

1 Kings 21

Aim of Lesson

To show that it is wrong to desire the possessions of others and that such craving can lead to disaster.

Background study

Exodus 20:17; Leviticus 24:16; Numbers 36:7-9.

Suggested outline of lesson

Start the story by painting a happy word-picture of Naboth living a quiet, industrious life tending his vineyard, as his forefathers had done. How honoured he must have felt to receive a visit from the king himself. But his pleasure turned to dismay on learning the purpose of Ahab's visit. Describe how Ahab assumed he had only to make a fair offer to Naboth, his subject, for this to be accepted. But it was not as straightforward as that. Naboth's ownership of the land was not merely a personal pleasure, but also a matter of inheritance, governed by law. Because of his faithfulness to the laws of God, he argued his case with conviction. Ahab had no right at all in the matter. His kingship in this case bore no weight. However, he was unused to being crossed or refused any favour, and was not prepared to be frustrated now. Even so, his reaction was so extreme that he sulked like a spoilt child. But he was a weak man and the matter would probably have ended there, but for the cunning of Jezebel.

Recount the devious and wicked means by which Jezebel had Naboth removed, showing that she was prepared, without a qualm, to resort to forgery, bribery, deceit and murder, twisting the law to her own ends. Ahab did not intervene to prevent her wicked schemes, nor apparently did he enquire about her plans. On hearing the news of Naboth's death, he did not question the circumstances but thought only of seizing the land the moment it was free. He was preoccupied with greed and self-gratification, and had turned a blind eye to the means that had enabled him to take possession of the vineyard.

God, on the other hand, saw very clearly the tragedy that had taken place and the evil that had caused it, and was angry. He sent Elijah with a message. What a shock Ahab received. When inspecting his new property he came suddenly face to face with the prophet. Elijah did not mince words, but challenged him with a direct accusation of his wrong-doing, and immediately passed sentence; God had judged him. Explain to the children that Ahab was held responsible for Naboth's death because, although he had not directly instigated it, his was the sin in coveting the vineyard in the first place, and in doing nothing in his position as king to restrain his wife's wickedness. For her part, Jezebel was also condemned to suffer a violent death.

Ahab had tried to ignore his own guilt but, when he was made to face it, he recognized the seriousness of the deeds and that he had been the cause of them, and felt remorse. As a result God modified the sentence.

Relevance to the children's lives

What had really caused the tragedy in the story? Where did it begin? Ahab desperately wanted the vineyard belonging to Naboth. Which of the ten commandments tells us how wrong it is to desire things that belong to other people? The word "covet" really means being envious. God tells us not to let ourselves feel like this, but to be thankful for what we have, and to be kind to - not envious of - others.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to be content with what we have, and to stop wanting things that other people have. Amen.

Memory verse

"For I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11).