

1 Samuel 25:23-28 and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Literary Reading

Maria Nneka Agbasianya¹ , Favour Chukwuemeka Uroko² 

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of the Social Sciences - University of Nigeria, Nsukka
agbasianyanneka@gmail.com

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Submitted : 10 May 2025
Revised : 24 May 2025
Accepted : 24 May 2025
Published : 21 June 2025

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.69668/sejati.v2i1.63>

Deskripsi

This article examines the application of conflict resolution strategies from 1 Samuel 25:23–28, particularly Abigail's actions involving humility, strategic communication, proactive mediation, and a principle-based approach, as an effective model for addressing ethnic, religious, and political conflicts in Nigeria.

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Agbasianya, M. N., & Uroko, F. C. (2025). 1 Samuel 25:23–28 and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Literary Reading. *Student Evangelical Journal Aiming At Theological Interpretation*, 2(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.69668/sejati.v2i1.63>

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the application of the biblical passage 1 Samuel 25:23–28 in addressing and resolving conflicts in Nigeria. The study identifies several key conflict resolution strategies from Abigail's actions, including humility, strategic communication, proactive peacemaking, and the appeal to higher principles. These strategies are found to be relevant and potentially effective in addressing conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in contexts marked by ethnic, religious, and political tensions. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a country rich in cultural diversity, natural resources, and economic potential. However, it has been beset by numerous conflicts over the years, ranging from ethnic and religious violence to political instability and resource-based disputes. The aphorism in 1 Samuel 25:23–28 is important in understanding the underlying causes and dynamics of these conflicts, and it is essential for developing effective resolution strategies. Data is gathered from biblical commentaries, theological texts, and scholarly articles. Emerged themes are: i) respect and humility; ii) taking responsibility and mediation; iii) acknowledging wrongdoing and deflecting blame; iv) appealing to higher principles; v) offering reparation and tangible solutions; and vi) seeking forgiveness and affirming positive outcomes. These strategies are found to be relevant and potentially effective in addressing conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in contexts marked by ethnic, religious, and political tensions. Abigail's approach, characterized by humility, tact, and moral persuasion, can serve as a model for contemporary peacemakers.

Keywords: 1 Samuel 25; conflict resolution; Nigeria; Abigail

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a nation characterised by its rich cultural diversity and complex social dynamics, frequently encounters conflicts that stem from ethnic, religious, and political differences. These conflicts often lead to significant social unrest and violence, underscoring the urgent need for effective conflict resolution strategies. As scholars and practitioners seek sustainable solutions, there is growing interest in exploring traditional and religious frameworks for conflict management. The biblical narrative of 1 Samuel 25:23–28 offers profound

insights into conflict resolution. This passage recounts the story of Abigail, who intervenes to prevent a violent confrontation between her husband, Nabal, and David. Abigail's approach, marked by humility, wisdom, and strategic communication, provides a compelling model for peacemaking and conflict resolution. As a process of consequent negotiation, this method consists of settling key questions that are at the base of controversies according to their significance and their content (Kahindo, 2011, p. 125).

In 1 Samuel 25, David, who would later become the king of Israel, is enraged by Nabal's refusal to provide provisions for his men. David prepares to exact revenge, but Abigail, Nabal's wife, intervenes. She approaches David with respect and humility, offering gifts and pleading for peace. Her actions and words not only avert bloodshed but also demonstrate the power of mediation and diplomacy (Alter, 1999; Brueggemann, 2003). Her strategies are relevant in addressing the growing conflict among Nigerians.

Nigeria is divided almost equally between Muslims, predominantly in the north, and Christians, mainly in the south. Religious differences have been a significant source of conflict, often exacerbated by political manipulation (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016). The struggle for political power is often intertwined with ethnic and religious identities, further complicating the conflict landscape. Conflicts between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers have escalated in recent years, particularly in the Middle Belt region. Competition for land and water resources, exacerbated by climate change and population growth, has led to violent clashes. This conflict is often framed along ethnic and religious lines, with predominantly Muslim Fulani herders clashing with predominantly Christian farming communities. Widespread poverty and economic disparities between regions contribute to grievances and unrest (Evans & Kelikume, 2019). Despite Nigeria's oil wealth, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty, particularly in the northern regions. Competition for resources, whether land, water, or oil, is a major driver of conflict. Resource scarcity, worsened by environmental degradation and climate change, intensifies these disputes.

Several scholars have noted the relevance of biblical principles in modern conflict resolution. For instance, Lederach emphasises the importance of moral imagination in peacemaking (Lederach, 2005), while Augsburg highlights the role of reconciliation and forgiveness in conflict resolution (Augsburger, 1992). These concepts resonate with the actions of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, suggesting that her approach can offer valuable insights for contemporary peacemakers. But finding a study that used 1 Samuel 25:23–28 in conflict resolution in Nigeria is scant. This is a qualitative study using the narrative method. Data is gathered from biblical commentaries, theological texts, and scholarly articles and analysed using literary analysis.

This is a qualitative study employing the narrative method, with data gathered from biblical commentaries, theological texts, and scholarly articles and analyzed using literary analysis. The study has four objectives: first, to provide the historical and immediate context of the pericope; second, to offer a close textual reading of 1 Samuel 25:23–28; third, to explore the dynamics of conflict in Nigeria and the limitations of existing resolution strategies; and fourth, to apply the text to the Nigerian context, providing recommendations for conflict

resolution rooted in biblical principles. By bridging the gap between biblical insights and contemporary conflict challenges, this study contributes to the growing discourse on integrating theological perspectives into practical solutions for peacebuilding in Nigeria.

METHOD

A suitable research method for this article involves a qualitative approach employing a narrative and literary analysis framework. The narrative approach is chosen for its ability to explore the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:23-28, focusing on the progression of events, character interactions, and theological implications within the narrative context. This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of Abigail's conflict resolution strategies and their relevance to the sociocultural and moral dynamics of contemporary Nigeria.

The study begins with close textual reading of 1 Samuel 25:23-28, examining the literary structure, key themes, and rhetorical elements. Data collection includes biblical commentaries, theological texts, and scholarly literature, with a focus on identifying themes such as humility, mediation, and moral persuasion. These themes are then systematically analyzed to uncover their theological and cultural implications. The analysis proceeds in the following steps. First Textual Analysis: Detailed examination of the passage to identify core conflict resolution principles. Second, to address potential interpretive biases, the study acknowledges the subjective nature of narrative analysis and adopts strategies to ensure objectivity. This method ensures a robust exploration of the text's relevance, providing practical insights into contemporary conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria while mitigating subjective biases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding The Book Of 1 Samuel

The Book of 1 Samuel is one of the historical books of the Old Testament, providing a detailed narrative of Israel's transition from a confederation of tribes to a centralised monarchy. It covers significant events and figures such as Samuel, Saul, and David, and is essential for understanding the historical and theological development of ancient Israel. The book is set during a critical period in Israel's history, roughly spanning the late 11th century BCE. It documents the end of the period of the judges and the establishment of the monarchy. While the exact authorship of 1 Samuel is unknown, it is traditionally attributed to the prophet Samuel, with later additions by the prophets Nathan and Gad (Walton, 2009). However, modern scholarship often views it as a composite work compiled from various sources (A. F. Campbell, 2003).

1 Samuel is divided into two main sections: the life and ministry of Samuel (chapters 1–12), the rise and reign of Saul, and the introduction of David (chapters 13–31). The first section focuses on Samuel's birth, calling, and leadership as the last judge of Israel. The second section details Saul's anointing as the first king of Israel, his subsequent disobedience and

downfall, and David's rise to prominence. The narrative consistently portrays Saul's downfall as a direct result of his disobedience (McCarter, 1980). God's control over the events of history and his guidance of Israel through prophets and leaders (Arnold, 2003). The book explores the qualities of godly leadership, contrasting Saul's failure with David's faithfulness, despite his flaws. This theme highlights the importance of obedience to God (Firth, 2009). The narrative reinforces the idea that Israel's success depends on its adherence to the covenant with God. Saul's downfall is portrayed as a direct result of his disobedience (McCarter, 1980).

The key figures are Samuel, the prophet and judge who anoints both Saul and David, serving as a key transitional figure between the period of the judges and the monarchy. There is also Saul, who was the first king of Israel, whose reign begins with promise but ends in failure due to his disobedience and impulsiveness. There is also David, who was introduced as a young shepherd and anointed by Samuel, David's early exploits, including his victory over Goliath, set the stage for his future kingship. The book of 1 Samuel employs various narrative techniques, including direct speech, dramatic irony, and character contrasts, to convey its messages. The stories are rich with literary devices that enhance the theological and moral lessons (Berlin, 1983).

Close Reading Of 1 Samuel 25:23-28

A close reading of the pericope reveals the following structure: Abigail's approach to conflict resolution, humility and accountability, deflecting blame and appealing to higher principles; offering a gift as reparation, and seeking forgiveness and affirming future peace.

Abigail's Approach (v. 23)

Abigail's immediate action upon seeing David is one of profound humility and respect. By dismounting quickly and bowing with her face to the ground, she acknowledges David's authority and demonstrates her own willingness to submit. This gesture sets a tone of respect and deference, which is crucial for defusing tension in any conflict situation. In the Nigerian context, where respect for authority and elders is deeply ingrained, Abigail's approach can be mirrored to de-escalate conflicts. Traditional leaders and mediators often use similar gestures of respect to initiate dialogue (Smith, 1991). Abigail's swift dismount and bowing indicate urgency and deep respect. The physical act of bowing with her face to the ground is a traditional gesture of submission and respect in ancient Near Eastern cultures. This act is significant as it sets the tone for her appeal, showing humility and acknowledging David's authority.

Humility and Accountability (v. 24)

Abigail takes personal responsibility, addressing David as "my lord" and referring to herself as his servant. By doing so, she not only humbles herself but also establishes a personal connection. Her plea to be heard reflects the importance of giving a voice to all parties in conflict resolution. This is relevant in Nigeria, where many conflicts arise from feelings of marginalisation and unheard grievances. Providing a platform for all voices is essential for

lasting peace (Albert, 2001). Abigail falls at David's feet, a position of humility and vulnerability. She asks David to pardon her and to listen to her plea, positioning herself as his servant. This establishes a personal connection and frames her approach as non-threatening. The repetition of "my lord" emphasises her respect for and acknowledgement of David's status.

Deflecting Blame and Appealing to Higher Principles (v. 25-26)

Abigail deflects David's anger from herself by acknowledging Nabal's folly and distancing herself from his actions. She then shifts the focus to a higher moral ground, suggesting that God has prevented David from committing bloodshed. This appeals to David's conscience and sense of divine justice. In Nigerian conflicts, appealing to shared values and higher principles—whether religious, cultural, or communal—can be effective in persuading conflicting parties to seek peaceful resolutions (Augsburger, 1992). Abigail candidly acknowledges Nabal's character, calling him "wicked" and explaining that his name means "fool." By dissociating herself from Nabal's actions, she seeks to redirect David's anger away from herself and towards Nabal's folly. She also clarifies that she was unaware of David's request, implying that had she known, she would have acted differently. Abigail invokes the name of the Lord, emphasising divine intervention in preventing David from committing bloodshed. She acknowledges God's role in keeping David from avenging himself, thus appealing to David's faith and higher moral reasoning. Her wish that David's enemies become like Nabal frames her plea within a context of divine justice, not personal vengeance.

Offering a Gift as Reparation (v. 27)

Abigail brings a tangible gift to David's men, which serves as a peace offering and a gesture of goodwill. This act of giving is a practical step towards reconciliation, acknowledging the wrong and compensating for it. In many Nigerian cultures, gifts and reparations are customary in conflict resolution, helping to restore relationships and build trust (Zartman, 2000). Abigail presents a gift to David, intended for his men. This act serves as a tangible gesture of goodwill and reparation for the offense caused by Nabal. The gift is a practical solution to the immediate need for provisions and a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

Seeking Forgiveness and Affirming Future Peace (v. 28)

Abigail seeks forgiveness for her actions and speaks prophetically about David's future, emphasizing his role in God's plans. By doing so, she not only seeks immediate peace but also lays a foundation for ongoing respect and harmony. This long-term perspective is vital in Nigerian conflict resolution, where building sustainable peace often requires ongoing efforts and reaffirmation of positive future relations (Galtung, 2000). Abigail asks for forgiveness for her "presumption" in intervening, further highlighting her humility. She affirms David's future, expressing faith in God's plans for him to establish a lasting dynasty because David fights the Lord's battles. By speaking of David's future success and righteousness, she appeals to his sense of destiny and his role as God's chosen leader.

Conflict in Nigeria

The conflict in Nigeria is complex, involving multiple dimensions including ethnic, religious, economic, and political factors. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups with diverse languages and cultures. The three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast. Ethnic competition for resources and political power has been a persistent source of conflict. Religious divisions, particularly between the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, have fueled violence. For example, the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has roots in religious extremism (J. Campbell, 2018).

There is significant economic inequality between different regions. The oil-rich Niger Delta, despite contributing substantially to the national economy, has seen minimal economic development, leading to militancy and demands for greater resource control (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Unemployment and poverty are widespread, particularly among the youth, making them susceptible to recruitment by militant groups and criminal organizations. The legacy of colonialism and the arbitrary boundaries drawn by colonial powers have contributed to ethnic tensions. Post-independence, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) left deep scars, particularly among the Igbo population. Historical injustices and perceived marginalization by various groups continue to fuel grievances. Nigeria has experienced several coups and periods of military rule since gaining independence in 1960. These periods of instability have undermined democratic institutions and governance (Paden, 2005). Corruption is rampant at all levels of government, leading to mismanagement of resources and failure to address the needs of the population.

Conflicts over control of oil resources in the Niger Delta have led to violence between local communities, the government, and multinational oil companies (Watch, 2019). Environmental degradation from oil spills has devastated local communities, leading to loss of livelihoods and health problems. The government's response to insurgencies, such as Boko Haram in the northeast and banditry in the northwest, has often been inadequate. Security forces are frequently under-equipped, poorly trained, and accused of human rights abuses, which can exacerbate the conflict (Group, 2020). There is a lack of coordination among different security agencies, and corruption within the military and police forces hampers effective action.

Widespread corruption undermines public trust in government institutions. Funds meant for development projects and social services are often embezzled. The government has failed to implement effective anti-corruption measures and hold accountable those involved in corrupt practices. Various groups feel marginalized by the central government, particularly those in the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt region. This sense of exclusion fuels resentment and conflict (Paden, 2005). The failure to ensure equitable distribution of resources and political representation exacerbates tensions.

The government often focuses on military solutions rather than addressing the underlying social, economic, and political causes of conflict. There is inadequate investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, particularly in conflict-prone areas. The judicial

system is slow, corrupt, and lacks independence. This inefficiency leads to a culture of impunity where perpetrators of violence are not held accountable.

Application of I Samuel 25:23-28 in the Nigerian Context

1 Samuel 25:23-28 provides a valuable narrative on conflict resolution through the actions of Abigail. This biblical account can offer practical insights into resolving conflicts in contemporary Nigeria, a nation often affected by ethnic, religious, and political tensions.

Respect and Humility

Abigail's immediate act of dismounting and bowing before David (1 Samuel 25:23) reflects a profound understanding of the power dynamics at play in conflict situations. This gesture, rooted in cultural norms of the ancient Near East, establishes a posture of deference and respect that defuses hostility. In Nigerian society, similar cultural expectations emphasize respect towards elders, authority figures, and even peers during negotiations. A mediator's ability to adopt a humble posture, both in speech and action, can open channels for meaningful dialogue. This principle can be particularly significant in contexts involving intergenerational or interethnic conflicts, where perceived arrogance or disrespect often exacerbates tensions. Implementing training for mediators that emphasizes respectful engagement, combined with cultural sensitivity, could strengthen peacebuilding efforts across Nigeria's diverse regions (Smith, 1991).

Taking Responsibility and Mediation

Abigail's willingness to take responsibility, even for actions she did not directly commit, highlights the role of proactive mediation in conflict resolution (1 Samuel 25:24). Her self-identification as David's servant and her plea for understanding exemplify a mediator's capacity to act as a bridge between conflicting parties. In the Nigerian context, where conflicts often involve communal or systemic grievances, mediators must adopt a proactive stance, stepping into disputes before they escalate. Traditional leaders, community elders, and religious figures are uniquely positioned to fulfill this role due to their societal influence. Developing formal frameworks that empower such individuals to mediate disputes—paired with training in negotiation techniques—can enhance their effectiveness in resolving conflicts. Additionally, this proactive approach can inspire a sense of shared responsibility within communities, fostering collaboration and reconciliation (Albert, 2001).

Acknowledging Wrongdoing and Deflecting Blame

Abigail's acknowledgment of Nabal's foolishness, coupled with her effort to dissociate herself from his actions (1 Samuel 25:25), serves as a masterful example of balancing accountability and deflecting blame. This approach avoids blanket condemnation while focusing on the specific issues at hand. In the Nigerian context, where collective blame often fuels cycles of revenge and mistrust, acknowledging wrongdoing in a nuanced manner can be a pivotal step in conflict resolution. Mediators and leaders can adopt this strategy by

addressing grievances directly while emphasizing individual accountability rather than attributing guilt to entire communities. This not only mitigates the escalation of tensions but also facilitates dialogue centered on problem-solving rather than assigning blame. Implementing restorative justice practices that prioritize personal accountability over collective punishment can further advance this approach (Zartman, 2000).

Appealing to Higher Principles

Abigail's appeal to David's sense of divine justice (1 Samuel 25:26) underscores the significance of invoking shared moral and religious principles in peacemaking. In a deeply religious society like Nigeria, where Christianity and Islam shape the ethical framework of many communities, appeals to divine principles can provide a compelling basis for reconciliation. By reminding conflicting parties of their shared spiritual values and their accountability to a higher power, mediators can foster mutual respect and a commitment to peace. Religious institutions in Nigeria could play a more active role in conflict resolution by offering platforms for dialogue grounded in shared theological principles. Moreover, interfaith initiatives that emphasize common values such as forgiveness, justice, and compassion can help bridge divides and promote unity (Augsburger, 1992).

Offering Reparation and Tangible Solutions

Abigail's peace offering to David and his men (1 Samuel 25:27) illustrates the importance of tangible reparations in conflict resolution. This act not only addressed the immediate grievances but also symbolized her commitment to restoring peace. In Nigeria, where conflicts often stem from economic disparities and resource-based disputes, reparations in the form of compensation, infrastructure development, or social programs can play a vital role in addressing grievances and fostering goodwill. For example, community development projects, such as building schools, healthcare centers, or water facilities, can serve as symbolic and practical gestures of reconciliation. Integrating tangible solutions into conflict resolution frameworks ensures that the process is not merely theoretical but also addresses the material needs of affected communities, paving the way for sustainable peace. (Zartman, 2000).

Seeking Forgiveness and Affirming Positive Outcomes

Abigail seeks forgiveness and speaks positively about David's future, emphasizing his role in God's plans and the importance of his righteous actions (1 Samuel 25:28). Seeking forgiveness and focusing on positive outcomes can help heal wounds and build a foundation for lasting peace. In Nigerian conflicts, emphasizing the potential for a harmonious and prosperous future can motivate conflicting parties to seek reconciliation. Affirming the long-term benefits of peace and cooperation encourages sustained efforts towards conflict resolution (Galtung, 2000). The principles demonstrated by Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:23-28 offer valuable insights for conflict resolution in Nigeria. Respect, humility, personal responsibility, appeals to higher principles, tangible reparations, and a focus on positive outcomes are all

essential elements that can be adapted to the Nigerian context. By integrating these biblical strategies, Nigerian society can enhance its capacity for peaceful conflict resolution and foster a more harmonious and cohesive nation.

Abigail's approach teaches the importance of humility and respect in conflict resolution. Her actions demonstrate that a respectful and humble approach can de-escalate potentially violent situations. Abigail takes personal responsibility for addressing the conflict, even though she was not initially involved. This highlights the role of mediation and the importance of stepping in to resolve conflicts even when not directly responsible.

By invoking God's name and emphasizing divine justice, Abigail appeals to higher moral and spiritual principles. This approach can be effective in conflicts where shared religious or moral values are significant. Abigail's offering of gifts serves as a practical solution to appease David and meet his immediate needs. This underscores the value of tangible reparations in conflict resolution. Abigail's affirmation of David's future role and success encourages a forward-looking perspective, focusing on long-term peace and justice rather than immediate revenge.

Recommendation

Church leaders could develop and implement training programs for conflict mediators that emphasize the importance of respect and humility in conflict resolution. These programs should highlight the effectiveness of approaches like Abigail's respectful demeanor towards David. Also there is the need to encourage mediators to incorporate culturally appropriate gestures of respect and humility, recognizing the diverse cultural norms across Nigeria.

The Nigerian government should empower traditional leaders, religious figures, and respected community members to take active roles in mediating conflicts. Provide them with the necessary resources and support to intervene effectively. This community engagement strategy would foster a culture where individuals feel responsible for their community's peace and also encourage community members to actively participate in conflict resolution processes.

Both conflicting parties should acknowledge wrongdoing and encourage constructive blame deflection. This could be done by organizing conflict resolution workshops that teach conflict resolution techniques focusing on acknowledging wrongdoing without assigning collective blame. These workshops can use case studies and role-playing to illustrate effective strategies. Also, dialogue forums could be established where conflicting parties can express their grievances and work towards understanding each other's perspectives, similar to Abigail's approach of addressing David's anger towards Nabal's actions specifically.

There is the need to harness the benefits of religious and cultural integration. Through this nexus, shared beliefs and values could be used and this could serve as a foundation for encouraging peaceful resolutions. Furthermore, church leaders, community leaders and stakeholders should support faith-based initiatives that promote peace and reconciliation, leveraging the strong religious values present in Nigerian society.

Just as Abigail provided compensation, the importance of compensation mechanisms in conflict resolution cannot be underestimated. Mechanisms for offering tangible reparations and practical solutions to address grievances needs to provided for effective conflict resolution. This could include economic compensation, community development projects, or restitution. Also, conflict mediators should ensure the fair and transparent allocation of resources to address the root causes of conflicts, such as economic disparities or resource disputes. The aggressor in a conflict should be able to seek forgiveness with the aim of reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Abigail's strategies in 1 Samuel 25:23-28 offer profound insights into contemporary conflict resolution, particularly in culturally and religiously diverse contexts like Nigeria. Her actions demonstrate the importance of humility and respect in negotiations, proactive mediation even when not directly involved, appeals to shared values and higher principles, tangible reparations to address grievances, and a focus on long-term peace rather than short-term retribution. This study uniquely contributes to theological conflict resolution by bridging biblical principles with practical applications for Nigeria's socio-political challenges. By integrating Abigail's approach, Nigeria can develop culturally resonant and morally grounded conflict resolution frameworks, fostering a more cohesive and peaceful society. This article underscores the relevance of biblical narratives as a resource for addressing modern conflicts, offering a distinctive perspective to both theological studies and Nigerian scholarship

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