

INTRODUCTION

I have been preaching on Sunday nights for a couple of years on “Big Events of the Old Testament,” as we are going through the Old Testament in a chronological sequence. If we could just take all the Old Testament experiences and wisdom and bottle it and sell it, we could just pay for this new building in cash. Have you ever heard Dr. R. G. Lee preach, “Payday Someday”? For many years Dr. R. G. Lee was pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and this was a sermon he preached, I want to say, almost 2,000 different times. I heard it on two occasions. He usually took an hour and a half to preach it, but don’t worry, I am basing this message tonight on the way he preached, “Payday Someday” but of course I am changing it and I can’t do it justice the way he preached it. Tonight I want to tell you the story about, “Murder in a Vineyard.”

I will introduce to you the four characters in this story. First, there was a man named Naboth. Naboth was a citizen of the town of Jezreel. For many generations Naboth and his family owned a plot of land near the palace where the king lived. Naboth grew up taking care of the vineyard that had been his fathers and his father’s father. Naboth was a noble man and a good, fine citizen.

The next character I introduce to you is Ahab, the most wicked king who ever sat on the throne of the nation of Israel. In fact, the Bible says of all the kings of Israel, none did more evil in the sight of the Lord than Ahab. He ruled an army, but he could not rule his own passions and his own desire and lust for more and more. He controlled an army, yet he was under the thumb of his wicked wife.

I introduce to you the third character in this story. Her name is Jezebel. Jezebel was a foreigner. She was the daughter of Ethbaal. She married Ahab in a political alliance and then began to control his life, and then the whole religious life of the nation of Israel. Baal is the worship of fertility. Jezebel and all of her maidens practiced all kinds of vulgar acts of worship and the nation of Israel became degraded and defiled in the eyes of God. If Ahab was the vile toad who squatted on the throne of Israel, Jezebel was the wicked adder coiled beside the throne.

And finally, let me introduce Elijah, God’s preacher. Elijah was a plain-spoken man. He dressed in plain clothes, but underneath those plain clothes beat a heart for God. Elijah was the one fed by the ravens and by widows, yet his heart beat for God. He was a natural, physical and a spiritual athlete for God. He spoke fearlessly for the God of heaven!

With the introduction to you of Naboth, Jezebel, Ahab and Elijah, I bring to you the story of “Murder in a Vineyard.”

1 Kings 21:1. “Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.”

ACT I, SCENE I: A REAL ESTATE REQUEST

Act I, scene I is this: It’s what we might call “a real estate request.” Naboth worked this little

vineyard that had belonged to his father and his father's father, and one day Ahab was looking out from the walls of his palace and he noticed this beautiful vineyard and decided he wanted to have that vineyard, although he had plenty of vineyards. He decided he wanted that vineyard for his own personal vegetable garden, because it was convenient to his palace, so he goes down in there and he calls to Naboth.

1 Kings 21:2-4. "Ahab said to Naboth, 'Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.' But Naboth replied, 'The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.' So Ahab went home, sullen and angry...He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat."

Later that day when word got around that Ahab was pouting, we see the second scene.

ACT I, SCENE II: A WICKED WIFE

The second scene of Act one was what we would call "A Wicked Wife." Jezebel comes sashaying into the royal bedroom and sees her husband with his back turned to her, facing the wall, sobbing in disappointment and depression. She says to him like probably many women have said to many men through the years, "What's the matter, Big Boy? What are you so sad about?" Ahab said, "I wanted Naboth's vineyard and he wouldn't give it to me. I told him I would buy him another vineyard a good one and he said I couldn't have this vineyard!" Jezebel said, "Aren't you the king? Can't you take anything you want at any time you want? Go just take that vineyard." "No, I can't have it. Naboth said I couldn't have it." Jezebel said, "Get up! Get up! Wash your face! Sit down, eat supper and start acting like a king and I will get you Naboth's vineyard."

ACT I, SCENE III: A PERVERSE PLOT

Then we see Scene III, which I call "A Perverse Plot." This wicked woman, Jezebel, decided to take matters into her own hands, so she schemed and plotted and planned. She wrote a letter to some of the member of the local Mafia that said, "We're going to declare a holiday and we're going to make sure Naboth is sitting in a prominent place on this holiday. I want two of your worst criminals to be sitting on either side of Naboth and at a certain time in the middle of this festival, I want those two witnesses to stand up and say to the entire city that they have heard Naboth curse God and curse the king, and then I want you to stone Naboth to death. Then stone his sons so that they cannot get his vineyard either. She wrote the letter and signed it "King Ahab." Then she took the wax from a candle and melted it on the parchment and took the king's very own seal and imprinted the wax with it and delivered it to some of the criminals in that area. Before long, there was a festival declared and Naboth was given a very prominent place, right there in the middle of the celebration. At the very height of this holiday, these two strangers stood up one on one side of Naboth and one on the other side of Naboth. One said, "I heard Naboth curse God!" The other one said, "I heard Naboth curse the king! You know what must be done. It is established in the mouth of two witnesses. We must stone him!" And they grabbed Naboth, this noble, fine family man, this wonderful citizen and dragged him out through his vineyard to a place where they had stored up rocks. They ripped his garments off him and began

to throw these stones from the pile they had conveniently prepared for just this deed. They threw, and they threw, and they threw, until his blood splattered and his brain was scattered and his skull was crushed like an egg under the heel of a giant. Then they said, "Let's kill his sons too, so they can't inherit the vineyard!" So they dragged his little boys out there and stoned them to death! And then they laughed as they left and completely ignored the Naboth's widow trying to beat the dogs away as they licked up the blood of her husband and her sons! There's the murder in the vineyard!

ACT I, SCENE IV: A VISIT TO THE VINEYARD

The next scene in this drama is what I call, "A Visit to the Vineyard," because when word comes back to wicked Jezebel that Naboth is dead, she finds Ahab, perhaps in the middle of some official act and she goes in there and speaks in Ahab's ear, "Naboth is dead! The vineyard is yours! I told you I would get that vineyard! What you were going to pay good money for or trade a good vineyard for? I got for you for nothing. Naboth is dead. The vineyard is yours. Let's go down and check it out." So, immediately Ahab left the palace and walked into the vineyard, which just the day before had been owned, and loved, and tended by Naboth and his family. As he walked through those vines thinking about how he was going to tear the vines down and plant vegetables, he was thinking, "It's good to be the king. I have what I want and I got it without it even costing me anything!"

ACT I, SCENE V: AN ALARMING ANNOUNCEMENT

As you come to this part of the story you may be wondering, "Where is God? Is there a God in heaven to allow something like that to happen? Where is God? Is God deaf that he cannot hear? Is God dumb that he cannot speak? Is God blind that he cannot see? Where is God?" Well God is where God always is. At about the same moment Ahab was walking through the vineyard, God was speaking to his prophet Elijah and says, "Elijah, Ahab and Jezebel have murdered Naboth and I want you to go down there and meet Ahab in that vineyard right now. I want you to tell Ahab what's going to happen because of what he and his wife have done." Elijah takes off running and makes it to the vineyard. As Ahab is walking through the vineyard, he hears all these strange noises around him. He sees a shadow and looks behind him. There standing at the entrance to the vineyard is Elijah, God's prophet. Elijah looks at Ahab and says, "God sent me to give you a message!" That's the final scene of Act I. It is an alarming announcement!

Elijah says, "Ahab. Because of what you have done, God is very angry with you! And I say unto you, because you have committed this act of murder, the time is going to come when the dogs who licked up Naboth's blood will lick up your blood, and the time is going to come when you won't have any descendants to sit on the throne, just as you killed Naboth's sons." Then Elijah turned to Jezebel and said, "Jezebel it's even worse for you! The time is going to come when the dogs will literally eat your body!" Then Elijah turned and he was gone! That's the murder in a vineyard. That's Act I. Then there is an intermission for one year, two years, three years, and we don't really see Act II until later on, some of it in 1 Kings, but most of it in 2 Kings 9.

ACT II, SCENE I: A DECEPTIVE DELAY

Here's the first scene of Act II it's what I call "A Deceptive Delay," because I can imagine after Elijah made that prophecy from God, every time Ahab heard a dog bark, he jumped. I can imagine every time Jezebel saw a dog she didn't like dogs very much. But a year went by and Ahab said, "Ha! I'm healthy and well and nothing has happened to me!" Another year went by and he said, "I'm healthy and well. Nothing is going to happen to me. Elijah didn't know what he was talking about." Three years go by and still NOTHING has happened to him. By this time they are laughing about the prophecy. "Do you remember when Elijah came there in our vineyard and said that dogs were going to lick your blood? Ha ha haaaaaaa! That fool!" But God always has a payday someday.

Three years after they killed Naboth there was a battle. The King of Aram came to fight against the Israelites. Those of Judah and the King of Judah, Jehoshaphat, confers with Ahab, the King of Israel. Ahab says, "You know, Jehoshaphat, they really want *me*, so when we go into battle today, I'm not going to be dressed like the king. I'm going to disguise myself as an ordinary soldier." So they went into battle and indeed the enemy was looking for Ahab, the King of Israel and they didn't find him anywhere. All they saw was Jehoshaphat. The battle was going in the favor of the enemy and the army of Israel and the army of Judah were retreating. They didn't even know who Ahab was and one of the soldiers of the enemy (the Bible says it's just a total random act) put an arrow on his bow and drew back and fired an arrow. The arrow went directly into the back of Ahab, who was disguised and wearing armor. That arrow goes right between the seam in the back of his armor and he begins to bleed. He doesn't die quickly. It takes the rest of the day, but his blood drains out into the chariot. By the time they get back to Jezreel, Ahab is dead and the dogs come and lick his blood.

ACT II, SCENE II: FINAL FULFILLMENT

The final scene in Act II is what I call, "Final Fulfillment," because Jezebel remains and she is as powerful as ever. She installs one of her sons as king and when he dies, she places another one of her sons on the throne. It wasn't one year, two years, three years, four years, it wasn't twelve or fifteen years or twenty years later. Elijah had already been taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Elijah is not even on the scene and I'm sure Jezebel was glad to see him go and Jezebel had forgotten about the prophecy of the dogs eating her.

God had his new prophet, Elisha. One day God said to Elisha, "Go down and anoint Jehu as the new King." So he goes down and he anoints Jehu as the new King of Israel and the first order that God gives to Jehu is, "I want you to go and take care of Jezebel! So Jehu gets his soldiers together and rides his chariot toward the city of Samaria, where Jezebel was at the time. They see Jehu and his soldiers coming and send someone out to find out what they are doing. This scout approaches Jehu and says, "Why are you coming?" Jehu says, "You had better get on my side instead of that side!" and the scout joins Jehu. They send out another scout, "Jehu, do you come in peace?" "You'd better get on my side and not be on her side!" And *that* scout joins them. Jehu rides up to the walls of Samaria and there is Jezebel, gathered on the walls of Samaria with all of her soldiers thinking she is in charge. The Bible says this woman, who for twenty years hated the prophecy of Elijah, has painted up her face and her lips and she looks down at Jehu and says, "Why do you come to see me this day?" Jehu looks up at her and says to the soldiers of Jezebel. "Who is on the Lord's side? If you are on God's side, throw that wicked

woman down from the wall!" It probably didn't take more than two or three seconds for some strong hands to grab this wicked woman and cast her to the ground. The Bible says she was not killed by the fall, it was the dogs that came and began to feed on her body. Later that evening when Jehu, who was now the new King of Israel, has a change of heart and says, "You know we really ought to bury the body of Jezebel because she was the daughter of a king. Go out and bury her." His aides come back and they say, "Sorry, there is nothing left to bury!"

CONCLUSION

When R. G. Lee preached this "Payday Someday" sermon, he always finished it with these words: "The judgements of God sometimes have leaden heels and travel slowly but they have iron hands and they crush completely." As we think about how all the promises of God are always carried out in his timing you remember there is always a "Payday Someday." In Galatians 6:7, there is a warning and an invitation to all of us: "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

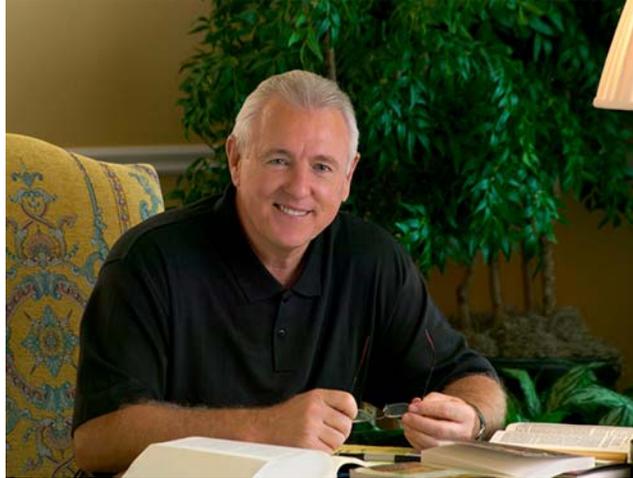
OUTLINE

ACT I

SCENE I: A REAL ESTATE REQUEST
SCENE II: A WICKED WIFE
SCENE III: A PERVERSE PLOT
SCENE IV: A VISIT TO THE VINEYARD
SCENE V: AN ALARMING ANNOUNCEMENT

ACT II

SCENE I: A DECEPTIVE DELAY
SCENE II: FINAL FULFILLMENT



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes