

Abigail's Welcome

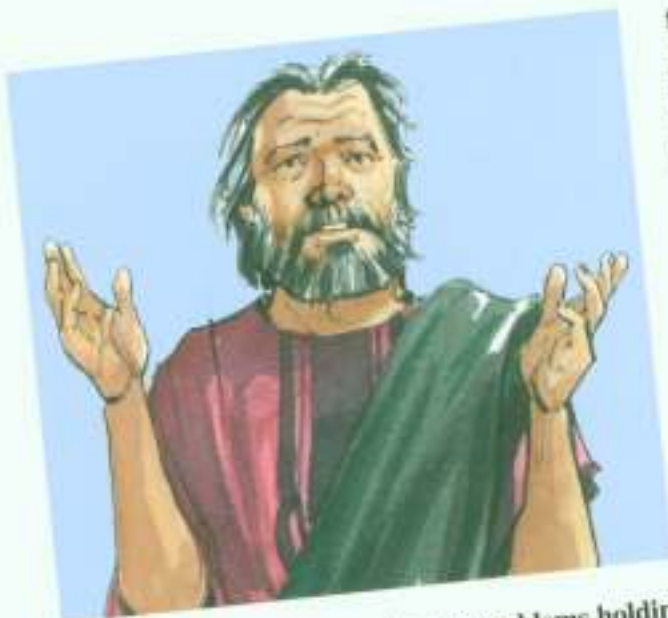
In this unit, you will be asked to think about:

- How people are vulnerable in wartime
- How God approves of peacemakers

Who suffers in war apart from the fighters?



Shock Marriage of Rebel Leader



The King's troops are having problems holding back rebels led by ex-shepherd boy David, who is trying to become king. David, a legend from his young days, was the boy who led Israel to victory over Philistine strong man Goliath. David now has a gang of young fighters camped out in the desert. At one time he was King Saul's favourite lyre player and a close friend of Prince Jonathan. Now he is an outlaw. It is said that Samuel, the great prophet of Israel, anointed David with oil. This was done as a sign that God wanted David to replace Saul as king.

More recently, David's troops tried to make peace with a rich sheep-owner in Carmel called Nabal. Men

from David's camp were sent to Nabal to ask for food and wool for clothing to help the rebel army. Nabal – well known as surly and mean – refused and sent them back to David with insults: "Who's this David? Never heard of him!"

So David took 400 men to attack Nabal. On the way he was met by Nabal's wife Abigail. She is as clever and beautiful as her husband is surly and mean. This brave woman faced the rebel leader. She knelt in front of him. She offered him 200 loaves, wine, cooked sheep, raisins and fig-cakes. She also apologised for her rude husband. Always keen on beautiful women, the rebel leader accepted her gifts. He said that by doing this she had saved the lives of many of her husband's people.

Abigail went home but found Nabal very drunk. So she said nothing about what she had done. Next morning, when her husband came round, she told him what she had given to the rebels. Nabal collapsed – with shock? Ten days later he was dead.

As soon as he heard, David sent a marriage proposal to Abigail. Reports from David's camp suggest that she arrived shortly after with five young women servants. They married immediately. Abigail is David's third wife, though it is believed that his first wife, Princess Michal, daughter of King Saul, has been taken away by her father and married to someone else. Rebel leader David was not available for comment, but a close friend said that *all is fair in love and war!*

Freely adapted from 1 Samuel 25

Use these clues to help you answer the questions.



- At the time of David the custom was that anyone who asked for help in the desert should be given it. A rich person was also responsible for the safety of their people. Abigail was therefore acting for the good of all the men, women and children connected with Nabal. She probably saved their lives.
- In Hebrew, the language of the narrative, people's names have meanings. Nabal means 'fool'.
- Eventually David did become king and despite major mistakes, his days as king were often looked back on as ideal, happy days.
- At that time it was OK for men to have more than one wife, but it was not common.
- Women were often drawn into the troubles of war and used as hostages or married off to princes or kings of a country their family wanted to make peace with. Saul took his daughter away from David to show that their friendship was over. It is difficult today to think of women being given away as though they were things, but in Bible times this was common.
- After the death of her husband, Abigail would have had no one to protect her. This may have been why David asked her to marry him. But he did like beautiful women!



Talk about

1. Should Abigail have gone against her husband's wishes even if she felt he was wrong? Why?/Why not?
2. How was Abigail vulnerable?
3. The Bible says that Nabal's 'heart died within him'. He 'became like a stone' and died 10 days later. What might have happened to him?
4. Do you think Nabal's people thought of Abigail as a hero or a traitor? Why?
5. Would David have been right to kill Nabal's people just because their master would not help him and his troops? Why?/Why not?
6. Do you think God would have agreed with what David was going to do to Nabal? Why?/Why not?
7. How might faith in God have helped one of the people in this narrative? What difference did it make, or might it have made for this person?

Make a record

1. Imagine that you are the official history writer for David after he becomes King. Tell the story of David, Abigail and Nabal as the King would like it to be written.

OR

Tell the narrative as Saul might have done when he heard about it. (Clues: Nabal doesn't support rebels; his wife does; what might Saul say about the quick marriage?)

Find out

1. Find out about trouble spots in the modern world. Look at a map and find all the places where there are wars or rebellions. Who is suffering there?
2. Find out what the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) believe about war.
3. Find out what Jesus said about peacemakers in the Gospel of Matthew 5:9.

Imagine

1. Imagine that you are a peacemaker.
 - (a) What advice would you give to David when Nabal refuses to help him?
 - (b) What advice would you give to Nabal when David asks for help?
2. What might God have thought about the events in this narrative?
3. Listen to 'Mars, the Bringer of War' from *The Planets*, by Gustav Holst. Write down the words that come into your head as you listen to it. Turn these into a poem or create a dance to the music to try to catch its mood.
4. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all agree that God/Allah approves of peacemakers. What skills do peacemakers need? (Bad temper wouldn't help!) What other situations apart from war might need peacemakers?
5. Read the famous Prayer of St Francis below. Then choose one line from it and use this line in a poster or a cover for a book or DVD on world peace.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.

