

1 Kings 21: 1 - 21a
Psalm 5: 1- 8
Galatians 2: 15 - 21
Luke 7:36 - 8:30

Notes on the Old Testament Lesson

1 Kings 21: 1 - 21a

Although it actually runs from northwest to southeast, the Jezreel Valley has been the major east-west thoroughfare in the land of Israel throughout recorded history. On the southern rim of the valley sits a site that is overlooked by most tour groups. It is Tel Jezreel, the location of Ahab's southern palace. Although the site was extensively excavated in the early 1990's, it has not been well maintained and is largely overgrown. Yet, it is still an important site to visit to have a better understanding of several events and settings of the Old Testament. This Sunday's text records such an event.

Plainly visible from Tel Jezreel is the clump of trees pictured to the right. This grove is fed by a spring. It is a principle of geology that although water courses often change their course, barring some cataclysmic event, water sources do not change. Thus, it is entirely likely that this spring has come to the surface in this same spot for thousands of years. Because of the spring and of the grove's easy visibility from Tel Jezreel, it is believed that this group of trees marks the location of Naboth's vineyard.



It should be noted that land in the Middle East is passed from father to son, often staying in the family for many centuries. This fact is as true today as it was in Naboth's time. It is not unusual to find families in the indigenous population who have held the same land for eight or more centuries. Thus, Naboth's cry that, "God forbid I should sell you my ancestral inheritance" comes from the depths of his heart.

Notes on the Gospel Lesson

Luke 7:36 - 8:30

A large meal to which a traveling rabbi was invited was a public affair in first century Israel. There was prestige attached to hosting such a person so the host would normally be pleased for the village to see that it was to his home that a rabbi, Jesus in this case, would dine. This explains how the sinful woman was able to get into the dinner.

Meals such as the one described in this week's text were not eaten at a table such as we use today. Instead, the host and guests would recline at a U-shaped table such as the one to the right. This clarifies how the woman had ready access to Jesus' feet. There are two factors in how she bathed Jesus' feet that add substantially to our understanding of this event.



Middle Eastern women would collect their tears in tear vases. (An excellent photo of a tear vase can be found at <http://leighdelozier.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/cropped-vase.jpg>) In some traditions, a single vase was used for all tears while in others there were two vases; one for tears of sorrow and the other for tears of joy. These vases would often be passed down from mother to daughter. It is believed that in addition to the tears that this woman wept in the gospel account, she poured out the content of her tear vases as well. Another way to consider this event is that this woman was pouring out all of her joys and all of her sorrows at Jesus' feet.

The next aspect of the story is very sensitive. No woman was to show her hair to any man except to her husband. To do so in front of other men was the equivalent of baring her breasts. (The Mishnah itself makes this exact comparison.) This prohibition is carried on today in the head scarves of Muslim women and in the hair bags of Orthodox Jewish women. What the unnamed woman in this gospel passage does as she dries Jesus' feet is an indecent display of intimacy. This explains Simon's reaction; a reaction that almost any person of first century Israel would have shared.

Jesus defends the woman's actions by pointing out Simon's failures as a host. When someone visits our home today; we welcome them in, take their coats, offer them something to drink (usually tea or coffee), and invite them to sit down. In the first century, a host would offer a basin of water so that the guest might wash off their feet. He would then greet the guest with a kiss, usually on the cheek, and anoint them with oil as a sign of blessing. Simon did none of these basic actions. Jesus points out that as the woman's need for forgiveness was greater, so her gratitude for forgiveness was greater.