

Justice and Mercy

1 Kings 21

¹ And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ² So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.”

³ But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!”

⁴ So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food.

⁵ But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, “Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?”

⁶ He said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’”

⁷ Then Jezebel his wife said to him, “You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

⁸ And she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth.

⁹ She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; ¹⁰ and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, “You have blasphemed God and the king.” Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.

¹¹ So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them.

¹² They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. ¹³ And two

men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died.¹⁴ Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

¹⁵ And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead."¹⁶ So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,¹⁸ "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it."¹⁹ You shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?'" And you shall speak to him, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.'"

²⁰ So Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD:²¹ 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free.

²² I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Abijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin.'²³ And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'

²⁴ The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field."

²⁵ But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.²⁶ And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

²⁷ So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

²⁸ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

²⁹ “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

—1 Kings 21

Read 1 Kings 21

No one gets away with evil—no one! Evil has a limited lifespan. The Bible explicitly states that *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). As if by a loan shark, evil is given loan after loan while the wages of sin (with compounded interest) are accruing. At any given time, without advance notice, the loan will be called.

We can become discouraged, frustrated, angry, fearful, and even aggressive when we see evil on the rise and gaining power. In these evil days and at these times, we need to remember that God has limited evil’s sphere, power, and time. There will be a reckoning. Paul reminds believers in Galatians 6:7, *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

Elijah’s life is an example of what to do in evil times. From Elijah, we learn to press into prayer and listen more intently to hear God’s Word, and obey His directives.

This is a long passage, but worth the read to understand just how diabolical the dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel was. Consider God’s awareness, judgment, and mercy as you read through 1 Kings 21.

1. From 1 Kings 21:1–6, record:
 - a. What Ahab wanted
 - b. What Ahab did

**FOOD
FOR THOUGHT**

The Hebrew for *vegetable garden* occurs elsewhere in the OT only in Deut. 11:10, where a contrast is offered between Egypt (a vegetable garden requiring human care) and the Promised Land (which the Lord cares for). Israel is also sometimes portrayed in the OT as a vine under God's special care (e.g., Isaiah 3:13–15). With these wider observations in mind, Ahab's desire to replace a vineyard with a vegetable garden may express (albeit unconsciously) a deeper desire to make Israel "like Egypt"—to blur Israel's special identity as God's people.¹⁴

c. Naboth's answer

d. Ahab's response

- 1) What does this convey to you about Ahab?
2. Use 1 Kings 21:7–15 to summarize Jezebel's solution.
 3. Note the outcome of Jezebel's plan. 1 Kings 21:15–16
 - a. What is troubling to you about what happened?
 4. From 1 Kings 21:17–19, observe and remark on:
 - a. God's response
 - b. Elijah's directive
 - c. God's judgment

5. Use 1 Kings 21:20 to share your thoughts about the interaction between the king and the prophet:
 - a. Ahab's accusation
 - b. Elijah's response
6. First Kings 21:21–24 foretells the judgment that would fall on Ahab and Jezebel for their evil. What do you see?
7. What do you observe from 1 Kings 21:25–29 concerning:
 - a. Ahab and Jezebel's wickedness
 - b. Ahab's reaction to judgment
 - c. God's mercy
8. What is your greatest takeaway from 1 Kings 21?

**FOOD
FOR THOUGHT**

Elijah's declarations concerning the death and demise of Ahab, Jezebel, and their offspring were fulfilled exactly as prophesied: Ahab's death (1 Kings 22:34–38); Jezebel's death (2 Kings 9:30–37); their offspring's death (2 Kings 10:10–11).

**FOOD
FOR THOUGHT**

Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

—Ezekiel 33:11