

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Reading: 1 Kings 21:1-16

Following from our lesson last week, the effects of Elijah's reforms on Mount Carmel were short lived. When Jezebel heard of his deeds and in particular how he had slain the prophets of her cherished religion, Baal worship, she immediately despatched a messenger to Elijah threatening that she would dispose of him as he had disposed of the prophets of Baal. Elijah's courage seemed to evaporate before this threat and he turned and fled for his life to Mount of Horeb. Thinking at this time he was the only person left worshipping God, Elijah was depressed and in fear of his life. I feel this incident gives us great courage ourselves, there are many times when we are depressed and down yet we know that God is with us and can and will help us. Elijah had witnessed the great power of Almighty God on Carmel yet in a short time allowed the threat of a woman to totally devastate him. Things were out of proportion and he forgot to trust God who had brought him through fears and had always protected and cared for him. God who knows we are all human gave Elijah three demonstrations of God's power, a fierce wind, an earthquake and finally a fire. But he was told that God was not in any of these, then there was still small voice or a gentle whisper and it was through this gentle whisper that God spoke directly to Elijah.

The strange events happened to teach Elijah a message. Up to now Elijah's work had been one of severity and judgement like the wind, earthquake and fire represented but now he had a greater work to do, there were still faithful people in Israel who were not worshipping Baal, in fact 7000 of them who needed the work of Elijah to encourage and help them.

There was still much work for Elijah to do, God was still working in the kingdom and Elijah was his servant. There were three very important things which Elijah was called upon to do:

1. To anoint Hazael King over Syria
2. To anoint Jehu King of Israel
3. To appoint Elisha to succeed himself

But now Elijah still had work to do to counteract the wicked actions of Ahab and Jezebel, the incident in today's lesson shows to us how evil these people were and how Ahab was no fit King of God's people.

After a victory over the Syrians who were always enemies of Israel the people had a measure of peace. Ahab had built a wonderful ivory palace at Samaria and another Palace in Jezreel where Jezebel set up her court. This is the background to 1 Kings 21, you will remember the story, Ahab offered to buy Naboth's vineyard at a good price that he would be able to make a park and beautify his palace. As king, Ahab should have known that this was forbidden. The land was

God's and it was divided by lot in the days of Joshua and passed on by inheritance in the families. God had commanded in his law how the people were to treat this inheritance.

Find the law concerning it in Leviticus 25 and Numbers 36. Notice how faithful Naboth was. It would have taken great courage to disobey the King but he had great faith in his God and was not prepared to break the law and disobey God just to please the King.

Ahab is shown up in his true light now because he has been refused the land and he sulks. A growing mature man sulks, is depressed, even refusing to eat his dinner just because his own plans have been spoilt and he could not get his own way.

Neither Ahab or Jezebel had respect for God or his laws, in fact they have no respect for anyone, she was determined to get what she wanted whatever the consequences.

The plot was laid, Ahab was the King and Jezebel was determined at whatever cost to get him the vineyard he wanted. They began to weave a trap for poor Naboth, resulting in false witnesses and accusations, unfair trial and then a cruel death. Notice the similarities between the circumstances in this chapter and these of the death of Jesus and Stephen. What Commandments from Exodus 20 did they break at this time? God sees and knows all and the death of this faithful man did not go unnoticed.

Ahab had no conscience about the bruised and battered body of Naboth, all he could think about was his new piece of land and joyfully he set out to claim it. However his joy was short lived because there stood a man before him with stern piercing eyes that were now fiercely turned on Ahab warning him of great trouble to come. Ahab's greeting to Elijah was:

"Have you found me my enemy". The Prophet replied that he had found him because of the evil he had done and had come to bring judgement on not only the King but his household as well.

- Evil would be brought against the King
- His house would be cut off and destroyed completely
- Jezebel would die and the dogs would eat her body by the walls of Jezreel
- There would be no hope for them
- Those who died in the city, the dogs would eat and those who die in the fields, the fowls will eat

The words were terrible enough but the manner in which they were uttered, the very appearance of the prophet as he looked sternly at the King absolutely overwhelmed Ahab. He could not bear to look at the prophet. He hid his head in shame. He realised the full enormity of what he had done. He ripped his clothes which were sign that his feelings were uncovered, put on sackcloth in mourning and fasted and afflicted himself. He lay in sackcloth to publicly reveal his repentance, and he walked before the people in a manner that showed that he was genuinely sorry for the wickedness he had done.

The brief summary in verse 29 is all we are told of the repentance of Ahab, you might question as to whether it was real, it would be difficult to us to say but God who knows all and can read man's hearts knew that it was and promised to postpone fulfilment of the curse until after his death. So Ahab was spared, but not so for wicked Jezebel, she had to be punished as hers was the greatest sin which was not repented of.

How merciful God is but what of poor Naboth? God did not desert him. There is a great reward for him at the coming of the Lord because he obeyed God's commands, he will be raised from the grave then to inherit the land which he was given so long ago.

The trouble in today's chapter all started with one word, covetousness. Find out the meaning of the word, also what the Bible teaches about covetousness and particularly what Jesus says. We need to remember to be thankful for what we have been given not to look at others and desire what they have. Remember God is in control of all things and he places us in positions in life as he sees fit for our good. To sulk and be depressed when things do not go away is a sin and offensive to God. Let us remember Ahab, and also beware that we do not allow others to lead us into sin. Jezebel was obviously a bad influence to a weak man, so we must choose our friends carefully and not get involved in those who would cause us to do wrong in God's eyes. The final lesson which shines out is the great mercy of the God whom we serve, when repentance is genuine God will forgive, but it must be a humble heart which seeks him.

Extra work

1. Find the law in Leviticus and Numbers where Naboth was taking his actions of not selling his land from.
2. Look up the meaning of covetousness and find out what the Bible teaching is on covetousness. Jesus mentions it and also the Old Testament commandments.
3. How can we fall into covetousness today?