

Discussion Questions for  
*Abigail*  
by Jill Eileen Smith

1. The story begins with Abigail discovering that her family does not approve of her betrothed nearly as much as she once thought they did; in fact, they want to put an end to her marriage and run after the king's outlaw son-in-law David. How does this discovery set the tone for the rest of the story?

Abigail, however, clings to the hope that once she marries Nabal, she will be able to change him. Why is such a hope of changing someone through marriage unlikely to be fulfilled?

2. When Abigail realizes the type of man Nabal is, she dares to hope that her father will have success in annulling her betrothal, but Nabal gets wind of the plan and comes for Abigail before her father can act. Abigail is thrust into a marriage to a controlling, abusive man, and there is nothing she can do to get out of it. In that culture, she was at his mercy. Have you ever been in a situation where you were helpless to get away and were at the mercy of unkind and perhaps even cruel people? If so, how did you respond? If not, how do you think you would respond?

3. After six months of marriage to Nabal, things go from bad to worse when Nabal physically abuses Abigail. From then on things change, with Abigail either avoiding Nabal or doing all in her power to appease his unpredictable moods. In our modern society, it may be hard to imagine a woman putting up with such a man, but Abigail had little choice and did the best she could. Have you ever had to live with or work for a person with such unpredictable moods—an angry, even violent person? What steps did you take to appease such a person? How would you counsel someone in a similar situation?

4. While Abigail is living every day of her life longing for peace, her parents, her brother, and his family have run away, leaving her alone with only her maidservants for comfort. Do you think Abigail should have gone with them to escape Nabal's wrath? Do you consider her father and brother cowards for running away from Nabal's employ and for leaving Abigail at his mercy? Why or why not?

5. When Samuel dies, Nabal makes a show of mourning the prophet only to gain the approval of the king. Have you known people who are concerned only with appearances and do things to look good even though they don't mean them? Have you ever done something similar to impress those around you? What was the result?

6. David sends men to Nabal to ask for food to help feed his hungry men and their families. He has provided unsolicited protection for Nabal's shepherds and considers such a request valid. Nabal obviously disagrees and rebuffs David. David reacts in a fit of rage, determined to kill not only Nabal but also every man in Nabal's household. Abigail hears of David's plan and sets out to stop him. Why is her decision to attempt appeasing David a risk to her own life? How do you think you would have reacted in similar circumstances? Have you ever had to play peacemaker?

7. Later, when Abigail is about to tell Nabal of her visit to David, she is given the chance to flee to David's camp and hide out with her family. But she chooses to stand by her abusive husband in order to protect the servants who would suffer if she left. She also feels a certain loyalty to her marriage vows. Do you think she did the right thing? Why or why not? Is her example necessarily sending a message to women to stay in abusive relationships? Does her attitude suggest weakness? Or does her response offer women in similar circumstances a glimmer of hope?

8. Abigail tells Nabal what she has done, and then Nabal suffers some type of seizure, which takes his life ten days later. A few days after his death, David proposes marriage to Abigail, and she accepts. But David already has a wife living as a fugitive with him. He is also technically still married to Michal and plans to get her back someday. Why do you think David wanted a third wife? Why do you think Abigail accepted, knowing she would be living in a polygamous relationship? Would such a relationship have seemed normal to her in that culture? Even if it did, how do you think Abigail might have felt knowing she would have to share her husband with another woman?

9. After years of running for his life, David grows weary of being a fugitive. He succumbs to the fears of those around him, particularly his wife Ahinoam. As a man, David would want to fix things, to provide his wives a place of refuge and peace, but the only way that seems likely to happen is for them to leave Israel altogether. Do you think David made a wise decision in running off to the land of the Philistines? How might he have handled the situation better? Did his decision show a lack of trust in God?

10. While David and Abigail are living in Ziklag, David lives a lie in relation to the Philistine king. That lie comes back to haunt him when he is asked to fight with the Philistines against Israel. No sooner is he freed from that dilemma than another rises, catching him completely off guard—he discovers his wives and the women and children of his band have been kidnapped and Ziklag lies in ashes. His men blame him for their predicament and threaten to stone him. How does David react? Do you think God allowed these things to get David's attention? Why or why not?

11. Abigail is dealing with a lot of emotions once David rescues the women and children from their kidnappers. On the one hand she is jealous that Ahinoam will be the first to bear David's child, while on the other hand she is silently grieving the loss of her maid Zahara. David refuses to discuss Zahara's betrayal or allow Abigail to share her feelings with him. Though Abigail's relationship with David is far better than what she had with Nabal, she cannot share her heart with him as she would like, and she must constantly share his love with another. How does she cope? Does she do a good job of it? Do you think she should have been more outspoken, stuck up for herself more, insisted that David meet her needs?

12. The day finally comes when David is crowned king of Judah, and he soon takes four more wives. Abigail has gone from being one of two to one of six women in David's life. To top things off, David rarely spends intimate time with her, thinking to spare her from suffering in childbirth, as she did with Chileab. How does this affect their relationship?

Even in modern times, polygamy is gaining acceptance in various religions and cultures around the world. Have you ever known anyone caught in a polygamous marriage? Have you ever had to deal with a spouse's unfaithfulness? How did you handle it? What advice would you give to someone in a similar situation?

13. When Chileab is five years old, something happens to him that changes David and Abigail's relationship. How can a husband and wife keep a good relationship in times of crisis? How could David have been a better husband to Abigail during this time? Should Abigail have acted differently toward him?

14. Toward the end of the story, Abigail's solution for living with a household of multiple wives is to get away. She wants to live with her father and make a safe sanctuary for David to visit her in peace, away from the jealous eyes of her sister wives. She presents her idea to David, thinking he will see things her way and happily agree to her plan. Instead, he sees her request as a slight to him and reacts in anger. Have you ever made plans that excited you, only to have them backfire and cause a reaction you didn't expect in the one you love most? How could David and Abigail have avoided such miscommunication? What steps could you take in the future to clear up a misunderstanding between you and a loved one? Will you take those steps?



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