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Sunday School Lesson

(By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

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LESSON FOR JANUARY 29

ELIJAH IN NABOTH'S VINEYARD

LESSON TEXT.—I Kings 21:1-29.

GOLDEN TEXT—Be sure your sin will find you out.—Num. 32:23.

REFERENCE MATERIAL—Lev. 25:23-28; Amos 8:4-10; Micah 3:1-4.

PRIMARY TOPIC—The Sin of Selfishness.

JUNIOR TOPIC—Elijah Denounces a Selfish King.

INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—Jehovah's Champion Feared.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—Respecting the Rights of Others.

I. Ahab Covets Naboth's Vineyard (vv. 1-6).

1. Location of the vineyard (v. 1). It joined Ahab's summer home in Jezreel. He wanted to transform it into an herb garden and thus round out his property.

2. Ahab's proposal (v. 2). He offered to buy it outright for money, or give in exchange a better one. Ahab's wish for it was a selfish whim. He did not at all need it.

3. Naboth's refusal (v. 3). It was for a twofold reason: (1) regard for the paternal estate; (2) obedience to God's law (Lev. 25:23-28, cf. Num. 36:7-9). His refusal was on conscientious grounds. A king, even, has no right to ask of his subject that he violate his conscience.

4. Ahab's behavior (v. 4). He came into his house, lay down upon his bed and refused to eat. The king was sulking like a spoiled child. This is a picture of what a fool even a king, may make of himself. Let us learn that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (I Tim. 6:6).

5. Jezebel's inquiry (vv. 5, 6). Apparently she came with the sympathy of a wife, inquiring as to the cause of his behavior. But when she knew of Naboth's refusal she was violently angry. That a humble subject should refuse to conform to the desire of the king was an insult which she would not brook.

II. Ahab Taking Possession of Naboth's Vineyard (vv. 7-16).

1. Jezebel's treachery (vv. 7-15). (1) Her contemptuous question (v. 7). She taunted him for his cowardice. The fear of being thought weak moves a weak man quickly. (2) Her exhortation to Ahab (v. 7). "Arise, eat bread, and let thine heart be merry." A wife has great influence over her husband. Many a man has been saved from discouragement and therefore defeat, through his wife's influence. Unfortunately in this case the influence of the wife is bad. (3) Her promise to Ahab (v. 7). "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." She took matters into her own hands. If Ahab was too weak to be king, she would rule for him. (4) Her wicked scheme (vv. 8-15). She wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal and sent them to the elders and nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth, asking them to proclaim a fast, as though some great calamity had befallen the nation, and place Naboth before the public as the one who was the cause of it all. They were instructed to find two false witnesses who would testify against Naboth. The charge they brought according to the wicked device of Jezebel was blasphemy against God and the king. Naboth's only offense was his refusal to sell his estate, contrary to the law of God. When they had stoned to death Naboth and his sons (II Kings 9:26), they came and told Jezebel, who in turn came to Ahab with the information and directed him to take possession of the vineyard.

2. Ahab goes to Jezreel to take possession of Naboth's vineyard (v. 16). Ahab had not killed Naboth, but he eagerly accepted the prize without inquiring as to how it was secured.

III. Elijah in Naboth's Vineyard Announcing Doom Upon Ahab (vv. 17-26).

1. Doom upon Ahab (vv. 17-22). Elijah told him the dogs should lick his blood in the place where they licked the blood of Naboth. Evil was to fall upon Ahab and his posterity, even wipe out his seed and name. He was guilty of conspiracy, murder, robbery, perjury, blasphemy, though he had been silent and inactive. God held him responsible for Jezebel's acts, for he was king and head of the nation. The day of reckoning did come to Ahab (I Kings 22:38).

2. Doom upon Jezebel (vv. 23-26). She likewise should be eaten by dogs by the wall of Jezreel. This was literally fulfilled (II Kings 9:33-37). "Be sure your sin will find you out."

IV. Ahab's Repentance (vv. 27-29).

Because of this, God promised to withhold judgment during his lifetime.

Death of Abraham.

And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.—Genesis 25:7-8.

The Murmuring Congregation.

And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?—Numbers 14:26-27.

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