

STRAIGHTWAY

“And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” [Mark 1:18].

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The Martyrdom of Naboth and His Sons

by Dr. H. T. Spence, President

*Surely I have seen yesterday
the blood of Naboth, and the
blood of his sons, saith the
LORD (II Kings 9:26).*

Tucked away in the annals of Old Testament history is the sobering story of a syncretistic king and a noble layman—the story of Ahab and Naboth. This historical incident given by infallible record in I Kings 21 brings to the righteous reader a holy anger commingled with lamentation. It is a story not so removed in its nature and spiritual battlement from the late times in which we live. It is a story that must be told again and again to the Lord’s people in every generation in order to preserve their God-given legacy and to remind them of the powers that are ever present to seize and destroy that legacy.

Ahab: The Syncretistic King

Ahab, who was the seventh king of Israel, reigned for twenty-two years over the northern tribes. He was one of the strongest, and at the same time one of the weakest, kings in Israel. His name means “the Father is my brother” or that God was chosen as his brother. King Ahab was one who carefully played both sides of an issue in order to accommodate his religious and foreign political desires.

Ahab’s syncretism—his attempt to unionize opposite religious tenets—is clearly seen throughout his life. Politically he had made an alliance with the commercial, heathenistic nation of Phoenicia, cementing the relationship by marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal,

king of Tyre. He then established relations with the kingdom of Judah and sealed this alliance by having his daughter Athaliah marry Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son. Another insight into his syncretistic heart is found in his treatment of Benhadad, king of Damascus. When God gave opportunity for Ahab to crush into dust the threatening power of Syria, the king of Syria sued for his life. After Ahab received him kindly, the prophets denounced Ahab for his leniency and allowance of Benhadad's departure.

Through his alliance with Phoenicia, not only did Ahab set in motion commercial currents with Tyre, but he also invited the Phoenician religion to become a part of his kingdom. Baal became equal with Jehovah God. Although he built a temple to Baal, his effort to worship Jehovah is evident in the names of his children: Ahaziah, "Jehovah holds"; Jehoram, "Jehovah is high"; and, Athaliah, "Jehovah is strong." He failed to

apprehend the full meaning of the principle that Jehovah *alone* is the Lord God of Israel. This became the pressing acknowledgment of the prophet Elijah at Mount Carmel, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Ahab was a man pulled by true prophets yet also by his wife and her religion. He walked lamely and unsteadily.

The Invisible Powers Vying for Men in Leadership

As Ahab's full story unfolds in the Scriptures, there is the evidence that invisible spiritual powers were constantly vying for his influence as a leader. This fact reveals a principle in Scripture that indicates when an individual enters leadership, either political or religious, there are invisible powers that vie for influence through his leadership. The higher a man becomes in his leadership and influence, the greater these forces will be upon him. The layman is not aware of these forces in life; such forces are evident only upon the lives of those who have deeper responsibility in leadership. This principle is one worth observing.

At the end of my first year in college, when I was in the denominational system (the latter part of the 1960s), there was a blind minister who preached a series of messages at the school that I was attending. In one of the evening services, he preached a powerful, moving message on the imperative need of godliness and holiness in the Christian life. At one point in the message he paused and then declared, "The people down in

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Franklin Springs (the headquarters of that denomination at that time) know nothing of this.” My own father had expressed his deep concern over the duplicity of life found in many of the leaders at that time in the denomination, but these words came from a minister of great prominence. This blind minister was clear in his preaching and his call for a devout, principled life. Within a few months, I observed his being “courted” by the leaders of that denomination. Within two years, he became the assistant bishop and finally the bishop of that denomination. It was amazing to see the change that came in his life and ministry with these appointments of leadership. In his prime as a preacher, he saw and preached the principles of a separatist’s heart; but when he became the powerful leader of a large denomination, he turned his back against his legacy and began to hate the true people of God.

We must have leaders; this is biblical. However, there are realms of the invisible that surround a leader. There are invisible powers that vie for his influence, often unbeknown to that leader. An angel revealed this principle to Daniel in the context of the Prince of Persia and Prince of the Jews (Daniel 10:13,20,21). When God spoke through Ezekiel concerning the King of Tyre, He was speaking to the influential power behind that king (Ezekiel 28). When God spoke through Isaiah concerning the King of Babylon, He spoke to the influential power behind that king (Isaiah 14). In these two contexts, the influential power was Satan

himself. The Devil works at controlling leaders, for they have the power and authority over people. The larger the organization, the larger the country, the greater the forces of influence will be felt.

This principle is a true observation also when it comes to good men of political influence. Concerning King David, II Samuel 24:1 states,

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

Yet I Chronicles 21:1 states,

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.

Harmonizing these two passages reveals that God suffered David to be moved to number the people and that the influential power upon David was Satan. Satan stood up against Israel and provoked (stirred up) David to number the people. This principle is also seen in the New Testament (Luke 22:31,32) when the Lord revealed to Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat (and Peter did deny his Lord). Thank God, both David and Peter recovered; but the satanic influence nevertheless was there, and the damage was done by both of them.

This is why it is imperative, more and more as we are near the coming of Antichrist and the False Prophet, that we pray for those in leadership. Such leaders will be

found in government, in the media, in the churches, in Bible colleges and Christian universities, and in secular and Christian music. The invisible powers may not be present on the ordinary context of human living, but when leadership is placed upon such individuals, the invisible powers draw near and begin their mental and spiritual enticement in a very subtle fashion. There are certain moments and arenas of opportunities where these powers will increase. It is always a fragile situation when both God and the Devil meet on the battlefield of a leader's soul. This is not a principle that can be alleviated; every leader will have to face these powers with God, with principle, and with prayer. The greater the influence of the leadership, the deeper the powers by which he will be influenced.

Yes, dear reader, pray for the leaders! Pray for the pastors! Pray for us who lead Christian institutions! Pray for us when the powers press for change and accommodation to the carnal. Pray for us when the invisible powers are pressing for the control of thought to compromise, to get the job done whatever it takes, to get the money in at any cost, to satisfy the people with their kind of music. The conscience smites a leader the first time a compromise is made; but afterwards, the conscience becomes more and more at ease. One concession makes it easier for another and then for another. These steps, guided by the invisible powers, finally will bring the heart to believe the Bible is no longer the singular standard

of *all* matters. Many good, spiritual things may be present in the life and even the memory of a leader; but after a number of years, the leanings in the other direction will take their toll upon him. Such leaders will then become a bridge for a far worse generation that will have no "halting" between the two opinions, for there will be no true God at all in their lives.

Not for Sale

In I Kings 21 we read of Naboth the layman whose life is found under the leadership of Ahab the king. We read of him in his singular appointment in sacred history. Naboth's name means "a sprout, fruits." He had a vineyard hard by Ahab's palace in Jezreel. He was a man who had received a piece of land through the providential hand of God. It was an inheritance from his father and had been in the family for generations. Nevertheless, Ahab desired this vineyard for himself. He wanted to change the vineyard into a garden of herbs because it was near his house. He was willing to give another piece of land for the vineyard or its worth in money. Surely, Naboth would have done well to sell or even exchange on such liberal terms as these. But the layman of principle responded to the leader, "God forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." These are the only words given by this dear man that are immortalized by the Eternal Canon. They portray a classic, separatist, Fundamentalist's declaration when leadership cared nothing for legacy and the inheritance of fathers. Naboth could

not—he would not—do this thing and sin against God.

Such a response brought great vexation to the impious heart of Ahab. When he told his wife of the tenacity of Naboth, she set out with a depraved plan to destroy this godly layman and annul his dogmatism for the inheritance. Letters were sent to the elders and nobles that were in the city; a religious fast was proclaimed, for Naboth was to be destroyed under the guise of religion; the death of the man was to be viewed for God's sake and the betterment of the body of God's people. This pretense of justice was to keep the reflection away from Ahab. Witnesses of the same evil heart as their leader became the final word of condemnation. These witnesses were sons of Belial, not sons of God.

The conspiracy against the inheritance was complete. His character was attacked, his reputation was destroyed, and Naboth was stoned. However, another obstacle lay in the way! Though Naboth was dead, his sons were still alive! The inheritance could not be taken without killing them as well. I Kings 21 mentions nothing of the sons, but II Kings 9:26 reveals that Naboth's sons were stoned as well.

The Cry Today: "Change the Inheritance"

Psalm 16 reveals the heart of David concerning his legacy:

The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines

are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

In contrast, the spirit of our generation is committed to changing legacies. In our own beloved country of the United States, the Republic which our founding fathers gave us has been turned into a Democracy, and we are now witnessing the slow takeover of everything we held dear. Even our contemporary history books are trying to convince us that such a Republic never existed or that such a goodly heritage is no longer appropriate or beneficial for the changing moods and moral concepts of the contemporary. Such a spirit pervades all compartments of human existence: politics, education, law, marriage, media, music, and its pervasive thought is climbing into the realm of Christianity. "Times have changed," so they tell us. "We must change with them," so they try to convince us. The vineyard of the past is no longer to be tolerated; it must be changed into a garden of herbs that will be more appropriate and accommodating for the assimilation by the world if we are to survive in it.

One of the saddest things for the laity is to witness the changes that come over a process of time to their pastor or alma mater. For a number of years they were taught soundly the Word of God, they were given a legacy and a goodly heritage of the Scriptures with biblical standards for living. But time now reveals that the leadership has changed. The invisible

spirit of the world has slowly manipulated the thoughts of such a leader. These leaders will not come right out and say "I want it; I want to change it." But the policies initiated, the messages preached under the guise of spirituality, and the subtle changes in the music will all be part of the voice putting pressure on the Naboths of the congregation.

What Does A Naboth Do?

What does a man or woman do who has been a member of a church for many years and begins noticing the landmarks of the legacy and spiritual inheritance being tampered with? What do they do when for years the pulpit preached from the Authorized Version and now the same pulpit declares that other versions are to be welcomed? What do they do when they hear all of the scholastic debates of which is which and what is what? What do they do when, after being warned years ago of the Neo-Evangelicals ushering in new versions and new music and new methods, now such realities are vying for takeover of their vineyard's legacy? The laymen have no Greek, no Hebrew, and no Criticism background, and yet their leaders are making changes. What are they to do? What do ministers do who have followed other leading men that now seem to have little desire for their inheritance? If they say anything to the leaders about the takeover of the legacy vineyard and the changes that are evident, they will receive private rebukes combined with reasonings for the changes. Then if a Naboth persists

in his concern, rebukes from the pulpit are given, then letters written, then conversations to get Naboth out of everything. It is one thing to deal with an apostate in a biblical manner; but when leadership compromises and its carnal followers support it, what will they do with the Naboth who refuses to change or bend to the change? What will they finally do with his persistence to preserve the legacy of his forefathers?

The Naboths of history have always had two decisions to make. They will eventually either sell out and give in out of fear for what they might have to go through, or they will refuse to leave their legacy and do all they can to stand. If the latter decision is made, their name and ministry will be ostracized or stoned in ruination. This is what happened to the spiritual fathers of the Fundamentalist movement when forced to leave the apostate denominations. The Fundamentalist Movement was a Naboth movement. But, as in the case of Naboth, the very legacy of the Faith will become the final judgment of compromisers. Naboth's vineyard became the very place for Ahab's demise.

The Sons of Naboth

As we enter the new millennium, it is important for us to reflect upon the legacy, the heritage, and biblical inheritance we have received as Separatist Fundamentalists. Several of our forefathers have passed away in recent years; no doubt, others will be called home soon, perhaps this very year. A number of individ-

uals may inwardly delight over their permanently silenced voices. This is one reason it is imperative that sons and students of godly, militant men step forward to keep the spiritual legacy of the inherited vineyard. When a Naboth dies, his sons own the vineyard. In order for the enemy to take control of the legacy, the sons must be confronted as well. The enemy may ultimately destroy some public vineyards of ministries, but they will have to confront a number of Naboths and sons in order to do so. Some may say that the teacher-preacher is finally out of the way and that we can now make the legacy anything we want it to be. That is the hour when the sons and students must rise up and say, "My teacher, my father may be gone, but I am still here to earnestly contend for the Faith left by him." The sons must have the same holy tenacity as their fathers, and the students as the teachers. They must pray for principle to govern their heart and for a magnificent spirit to mark their stand. God forbid that we as sons and students to a spiritual legacy sell out under the pressure to compromise when our fathers gave their lives refusing to do so! We must earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto us.

Conclusion

Oh that God would raise up sons and students who will give their lives, just as their fathers or preachers did in order to keep heaven's appointed vineyard of the Faith! The invisible powers of evil are ever increasing with greater force to squeeze us into the mold

of compromise and conformity. Christ, Who at one time was standing in the midst of the candlesticks (the institutional church) is now on the outside of the church. Only individuals will hear His knock and hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. It has become the day of the individual's walk with God while the corporate witness of Truth is declining. More local churches are becoming divided on the issues that we face. The man or woman with a conscience captive to the Word of God is becoming a rare breed indeed. But such a man or woman is part of the legacy of our past, and by God's grace we must stand in our inheritance, having done all to stand, even if it costs us our lives.

May the Lord grant to us as leaders, including husbands, the heart and biblical tenacity to stem the tide of compromise in our sphere of influence. May the Holy Spirit empower us to withstand the "sell-out" oppression that is dominating our times. And may God enable the laity to remain true to the Scriptures when leadership begins demanding another way. This too is part of the Christian Fundamentalist legacy.

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A Warning From the Former Generation

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder

Taken from *The Human Spirit, Volume I*

The contemporary church ministries of our own time have all but lost the message of historic Christianity and the grace teachings of the New Testament. The charismatics have gone to their extant voices, visions, and dreams and have become bankrupt of any former claim to holiness of life while getting bogged down in their erroneous glossolalia. The neo-evangelicals have fled to ecumenical evangelism which has become the most popular form of Christianity in the history of the Christian Church. All of these are going back to Rome for their fellowship and their survival. The fundamentalists have a totally new face which would not have survived in the first two generations. Contemporary music has opened the door for the loss of historic fundamentalism while the youngest fundamentalists are seeking to be relieved from the battlefield, believing a more tolerant spirit with the charismatics and the neo-evangelicals could bring them back to fundamentalism. Of course, the battle against the Authorized King James Version is now appearing more prominent than it was in the first and second generations of the fundamentalists when it was lauded high. It appears that the very movement that gave the battle-cry for the KJV will now get rid of its prominence among them. That faithful war-horse has won many a victory for the Word of God.

Generally speaking, it is in the air: most of these groups want Christianity to be very easy, simple, somewhat light and chaffy, with not too much scholarship except as a rare tool on a rare occasion to exalt another particular English version of the Bible. The preacher who now comes along and speaks seriously for the Word of God will suffer the criticism, "He is too deep." It seems to be never considered as a possibility, "Christianity has become too shallow." Rarely, any more, do you see a hunger in the modern congregation or the pulpit for anything deeper than what has been said over and over again for many years. We placed the word congregation (the audience) first in the previous sentence because it appears that the congregation determines the preaching of the pulpit instead of God's preacher. We have turned away from honorable debate over the depth of the Bible; we prefer the dialogue instead. The inevitable Biblical controversy has all but fled from the men reputed to be the men of the Lord.