



THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

LESSON 8: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 21)

In our study of 1Kings 20 we noted that even though Ahab was twice victorious in battle against Ben-hadad of Aram, the chapter sets up God's judgment against the Israelite king. He could have learned the vital lesson that Jehovah is the Lord (1Kings 20.13,28) and that allegiance to Him would grant safety and security, but instead Ahab was content with an alliance with the Syrian king (1Kings 20.34). As a result, the Lord declared that "your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people" (1Kings 20.42). The chapter concluded with the king of Israel returning to his capital "sullen and vexed," perhaps setting up the events of chapter 21. Was Ahab seeking to purchase Naboth's vineyard as a means of cheering himself? Interestingly, Ahab who had just shown himself as merciful to the Arameans, would show himself as a despot to his people.

1Kings 21.25 declares, "surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife incited him." This statement is made immediately following their treachery in dealing with Naboth, and to better understand their treachery we must first understand the importance of the land to Israel. First, the land was the inheritance of Israel and was divided first by tribes then by individual families in each tribe (Numbers 26.52-56). And since the land was their inheritance, it was not to be transferred from one tribe to another (Numbers 36.7-8). Finally, consider the Lord's words in Leviticus 25.23, "'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.'" The Lord went on to provide for how the land could be redeemed (vss. 24-28), but His point was clear: it was His land and the promised inheritance of His people. And what He had provided for His people should remain theirs. Thus, Ahab and Jezebel didn't just commit murder and theft, they deprived Naboth and his family of their rightful inheritance. And they would be judged for it!

NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1
 - » Jezreel was ~ 23 miles from Samaria. "The site of Jezreel has a commanding view of the Jezreel Valley's eastern bay. From there one can see the Carmel range to the west, the central mountains of Ephraim to the south, as well as Mount Gilboa and the heights of Gilead to the east—most of the territory in Ahab's kingdom. The city's low elevation made it an ideal spot for the winter palace of the Omride dynasty." (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)
 - » "Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel" the language here emphasizes that this land was part of his inheritance. The land is in Jezreel, Naboth was from Jezreel.
- Vs. 2, Israel's king should have protected the rights of the people (see Deuteronomy 17.14-20), but God revealed that their kings would oppress them (1Samuel 8.14). Ahab's request smacks of the latter.

- Vs. 3, see Numbers 26.52-56; Leviticus 25.23-28.
- Vss. 5-7, Jezebel the daughter of the Sidonian king (1Kings 16.31) was not accustomed to a king being refused by a citizen. She fashions Israel into a despotic kingdom. "This passage is believed to represent a true distinction between the rights extended to the king in Israel and those current in Phoenicia. Differences involve issues concerning (1) the ultimate ownership of land and (2) the absolute power of the king. In the first category, Israelites believed that all the land was Yahweh's land, while the Phoenicians would have seen land as royal fiefdoms—all land was on grant from the king. In the second category, Israelite kingship was designed to be less despotic than most monarchies—the king was not above the law. Jezebel would not have been accustomed to such niceties." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vss. 9-14
 - » A fast would be proclaimed during difficult times or in times of mourning (see 2Chronicles 20.3-4). Perhaps this was proclaimed in relation to a time of famine.
 - » "The prominent seating of Naboth would reflect his status in the community and sets him up for the contention that his actions were capable of affecting the entire community. The two false witnesses are seated near him so that they can claim to have heard his words." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » "Isaiah 8:21 features the combination of cursing both God and king in the context of fixing blame for hardship or crisis. As the community is being led in this fast to seek the cause of their crisis, these two planted witnesses claim that they heard Naboth fixing blame for the crisis on God and the king." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
 - » "worthless men" = sons of Belial, see 2Corinthians 6.15.
- Vs. 18, "Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria" doesn't mean that Ahab was currently in Samaria, rather that was the seat of his power.
- Vs. 19, the fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in stages. First, Ahab's blood was licked up by dogs (1Kings 22.38), but then his son Joram was cast on this ground (2Kings 9.25-26).
- Vs. 20, Ahab had broken two of the ten commandments by coveting his neighbor's land (Exodus 20.17) and by committing murder (Exodus 20.13).
- Vs. 23, see 2Kings 9.30-37.
- Vs. 29, not the only occasion where repentance temporarily deferred punishment (see Jonah 3.10).

TAKEAWAYS:

1. **Justice will be done... ultimately.** Ahab should have upheld justice in Israel, but tragically he was the source of injustice. Naboth was powerless to stop the treachery committed by Ahab, Jezebel and their willing accomplices. Yet, Jehovah's pronouncement of judgment on Ahab, Jezebel and all their descendants emphasizes the fact that the Lord will ultimately execute justice (vss. 19-24).
2. **The mercy of God.** The mercifulness of God is exhibited throughout Scripture, but who would think He would exhibit mercy to Ahab? Yet, that exactly what the Lord did when Ahab exhibited contrition (vss. 27-29). Truly, the Lord does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2Peter 3.9).

3. **An inheritance that cannot be taken away.** As we noted at the beginning of the lesson, the treachery of Ahab and Jezebel extended beyond theft and murder; they deprived Naboth and his family of their rightful inheritance (see Numbers 26.52-56; Leviticus 25.23). Praise God that we have obtained “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1Peter 1.4).