

# ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### NABOTH'S VINEYARD

A woman of Canaan is mentioned, in the New Testament, as remarkable for her humble acknowledgment of unworthiness, and for the greatness of her faith in Christ (Matthew 15:21-28). The conduct of another woman of Canaan, Jezebel, will be noticed in the portion of sacred history before us, who was of a very different spirit. The latter was of the mighty and noble of this world: the former had no pretensions of that kind. Consider, as we proceed, which of these two persons was the happiest, and which is the happiest now!

**“And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel”** (I Kings 21:17-21).

About the time when Elijah called Elisha from the plough, and consecrated him to be a prophet, a terrible war broke out between Syria and Israel. The Syrian king, Benhadad, with an enormous host, which was aided by thirty-two tributary allies, took the field, quite unexpectedly against Ahab, but by God's help he was defeated and compelled to terms of peace.

Where Elijah abode during these tumultuous times we are not informed. It is only after the disturbances are over that we find him reappearing in the narrative, and this as an ambassador of God. He was sent to Samaria, to reprove king Ahab for his sin. This mission of Elijah is the subject of our present consideration.

We will notice,

- I. Its occasion;
- II. Its object;
- III. Its immediate consequences

**I. “The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,  
Arise, go down to meet Ahab of Israel, which is in Samaria:  
behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is  
gone down to possess it”**

The crime which Ahab had committed against Naboth was the occasion of the prophet’s present mission to him. We are already acquainted with king Ahab, the weak instrument of others, who always suffered himself to be governed by circumstances; and just what these made of him, such was he. Thus at one time he could show himself even kind and generous; as in his behavior to the vanquished Syrian monarch, so that a prophet was even commissioned to reprove him for his ill-timed lenity. **“Because thou hast let go out thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people”** (I Kings 20:42).

He could also, the very next moment, according as he was externally wrought upon, perpetrate the most infamous cruelties, especially when it could be done without endangering his person.

Under better influence, Ahab would probably have been a better king; but, led as he was by such a woman as Jezebel, and by such a host of sycophants as his court was composed of, he necessarily became the very tool of iniquity.

As he was very effeminate and luxurious, he left the affairs of his government, in a great measure, to Jezebel his wife, and was glad when he could pursue his pleasures with undisturbed ease. After the war was finished he had retired to his country residence at Jezreel. To pass away the time, he amused himself with beautifying and enlarging his sumptuous palace and gardens.

Adjoining the latter was a vineyard, which belonged to the paternal inheritance of Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab having thought that his grounds would be much improved by the addition of this piece of land, set his heart on obtaining, it. Accordingly he sent for the proprietor, told him his wishes, and offered him either an exchange of land, or the value of it in money.

But Naboth could properly part with his vineyard, because, by the law of Moses, no Israelite was permitted to sell his inheritance. All land was to be considered as the Lord’s property, and held only as a fief under him. It was indeed allowed to be exchanged, but even then it was to be restored in the year of jubilee. This was the Divine command, and Naboth would not deviate from it, nor would he make an exchange, because he foresaw that the idolatrous king would pay no regard to the year of jubilee, or the laws respecting it. Therefore he answered, **“The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”**

He was not afraid of confronting the idolatrous monarch as a worshipper of the God of Abraham; and we rejoice to see here another individual of that seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

The king was not prepared for such a refusal as this.

He could not endure to have his favorite plans frustrated, and especially by one who pertinaciously, as it seemed to him, and in despite of his royal authority, adhered to the ancient law, and refused homage to the Sidonian idol. Wounded in his pride and dignity by this supposed insult, he hastens to his palace, behaves like a spoiled child whose will has been resisted, throws himself upon his bed, turns his face to the wall, and refuses to eat.

Jezebel, astonished at finding him in this disconsolate situation, inquires what has happened, and learns from him the whole affair. Her reply to him is that of a resolutely unprincipled, despotic, and abandoned woman: **“Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”**

As if she had said, “Is that all that troubles thee? We will soon finish this matter. What kind of a government would it be in Israel, if such things were permitted!” Thus, partly to revenge the insult which the king’s majesty had sustained, and partly to attach her husband still more closely to herself, she takes measures immediately to procure the vineyard at any price.

She writes letters in Ahab’s name, to which she misapplies the royal seal; she orders the elders and nobles of the town to proclaim a fast, which was wont to be done when any great calamity had occurred or any dreadful crime been committed. She requires them to assemble the people, to put Naboth upon a mock trial before them, and suborn two villains to give false evidence against him, and accuse him of having uttered blasphemies and curses against God and the King.

This being done, Naboth was condemned unheard, dragged out of the town, and cruelly stoned to death. And when the bloody execution was accomplished, Jezebel went triumphantly to Ahab, and said, **“Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead.”** When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, the miserable man rose up from his melancholy and chagrin, **“to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.”**

Behold, such was the atrocious crime, primarily, of Jezebel; but Ahab equally participated in it, since he heartily approved of the infamous deed, and readily seized the property. Indeed he would probably have contrived and perpetrated the deed itself, had he been possessed of that resolution and cunning for which his wife was so remarkable. They were both of them the murderers of Naboth, both defiled with his blood, both guilty, and equally deserving punishment.

This atrocity was the more horrible and flagitious, because it was certainly not obstinacy which induced the unfortunate man to reject the king’s offer, but faith in the God of his fathers, and obedience to his holy ordinances. But there is no doubt, as we have already observed, that this very circumstance exasperated the murderers still more, yea enraged them to the highest degree. Worldlings can least of all bear to have anything refused them upon grounds of piety and faith.

Thus an unbelieving master has often required a pious servant, or laborer, to join in some dishonest plan in trade or business; and when the latter has refused, the thing would often have been taken no notice of, if the servant had only assigned some worldly reason for his refusal, such as the danger of adulterating goods in such a manner, or the injury it might cause to the master, and the like.

But when persons in this situation have referred to the will of their Saviour, and mentioned the law of God as the reason of their refusal, cursing and reviling have been the consequence, and they have been threatened with dismissal from service, or a discontinuance of employment; and though matters were not carried to the length of a stoning to death, yet, virtually and in principle, Ahab and Jezebel were there on the one side, and Naboth on the other.

But Ahab's wicked pleasure at taking possession of Naboth's estate was not of long duration, However secretly the murderers had acted their part and devised their infernal plan, One, of whose presence they thought not, had seen and noticed all.

This secret witness was no other than He, whose eyes are as a flame of fire; the Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, who understandeth its thought afar off; who is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways. Surely he had seen it, and had prepared for them the instruments of death, and ordained his arrows against the persecutors.

But why, when the Almighty saw the impious deed devising, did he not interpose to prevent it? Why did he not rescue innocent Naboth, who was his servant and his child, and brought into peril by his faith and obedience? For replies to such questions as these, the Scripture refers us to the world to come. Till that arrive, we must silently and resignedly submit to the many mysterious disposals which occur in God's government of the world.

We must often, in opposition to appearances and short-sighted reason, rely solely on the sure word of prophecy, by faith give God the glory, and knowledge that even what appears to the carnal mind foolishness, is in reality adorable wisdom; and that what is apparently contradictory in the divine government, is part of an economy and plan which will eventually call forth our profoundest admiration.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are infinitely higher than our ways. "We do not understand his mode of government," says an enlightened writer, "and are always liable to run into mistakes, both when we commend and when we find fault with it." God has infinite complacency in his own designs, and is infinitely above all the opinions of men.

"It is really absurd," says the same author, "to wish for a hair more or less than we possess; and it is certainly better to be Elisha than Absalom; better to be as Lazarus at the rich man's gate, full of sores, than to be the rich man himself." Let the earth be what it will to us; provided God reign in it, or rather in our own hearts, his ways will ever be well pleasing in our sight.

It is certainly true, that the permission of such an event as the death of an innocent man like Naboth, under circumstances of the most despotic cruelty, is sufficient to put our faith upon exercise, and to stagger the judgment of natural reason. But events of this description will all be satisfactorily explained in eternity. Let us leave them to the Lord: he will solve every such difficulty hereafter, to his own glory and his people's happiness. We may be quite sure that it was with no discontent or complaint against divine providence, that Naboth, just after he had closed his eyes upon this world, amid volleys of stones, opened them before the throne of God.

And doubtless his cruel death is, to this moment, a subject of praise with his spirit; and could he now converse with us, any dissatisfaction on our part at God's providence towards him would give him pain, and he would call upon us to join him in adoring that providence as full of wisdom and love.

This you may allow to be true; but still you are ready to ask, what becomes of the promises of God, when it can fare so ill with such a man as Naboth? I answer, the promises of God are still what they ever were; "**They are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus.**" God has promised to them that love him, that all things shall work together for their good and so it really happens. He has promised to be with them in fire and water; and he is with them. But you seem to assume that the promise is neither fire nor water shall come nigh them, nor any pain or mishap befall them; but this is not correct. It is, on the contrary, expressly said, that the way to the kingdom of God is "**through tribulation;**" and the Saviour does not conceal it from his friends, that he appoints unto them the kingdom, even as his Father hath appointed it to him (Luke 22:29). "But if this be so," you may be tempted to say, "we must be in continual anxiety, and cannot be certain of escaping any danger.

- If we travel in a lonely place, we are certain that robbers and murderers will not have their will of us.
- If we cross a river, or the sea, we have no certainty that we shall not be drowned.
- If we are deprived of work or wages, we have nothing to assure us that God will preserve us and our families from starvation.
- If the pestilence rage around us, we have no assurance that the destroying angel will pass over our houses.

There are, then, no promises to secure our preservation from calamities; so that, though we are God's children, we must be subject to the same apprehensions as those who are strangers to the covenant of promise!"

No, my friends, such conclusions are erroneous. It is certainly not unconditionally promised us that we shall escape every danger and misfortune; but he that believes shall see the salvation of the Lord; and all things are possible to him.

You know that great assurances are given us— assurances of unlimited extent—promises which leave us nothing to wish for. Whatever may be the distress by which we are threatened, we need only "**call upon the name of the Lord,**" according to his express declaration, and we shall be delivered. Nay, the Saviour has said, in John, 15:7, that inasmuch as we abide in him, we may ask what we will, and it shall be granted us.

But what is it to abide in Jesus? It is indeed a great and important matter, which is pointed out to us by this expression. For if I really abide in Christ, then I forget myself; I behold myself in Christ, and the evil conscience of sin is lost in that of his merits. I consider myself as dead with him, risen with him, and exalted with him above the world, sin, and death. I rejoice in his righteousness as my own. I feel assured that God neither can nor will deny me, as his child, and well-pleasing to himself in the Son of his love, anything that is good for me.

Nothing any longer prevents me from joyfully casting myself, with all my concerns, upon the tender and paternal heart of God. Thus, there may certainly be a life free from care and fear, even in the midst of a thousand dangers; there is a state of mind, in which we have in our hands a key to all the treasures of God, as well as a shield against every danger both of body and soul. Only learn the happy art of being in Christ, and of asking in his name, then ask what thou wilt; for, whilst praying, thou hast thy petition.

But to return to our history. The black deed at Jezreel has been perpetrated. Naboth lies buried under the earth; but the voice of his blood cries to heaven for vengeance. The great Advocate and blood-avenger of his church hears it, and prepares for judgment. He gives to his servant the Tishbite a commission to king Ahab: **“Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.”**

Dreadful message! One would think Elijah himself must have shuddered at delivering it; nay, he must himself have sunk under such a knowledge as he had of the righteous judgments of God, had he known nothing of the grace of the Gospel. But he knew much of this, by his own experience, as is evident by attentively considering his history and character; and this rendered him undaunted and of good courage.

### **III. The king of Samaria is gratifying the lusts of his heart in the vineyard of Naboth**

He exults over the valuable plunder, and is considering how this acquisition may be turned to the best advantage, and united with his grounds. But suddenly he hears footsteps behind him, and turning about beholds, to his amazement, a man approaching him, in whose stead he would rather have seen a whole army marching against him, and who had never come upon him more unseasonably than just at this moment. It was Elijah the Tishbite. The prophet had sent no one before him to announce his approach, or inquire whether it is the king's pleasure to admit him into his presence.

He assumes his rightful prerogative of speaking in the name of the Lord, and makes no scruple of surprising the monarch in the midst of his pleasure-grounds and gardens. Dreadful must such a meeting have been to Ahab. He had probably vainly hoped that Jezebel had frightened away this unwelcome guest forever. He had thought him far enough away beyond the mountains; if not, which he would vastly have preferred, in his grave. But lo, he stands before him like an apparition from another world; nay, like the ghost of the murdered Naboth. Anticipating but too truly his message, he exclaims, before a word is uttered from Elijah, **“Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?”** Thus his own fury and malignity betray him, and become his own accusers.

How commonly, my brethren, is it the lot of your ministers to be treated like Elijah, when they succeed in finding out sinners in the church; or rather, when, by their instrumentality, sinners are found of God!

Yes, when our arrows hit the mark—when one and another of our hearers is compelled, against his will, to see his moral deformities in the mirror we place before his eyes—then it is immediately said to us, in the hearts of those that are thus smitten, “**Hast thou found me, O my enemy?**”

We are then regarded as disturbers of men’s peace, and as taking a malicious pleasure in distressing their minds. As for charity, we are accused as strangers to it, and gloomy views of enthusiasm are the things we are charged with preaching and teaching. Our sermons are considered as unsound and extravagant. Such are the heavy charges which we are obliged to put up with; but sometimes mere hard words are not deemed sufficient and the criticism becomes of a more active kind.

These individuals seek to repay us for venturing to promote, in the only right way, their peace of mind, by resolving never to hear us again, but to go in future elsewhere. Go, then, ye stricken deer, whithersoever it pleases you. It is not we that have “**found**” you, but it is God who has found you by our means, and from him you cannot escape. His word has pierced to the joints and marrow, and what avails it to endeavor to get rid of it again, until the same Almighty hand which pierced you shall heal the wound.

If he is leading you to repentance, spare yourselves the fruitless labor of kicking against the pricks. No means you resort to of this world’s devising will be effectual to heal the wound that is rankling in your conscience. The burning in your heart will only increase from day to day, till it is quenched in the blood of the Lamb. O that we might but “**find**” you effectually, we would gladly submit for a while to be treated by you as enemies.

“**I have found thee!**” said Elijah, serene and undaunted. How must the criminal have felt at these words? Confused and oppressed by the dreadful accusations of his conscience, he saw himself utterly unable to offer the smallest defense against the denunciation of the prophet. Besides, it had come upon him like a thunder clap, especially as it had found him in Naboth’s vineyard itself, where the prophet could appeal to the very stones of the vineyard to cry out and awaken the king’s conscience.

Truly it was a pitiable position which the king of Samaria occupied at this moment. He had, probably, never before experienced such a disgraceful defeat. The glory of his regal crown has vanished in an instant.

He stands before the messenger of God as a poor perplexed delinquent, out of whose hands every weapon has been wrested; nothing now was left to him but his own stifled and impotent rage; and it must have been painful to the Tishbite himself, to see his sovereign thus overpowered, confused, and abased before him. Thus the Lord is able with a word to bring down the pride of the haughty.

Who can resist the appalling power of that word, “**I have found thee,**” when it comes as the language of the holy law, by which is the knowledge of sin, but not of mercy? May everyone of us feel it, if we have not felt it hitherto; but may it be accompanied by the gracious tidings of forgiveness and justification by faith in the atonement of the Son of God!

Yes: with the dreadful sentence, “**Cursed is everyone that continued, not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them,**” may the blessed announcement be heard in our inmost souls, that Christ is “**the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth;**” and that “**whosoever believeth in him hath eternal life.**”

If we hear believingly the one announcement, “**Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;**” May we hear believingly the other announcement, “**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!**” Then shall the “**fearful looking for of judgment**” be exchanged for that “**godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of;**” and the terrors of the law shall give place to that inner contrition, which not only God will not despise, but which is the work of his own hands, the first sign of a new and endless life.

It is not the terror of the Divine holiness, but the manifestation of the love of God towards us in Christ Jesus, which softens the heart and renews the soul. By this the believer is more and more divested of self, becomes the willing servant of the Lord, and finds his service perfect freedom. He now loves God, and serves him; not in the slavish bondage of fear, much less in the vain endeavor to serve two masters; but from the constraining influence of gratitude; even as Paul could say, “**The love of Christ constraineth us.**”

He performs that which is good, as it were spontaneously, from a vital principle within. Here is an instance wherein, as we may say, liberty and necessity are closely allied to each other. The true believer becomes a captive of love, and yet in this captivity he enjoys the only true liberty.

Such are the happy effects of the Gospel of peace.

The law worketh no such wonders as these. Only where love and grace reign, are the true springs of life and salvation to be found. Only yield yourselves up to the influence of this grace and love, and you will inhale, with every breath, the powers of the world to come, and will be elevated in spirit above the love of the world, and of the things of the world, as if a thousand hands were conducting and welcoming you into the heavenly places!

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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