

“That Woman Jezebel”

The Master’s letter to the ecclesia at Thyatira describes a corrupting influence within the assembly of brethren:

“... Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest *that women Jezebel*, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not ...” (Rev. 2:20-21).

The allusion here, is to Ahab’s wife who was named Jezebel, and who instigated great evil amongst the congregation of Israel. The first reference to this woman in Scripture describes her origins, and how Ahab did wickedly in marrying her:

“.... And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of Yahweh above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him” (1 Kings 16:31).

We find then, that not only did Ahab marry outside of the Truth – he embraced an idolater. And not only so, but forsaking the true worship of Yahweh, he went and worshiped her deity with her. And she proved to be a pernicious influence for evil in the nation which should have been Holiness to Yahweh.

FALSE PROPHETS

Once Jezebel had a foot in the door, so to speak, she used her position to persecute the true followers of Yahweh. The record in 1 Kings 18 describes how she “cut off the prophets of Yahweh” (vs 4). The chapter continues with the challenge of Elijah to the gods and prophets of Jezebel. Verse 19 describes how there were 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of the groves, which ate at Jezebel’s table - and by contrast, there was only a single prophet of Yahweh remaining: Elijah himself. The contest was set, and the prophets of Baal were proved to be as impotent as their god. The sacrifice of Elijah was consumed by the Divine fire of approval, and the prophets of Baal were slain, with not one of them escaping (vs 40). But the response of Jezebel and her weak husband was not to repent of their idolatry, but to seek to slay the only remaining prophet of Yahweh:

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1 Kings 19:1-2).

Having received the message, Elijah fled in despair. He “went for his life” (1 Kings 19:3), into the wilderness for refuge. There, in his state of despondency and depression, Elijah “requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now O Yahweh, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” (vs 4).

However, the hand of the Lord was gracious to his Prophet, and material sustenance was provided. Yahweh famously manifested His Presence in the words of a still small voice, and sent Elijah on a mission to further the progress of the Word that was spoken. And He also provided words of encouragement to the effect that although Elijah was the only remaining prophet of Yahweh, there was still a remnant that had not forsaken the worship of Israel’s God:

“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18).

This passage is cited by Paul the Apostle, another one who was sent for the furtherance of the Truth. He demonstrates that even in the deepest Apostasy, there will always be a few who hold to the Truth:

“... what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee, to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace ...” (Rom. 11:4-5).”

In every age, there is always a remnant who refuse the evil, and choose the good. In Elijah’s day, there were 7,000, but in Noah’s day, there were 8. In our day, the truth-holders are undoubtedly in the minority – but all things will work out “according to the election of grace”.

NABOTH’S VINEYARD

One of the elect 7,000 was a man named Naboth, whose vineyard King Ahab desired to have. It was one of the prophesied characteristics of Israel’s kings, that they would “take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them ...” (1 Sam. 8:14), and Ahab was no exception to this:

“and Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, Yahweh forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my father unto thee” (1 Kings 21:2-3).

It was a principle of the Mosaic Law, that land ownership could not be transferred between the tribes. So, in speaking of a particular situation we read:

“So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers” (Num. 36:7).

And in the future kingdom of God, when the land shall be apportioned once more, we read:

“Moreover the prince shall not take of the people’s inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession” (Ezek. 46:18).

What a marked contrast this is, to Ahab, and the means by which he was to eventually obtain the inheritance of Naboth! Rather than to accept the situation as detailed by Naboth, Ahab sulked like a spoiled child who couldn’t have things his own way! “he laid himself down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread” (1 Kings 21:4). But notice how he relayed the situation to Jezebel his wife, in response to her question as to why he was so miserable:

“And he said unto her, because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him Give me the vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: ***and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard***” (1 Kings 21:6)

In Ahab’s complaint, we have a gross misrepresentation of Naboth’s words. He did not say: “I will not give thee my vineyard” at all. What he actually said was: “***Yahweh forbid it me*** that I should give ***the inheritance of my fathers*** unto thee”. There are two items here: firstly, God would not allow Naboth to do this thing. And secondly, the land was regarded as an inheritance of his fathers, not solely his own to do as he pleased with it. This is the way of the flesh: to misrepresent the people of God. Ahab saw the situation as a personal one between him and Naboth, whereas in actual fact, it was between Ahab and Naboth’s God. Men of the flesh cannot see the difference, but to the children of the spirit, it is of vital importance.

“That Woman” the unprincipled Jezebel, however, devised means by which Ahab could have his plot of land and do with it as he pleased. She wrote letters in Ahab’s name saying:

“Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die” (1 Kings 21:9-10).

This thing was not to be done in a corner. Naboth was to be lifted up before the eyes of all the people, and two false witnesses would indict him before them all. The claim was that he had spoken against God and the King. Nothing could be further from the truth: far from blaspheming God, he actually remained faithful to Yahweh’s commandments. Yet in the eyes of the unbeliever, truth is a secondary element: Jezebel, herself a blasphemer of Israel’s God had no regard for truth, but was intent on condemning the guiltless in order to take possession of the vineyard for her weak and sullen husband.

The charge against Naboth is similar to the accusation made against Stephen, one of the early disciples. Like Jezebel, “they suborned men, which said, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God” (Acts 6:11). Moreover, in addition, they “set up false witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:13). In both cases, the principal charge was that faithful men were actually blasphemers. A passage from the prophets comes to mind:

“Hear the word of Yahweh, ye that tremble at his Word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let Yahweh be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed” (Isa. 66:5).

For Jezebel, the great idolater, it was the utmost hypocrisy to condemn Naboth as being a blasphemer of Israel’s God. Similarly, those who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ had no good cause to claim Stephen had spoken against God. But both were condemned by the words of false witnesses and were put to death by stoning, by the people.

It is interesting to note that Jezebel, despite her wicked idolatry, knew something about the Law of Moses. According to the Law it was written:

“One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: **at the mouth of two witnesses**, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (Deut. 19:15).

So it was that Jezebel raised up two witnesses to testify against Naboth. But it was not Naboth alone who was killed: ordinarily upon his death, his children would inherit his property and that which appertained to him. Indeed, that is how Naboth had possession of the vineyard: it was the inheritance of his Fathers. Jezebel had to put his sons to death, in order to remove any claims to that inheritance. This is related later on in Scripture, in the words of the Lord:

“Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, **and the blood of his sons**, saith Yahweh; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith Yahweh” (2 Kings 9:26).

In various ways, the slaying of Naboth in order to take his inheritance, typifies the slaying of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read that those who were incited against Naboth were his own kinsmen: “the elders and the nobles that were in the city, **dwelling with Naboth**” (1 Kings 21:8). They rose up against him, and had him killed. Even so it is written regarding Messiah:

“One shall say to him, What are these wounds in thy hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded **in the house of my friends**” (Zech. 13:6).

Just as the charge against Naboth was blasphemy against God and the King, so Jesus was accused likewise:

“... whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar ...” (Jno. 19:12).

“then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?” (Mat. 27:65).

And verse 60 tells us that there were “two false witnesses” that spoke against him, just like in the case of Naboth. Again, just like Naboth, the Lord was slain in order that others could possess his inheritance (see Mat. 21:38). But notice the response of the landowner: “He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons” and the interpretation of this is given: “the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mat. 21:41, 43). Here is the irony: those who oppressed others to take their inheritance will themselves have it taken from them and given to another. Though Jezebel and Ahab secured the death of Naboth, he will be amongst that nation to whom the kingdom will be given, rendering the fruit in due time. Indeed, this is implied by the meaning of his name: Naboth means “fruitful” - by contrast to Ahab and Jezebel who bore no fruit to the landowner: Yahweh himself. They will therefore be miserably destroyed at the time when those who have given their lives for the preservation of the Truth shall be rewarded according to their deeds.

It is interesting to note that whilst Jezebel had Naboth and his children slain, the same was to be done to the Jezebel influence in the ecclesia: “... I will kill her children with death; and all the ecclesias will know that I am he which searcheth the reins and the hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according unto his works” (Rev. 2:23). These children are again represented later in the Apocalypse, in the vision of the Mother prostitute: “... upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS UPON THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). These daughters, together with their harlot mother, will be destroyed with the coming of Messiah.

Truly it is that “there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Yahweh, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” (1 Kings 21:25).

But by contrast to Jezebel, the faithful remnant will make themselves ready to be Messiah’s ecclesial Bride. It is a characteristic of the Proverbial virtuous woman, to care for her children, and plant vineyards (see Prov. 31:16, 28). And it is the responsibility of those who would be part of Messiah’s Bride to be diligent in their work. Rather than to permit the Jezebel influence to prosper in our midst, we must be discerning and reject her, like the first Century believers were to do. We must heed the example of unbelief of both Ahab and Jezebel, and rather look forward to better days ahead. Then, we will be given our inheritance, which no man can take away – and the Jezebel influence which can only stir up trouble and strife in the ecclesias, will finally be removed.

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