

1 Kings 21
March 9, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What goes wrong when a person in power does not get what he or she wants? [Let people engage]

Transition: It's not uncommon to see people with power abuse or misuse their power for their own end, which goes against what God expects. God expects His children to be about justice and to help those who are oppressed. In today's story, we will read about Naboth who has a vineyard that is very near King Ahab's palace. Ahab wants it and tries to make a deal with Naboth, but Naboth wasn't willing to sell it because, according to the Israelite law, a man's inheritance was his father's property and belonged in turn to his sons. So it was not for sale! Let's see how he and Jezebel use their position of power and authority to obtain Naboth's vineyard. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Naboth's Vineyard

21 Sometime 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. ² 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."

³ But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

⁴ So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

⁵ His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

⁶ He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

⁷ Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. ⁹ In those letters she wrote:

"Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. ¹⁰ But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

¹¹ So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. ¹² They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. ¹³ Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. ¹⁴ Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, “Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead.” ¹⁶ When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth’s vineyard.

¹⁷ Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ “Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth’s vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. ¹⁹ Say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?’ Then say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!’”

²⁰ Ahab said to Elijah, “So you have found me, my enemy!”

“I have found you,” he answered, “because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. ²¹ ‘I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. ²² I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin.’

²³ “And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’

²⁴ “Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country.”

²⁵ (There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. ²⁶ He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.)

²⁷ When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

²⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹ “Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

There are some things that ought not to be for sale. Naboth recognized that. Someone has said that every person ought to have at least one thing that he would not sell for any price. This is true of a man’s soul, his character, his reputation, his family, his church.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Kings 21)*. Victor Books.

II. Ahab's Deception (21)

A. The sin (vv. 1–16).

The heart of the wicked is constantly lusting after things, and even the king is not satisfied in his empty idolatry. Now he covets his neighbor's vineyard and "pouts" because his neighbor will not disobey the Word of God and give it to him (see Lev. 25:23 and Num. 36:7). Queen Jezebel solves the problem by bringing false witness against Naboth, forging letters in her husband's name, and hiding the entire undertaking under the disguise of a religious fast. Naboth, an innocent man, was stoned to death just to satisfy the lust of King Ahab and his Baal-worshipping wife. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

B. The judgment (vv. 17–29).

God knew all that had happened, and He sent Elijah to settle matters with the wicked king. "Have you found me?" asked Ahab, reminding us of Num. 32:23—"Be sure your sins will find you out." Elijah announced doom to the household of Ahab, and in a short time his prophecies came true (2 Kings 9–10). Ahab had "sold himself to do wickedness" and therefore he had to accept the wages he had earned. The king humbled himself before the Lord (whether sincerely or hypocritically, we do not know), so the Lord postponed the punishment.

Constable, C.L. (1985). *1 Kings*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 532-533) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

5. Ahab's crimes against Naboth (chap. 21)

a. Ahab's proposal (21:1–4)

21:1–2. A period of peace followed the battle of Aphek (20:26–34). **Some time** after the battle the events recorded in chapter 21 took place. This **incident** further illustrates the evil characters of **Ahab** and Jezebel and enables readers to understand God's dealings with them. It also shows God's faithfulness in fulfilling the prophecies given by Elijah (21:20–24).

Naboth was Ahab's near neighbor **in Jezreel**; they apparently owned adjoining property. **Ahab** offered to buy Naboth's **vineyard** because it was a suitable piece of ground **for a vegetable garden** he wished to plant. Ahab offered to **pay** for it with **a better vineyard** elsewhere or with cash, whichever Naboth might prefer.

21:3–4. **Naboth** was a God-fearing Israelite. In obedience to the Mosaic Law, he refused to sell his paternal **inheritance** (cf. Lev. 25:23–28; Num. 36:7). Evidently Ahab wanted this to be a permanent transaction. Again **Ahab** returned **home sullen and angry** (cf. 1 Kings 20:43). Ahab behaved in a childish manner. Rather than accepting Naboth's decision, Ahab **lay on his bed sulking and even refused to eat**.

b. Jezebel's plot (21:5–10)

21:5–7. When **his wife** asked Ahab why he was behaving strangely, he told her about Naboth's refusal. She had grown up in a culture where the rights of individuals were not honored as they were in **Israel**. It seemed incredible to her that Ahab would not just take what he wanted. That was how a **king** should **act**, according to her way of thinking. If he would not do what was necessary *she* would do so and without hesitation.

21:8–10. Knowing how to use the laws of Israel to gain her ends, Jezebel sent **letters** to leaders in **Naboth's** town, asking them to declare a fast and to have **two scoundrels** accuse **Naboth** of cursing **God and** Ahab so that the people would **stone** Naboth. At least two witnesses were required to condemn a person in Israel (Deut. 17:6–7). Cursing God was a crime punishable by stoning (Lev. 24:16). Cursing the king was not punishable in that way. Jezebel may have added that part of her orders because she may have thought it was also punishable by death.

c. Naboth's murder (21:11–16)

21:11–14. The leading men of Jezreel obviously feared **Jezebel** more than they feared the Lord because they carried out her orders exactly. When **Naboth** (and his sons; cf. 2 Kings 9:26) were **dead** the **scoundrels** dutifully reported that the job was done.

21:15–16. **Jezebel** then announced **to Ahab** that he could **take possession** of Naboth's **vineyard** because its former owner was now **dead**. The king **got up** from his bed **and went down to take possession of** this property he coveted.

d. Elijah's prophecies (21:17–26)

21:17–19. Again God chose **Elijah** to bear a message of judgment to **Ahab**, who was then **in Naboth's vineyard**. God told Elijah just what to say (cf. v. 19). Jezebel was directly responsible for Naboth's death, but Ahab was ultimately responsible since Jezebel's letter to the elders ordering Naboth's murder had been sent out over Ahab's name (v. 8). Elijah said Ahab had committed the crime of seizing **property** not his own as well as killing Naboth. **The place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood** was in Jezreel. Dogs licking up one's blood was a disgraceful death, especially for a king whose body would normally be carefully guarded and buried with great respect. Elijah left no doubt in Ahab's mind concerning whose **blood** he referred to: **yes, yours!**

21:20–22. When **Elijah** approached **Ahab** in the stolen vineyard, the king greeted him with the words, **So you have found me, my enemy**. This suggests that Ahab may have concluded that it would be only a matter of time till Elijah or some other man of God hunted him down. Elijah was not now the "troubler of Israel" (18:17), but the king's "enemy." Ahab had made himself the enemy of the Lord and His people by doing **evil in the eyes of the Lord** (cf. 21:25). When Elijah said the king had **sold** himself, he meant the king had sacrificed his principles to obtain what he wanted, which included a comparatively worthless vineyard. God promised **to bring disaster on** Ahab personally and to **consume his descendants**, cutting **off from him every ... male in**

Israel. He would have to stand alone without allies (cf. 14:10; 16:3). Ahab's dynasty would be cut off as Jeroboam's and Baasha's had been (cf. 2 Kings 9:9).

21:23–24. As for **Jezebel ... dogs** would eat her **by the wall of Jezreel**, hardly a fitting end for a powerful queen (cf. 2 Kings 9:10, 36–37). Wild dogs lived off the garbage in cities such as Jezreel. Ahab's descendants would not receive honorable burials either but would be consumed by **dogs** and **birds** (cf. 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4).

21:25–26. The writer at this point inserted his own evaluation of **Ahab** and **Jezebel** into the narrative of Elijah and Ahab's conversation. Ahab was unique in his wickedness. He **sold himself to do evil in the Lord's eyes** (cf. v. 20). **Jezebel**, being void of any spiritual sensitivity and conscience, **urged him on** in evil. In pursuing idolatry Ahab **behaved in the vilest manner** by following the sinful ways of **the Amorites** whom God had driven **out** of Palestine when the Israelites entered the land in Joshua's day (Josh. 10:12–13).

e. Ahab's repentance (21:27–29)

21:27–29. Elijah's predicted judgment crushed **Ahab**. In sincere repentance he **humbled himself** before **the Lord**. Tearing one's **clothes** (Es. 4:1; Job 1:20), wearing **sackcloth** (Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 20:31–32; Es. 4:1; Neh. 9:1; Dan. 9:3), and fasting (Neh. 9:1; Dan. 9:3) all manifested a spirit of grief and contrition. God noticed Ahab's change of mind and behavior. Ahab's life was deep-dyed with sin, but in response to his self-humbling, God showed him some mercy. The destruction to come on Ahab's **house** would not be carried out in his own **days** but **in those of his son** Joram (2 Kings 9:24–26; 10:17). Jezebel, however, did not repent. She suffered all that God promised she would without mercy (2 Kings 9:30–37).

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 143-144). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Naboth's Vineyard (21:1–29). The evil plot against Naboth brought God's wrath against Ahab, including the deaths of Jezebel and his son Joram (1 Kgs. 22:37–38; 2 Kgs. 9:24–26, 30–37). Because of the law of Moses, Naboth refused the king's request to acquire his vineyard. The law taught that God was the owner of Canaan and that the people, as its tenants, could not dispose of their land (Lev. 25:23; Num. 27:1–11; 36:1–12). Ahab, perhaps respecting the law of God more highly than Jezebel, only sulked about the refusal whereas Jezebel took steps to steal the land. She sent letters to powerful leaders of Jezreel to entrap Naboth with false charges of sedition and blasphemy. He was executed for these crimes, and his land was gobbled up by Jezebel and Ahab.

Yet their murder of Naboth did not go unnoticed. Elijah delivered God's denunciation in the very vineyard Jezebel conspired to get. Although Ahab was the passive player in this evil deed, he was held responsible for failing to stop his wicked wife. The prophet predicted that in the place the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, Ahab's blood also would be the delight of the city's stray dogs. Jezebel also would be a delicacy for the ravenous hounds of Jezreel.

Ahab repented when he heard the word of the Lord. Though he was the most wicked man of Israel, God took mercy on him and prolonged his life. This postponement did not mean, however, that God had changed His opinion on the character of Ahab's reign (see 22:37–38).

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 1 Kings. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 205-206). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–29)

The passage—Near Ahab's summer palace at Jezreel, Naboth had a vineyard Ahab wanted it very much and offered to buy it. Naboth could not sell it because according to the Israelite law a man's inheritance was his father's property and belonged in turn to his sons. Ahab knew this principle of justice, but still he had a passionate covetousness for the vineyard. He made himself sick over the matter.

Jezebel, his wife, determined to get it for him and so promised it to him. She arranged a great feast to honor Naboth. She had two base fellows to be there and to accuse him of blaspheming God and cursing the king. He was falsely charged and was stoned to death. According to 2 Kings 9:26 Naboth's sons were killed also. Ahab went down to Jezreel to take possession of the prize. God sent Elijah to rebuke Ahab for his gross injustice and murders. He asked Ahab, "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" (v. 19). "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."

Ahab said, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Elijah answered, "I have found you because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord." Not only did Elijah pronounce doom on Ahab, but on Jezebel as well. He predicted that dogs would eat her body in Jezreel. Rather surprisingly Ahab humbled himself before God. We cannot know the depth of his repentance, but because he did humble himself before God, his judgment was delayed. Ultimately, however, the punishment came and the prophecy was fulfilled. Read 1 Kings 22:38 and 2 Kings 9:30–37.

Special points—The phrase "sold yourself" used by Elijah to describe what Ahab had done in obtaining Naboth's vineyard means that he had become a slave of his own sin. Greed had become his god and would destroy him. John 8:34 gives us the words of Jesus on this matter. Read also Matthew 16:26.

Truth for today—There are some things that ought not to be for sale. Naboth recognized that. Someone has said that every person ought to have at least one thing that he would not sell for any price. This is true of a man's soul, his character, his reputation, his family, his church.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Kings 21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.