

1 Kings Chapter 21

1 Kings 21:1 "And it came to pass after these things, [that] Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which [was] in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria."

"Jezreel" was a town on the southern border of Issachar (Josh. 19:18), but belonged to the tribe of Manasseh.

It commanded the valley of Jezreel and was identified with modern Zerin.

Jezreel was called Esdraela in the time of the Maccabees, and is now replaced by a small and ruinous Arab village, called Zerin, at the northwest point of mount Gilboa.

Jezreel was about 56 miles north of Jerusalem and lay between Megiddo and Beth-shean (4:12).

Here, in the days of Saul, the Israelites encamped before battling the Philistines (1 Sam. Chapter 29), and this was one of the towns over which Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, briefly reigned (see 2 Samuel 2:9).

Ahab had a royal residence here (18:45-46), and Naboth's vineyard, which Jezebel plotted to obtain was beside the palace (Chapter 21).

At Jezreel, Jezebel met her bloody death (2 Kings 9:30-37), as did the remainder of the house of Ahab (2 Kings 10:1-11).

See note on 18:45.

Ahab had built a second palace in Jezreel, where he lived when not in the capital at Samaria.

Verses 2-3

Israelites were not to sell their land permanently, for the Promised Land belonged to God (Lev. 25:23; Num. 36:7).

"Naboth" knew the dangers of disobeying a ruthless king, but refused to violate God's law and courageously refused Ahab's request for his land.

1 Kings 21:2 "And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it [is] near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; [or], if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money."

"Give me thy vineyard":

In Canaanite culture, since land was simply a commodity to be traded and sold for profit, Ahab's offer to Naboth of an exchange of property or offer of purchase was a common transaction in the Near East.

"Naboth" means "fruits".

It appears Naboth was an honest man working his vineyard.

The problem was that the vineyard was near Ahab's house.

Ahab had everything being a king could get him, but he was greedy and wanted Naboth's vineyard.

He did offer to buy Naboth another vineyard, or pay him for this vineyard, but Naboth should not have to let go of his vineyard if he did not want to.

1 Kings 21:3 "And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

"The LORD forbid":

Naboth's words implied that trading or selling his property would be a disregard of the law and thus displeasing in God's eyes (1 Sam. 24:6; 26:11; 2 Sam. 23:17).

The reason was that the vineyard was his ancestral property.

The LORD, the owner of all of the land of Israel, had forbidden Israelite families to surrender ownership of family lands permanently (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:7-9).

Out of loyalty to God, Naboth declined Ahab's offer.

"Naboth" refused to sell his property to "Ahab" on the basis of the inheritance regulations of the law of Moses.

Naboth believed in the LORD.

He probably was one of the 7,000 who had not bowed his knee to Baal.

The inheritance that the LORD had given them was not to go out of their family.

We see in this that Naboth believed in God and wanted to keep His commandments, even in this land of idol worship.

It was a very dangerous thing to deny a king his wishes.

Naboth had stood up for the LORD to the point of death.

1 Kings 21:4 "And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread."

Just in the same mood he was after the prophet had delivered his message to him (1 Kings 20:43), where the same words are used as here.

"Because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers":

Neither by way of exchange nor of purchase.

And such a denial he could not bear, since it looked like treating him with contempt, and taxing him with imprudence at least, if not with injustice, or both.

"And he laid him down upon his bed":

Or couch, which might be not in his bedchamber, but in one of his halls, where his courtiers were.

"And turned away his face":

To the wall, not choosing to have conversation with any of his nobles.

"And would eat no bread":

The vexation took away his stomach, and he became melancholy, at least sullen.

Ahab is acting like a spoiled child.

He had been pampered to the point that he thought whatever he wanted should be his, regardless of what it did to someone else.

Naboth could do nothing else than what he said, unless he angered God.

Ahab should have understood.

He did not consider Naboth in this, only himself.

1 Kings 21:5 "But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?"

She perceived he was low spirited, and supposed he had met with something that had ruffled him, and made him so uneasy that he could not eat his food.

And she desired to know what it was, that she might relieve him if possible.

Jezebel had missed him, when it came time to eat, and went to inquire what was wrong with him.

1 Kings 21:6 "And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee [another] vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard."

Sell it him at his own price.

"Or else, if it please thee":

If he liked it better.

"I will give thee another vineyard for it":

As good, or better; and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard.

He represents this answer as surly and ill natured, and as the effect of obstinacy, concealing the reason Naboth alleged for his denial.

We must realize that as evil as Ahab was, he was not as evil as Jezebel.

Ahab tells her the problem, without telling Jezebel the reason for Naboth not complying with his wishes.

Probably Ahab had somewhat of a fear of the LORD, even though he did not live by the commandments.

We must remember that Ahab had seen the fire come from heaven on Mount Carmel.

He had, also seen his handful of men drive off hundreds of thousands of the Syrians, because God helped them.

He had a healthy fear of the LORD, even though he could not be classified as living for the LORD.

1 Kings 21:7 "And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, [and] eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

"Dost thou now govern the kingdom":

Jezebel was sarcastically rebuking Ahab for not exercising absolute royal power in the matter.

Jezebel is telling Ahab that he is the king, and can take whatever he wants.

In this case, she says she will do it for him.

Verses 8-14

To acquire Naboth's vineyard for her husband, Queen Jezebel committed several crimes: forgery, hypocrisy (using the religious ritual of fasting to cover up her scheme), perjury, and murder.

She even had Naboth's sons killed (2 Kings 9:26).

1 Kings 21:8 "So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed [them] with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that [were] in his city, dwelling with Naboth."

She wrote letters":

Written by the royal scribe, ancient letters were mainly in the form of a scroll sealed in clay or wax with the sender's personal sign.

The seal made the contents of the letters a royal mandate and implied that disobedience would certainly lead to some kind of punishment.

Jezebel had no authority to do this, unless the king had given her authority.

She did not let that stop her.

She wrote using the king's name and his seal.

The people receiving these letters, assumed they were from the king.

1 Kings 21:9 "And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:"

"Proclaim a fast":

To call an assembly for solemn fasting implied that a disaster threatened the people that could be averted only if they would humble themselves before the LORD and remove any person whose sin had brought God's judgment upon them (compare Judges 20:26; 1 Sam. 7:5-6; 2 Chron. 20:2-4).

Ahab died in battle shortly after these events, and "dogs licked" his "blood" at the pool in Samaria (22:34-38).

Confidence in God's willingness to avenge wickedness is what gives believers the courage not to take revenge into their own hands (Rom. 12:19).

This fast was supposedly to cleanse the land of some sin.

Naboth was in the place of prominence at the fast.

He might have been of noble birth, or else she was just setting him up to destroy him.

1 Kings 21:10 "And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And [then] carry him out, and stone him, that he may die."

“Two men”:

The Mosaic law required two witnesses in capital cases (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 20:2-3).

“Sons of Belial”:

These were utterly wicked men (see note on 1 Sam. 2:12 and Judges 19:22).

“Blaspheme God and the king”:

The penalty for cursing God and the king was death (Exodus 22:28).

"Sons of Belial" means they were worthless men.

Notice even here there had to be at least two witnesses to establish guilt.

Naboth is a type and shadow of Jesus in this.

He was innocent, yet accused for something he did not do.

In both cases they were accused of blaspheming God.

He will die an innocent man upholding God to the end.

He is killed because of his faith.

1 Kings 21:11 "And the men of his city, [even] the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, [and] as it [was] written in the letters which she had sent unto them."

That Jezebel should contrive so extremely bad a scheme and that there should be such sons of Belial among the common people to swear to such falsehoods, need not seem strange.

But that the elders and nobles of the city, the chief magistrates thereof, should be so sadly and universally depraved as to execute such a piece of villainy is really surprising.

Idolatry, when it prevails, takes away all sense of humanity and justice.

"And as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them":

They punctually, exactly, obeyed the orders in them, as follows.

The men of the city were Israelites, the same as Jesus' accusers.

These people were not aware this message was from Jezebel, because she had used Ahab's name and seal to send the letters.

They would not dare to disobey the king.

1 Kings 21:12 "They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people."

Or called a court (see 1 Kings 21:9).

"And set Naboth on high among the people":

Placed him at the bar as a criminal (see 1 Kings 21:9), though Josephus thinks he was set on a high place in the court, because he was of an illustrious birth.

1 Kings 21:13 "And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, [even] against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died."

"Out of the city":

They hypocritically climaxed their violent murder by killing the innocent Naboth in a place that was in accordance with the Mosaic law (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35-36).

He was stoned to death in the open fields and his sons were killed with him (2 Kings 9:26), eliminating all possible heirs.

It appears, this trial was by night, just as Jesus' trial was at night.

It appears that Naboth's children were killed at the same time, so there would be no one left to inherit the land.

1 Kings 21:14 "Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead."

Naboth's sons were apparently put to death at the same time (2 Kings 9:26).

Since there was now no male heir for the property, and because “Naboth” supposedly had committed blasphemy, custom dictated that the king could lay a claim to the property for the crown.

At least those who carried the message knew that it was sent by Jezebel, because they came back to her with the report of what happened.

1 Kings 21:15 "And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

To whom she communicated the news as soon as possible.

"Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite":

Which he refused to give thee for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead.

Some think that Naboth was a near relation to Ahab, his father's brother's son; which they endeavor to support from his estate lying next to Ahab's, and from his being ordered to be set in a high place among the people.

And Josephus, as before observed, says he was of illustrious descent.

So Ahab upon his death, his sons being also put to death with him, was next heir to his estate.

Therefore, Jezebel bid him enter on the possession of it, he being dead, and his sons also.

And therefore, there was nothing in his way to obstruct him.

But rather her meaning was that Naboth was dead, not of a natural but a violent death, by the hand of the civil magistrate, as for blasphemy against God.

So, for treason against the king, in virtue of which his estate was forfeited to the crown and that Ahab had a right to possess it.

And so, it was certainly condemned in later times however among the Jews, that if a man was condemned to die by the Sanhedrim, his goods came to his heirs, but if for treason against the king, they ceded to him.

When a person was found guilty of unfaithfulness to the king, his possessions went to the king, at his death.

Jezebel's evil plan had gotten the vineyard for nothing.

1 Kings 21:16 "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it."

Of which he was informed by Jezebel.

"That Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it":

If it was in Jezreel, that was sixteen miles from Samaria, and lay lower than that, in a valley, and therefore he is said to go down to it.

And which he did very likely in great state and pomp, many of his nobles and captains accompanying him, as we read that Jehu and Bidkar did ride after him at this time (2 Kings 9:25).

It is hard to understand why Ahab does not require the details of Naboth's death.

He is so glad to get the vineyard, that he probably does not care how Jezebel got it.

1 Kings 21:17 "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,"

Where he was now when this word came to him, is not certain.

Or what he had been employed in for some time past, since we hear nothing of him since the unction of Elisha, other prophets of lesser note being employed in messages to Ahab from time to time.

Perhaps Elijah, while Ahab was engaged in war with the king of Syria, spent his time in founding or reviving the schools of the prophets, and instructing and training up those that were in them for public usefulness, since we afterwards hear of them.

The word that came to him is, by the Targum, called the word of prophecy, as indeed it was, foretelling the destruction of Ahab and his house: saying; as follows.

1 Kings 21:18 "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which [is] in Samaria: behold, [he is] in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it."

Whose seat was there in his palace where he dwelt.

And Benjamin of Tudela says that in his time might be discerned in Samaria the palace of Ahab king of Israel, that is, some traces of it.

Some connect the last clause with Israel, as if the sense was, that Ahab was king over those tribes of Israel, of which Samaria was the head.

"Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth":

Or "will be" by the time he gets there; though the Arabic version is, he is "now" in the vineyard of Naboth.

"Whither he is gone down to possess it":

As if it was his legal inheritance.

The LORD sends Elijah to the vineyard to denounce the act of violence against Naboth.

Jezebel had a death warrant out for Elijah.

This would have been a dangerous thing for Elijah to do, had not God sent him.

The LORD knew that Ahab would be in the vineyard, and sent Elijah ahead to wait for him.

When Ahab is walking through the vineyard, Elijah confronts him.

1 Kings 21:19 "And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

Elijah's' first announcement of judgment applied to Ahab personally.

He said that the dogs would lick Ahab's blood in the same place that Naboth died, outside the city of Jezreel.

This prophecy was not fulfilled because of his repentance (verses 27-29), but was partially fulfilled in the licking of Ahab's blood by dogs at the pool in Samaria (22:37-38).

The judgment of the LORD is spoken against Ahab.

Indirectly he had murdered Naboth.

He had allowed Jezebel to do this terrible thing.

It had been within his power to stop her, and he did not.

The judgment is that he will die in the same spot where Naboth was killed.

1 Kings 21:20 "And Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found [thee]; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD."

So he reckoned him, because he dealt faithfully with him, and reprov'd him for his sins, and denounced the judgments of God upon him for them:

"And he answered, I have found thee":

As a thief, a robber and plunderer, in another's vineyard.

He had found out his sin in murdering Naboth, and unjustly possessing his vineyard, which was revealed to him by the LORD.

Now was come as his enemy, as he called him, as being against him, his adversary, not that he hated his person, but his ways and works.

"Because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD":

Had given up himself wholly to his lusts and was abandoned to them, and as much under the power of them as a man is that has sold himself to another to be his slave.

And that he served openly, publicly in the sight of the omniscient God, and in defiance of him.

Abarbanel gives another sense of the word we render "sold thyself", that he "made himself strange", as if he was ignorant, and did not know what Jezebel had done.

Whereas he knew fully the whole truth of the matter, and that Naboth was killed through her contrivance and by her management purposely; and so he did evil in the sight of that God that knows all things, pretending he was ignorant when he was not.

And this Elijah found out by divine revelation; so the word is used (in Genesis 42:6), but the former sense is best (as appears from 1 Kings 21:25).

Suddenly, Ahab realizes the magnitude of the sin against Naboth.

When he sees Elijah, he knows the LORD is about to speak condemnation upon him.

It is as if he is asking Elijah, how did you know I would be here?

He really knows the LORD had sent him.

Elijah immediately tells him of his sin.

Even though Jezebel did this, Ahab allowed it.

He is guilty too.

Verses 21-24

Elijah's second announcement of judgment applied to Ahab and his house.

The judgment was virtually identical with one made to Jeroboam (14:10-11), and similar to the one made to Baasha (16:3-4).

1 Kings 21:21 "Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel,"

Distinct from that message of personal judgment is the doom of utter destruction pronounced on the dynasty of Omri.

"And will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left Israel":

See 1 Kings 14:10.

This is not just speaking judgment on Ahab, but on all of his male descendants.

There will be no one to carry on his family.

1 Kings 21:22 "And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked [me] to anger, and made Israel to sin."

Two of his predecessors, whose families were destroyed (1 Kings 15:29).

"For the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin":

Not only by his worship of the calves, but of the idols of the Zidonians, particularly Baal, and also of the Amorites (1 Kings 21:26).

Jeroboam and Baasha had all of their people killed.

There was no son to carry on their names either.

Ahab, not only sinned himself, but he led Israel to sin as well.

Verses 23-24

This prophecy "concerning Jezebel" was fulfilled during the reign of Jehu (2 Kings 9:30-37).

1 Kings 21:23 "And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

"Of Jezebel":

Jezebel was singled out for judgment because of her initiative in driving Ahab in the promotion of Baalism (verse 25).

Elijah's prophecy concerning her was literally fulfilled in 2 Kings 9:10, 30-37).

Jezebel is so evil, that she will not even be buried.

The dogs will eat her body.

It will happen at Jezreel in full view, so that all will see that the LORD condemned her for her evil.

1 Kings 21:24 "Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat."

That is, they shall have no burial (see 1 Kings 14:11).

Hitherto are the words of the LORD by Elijah; next follow the remarks of the historian.

This is saying there will be no mourning and burials for the family of Ahab.

They are among the cursed.

They will be eaten of the dogs in the city, and the fowls will eat them in the country.

Verses 25-29

Despite his idolatry and evil deeds, God had mercy when Ahab repented and did not bring judgment on his house during his lifetime.

Even the worst Israelite king ("there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness"), was not beyond the mercy of God.

There were still consequences, God brought judgment of Ahab's house", just not during Ahab's lifetime ("in his days").

God gives grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34; James 4:6).

1 Kings 21:25 "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

Not of any of his predecessors, even those whose families had been destroyed, as his would be (1 Kings 21:21 and see 1 Kings 21:20).

"Whom Jezebel his wife stirred up":

To idolatry, revenge, and murder, and to whose will he was a slave, and is one instance of his being a captive to sin, and giving up himself to the power of it.

Jezebel was one of the most wicked women that ever lived.

She had no power to do these things however, without the permission of Ahab.

She had great influence on her husband, but it was his power they used to do the evil.

1 Kings 21:26 "And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all [things] as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel."

It is not just the wickedness he had committed in having Naboth killed that Ahab is judged for.

He was an idol worshipper.

He and Jezebel brought the worship of Baal to the forefront in the land that should have belonged to God.

The people of Israel that they ruled were the chosen of God.

Ahab and Jezebel had turned God's people to the worship of false gods.

Verses 27-29

"Ahab" performed the traditional acts of mourning and repentance.

Ahab had a complex personality.

At times he could respond to divine rebuke and instruction.

However, despite God's long-suffering kindness to him, there is little indication of any spiritual reality in Ahab.

God is patient and gracious (2 Peter 3:9).

1 Kings 21:27 "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."

"Rent his clothes":

The tearing of garments was a common expression of grief, terror, or repentance in the face of great personal or national calamity (Num. 14:6; Josh. 7:6; Judges 11:35; 2 Sam. 1:2; 3:31).

Ahab humbled himself before God and truly repented of the evil he had done.

All of the things mentioned above show great remorse for the sins he committed.

He became nothing before the LORD that the LORD might forgive him.

1 Kings 21:28 "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,"

Ahab did not like the prophet "Micaiah" because he would not conform to the king's expectations.

The parallel account of these events is (in 2 Chron. 18:8-27).

1 Kings 21:29 "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: [but] in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

"His son's days":

Since Ahab had truly humbled himself before the LORD, he did not see the disaster forecast for him (verse 19).

Instead, God postponed it until the reign of his son, Joram, ca. 852-841 B.C. (2 Kings 9:25-26).

Joram died in the field of Naboth (verse 19).

God postponed punishment to the time of Ahab's son, because Ahab truly repented.

The son was very evil, as well.

He was probably, greatly influenced by his wicked mother.

1 Kings Chapter 21 Questions

1. Who had a vineyard that Ahab wanted?
2. What did Ahab offer to do for Naboth in exchange for the vineyard?
3. What does "Naboth" mean?
4. How did Naboth answer Ahab?

5. Who does the author suppose that Naboth was one of?
6. Ahab is acting like a _____.
7. What did Jezebel ask Ahab?
8. What did Ahab tell her?
9. Why did Jezebel tell him to eat and be merry?
10. What did she do in Ahab's name?
11. What was this fast supposedly for?
12. What does "sons of Belial" mean?
13. How does Naboth shadow Jesus in this?
14. Why were the elders deceived?
15. What time did they judge Naboth?
16. What was Naboth accused of?
17. What message did they bring back to Jezebel?
18. What did Jezebel tell Ahab to do, now that Naboth is dead?
19. What prophet did the Word of the LORD come to for Ahab?
20. Where was this prophet to go to tell Ahab the message from God?
21. What was the message?
22. What does Ahab suddenly realize?
23. In verse 21, what judgment is given on Ahab?
24. What other two kings had like judgment spoken on them?
25. What will happen to his relatives, who die in town?
26. What else was Ahab guilty of, besides killing Naboth?
27. What would happen to Jezebel?
28. What did Ahab do in the way of repentance?
29. Because Ahab humbled himself before the LORD, what did God do?