

# 1 Kings 21:1-29 // Naboth, Ahab, and the mercy of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following is 1 Kings 21, verses 17 to 29, and this can be found on page 364.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the Tishbite. 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.

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. 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, he says, I am going to bring disaster on you.

[ 1 : 24 ] I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel, slave or free. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and that of Bashar, son of Hejar, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.

And also concerning Jezebel, the Lord says, dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country.

There was never anyone like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel, his wife.

He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel. When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted.

He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite. Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me?

[ 2 : 48 ] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks very much, Kathy. Obviously the 11.30 service starts a little bit later, so I can see a few more bushy eyes after people staying up for the football.

If you did, please come and chat to me. I made that unwise decision to watch that horrible football game. But here we are, and I'm very thankful that we can put our trust in the Lord Jesus rather than Steve Clark.

Let's look at God's word together. Let me pray before we go. Father God, we thank you so much for your words. Help us now to be people who read it, who hear you speak and obey.

We might not end up as people like Ahab did, who reject your words and face the consequences, but as people who are one in Jesus. Help us now to understand. Help me to speak clearly and faithfully to your words.

[ 3 : 50 ] I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder how you respond if someone tells you no or starts telling you to stop doing something. A new favorite thing for me to watch is, and many of you will know this well, is watching little children ignoring their parents when they tell them no.

And specifically little kids below the age of around one. You know, the kids who you look at and go, well, they're not speaking yet. Maybe they don't understand what's happening. And then you see their little face when they're doing the thing, and they're kind of like, you know, side-eyeing it.

They definitely know what the word no means, and they like to just ignore it and keep going. It's funny. It's funny watching it and seeing what's going on.

But it's one of those excellent moments where little children reflect a true sense of humanity, because kids are just little humans. They have the same heart problems we do. And we don't like

being told what to do.

We love to ignore being told off. If someone is trying to tell us to stop doing something, it's much easier to ignore it. It's maybe give them a little of a side-eye and just kind of keep going.

[ 4 : 56 ] Or we might take a bit of a strop, just like a toddler. King Ahab in our story today is someone who does not like being told no. So, chapter 20, which we've moved over to get to chapter 21, ends with a prophet speaking to Ahab, telling him he's going to die because he has not done what God commanded him to.

And rather than listening to God's words, what Ahab does is he slinks back to his palace, vexed and sullen. He's a bit grumpy. This is the state of mind that Ahab is in as we start chapter 21.

And you know what makes me feel better if I've been told no, I'm a bit grumpy? Getting something new. And that's what Ahab does. He sits in his palace and he looks out over the window and he sees a lovely vineyard at the end of his garden.

And Ahab decides he wants that vineyard. So he goes to meet the owner and make him an offer he can't refuse. He offers to take the vineyard from Naboth and Ahab will give him money or, you know, he'll swap him a better vineyard.

What could go wrong? Well, Naboth says no. And just like in chapter 20, Ahab does not like being told no.

[ 6 : 15 ] So he goes off sullen and vexed. And essentially, he takes a little bit of a hissy fit. Look in verse 4. He lies in his bed sulking and refuses to eat.

That is proper toddler behavior, isn't it? It's just totally embarrassing. This is Israel's king. This story would be almost like pathetic satire about a weak king if it just ended with him all sad in his bed.

But as you get through this story, it unfolds into a tragedy. The queen, Jezebel, Ahab's wife, she returns to the palace and finds her royal husband acting like a spurned toddler hiding in his bed.

The duvet pulled up, refusing to eat anything. Look with me at verse 7. See how she responds.

Wives, I wonder if you might respond the same way if your husband did this. After Ahab explains what the problem is, she says this.

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. The question is dripping in sarcasm, isn't it?

[ 7 : 29 ] Is this how you act as the king over Israel? You see, Jezebel, her dad was a king. She knew what it looked like to wield power to get what you want.

And it's about time that she wields power to get Ahab what he wanted. So she sets a conspiracy. She writes notes in Ahab's name to the nobles and the elders conspiring to kill Naboth.

It's simple. They'll host a party. Naboth will be at the head, honored. But he'll be sitting across from two scoundrels. And those scoundrels will make something up. They'll accuse him of blasphemy, of speaking against the lord and the king.

And the people will take him out and stone him. We find out this conspiracy doesn't actually just end with Naboth. In 2 Kings we hear that Naboth's whole family was killed, all of his sons.

Jezebel did not want any awkward questions about inheritance coming along. And Jezebel's plan was enacted perfectly. And Naboth's body was left bleeding in a ditch outside the city.

[ 8 : 37 ] As she returns to Ahab and gives him the vineyards. It's almost comedic in absurdity. Can you imagine if a world leader would do that today?

Look at some lands. Decide he wanted it. Asked for it. Told no. Goes off in a huff. You're just glad Truth Social didn't exist in Ahab's day. Can you imagine what he'd have posted?

This story is actually an unjust tragedy. It's not just an unfortunate story. We've been given it in our Bibles. That we might reflect on the depths of Ahab's sin.

And try to figure out where we sit within this story. Who are we meant to relate to? So what we're going to do now. We've covered the story. Quick fire. We're going to pick out some details. And try and figure out what is going on here.

What are we meant to take away? It's worth knowing that throughout scripture. The vineyard is used as a picture of God's people Israel. And so it is quite interesting.

[ 9 : 40 ] That the center of this narrative is a vineyard. A vineyard that Ahab the king wants to take for his own selfish needs. He doesn't just want to take it.

He wants to take this vineyard. And turn it into his own personal vegetable garden. Did you spot that in verse 2? Look there with me. It's quite a strange little phrase. It only exists one other place in the Old Testament.

And it's used in Deuteronomy 11. So this story is a little bit more than just a grumpy king acting like a toddler.

This is a story where the king of Israel wants to take God's people. And use them for his own selfish gain. Ahab is giving strong Pharaoh vibes here.

Using wealth and power to take what he wants when he wants it. And the only thing that stops Ahab doing this. Is a faithful man called Naboth.

[10:45] Who stands firm. In this whole first half. Naboth is the only person who mentions the Lord. So look with me at verse 3 to see why Naboth says no.

The Lord forbids that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors. This is the land that God gifted to Naboth's family.

Naboth has roots here. He can't just hand over his vineyard for another one. Because God didn't give the other one. Instead, Ahab is trying to take it for himself.

And Naboth ends up paying a painful price for standing firm in the face of this royal pressure. Like many people throughout history, Naboth is killed for choosing to stand on God's words.

He is killed by people trying to take God's place and rule for their own selfish desires. But in this story, it's not just Ahab who acts like God's.

[11:50] Notice how Jezebel too tries to take God's place on Ahab's behalf. Throughout this whole story, she's constantly twisting things God says for her own means and Ahab's benefit.

Look at verse 7. She tells Ahab to get up and eat. Which is the exact phrase God told Elijah in chapter 18 verse 7 that we saw last week. Get up and eat.

Or verse 15. Jezebel tells Ahab to get up and take possession of the vineyards. That is almost a direct quote from Moses in Deuteronomy. Where Moses tells the people, Go up and take possession of the land the Lord swore he would give you.

Ahab and Jezebel want to take God's place. They want to take the promised land and rule it for themselves. Nothing's going to stop them taking it, perverting it and using it for their own gain.

This really is a miserable affair all around that ends in the death of an innocent man. Notice how Ahab does not once question what happened to Naboth.

[12:58] There's no attempt by this king of Israel to care for or defend his people. Instead we just see a happy toddler who finally gets what he wanted.

That is what Ahab's greatest failure is. Ahab's most serious failure is to ignore the suffering of God's people and reject God's words. It's interesting to note the thing he gets called out there for.

He doesn't kill Naboth himself. He does not commit that sin. Rather his greatest flaw is omitting to do what is right. Ahab is a very bad king because he does not protect God's people.

But Ahab is not unique in that. He might be the very worst king Israel have. But the writer wants us to see that that is not a one-off. He's actually the pinnacle.

He's an example of the selfish sin that all the kings have struggled with and will struggle with. You see Ahab is the seventh king of Israel. Seventh is a number that represents fullness in the Bible.

[14:04] And in Ahab we see the seventh king representing the fullness of evil. You can imagine as the first readers were listening or the people who were living in this time might have thought, Oh, I wish we had a better king.

I wish we lived in the time of David when everything was good. Except David faced the same problem Ahab did. You see this is not the first time a king has sent a letter to have someone killed unjustly that he might take what he wants.

In King David's worst moments he saw a woman he wanted for his wife. So he sends a letter that condemns Uriah the Hittite to death so he could take Bathsheba.

David sees, he wants, he conspires, he takes. Does that ring any bells from our story this morning? Even the greatest king had the same problem as the worst king.

And there's no sense in the Israelites thinking, well maybe the next one will be alright. Because every other earthly king will fall to power. They will misuse what they have for their own gain.

[15:21] That is what the writer wants us to see. The great problem of every political power is they have evil in their hearts. They always want what they can't have and yet take it anyway.

But we're not meant to put these kings on a, well, what's the opposite of a pedestal? We're not to think they're worse than we are or we are better than them. Instead, this story also helps us see that Ahab's problem is the same problem all of humanity faces.

This was not a one-man conspiracy. Everyone in Jezreel got involved. Look at verse 8. Letters were sent to the elders and the nobles, those in charge. They said yes immediately to this command. The scoundrels were in on it. They loved getting involved pretty quickly. And even in verse 12, This story is a picture of Israel's total brokenness.

Ahab is a figurehead for the rampant problem of selfish sin that Israel were struggling with. This whole story has a real end of judges vibes.

[ 16 : 34 ] Everyone is doing what was right in their own eyes for their own gain. They didn't care about anyone else. And that is not a problem limited to the time of Ahab and Israel.

We continue to live in a post-fall world where everyone sees what they want and acts to take it for themselves. Ahab's actually a really helpful definition of sin for us.

You see, Ahab ignores the word of God. And instead sees what he wants and takes it as if he is the God of his own life. Doesn't matter what the cost is.

And that is sin. Humanity has always done the same. Ignored the word of God and tried to sit on the throne themselves. We might not organize a conspiracy to kill an innocent man.

But we today all still ignore God's words and try to take his throne. We hate being told no. It might be that we strive for control in our lives.

[ 17 : 33 ] And there's some area we can't have it. So in other areas we grasp for it. Maybe it's in your life you're grasping for control of the finances in your house.

Maybe you're unwilling to spend money on things that will benefit other people but only hoard it for yourself. Or maybe we desire power like Jezebel. So we speak down on those around us.

We lie and do whatever we can to make ourselves seem better and gain more power in whatever situation we're in. Or maybe we're a little bit like Ahab.

We like easy lives. No stress. So we suppress the hard things in our lives and instead give in to self-soothing habits. Maybe it's addictions.

Alcohol, porn, shopping, drugs. Or maybe we just seek a life of pleasure by ignoring the things that are hard. By omitting to do what is right.

[ 18 : 32 ] We ignore the person in our workplace who is lying to get ahead. We turn a blind eye to someone who is doing wrong and hope that we'll be okay. All of these things are symptoms of the same selfish sin that Ahab has.

It is saying no to God's words and putting ourself on the throne thinking we know best. Ahab reflects all of humanity with his selfish sin problem and it is right to think how do I do the same.

But he's not the only person we can connect to in this passage. We might also recognize ourselves in Naboth. Naboth who stood alone standing on God's words and the promises God made to his family.

And in clinging to God's word he was murdered. Not one person defended him. Not one person cared that he died. You might be in a situation where you're being mistreated for standing on God's words.

For listening and living your life according to what Jesus has told you. Those with power will always hate it when you say no to them. Maybe you've lost jobs, friends, respects.

[ 19 : 46 ] Around the world there are people losing their lives for trusting in God's words. These injustices happen. We don't get to ignore it. Kings does not pretend this doesn't happen.

We can't try and respond to this by turning ourselves into a political power. By trying to be the one in charge that we might not commit injustice.

Because it doesn't work. And we shouldn't side with people who are misusing their power because we think it will benefit us. Even if they're doing it for their own political advantage.

The only thing we can stand firm on is God's words. And we may suffer injustice. We may be mistreated.

Others might not care. They might ignore what is happening to you. But there is someone who sees. There is someone who cares. And there is someone who will act on these injustices.

[ 20 : 47 ] Let's move on to the second half of our passage. And see exactly how God's word comes in to bring justice to the injustice of Naboth's death.

It is in verse 17 that Elijah the Tishbite once more is called into our narrative. And once again he's called to prophesy to evil King Ahab. And once again the word he has for evil King Ahab is not good.

Look with me at verse 19. The Lord says, Say to Ahab, this is what the Lord says. Have you not murdered a man and seized his property? In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood.

Yes, yours. And even in the face of this prophecy, it seems that Ahab doesn't care about God's words. Because his first response is to Elijah the man.

Verse 20. So you have found me, my enemy. It almost reads like a really cheesy movie villain facing off against the hero. As if Elijah's been on some great quest to find him.

[ 21 : 55 ] In reality, this was not a difficult search. I have found you because you sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. Ahab thinks he's bigger than he is.

He's not bigger than God. God has seen everything that he has done. The murders. The thefts. The ways that he was bought off.

The idolatry he led Israel towards. And God is angry. He is angry that Naboth was killed for blasphemy by a blasphemer.

He is angry that the righteous are being killed while the unrighteous enjoy unrestrained pleasure. But judgment is coming. The unclean dogs will lick Ahab's blood.

Jezebel's blood. They will be dead and left to die for their rejection of God's words. It will be a completely unceremonious death for a king who has acted so unceremoniously.

[ 22 : 57 ] The injustice of Naboth losing his vineyard and his life will not be left unchecked. And the guilty today will pay the price for ignoring God's word and killing his people.

There is no running from this judgment. Look at verse 24. Those in the city and those in the fields. Those in the hills and those in the country will all face God's justice. They cannot run. Justice will find the people who wrong God's people.

And when Christ returns, no one can escape. We can be sure of that. We can hold firm to God's words when he tells us that. No matter how hard it may seem.

It would be, I think, quite right for the story to end here. You know, we'd move swiftly into chapter 22 where Ahab dies. Ahab dies. Spoiler alert. But it doesn't.

The chapter keeps going. Instead, in verse 25, we get this little interesting author's notes. Again, look with me. This is a damning summary of Ahab's life and reign.

[ 24 : 04 ] There was never anyone like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel, his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.

Ahab was such a very bad king that he took Israel back to the worst extent of idolatry. That it may as well be that the Amorites lived in the promised land now.

There are few people in the whole Bible who deserve God's judgment more than Ahab. But that is still not where our passage ends. Look at verse 27.

Verse 27. When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite. For the very first time in his life, it seems Ahab has listened to the word of God.

[ 25 : 34 ] The beginning and the end of our chapter, they're fathoms apart. We had the moping toddler Ahab, who hated that he was told no, is now showing genuine signs of remorse for what he has done.

For the first time in his reign, Ahab listens to God's words. And he grieves and mourns what he's been told. From sullen and angry to meek and humble.

And then in verse 28, it gets even more shocking. It's almost like God nudges Elijah. Hey, Elijah. Have you seen what's happening with Ahab? He's humbled himself. I think this might be the most shocking moment in all of scripture. When the very worst king in Israel's entire history hears God's words and receives some mercy.

I say some mercy. Ahab is sorrowful here. He doesn't seem to truly repent. He shows remorse for what he's done.

[ 26 : 44 ] He regrets what has happened. But he does not turn back to the Lord's ways. He does not go on to live God's word and do as he says. Ahab shows remorse.

And so God shows mercy in postponing his judgment. It is not canceled. Justice will still prevail. And we will see in the coming chapters that Ahab will still face up to his actions.

And his children will suffer the consequences of his selfishness. Selfishness. And their own. But in God's mercy. Ahab will not see his own children die.

For now. In this moment. Ahab. Receives mercy. For his humility. What does that tell us about our God?

The Lord Yahweh. Loves. To show mercy. He is eager. To show mercy. To those who are humble. Before him. If God's response to Ahab's remorse.

[ 27 : 48 ] Is this kind of mercy. How much more might we see. When someone truly repents. And turns back to God. If the very worst king.

Doing the very worst thing. Can still be shown mercy by God. Then there is no one. Who can sin so much. That God will not show. Their humble repentance mercy.

When they hear God's word. There are. Former gang members. Murderers. People who have done the most abhorrent things. Throughout the world. Who heard God's words.

Who saw their selfish sin. And turned to him in grief. For their actions. And asking for his forgiveness. And the Lord looked upon him.

Looked upon them. And said. See how they have humbled themselves. Before me. I will bring them into my house. Because they have turned to my son. Whoever you are.

[ 28 : 44 ] Whatever you have done. Hear God's words. Come now. Before the Lord. For he is merciful and kind. Full of compassion.

And slow to anger. There is no selfishness in your life. That is too great for his mercy. But be careful not to fall into Ahab's mistake.

Do not only show remorse. Without repentance. Because to truly hear God's word. Is to say no to the things we have done before. And turn to Jesus.

To turn away from our selfishness. Humbly pursuing the Lord. And asking for his forgiveness. We need to respond like Naboth does.

And stand firm in the words of God. But I think often when we hear that kind of sentence. We think it means we have got to do something.

[ 29 : 43 ] That we need to be the one whose strength stands firm. But thankfully that's not how mercy works. It won't rely on how well you hear. It does not require your works or efforts.

Instead we rely on one who has gone before us like Naboth. And said no to the lies and requests of evil. Jesus was taken up onto a great high mountain.

Where he saw the entire world. As Satan said to him. I will give you everything. If you come and follow me. Jesus said no.

He did not submit. But stood firm. Relying on God's word. As it is written. And then Jesus like Naboth. Became the victim of false testimonies.

There were scoundrels. Who brought false charges. That led to an unjust conviction. And Jesus like Naboth. Was taken out of the city.

[ 30 : 44 ] Where his blood was shed. Jesus is the one. Who stands firm forever in the word of God. Jesus is the one.

Who declares this word faithfully. To every single one of us. But not only that. He embodied it perfectly. He is the word we need to hear.

To respond to. To turn back to. We have this picture perfect prophet. Declaring God's word to us. And that word is this.

Because of his unjust death. Because of his obedience to God's words. We can be absolutely certain. That we are washed clean.

We are given grace. And mercy. And forgiveness. Praise God for our truer Naboth. And praise God for his abundant mercy. If you are a saint.

[ 31 : 41 ] Who is struggling with sin. Do not hold back. From the fountain of God's mercy. There is nothing. That can keep you away. Repent of your selfish ways.

And get back on the path with Jesus. If you are here for the first time. And you are struck by the weight of your selfish sin. Hear this word of God.

There is forgiveness for those who are with Jesus. Do not only regret what you have done. But turn to God and ask for his forgiveness. And it is there.

Every single one of us. Struggle against the sinful selfishness of following humanity. But we have been offered a way back. Let's go beyond that remorse of Ahab.

And into true repentance. And the powerful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me pray. Father God we thank you.

[ 32 : 37 ] That there is one. Who is greater than Naboth. Who suffered the same unjust fate. And whose blood was shed. And yet in that great injustice.

We might now know mercy and forgiveness. Lord help us to hear your words. To respond truly in repentance. We ask for your help going forward.

That we might really live for you. Standing firm in your word. No matter what happens to us. From those who hate you. Help us now. To repent truly. And follow you.

In Jesus name. Amen.