

FIRST KINGS

Chapter 21

Naboth's Vineyard

Some time 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

Jezeel.’ 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.”

21:1–16 Ahab “did evil in the sight of the LORD” by introducing Phoenician idolatry (16:29–34) and by entering a forbidden alliance (20:31–34). But here is still another kind of crime. In order to satisfy a royal whim, Ahab deprived a private citizen of his inalienable right to his family’s inheritance. (TLSB)

21:1 *Naboth.* Little is known of this sad character who lived in the historic region of Isaachar. (TLSB)

Jezeel. Fertile valley stretching from Mount Carmel southeast to the Jordan Valley. Cf 18:45; (TLSB)

close to the palace of Ahab. Ahab maintained a residence in Jezreel in addition to his official palace in Samaria (see 18:45; 2Ki 9:30). (CSB)

Samaria. The entire northern kingdom is here represented by its capital city (see note on 16:24). (CSB)

21:2 *after this.* After the war, ch 20. (TLSB)

Let me have your vineyard. Because royal power in Israel was limited by covenantal law (see Dt 17:14–20; 1Sa 10:25), Ahab was unable simply to confiscate privately held land, as was customary with Canaanite kings (see note on v. 7; see also 1Sa 8:9–17). (CSB)

21:3 *The LORD forbid.* An oathlike prayer. (TLSB)

inheritance. Naboth had the law on his side (Lv 25:25–28) (TLSB)

Naboth’s refusal to dispose of his land was based on the conviction that the land was the Lord’s, that he had granted a perpetual lease to each Israelite family and that this lease was to be jealously preserved as the family’s permanent inheritance in the promised land. (CSB)

21:4 *vexed and sullen.* His condition, first described in 20:43, continues. (TLSB)

21:7 *Is this how you act as king over Israel?* A sarcastic remark of incredulity spoken by one accustomed to the despotic practices of the Phoenician and Canaanite kings,

who would not hesitate a moment to use their power to satisfy personal interests (contrast the attitude and practice of Samuel in the exercise of his civil power, 1Sa 12:3–4). (CSB)

21:8 *letters*. Numerous informal messages have been discovered written on pieces of pottery. (TLSB)

in Ahab's name. Jezebel uses deception to surprise her husband. (TLSB)

21:9 *Proclaim a day of fasting*. Jezebel attempted to create the impression 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 on them (cf. Jdg 20:26; 1Sa 7:5–6; 2Ch 20:2–4). (CSB)

Jezebel insinuated that a crime of such a grave nature had been committed as to require the calling of a penitential general assembly (Jgs 20:26; 1Sm 7:6; 2Ch 20:3). (TLSB)

head. At the front, as a leader. The unsuspecting Naboth was to be accorded a place of honor. (TLSB)

21:10 *two*. Mosaic law required two witnesses for capital offenses (Nu 35:30; Dt 17:6; 19:15). (CSB)

Lit, “sons of Belial” (cf Jgs 19:22). (TLSB)

scoundrels. See note on Dt 13:13. (CSB)

have them testify. The entire scenario was designed to give an appearance of legitimate judicial procedure (see Ex 20:16; 23:7; Lev 19:16). (CSB)

he has cursed both God and the king. For this the Mosaic law prescribed death by stoning (Lev 24:15–16). (CSB)

As though he were hostile to established order. (TLSB)

21:13 *sat opposite him*. The fast apparently included an assembly and perhaps rituals. (TLSB)

outside the city. In accordance with Mosaic law (Lev 24:14; Nu 15:35–36). Naboth was stoned on his own field (compare v. 19 with 2Ki 9:21, 26), and his sons were stoned with him (see 2Ki 9:26; cf. the case of Achan, Jos 7:24–25), thus also eliminating his heirs. (CSB)

stoned him. Penalty prescribed in Lv 24:13–16. (TLSB)

21:15 *take possession*. Property reverted to the king if its owner was executed or if there were no rightful heirs. (TLSB)

21:1–16 When Naboth refuses to sell his vineyard to Ahab, Queen Jezebel schemes to charge Naboth with cursing God. Having been falsely accused, Naboth is stoned to death, and Ahab takes possession of the vineyard in violation of God’s commandment (Ex 20:17). We are constantly tempted to get what we want at the expense of others. Instead of taking from others, Jesus gave Himself for us. In sacrificing His life for the sins of the world, He gave us the priceless treasure of life and salvation. • Lord Jesus, touch our cold and loveless hearts, and fill them with the warmth of Your love, that we may reach out to all who are in need. Amen. (TLSB)

21:17–24 Chem: “Certain statements of Scripture do not speak of the remission of guilt and eternal punishment but of the remission of temporal punishment which is turned away sometimes through a complete repentance” (*LTh* 2:642). (TLSB)

21:19 *Thus says the LORD.* Luth: “Ahab ... had his triumph with Jezebel after having killed Naboth, but God had the last word” (AE 17:74). (TLSB)

Have you not murdered a man and seized his property? Ahab’s willing compliance with Jezebel’s scheme made him guilty of murder and theft. (CSB)

In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood. Ahab’s subsequent repentance (v. 29) occasioned the postponement of certain aspects of this prophecy until the time of his son Joram, whose body was thrown on the field of Naboth (2Ki 9:25–26). Ahab himself was killed in battle at Ramoth Gilead (22:29–37) and his body brought to Samaria, where the dogs licked the blood being washed from his chariot (22:38). (CSB)

Lit rendering; could also mean “instead of.” Cf Hos 1:10. Naboth was killed at Jezreel (v 13); Ahab, at Samaria (22:38). The corpse of Ahab’s son J[eh]oram was thrown into Naboth’s vineyard (2Ki 9:25). (TLSB)

21:20 *Have you found me.* Sarcasm, since Ahab had struggled previously to find Elijah. (TLSB)

sold yourself. As a person sells himself to slavery to pay his debts. Ahab is totally given to his evil. (TLSB)

21:21 *slave or free.* See note on 14:10. (CSB)

21:22 *like that of Jeroboam.* See 14:10; 15:28–30. (CSB)

that of Baasha. See 16:3–4, 11–13. (CSB)

21:23 *eat Jezebel.* See the fulfillment in 2Ki 9:35–37. (TLSB)

21:24 See notes on 14:11; 16:4. (CSB)

21:24 To not have a proper burial was considered a great shame.

21:17–24 Elijah goes to meet Ahab while he is in Naboth’s vineyard. There Elijah boldly prophesies the death of Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Risking his own welfare, Elijah speaks God’s Law to Ahab. Thanks be to God, His Word does not end with the Law but includes the precious Gospel as a key to forgiveness and heaven. • Almighty Judge, Your Law condemns the sinful lives we lead. Forgive us for Jesus’ sake, and create in us new hearts that are set to obey Your Commandments. Amen. (TLSB)

21:25 *urged on by Jezebel.* See 16:31; 18:4; 19:1–2; 21:7. (CSB)

Ahab was soft clay in the strong hands of evil Jezebel, the “Lady Macbeth” of the OT. She did not share his repentance (vv 27–29). (TLSB)

21:26 *Amorites.* Here a designation for the entire pre-Israelite population of Canaan (see Ge 15:16; Dt 1:7). (CSB)

21:27 *sackcloth.* See note on Ge 37:34. (CSB)

Wearing this coarse garment was a sign of mourning. (TLSB)

21:29 *in the days of his son.* The judgment was postponed but not rescinded (see note on v. 19). (CSB)

The death of his son J[eh]oram is recorded in 2Ki 9:24; the extermination of his house, in 2Ki 10:1–11. Cf Is 39:5–8, which tells of God’s mercy to Hezekiah. (TLSB)

21:25–29 Having been confronted by Elijah, Ahab shows repentance and humbles himself before God. God’s Law is powerful, as evidenced in the case of Elijah and Ahab. The power of God’s Word—both Law and Gospel—surpasses mere human eloquence and brings life-changing results. Yet, only the Gospel provides forgiveness and new life. • O God, forsake me not. Grant me sincere and lifelong repentance, coupled with sincere and bold faith. Amen. (TLSB)