

A KING SOLD HIMSELF

– *I KINGS 21.* – *FEBRUARY 26.* –

**"Take heed and beware of covetousness – which is idolatry."
– Luke 12:15; Col. 3:5.**

TO King Ahab Elijah said, "Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." The effects of the drouth gradually disappeared, but its salutary lesson remained with the King and with the people to a considerable extent. The true God had some recognition. Baal's influence was considerably broken. Queen Jezebel evidently relented concerning her threat against Elijah. He returned and founded various Schools of the Prophets in Israel, himself being the master-spirit amongst them.

Our present lesson shows the meanness of covetousness and the awful power of a wicked woman. Ahab had two fine palaces; one of them, at Jezreel, was an "ivory" palace, but even its possession did not make the King happy. He desired to attach to it a fine vineyard owned by Naboth. He sent Naboth word of his desires, offering to purchase with money or to trade for it another vineyard. Naboth, asserting his rights, declined to sell for any price.

As a result the King was disappointed, heart-sick, vexed, pouty. He had allowed covetousness to grow in his heart. He wanted that vineyard. He was King, so it was very disrespectful of Naboth to refuse to take a good, liberal price for it. Naboth declared as his objection that the Lord's regulations forbade that he should sell his family inheritance. Apparently it was a hopeless case and Ahab, solemn and sour, lay abed, refusing food.

Then entered Jezebel the Queen, inquiring the cause of his sorrow. Hearing it she answered, I will give it to you. Forthwith she wrote letters to the chief men of the city, signing the letters with her

husband's seal. With brutal frankness the letters told the select men of the city what was desired of them.

(1) They were to make a mockery of religion by keeping a fast.

(2) They were to act hypocritically to their neighbor Naboth by giving him the most prominent place of honor at the fast.

(3) They were to provide two worthless scamps (presumably by bribery) who, at the appropriate time in the fast would take their places near Naboth and then, with feigned religious fervor, protest against him and denounce him as a blasphemer of God and the King, corroborating each other with sworn testimony that they had heard the blasphemy with their own ears.

(4) The penalty of blasphemy was recognized to be that of stoning and the decree was to be carried out and Naboth thus to be gotten rid of.

If we are inclined to feel or speak strongly of the wicked course of Jezebel, as we should, let us not forget that somewhat similar practices prevail in our day. True, no one today could be stoned to death at the suggestion of a Queen in civilized lands. Nevertheless, people have been heard to express the wish that they had lived in former times, so as to have had an opportunity for stoning those whom they disliked. But take a case in point: Suppose a man conducting a successful business. Suppose covetous neighbors set up a competing business, as they would have a full right to do. But suppose, then, that one or the other, coveting the whole trade, were to attempt sharp practises in business, selling commodities at below cost, interfering with the other's credit at the bank, or slandering the other, would not this be covetousness in action – covetousness of the same kind which King Ahab entertained? And would it not be reprehensible in God's **[R4742 : page 14]** sight? And dare any who respect the Lord, so thoroughly neglect the Golden Rule of his Word?

Another illustration: A storekeeper doing a good business was offered a certain commodity at a less price than he had been paying under a three-years' contract. He accepted. The party who had been selling him this commodity in the past was angry, covetous of the trade. He set up a competing business and sold goods at a loss, as he could afford to do, being wealthy, until the first storekeeper failed for lack of business. Then the new store was closed down, because it had effected its work as a business assassin. It had killed Naboth. Indeed, covetousness and Jezebel methods, adapted to present-day conditions, prevail much more generally than the majority of people suppose and chiefly amongst the very rich, who have enough and to spare, but who covet their neighbors' stocks and bonds, gold and silver, etc. If God denounced Ahab as having sold himself to iniquity, what would the Lord's verdict be on some of the customs of our day, which has so much greater degree of light and knowledge than Ahab possessed?

"THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL"

As per instructions, word was at once sent, which came to the hands of Jezebel, saying that Naboth was dead, as per the King's wishes. The Queen then said to her sullen lord, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth; he is dead.

The King seems to have had no qualms of conscience, but to have been in some respects as bad as the Queen, but with less courage. At all events he proceeded to take possession of the vineyard – as though he did not recognize that there is a God of Justice to whom he must ultimately account.

Then Elijah, under Divine direction, went forth to meet the King and, by the Lord's command said, "Hast thou killed and also taken possession? In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood." And this prophecy was fulfilled to the letter very shortly after. Note, however, the King's attitude and how inclined he was, as before, to ignore the Lord and to think merely of the Prophet.

Ahab accosted Elijah, saying, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" He received the answer, "I have found thee because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

Covetousness is one of the most crying evils of our day. It is causing more heartaches and trouble of every kind, perhaps, than any other sin.

