

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ABIGAIL: LESSON THIRTY

by Sandy Harber

"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." I Samuel 25:37-38

The day after the big feast Nabal was sober again. This is when Abigail sat him down and told him all that happened after he sent away David's soldiers empty handed.

Nabal learned that his stingy ways and arrogant speech turned allies into enemies. David and his 600 warriors had protected Nabal's servants and property before that fateful meeting. Afterward, David and 400 armed soldiers were headed for Nabal's estate with murder in their hearts.

The blood drained out of Nabal's face, his heart raced, and his breathing became labored. But Abigail wasn't finished. She went on with her story of a frantic servant who had sought her out and warned her of impending danger. Nabal heard about his quickwitted wife's desperate plan to turn David and his army from their mission. He listened in amazement at her description of the efficiency of his own servants who had assisted in loading provisions onto his donkeys. Clutching his chest, Nabal stared opened mouth at Abigail's tale of her meeting with David. He felt a pain in his chest as she admitted that she had groveled before the future king and begged him to lay Nabal's folly at her door. She took on the burden of guilt.

Abigail finished her story with the assurance that David was no longer interested in vengeance. He had been content with the offering of food Abigail provided. By this time it was too late for Nabal. He clutched his chest, unable to speak, he went down like a stone.

Of course, this description of Nabal's collapse is a bit fanciful. The Bible only tells us that "his heart died within him." Most commentators believe that he had a stroke and became paralyzed ("he became as a stone.") Other commentators believe that he had a heart attack. Whichever is true the result was the same.

Nabal lingered for 10 days before he died. The Bible doesn't tell us if he was conscience. Perhaps he laid for 10 days in a coma before the end came. Or, he may have laid in bed, paralyzed, but with a mind active enough to go over and over again the scene that had led to his stroke, remembering over and over the foolish words that had angered David.

We can only speculate on what went through Nabal's mind when he heard Abigail's story. What brought on the stroke? Fear, because he realized how close he had come to death at David's hand? Anger, because his wife went behind his back and provided David with the very food that he himself had denied him? Perhaps he was afraid that King Saul would learn that his wife had aided David by providing food for his army. Maybe it was wounded pride. He was humiliated that his wife had to save him. Whatever his feelings, they were strong enough to cause a medical emergency.

God spared Nabal for 10 days. Again, we have no Biblical confirmation of why he had those 10 days. Maybe God was giving him a second chance. A chance to repent and ask for forgiveness. It may be that only God could hear his confession if he made one.

Our God is a God of second chances. Sometimes He allows bad things to happen to us in order to stop the direction we were moving in. He gives us an opportunity to take stock of our lives. He gives us time to repent. He wants to forgive. Since God "smote" Nabal so that he died it seems likely that Nabal never repented. God does not wait forever. There comes a point when it's just too late.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9