

# 1 KINGS 21

## COVETING, MURDER, POWER PLAYS AND REPENTANCE; HOW DO WE DEFINE “NORMAL”?

One of the constant themes we have seen throughout our study in Kings is that of obedience. That seems like it ought to be a “no-brainer.” However, the issue of disobedience can creep into our lives more easily than we might think. It is easy to see this when it comes to an episode of God, an angel or a prophet speaking directly to someone in the Bible. When we have such a supernatural manifestation, particularly with marching orders, we think, ‘That should be easy to heed.’ But what about when it comes to the everyday things that don’t necessarily jump out at us?

What we learn about the Law, the Torah, is that it is so different from the way the surrounding nations behaved, that the Israelites often defaulted to the cultural norms. Many times, they did this because the norms just seemed like the right thing to do. We can fall into the same trap. What we have to do is go back to the Word of God to inform us. And it most often has us swimming upstream, against what society says is ok.

We are about to read of Ahab wanting someone else’s property and making what we would consider a legitimate offer. But there is more in play here than we might think.

### THE PLOT OF MAN

*1Kings 21:1 Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. <sup>2</sup> And after this Ahab said to Naboth, ‘Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable*

*garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.”<sup>3</sup> But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.”<sup>4</sup> And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said 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.*

- Ahab sees Naboth’s vineyard and offers to swap properties with him or, to buy it for cash.
- What is wrong with that?
- Naboth refuses, stating that, “*The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.*”
- What does Naboth mean?
- **Lev. 25:23** “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.<sup>24</sup> And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.
- The land was God’s and was meant to stay in the family. It wasn’t to be sold. Ahab should have known this. Naboth was following the Law. Ahab wasn’t.
- Ahab goes home and pouts. We see that he is a weak man, in many regards. We also see that he is a covetous man. And his pouting and coveting is about to lead to an even greater travesty. But once again, it all comes from refusing to live according to God’s Law.
- This is where most of us go wrong. When we refuse to live according to God’s Law, which operates according to God’s character, even in the so called, “little things,” we are wrong and nothing good can come from it.

*1Kings 21:5 But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?”<sup>6</sup> And 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’”<sup>7</sup> And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”*

- Jezebel sees Ahab pouting in his room and asks him, “Do you govern Israel?”
- “Are you the king or not? Are you a man or a mouse?”
- Jezebel, as she has done in the past, takes the bull by the horns and hatches a plot in order to give her weak husband what he wants, and also to show everyone who is boss.
- She is breaking the Law, making a power-play. She is using her position and power to take advantage of the vulnerable.
- This is contrary to all for which God stands.
- Her plot.

*1Kings 21:8 “So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. <sup>9</sup> And she wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. <sup>10</sup> And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” <sup>11</sup> And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, <sup>12</sup> they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. <sup>13</sup> And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people,*

*saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. <sup>14</sup> Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”*

***1Kings 21:15** As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, 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.” <sup>16</sup> And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.*

- Jezebel has some men call a fast and sets up Naboth with false charges of cursing God and the king.
- Naboth is killed.
- Naboth is innocent, yet he dies at the hands of evil people. It happens. But God is working out a bigger plan.
- It isn't always as simple as the innocent always winning. In fact, in this world, many times it works out the opposite way. Naboth goes to his reward, but Ahab and Jezebel are left here until they have to pay the price for their deeds.
- Any way you slice it, God is in control.
- And now we see God enter the picture through His prophet, Elijah.

ENTER THE PROPHET – GOD’S RESPONSE; Elijah is back on the job.

*1Kings 21:17* Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, <sup>18</sup> “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. <sup>19</sup> And you shall say to him, “Thus says the LORD, “Have you killed and also taken possession?”” And you shall say to him, “Thus says the LORD: <sup>20</sup> “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.””

- God tells Elijah where to go, what to do and what to say. He complies.

*1Kings 21:20* Ahab said to Elijah, <sup>20</sup> “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because <sup>21</sup> you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>21</sup> Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and <sup>22</sup> will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. <sup>22</sup> And I will make your house like <sup>23</sup> the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like <sup>24</sup> the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you <sup>25</sup> have made Israel to sin. <sup>23</sup> And of Jezebel the LORD also said, <sup>24</sup> “The dogs shall eat Jezebel within <sup>25</sup> the walls of Jezreel.” <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”

- I find the relationship between Ahab and Elijah interesting. It’s almost like what you see in a movie between a superhero and a supervillain. Though they are at odds in massive ways, they can still have a civil conversation.

- What has made God so angry? Elijah tells us that Ahab has, “sold himself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.” What does that mean?
- Ahab is bent on doing what is wrong. He always has been. Even though he made what to us looks like a legitimate offer, he wanted what the Law said he couldn’t have.
- He knew better. But he didn’t have Naboth killed, his wife did. Now I would ask Ahab, “Do you govern Israel, or does she?” He went along with it. He is culpable.
- What has made God so angry? Using one’s power to take advantage of the vulnerable.
- Torah is there to protect the vulnerable, among other things. It mirrors God’s character. This is why the Law is so important, and we have seen Ahab use his position and power to take advantage of others. He has consistently broken the Law, in his lust for power and gain. He is not a “servant leader.” And in his weakness, he is fine with allowing his evil wife to exploit others.
- We then get a summary of Ahab’s life and reign.

*1Kings 21:25 (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. <sup>26</sup> He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.)*

Do any of us want this epitaph written on our tombstones?

*1Kings 21:27 And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. <sup>28</sup> And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, <sup>29</sup> “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled*

*himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”*

- Ahab repents. That is something new.
- But why has it taken such stark judgement to bring him to this place? Elijah gives us the answer. His heart was set to do evil.
- But what about when the disobedience isn't so obvious? What about when we are disobedient because we are in default mode – just doing what the culture says is normal?
- Do we force God's hand, when we continue in our disobedience, to push Him to the place of having to respond in such a harsh manner?

#### APPLICATION:

- Like Ahab, when we can't have what we want, do we pout? Do we covet?
- Do we cherry pick through scripture and then justify our sin?
- When we see someone upset at not being able to get what they can't have, do we respond like Jezebel? Do we enable them, maybe justifying our actions by saying we are being nice or helping them?
- Do we bite our tongues and not speak truth in order to come across as being sweeter than Jesus?
- Are we afraid of being seen as critical?

You see, the law that Naboth was following was seen as a trivial thing in Jezebel's eyes. She knew something of the Law, that is why she hatched the plot that killed Naboth. It had the look of being legitimate and legal. But she also felt that her position allowed her to take what she wanted. She overlooked the Law and its character. She ignored God's character, though she had seen Him move in miraculous ways.



Ahab was culpable. He attempted to take possession of the vineyard, though he still had no legal grounds to do so. As a result, an innocent man was slandered and killed.

These things stick out at us. But if we look at it as more than just murder – if we see it as “overlooking” what some might say was a small thing, the perpetual ownership of the land, in order to make what looked like a legitimate deal, then we must also see what caused God to act in the way He did.

God doesn't approve of us not living according to His Word, even when it seems like a small thing. And if you pay attention to the narratives in the OT, you see Him step into events, particularly when the vulnerable are being abused. And any time we are acting contrary to God's Word, even if it isn't obvious, even when it seems like a legitimate thing according to the prevailing thoughts and culture, someone is being victimized. Someone is being abused.

But maybe this is the one time, Ahab can be an example to us. Ahab repented. This is one of the few times we don't read that he went home, “sullen and vexed.” What, was the result his repentance? God stayed the portion of the prophecy that his line, the Omride dynasty, would be cut off. Ahab wouldn't have to see that. It would happen later, in Second Kings. Ahab will still be replaced. He will die. But that is because he later goes against God's will. Ahab is repentant at this point, on this matter, but he will eventually return to his sinful nature.

We really need to take the marching orders of our lives from God's Word and not from the prevailing culture. The culture “normalizes” things. Through the media, over time, the culture desensitizes us to what is wrong in God's eyes. Foul language that once was seen as abhorrent is now commonplace, even among Christians. People, even Christians engage in sex outside of marriage. They live together. This is done under the guise of love. Men marry men and women marry women. This is done under the guise of love. And love is harmless, right? I imagine Jezebel did what she did out of love for her husband. But when we go to the Word of God, we see that even what most say is love, is an exploitation of someone else. And God doesn't take that lightly.



So, what is the answer? What should our response be? In this case, it should be the same as Ahab's – repentance.

Let's look at what the world sees as normal, then compare it to the Word of God, repent and make an about face.