



● PART TWO of the study of Biblical economics by Archer Torrey, Director of Jesus Abbey, Korea, who is pictured above with Jeremiah Chu at The Grange, 10 miles from the mother house.

# BAAL

## God of the land lords

By the Reverend  
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**O**MRI CAME to power 125 years after David's accession, and his life came to an end just 50 years later with the execution of his daughter, Athaliah, who was queen in Jerusalem. But the laws which Omri introduced and which his son Ahab and daughter-in-law Jezebel enforced continued to compete with the law of the Lord until finally the law of the Lord was almost forgotten and Israel was wiped out as a nation.

Micah, the eighth century prophet, speaking shortly before the fall of Samaria, when the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was also deeply dyed with the land lust of the Phoenicians, said, (Mic. 6.16) "For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation . . ." This is elaborated in 2.2: "They covet fields and take them by violence: and houses and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." This describes Ahab.

The episode of Naboth's Vineyard is the central fact given for Ahab's reign, and the specific reason given by the prophet (1 Kg 21.19) for the destruction of the entire dynasty of Omri. It involves Ahab's greed for land and Jezebel's application of Phoenician (Baalistic) law to Israel.

Ahab wanted to buy or exchange Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth pointed out that, under the law of the Lord he was forbidden to alienate the heritage of his clan. Ahab, still an Israelite at heart and half a believer in the Lord, hesitated to act. Under the Phoenician system, however, this was a ridiculous position and, moreover, Naboth's refusal to accede to the King's reasonable request (under the Baal system) was *lèse majesté*. Jezebel said to Ahab: "Aren't you the king of Israel? I will get it for you myself," and proceeded to have Naboth condemned in a public trial for blasphemy against God and the king. Certainly, it was blasphemy against Baal to assert rights or duties given by the Lord (Yahweh), and it was blasphemy against the king to assert that he was not free to enforce the Phoenician system which treats land as a commodity and not as a heritage.

**T**HE CONCEPT of "heritage" is important: it means that the land is God's property. The "possessor" is given the use of the land by God on the understanding that he must pass it on to his descendants. Naboth's reply to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the

inheritance of my ancestors!" is, indeed, under the laws of Omri, blasphemy against God (Baal), and king. Naboth and his heirs were executed and the land reverted to the crown, but not without an immediate condemnation by the fierce prophet Elijah, who was sent to meet the king as the latter was in the act of taking possession of Naboth's land. Elijah pronounced God's sentence of death on Ahab, Jezebel, and every male descendant of his line. The episode is referred to again in 1 Kg 22.38, with the account of Ahab's death, again in 2 Kg 9.7-10 when God's commission to wipe out the house of Ahab is given, and again in 9.26 when Jehu killed Ahab's son, Joram, and threw his body into Naboth's field.

The prophet's word on Ahab, in 1 Kg 21, given at the end of the account of the Naboth episode, was "Indeed there never was anyone like Ahab for double-dealing and for doing what is displeasing to the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the most abominable way, adhering to idols, just as the Amorites used to do whom the Lord had dispossessed for the children of Israel." Here the idolatry (Baal-worship) of the Amorites is clearly put in the context of the land issue.

The prophet Elijah had received a commission from the Lord to anoint Jehu king and this commission was passed on to his successor, Elisha (2 Kg 9). Not only did Jehu make a clean sweep of Ahab's dynasty, but he also, by pretending that he was going to go along with the Baal thing, wiped out all the devotees of Baal, not just the prophets and priests, but all the worshippers. This effectively broke the back of any landlord opposition to the enforcement of the laws of the Lord.

There was one woman of Omri's line, his daughter, Athaliah, who was not killed in Jehu's revolution. She continued to support the landlord movement in Judah. The taste for power and luxury living which had been introduced into both kingdoms by this family did not die easily.

Elijah the prophet dealt only with Ahab and his son, Ahaziah, but his successor, Elisha, headed the opposition to the Baal movement during the reigns of Ahab's second son, Joram (who succeeded Ahaziah), the reformer, Jehu, and Jehu's son Jehoahaz and grandson Joash. During the time of Elisha, one land case is recorded, but the king's name is not given. Presumably it was Jehu or one of his successors. The account is given in 2 Kg 8.6. The account is of a Shunamite woman whose son had been raised from the dead and who had been warned by Elisha of a famine and advised to leave the country. She was gone seven years, and when she returned she found that her land had been confiscated. We are not told by whom or on what pretext. It may be that the influence of the laws of Omri made it impossible for her to receive justice in the lower courts. She appealed to the king and the king, influenced by the prophet Elisha, ordered her land to be restored to her together with the revenues for the time she was away. This would indicate that she had not, as Naomi and Elimelech had done, leased her land, but had intended that it should lie fallow. The king's order that she should be given the revenue from the land indicates that this was not a case of someone refusing the right of redemption (a right unique to the laws of the Lord). Had this been a case of redemption, the revenues up to the time of redemption would have belonged to the lease-holder. The land had been seized illegally.

**I**N THE meantime, Ahab's sister, Athaliah, who had survived Jehu's purge, had married king Jehoram of Judah and was obviously the main source from which the "Laws of Omri and the Practices of the House of Ahab,"

referred to by the prophet Micah, entered into the life-stream of the nation of Judah.

Up until now, under the two long and just reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat, the laws of the Lord have been taught and enforced in Judah. But now, in Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, we meet a man who was a fair match for his wife, a woman as ruthless as her more famous sister-in-law, Jezebel. As soon as Jehoram had secured his own position as king (2 Chr 21) he murdered his six brothers, and some officials of Israel, too (members of the embassy?).

This Jehoram of Judah (not to be confused with his contemporary, Ahab's son, Jehoram of Israel) was succeeded by his and Athaliah's son Ahaziah. Their daughter, Ahaziah's sister, Josheba, married Jehoida, the priest of the Lord, although the rest of the family were giving their support to Mattan and his temple of Baal. Ahaziah "followed the example of the House of Ahab, since his mother gave him wicked advice... he also put their counsel into practice (2 Chr 22)," but he was killed the same year, getting caught in Jehu's revolution when he went to visit his cousin Jehoram of Israel.

Athaliah was determined that Jehu's reform not spread to Judah, and she had the entire royal family, including her own children, liquidated, except for Ahaziah's infant son who was rescued by Ahaziah's sister, Josheba, Jehoida's wife. Athaliah was not aware that one infant remained, secreted in the Temple. His name was Joash. For eight years Athaliah ruled the country, but when Joash was eight years old, Jehoida the priest very skilfully and carefully arranged a *coup d'etat* and proclaimed Joash king before the people. He crowned him, anointed him, and "imposed the law on him" (Cf. Deut. 17.18: the king is required to write out a copy of the Law of the Lord in his own hand). The people had acclaimed the king before Athaliah knew what had happened and she was put to death when she attempted to interfere, and Jehoida "made a covenant between the king and all the people, by which they undertook to be the people of the Lord. All the people then went to the temple of Baal and demolished it... and killed Mattan, priest of Baal... then taking the commanders of hundreds, the notables, those holding public positions, and all the country people, he escorted the king down from the Temple of the Lord... and seated the king on the royal throne. All the country people were delighted, and the city made no move." (2 Kg 11 and 2 Chr 23). 2 Chr. 24.15 records that Jehoida's influence was so great and so greatly appreciated that he was buried among the kings when he died at the age of 130. He would have been past 90 when he put Joash on the throne, as he lived almost to the end of Joash's reign.

**T**HE TWO references to the "country people," or "people of the land," in the account of Jehoida's coup, are the first in a series of such references in the historical books. This is a new class that has arisen, and their political power is shown by the role they played in this coup. It is they, rather than the city (which "made no move"), who supported the reforms. This new class appears to be in opposition to the sophisticated luxury-loving urban classes who are condemned increasingly by the prophets from this time onward. They would include those who have lost their lands under the Phoenician system and have now become tenants on their own lands, people whose only hope is that the king will declare the sabbatical year for the cancelling of mortgages and the jubilee for the return to one's own inheritance. As time goes on it becomes clear that they distrust any but the House of David and become increasingly and fanatically

loyal to the royal house of Judah, to their own undoing; for the house of Judah eventually became as corrupt as the successive dynasties of Israel.

Although Jehu's revolution in Israel had liquidated one set of landlords, the taste for luxury living to which Omri's system had given such stimulus revived in full force during the long and (superficially) prosperous reign of Jereboam II, Jehu's fourth generation descendant. As predicted by the Lord (2 Kg 10.30), he was also the last of Jehu's line.

Every aspect of the life of the upper classes, their ivory houses, their drinking parties, their overeating, their love of entertainment and music, and the ruthless exploitation of the poor that supported all this, is condemned by the farmer-prophet Amos in some of the most scathing language in the Bible. Amos was the first of the writing prophets, but he was followed by a brilliant succession, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Amos condemned the land-hungry real-estate speculators as men so eager for land that they were "painting after the dust on the heads of the poor." They didn't just take the poor man's inheritance out from under his feet (cf. Isaiah's expression, "until there is nowhere to stand": Is. 5.8) but they want even the dust on top of their heads! He warns of either land reform or foreign invasion and makes it clear they can have their choice. He says (5.11) "Forasmuch therefore as your treading is on the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards but ye shall not drink wine of them . . . they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate (from their rights) . . . wherefore establish justice in the gate,\* it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious."

What rights did the poor have, when they came to the courts for justice? The law of the Lord gives the poor three basic rights: the right of redemption on the land, the right to return to his land in the jubilee if not previously redeemed, and the right to have his debts cancelled in the sabbatical year. Obviously, it was the rejection of these rights that was the foundation for the luxury of Samaria.

Although there was no temple of Baal or prophet of Baal at this time, the royal temple at Bethel and its venal high priest Amaziah supported the system completely, and Amos was warned to prophesy in Judah where he could make more money as a prophet in his style. Amos replied that he was not a professional prophet and he wasn't in this thing for money, but that he was simply obeying the word of the Lord. Then (7.17) he warned Amaziah that when the land reform did come (presumably at the hands of invaders from a foreign country) Amaziah's land would be divided by line, and all Israel would go into captivity.

In chapter 8 there are further condemnations of the rich who "swallow up the needy and make the poor of the land to fail." It is clear that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing and, judging from the messages of Amos' successors it continued to grow until the end, for no prophet was ever able to bring the landlords, merchants, grafters, or corrupt officials to repentance. Moses had promised that if the worship of the Lord in the three great feasts of redemption, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, were kept faithfully, "no man will covet your land" (Ex. 34.24); but the feasts and the reading of the law, much less the execution of the law, were now a thing of the past, having been replaced by the libidinous worship of the Amorite gods.

#### To be concluded

\* As the city gate square was the place of judgment the word "gate" in the Bible is the same as "court" in the modern sense.

## HUD's over the moon

**M**OON LANDRIEU'S land deals were scrutinized by a Senate committee after President Carter nominated him as head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As Mayor of New Orleans, Landrieu had some interesting connections with real estate developer Joseph Canizaro. For example, the land speculator helped the mayor to turn a \$300 investment into a \$60,000 profit — but this "had nothing to do with the city of New Orleans."

In his eight years in office, Landrieu admitted to being involved in the city's decision to buy land for a car park as a result of which Canizaro made a \$80,000 profit and in the decision to swap 3.7 acres of city land for 1.5 acres owned by Canizaro.

Landrieu denied unethical conduct. After leaving his public office last year, Landrieu went to work for Canizaro.

The new head of HUD is not likely to alter the department's policies, for there appears to be agreement on priorities. This is illustrated by the way taxpayers' money is being shovelled into the pockets of land speculators. A case in point is the Pier House, a Key West (Florida) hotel where anyone can stay for \$175 a night!

The Pier House Partnership — in which Landrieu has a 5% stake — raised nearly \$15m. to buy and expand the luxury hotel. Still, HUD decided that it was in the public interest to lend the Partners \$900,000 — at a low interest rate and favourable repayment terms — as an Urban Development Action Grant.

"Welfare for the rich," said one critic.



*DR. WESLEY FRY paid \$14,000 for 13 acres back in 1958. The land was an island in the middle of the Potomac River, 20 miles south of Washington. Now he wants to sell it. Price: \$800,000. Among the people interested: ex-Beatle John Lennon and a Saudi prince.*

## A tale of dead cats

**D**EAD cats and dogs can affect land values, as Lester Schwab recently discovered.

He thought he was onto a good deal when he bought a one-acre animal cemetery in San Francisco for \$1,000. He calculated that the land would be worth \$150,000 to \$200,000 if he could resell it for commercial use.

But one small problem stood between him and the boost in the value of his land . . . he had to get rid of the dead cats and dogs.

He offered to pay another pet cemetery \$30 for each transferred carcass, but this was turned down. The going rate for burials, it seems, is \$150 — which would put a big dent into Schwab's anticipated profits.

"I want to do the thing right," he says. "But I bought the land. It's mine. People just go nuts when it comes to kids and pets." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17.8.79.)