



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

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SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: 1 Kings 11, Jeremiah 37, Mark 11

“Being Content”

Each time I read **1 Kings 21** an image comes into my mind. It is of a distinctively dressed prophet, patiently waiting in the shade in a vineyard in Jezreel for the king to arrive. Ahab must have been very apprehensive when he saw the characteristically dressed figure standing there. He did not need to ask who it was. He recognised him straight away. He was wearing: *“a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.”* (**2 Kings 1:8** ESV). This was the austere way in which Elijah habitually dressed.

Ahab must have thought he could get away with taking Naboth’s vineyard and that he would be able to transform the vineyard into a vegetable garden without any problem. It seems a strange request to make, some have thought that he may have wanted to grow drugs, or made some other use of the forbidden garden. It does not really matter. Ahab should have known the law, designed by the Lord God to prevent the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer. *“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.”* (**Leviticus 25:23**). It was not their land, it was God’s. It could be handed on from one generation to the next, or sold until the next jubilee, but then it would revert to the original owner. Ahab should have known all of this.

There were other parts of the law which were also important. *“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour’s.”* (**Exodus 20:17**). This last of the Ten Commandments was very important. It was to prevent theft, adultery and in this case, murder. If you did not covet something which belonged to your neighbour you would be unlikely to steal it. If you do not covet your neighbour’s wife, you would not commit adultery with her. Ahab should have known all of this, but he did not.

Still with the law we have: *“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them.”* (**Deuteronomy 17:18-19**). This was expressly to prevent the king becoming self-important. It would take time, at the beginning of his reign, to sit down and carefully write out the Book of the Law in his own handwriting. What better way was there to ensure he had his own copy and could remember what was in the law, how he was supposed to behave and live? He was supposed to read it every day. Sadly, there is no record of any of the kings having ever done this. It might be that this was one of the things done by the Lord Jesus during the time when he was in Nazareth and subject to his parents, in that time between when they found him in the Temple, and when he began his ministry.

Ahab had other ideas. *“And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him.”* (**1 Kings 16:31**). He made no attempt to worship God, no attempt to learn the law, no attempt to keep it. When he was thwarted by Naboth’s steadfast refusal to sell his land, he did not turn to God, or to His word to see what it said, he turned to his wicked, wilful wife. She also set herself to act against God. *“And Jezebel his wife said to him, ‘Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’”* (**1 Kings 21:7**). She would do what God had forbidden. Naboth would struggle against

this dreadful woman. She had no difficulty in forging letters in Ahab's name and using his official seal; he apparently knew nothing about all of this. Did he have no suspicion at all when Jezebel told him she would give him the vineyard? Did he have no qualms when Jezebel told him Naboth was dead, and that he could go and take the vineyard?

The king came to Jezreel; prophet and king met. *"Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD." (1 Kings 21:20).* Elijah made a list of punishments which would come on Ahab and his descendants. Ahab presented a pathetic and tragic figure, he should have known, and should have avoided the covetousness which the tenth commandment forbade. He had sufficient; he did not need any more. In **1 Corinthians 7**, Paul emphasises this point: *"Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches." (1 Corinthians 7:17).* Paul had been teaching about marriage, but then began to widen out the theme of his letter to encourage all to contentedness: *"Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called." (v20).* If you were called as a single person, you will not be a better servant of God by being married, nor if you were married will you improve your service by becoming single. Slaves can be good servants of God; they will not improve just by becoming free. There is a good reason for this, and it is because of the nature of our redemption. *"You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." (v23).*

Let us now go to another garden, and another man. As the twilight faded Jesus was not waiting for another to come, but wrestling in prayer: *"And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:41-42).* The Lord God sent an angel to strengthen him, so that he would be able to face the awful agony of crucifixion. He knew about the temptation to sin, and knew also how to overcome it. When his resolve wavered for a moment, he went to his Father in prayer. What contrast with Ahab, who sold himself to do wickedly.

The lessons of patient endurance and careful obedience are all there for us as we quietly remember our Lord in bread and wine and the way of our redemption. We should be content with that until he comes.

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