovers, that their meeting was fated, and that they met soul to soul. Each had found the spiritual other half -- he is what she needs and she is what he needs. In a way, this may not be that far from the truth in the sense that David and Abigail seem to have had so much in common:

- both were intelligent and attractive people,
- both could be called masters of diplomacy,
- both were leaders,
- both were charismatic,
- both were good communicators,
- both were looking out for themselves -- they knew who had the power and how to advance one's self,
- both were manipulative -- they both knew how to play the situation to their advantage,
- both were good at feigning victimhood,
- both were deceptive and betrayed the trust of others.

No doubt there was sexual attraction and infatuation between them. The question is did David really love Abigail, or was his love self-centered, self-indulgent, always needing immediate gratification? "Sexual gratification, sexual attraction, and sexual feelings are tremendously powerful inducements to behaviors that seem to propel us out of control of our good sense and values."²⁰ But sexual attraction is not love.

I have to believe that Abigail didn't look at the long range consequences of her actions. One wonders if David let Abigail in on her true role in his life? Did she continue to have the love, the honor and the respect she enjoyed in Nabal's household as his wife?

The bottom line is that it was their behavior that tells us who they truly were. A person's actions speak louder than their words. Dr. Schlessinger writes that "It is in the obligation to others; the integrity of our beliefs and our actions; our regard for agreements and pledges; our sincerity; the bond of our word; our honesty; our conformity to right and good; our fairness; our inability to be readily influenced away from those character traits by the seduction of exciting momentary gain that others come to be comfortable and secure with us and therefore love us."²¹ And this is the true measure of a person, a mensch, an Eshet Khayil. I can't help but wonder, did Abigail end up discovering that "If you kiss a toad you don't get a prince, you get slime in your mouth and bad memories?"²²