

the gentle stillness, to be exemplified in the person and ministry of Elisha.

He was taught that God's kingdom was to be spread not by the hurricane and earthquake of opinions and strife, or the thunder and lightning of human passion, but by the gentler agency of conviction and love in the heart leading to true reformation. It was the same lesson Moses learned when he said, "The Lord is a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth."

Elijah was recommissioned for further service. Three commandments were laid upon him; three changes were to be made (v. 15, 16). God was preparing His instruments already to punish the house of Ahab. He showed Elijah that the visible fruit of the labor of God's servants is but a small part of the result, and henceforth the lonely prophet was to have Elisha as his companion and servant in training and preparation as his successor.



### LESSON 5.—JULY 31, 1898.

#### Naboth's Vineyard.

(Lesson Text: 1 Kings 21: 1-6. Memory Verses: 4-6.)  
(Read chaps. 21 and 22.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house."  
—Exod. 20: 17.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday: 1 Kings 21: 1-6. Tuesday: 1 Kings 21: 7-10. Wednesday: Lev. 25: 18-28. Thursday: Eccl. 2: 1-11. Friday: Micah 2: 1-10. Saturday: Josh. 7: 10-13, 19-26. Sunday: Luke 12: 13-21.

#### The Heart of the Lesson.

Since we last met Ahab, God had given him two such signal victories over Benhadad, king of Assyria, that there could be no doubt of the divine and supernatural interposition in his behalf. The goodness of God, however, did not lead him to repentance; it was marked by no note of thanksgiving, no expression of gratitude. Ahab returned a conqueror to his capital, puffed up with the pride of conquest. He had much to make life pleasant for him. He had great opportunities for usefulness, but he improved none of them. He did not even enjoy his palace and gardens at Jezreel.

Haman, the haughty Persian at Sushan, could not enjoy his riches, promotion, and royal favor, because there was one stiff-backed Jewish porter at the gate of the king's palace who refused obeisance to him. This must ever be the case with the man whose happiness depends on "the things which are seen and temporal," and not on "the things which are unseen but eternal."

Ahab had a fly in his pot of ointment; his honey had turned to gall. Naboth, his neighbor, had refused to sell him his vineyard. Contentment rests on what God has given us to enjoy; covetousness makes us wretched no matter how much we possess. Because of one vineyard which he could not obtain, all the kingdom which he had counted for nothing in his mind. He had lost nothing; he was simply unable to get something more. It has been said the lion is carnivorous, and wants flesh, the ox is graminivorous, and wants grass, but that man is omnivorous and wants everything. First, a man wants a living, then a competency, then superfluity, then more. Selfishness grows monstrous by indulgence; and in an oriental despot like Ahab, everything tended to increase it.

The ground of Naboth's refusal was, "he feared the Lord." The favor of God was more to him than the king's coin. The Israelites held their land by a peculiar tenure. Jehovah was the real owner. "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine." Had Naboth been in debt, his vineyard might have

been claimed by clamorous creditors; but even then the reversion of the property to his family would be insisted upon at the year of jubilee.

Ahab was wicked, but he evidently had no thought of violently wresting the coveted property from its owner. He had enough conscience left to restrain him from that sin. Ahab was weak, so stubborn, and, in the sulks like a pettish child, he threw himself on his bed. Hezekiah, in affliction, "turned his face to the wall" and communed with God; in answer to prayer, his life was prolonged. Ahab "turned away his face and would eat no bread," because he could not have what was not his.

English history tells how Queen Eleanor sucked the poison out of her husband's wounds; and in a moral and spiritual sense that is what every true-hearted wife seeks to do for the husband who is wounded in the conflicts of life. A true wife would have found a remedy for this childishness on the part of Ahab. But, alas! if Ahab was wicked and weak he had made an unholy alliance with the heathen princess, Jezebel, who was wicked and strong. By refined irony, hypocrisy, abuse of power, hatred, false-witness, and murder, she proceeded to secure the coveted plot. The elders of Jezreel slavishly obeyed her orders, and Naboth, falsely accused of blaspheming God and the king, was stoned to death with his sons, and his vineyard, as belonging to a criminal, became the property of the crown. It seemed as if high-handed villainy had triumphed. There are times when God apparently allows the wicked to triumph and the cause of the righteous to go unvindicated, and we are ready to say with Asaph, "Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency."

Without a word of horror or any hesitation, Ahab proceeded at once to take possession of the vineyard and enjoy the fruits of the crime at which he had connived but dared not himself perform. The will to receive the coveted vineyard loaded him with the guilt of the getter—he was a murderer. This murder had both a genesis and a pedigree. Coveting begat anger, anger begat falsehood, and falsehood begat murder. This murder was also to have a posterity. "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him, but it shall not be well with the wicked."

Suddenly and unexpectedly Elijah's grim figure, like an embodied conscience, confronted Ahab. His sin had found him out, and he heard the denunciation of his crime and the prediction of his punishment—"The dogs shall lick thy blood where they licked Naboth's;" "The dogs shall eat Jezebel;" and "I will cut off thy posterity."

God frequently punishes evil doers in a similar way to what they have done to others. Jacob deceived his father Isaac, and was himself deceived by his own sons. Adonibezek, king of Canaan, when taken prisoner, had his thumbs and great toes cut off. He then said, "Three score and ten kings, having thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table. As I have done, so God hath requited me." If God is our enemy, it is because we have made Him so by our sins. We reap in kind as we have sown.



It isn't the number of joys we have  
That make us happy and gay;  
But the number we share with our little friends,  
Oh! that is the secret, they say!