

cause they have the king's command for it—letters written in Ahab's name and signed with Ahab's seal. It is the deed of Ahab, though he himself neither planned nor enjoined it. He is the working instrument made use of to commit this horrible crime. It is plain enough now.

*Who is this poor slave's master?* The Lord Jesus has told us: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (that is, slave) of sin." John 8. 34. Ahab has sold himself to this master—a master who will leave him no rest, and the task to which he is set is "to work evil."

But what did Ahab get for all this? A slave-master, it is true, gives no wages, but he pays a price for his slave.

*What price did this poor slave get for the sale of himself?* His wife's approval was certainly part of it. It was at her instigation that his greatest acts of idolatry and his worst crimes were committed. Ver. 25. But he cannot have got a full share even of this. There is a certain contempt in the way Jezebel speaks to him: "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? . . . let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard," etc. But the desired vineyard—that he did get. Yes, and what was the first thing he met there? Not pleasure and satisfaction, but an enemy, a rebuke, a fearful prospect. The desired thing turns to a curse. He is brought face to face with the consequences of his sin—vengeance is waiting him. This is the price he gets!

*Was Ahab the only slave who ever sold himself?* He is but one among thousands! Of how many among ourselves are the words true, "servants of sin!" Rom. 6. 16-20. A. is discontented, full of envious thoughts, fretting secretly because others are richer or more admired than herself, so full of her wants and wrongs and disappointments that she can hardly find time to fulfill her daily duties or to enjoy any thing at all. B. is spending her money on dress, and every spare hour in gaiety—no quietness, no leisure, but life a perpetual whirl. C. is stifling his conscience and taking up evil ways. All going the same way as Ahab, selling themselves, poor, hard-worked slaves! And what is the price? Often and often the approval of some companion. But whatever it be, the price, if they get it, is certain to be like Ahab's: it will turn to a curse. "The wages of sin is death."

But One has come to redeem the slaves of sin. The Lord Jesus is the great Liberator. He has paid a heavier price than either England or America for the liberty of the slave. There is not one but may claim freedom through him. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

### Bible Reading Lesson Analysis.

#### The Story of Naboth. 1 Kings 21. 4-19.

1. To covet, in the bad sense, is to inordinately desire the possessions of another. ver. 4. God forbids it: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. . . nor any thing that is thy neighbor's." Exod. 20. 17; 1 Tim. 6. 9; Ezek. 22. 12; Psal. 10. 3; Jer. 6. 13.

2. It was Ahab's self-will that made him unhappy when very admittedly refused a request. ver. 4. "Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck." Psal. 75. 5; Heb. 13. 5; Luke 3. 14; Isa. 5. 8; 1 Tim. 6. 6.

3. The contented man is the king. Personal peace is imperial. Self mastery is real dominion, ver. 4. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Tim. 6. 6; Psal. 73. 25; 146. 5; Esth. 5. 13; Phil. 4. 11, 12.

4. These words of Jezebel were tender, but her spirit was always terrible. ver. 5. "For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord." 1 Kings 18. 4; Mal. 14. 3-8; 2 Kings 9. 30-37; Rev. 2. 20.

5. Rousing himself out of the insanity of such discontentment, Ahab, when thus addressed by his wicked wife (vers. 5-7), should have replied, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Matt. 4. 10; Prov. 16. 12; 25. 2; 28. 16; 29. 12; 31. 5.

6. The bad woman made the bad queen. Character is character irrespective of position, ver. 7. "Dost thou Solomon, king of Israel, sin? Even him did outlandish women cause to sin." Neh. 13. 26; Num. 31. 15, 16; Isa. 3. 12; Gen. 3. 6, 11, 12; Eccl. 7. 26.

7. The proclamation of a fast under these circumstances was profanation, ver. 9. "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto your God." 1 Sam. 1. 14; Isa. 58. 6, 7; 1 Sam. 7. 6; 2 Sam. 12. 16; 2 Chron. 20. 3.

8. God is on the side of fairness. The God of the old Bible was always just. He hated then, and now hates, iniquity. Read, and see how you will instinctively approve his views on the subject of perjury, ver. 10. "And ye shall not swear by name falsely." Lev. 19. 12; Zeph. 8. 17; Psal. 24. 4, 5; Deut. 19. 16, 18; 1 Sam. 19. 6, 10.

9. Some points of Jewish law and practice illustrated in the directions given by this infernal queen, ver. 10. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death." Deut. 17. 6; Lev. 24. 14, 16; Acts 7. 8; Luke 4. 29; 2 Kings 9. 26.

10. Five of God's commands were deliberately broken in this plot against Naboth, ver. 11. "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." Deut. 11. 1; Lev. 19. 13; Deut. 5. 17, 19, 20.

11. God suffered this awful crime to be committed, but he was not unmindful of it, ver. 17. "When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them; he forgetteth not the cry of the humble." Psal. 9. 12; Zeph. 1. 14-18; Isa. 48. 9; Jer. 36. 31; Lev. 26. 18.

12. Elijah illustrated the fearless fidelity of a prophet of God, ver. 20. "And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." Ezek. 2. 6; 1 Sam. 15; Deut. 18. 30; 2 Sam. 12; 2 Chron. 15.

13. Some modifications of this severe prediction owing to Ahab's repentance, vers. 27-29. 2 Kings 9. 30-35; 1 Kings 22. 34-35.

#### Lessons:

1. Covetousness is a possible, but not a frequent, sin, vers. 4-6.

2. The desire to secure possessions like those of our neighbor is often called covetousness, but instead of that may be worthy aspiration.

3. It is folly to become impatient when your will is frustrated. Even God is not allowed to have his own way in his own world. Kings have no right, and no law, to make some demands, ver. 4.

4. The spirit of Jezebel was infernal. She felt at home in hell as soon as she got there. Nothing more infamous ever occurred, vers. 5-16.

5. The nature of this queen was extraordinary in its resources of evil. In her conduct she was herself, that explains all. For Ahab with such a wife I entertain a grain of pity.

6. Men can be hired, patronized, frightened, to do any deed of darkness and danger. It is as easy to get men to work in a powder-mill as a green-house. Wages are practically omnipotent, vers. 13, 14.

7. God in the midst of sin is not inattentive to its alarming manifestations. His word, a prophet, is always on hand to warn men of danger and mention a way of escape.