

# "Naboth's Vineyard"

1 Kings 21

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## Introduction:

Most of us would probably agree that we are living in a world where people seem to do just about anything to avoid getting caught in sinful behavior. And yet from Eliot Spitzer to Larry Craig to Ken Lay, the rich and the powerful continue to think that they are above the law. And at all levels of society, people continue to think that they will be able to avoid being held accountable for sin.

Perhaps some of you are aware of a rather new company based near Chicago, referred to as the Alibi Network. **\*\*PPT\*\*** According to their website, they appear to specialize in helping people avoid getting caught for what they know they should not be doing. One of their specialties is, "...a carefully constructed 2-5 day alibi package." And so if you want to get away from your wife for a few days, they will coordinate the complete package. They will call you in advance to confirm a seminar for work. They will mail you a conference invitation. They will send you an overview of topics. They will send you an e-ticket confirmation and fake airline tickets. Apparently, the scheme involves a fake company—complete with a website and a toll-free number. And so if your wife calls, the number will be answered 24 hours a day by a highly trained receptionist who will then handle the call any way you want her to. She can put the call through to the voicemail at your bogus hotel room, or to any other phone anywhere in the world. Even after the phony seminar, they will send you a certificate of completion 10 days after the training has been completed. By way of follow-up, they can e-mail you digitally modified photos of you pictured with other participants at the training at any location. According to the website, "**We offer complete phone support and any other backup you might need.**" And their phone number is 1 (877) ALIBI-ME (I hope that no one wrote down that phone number)! Very interesting!

However, trying to get away with sin is not something that is new to the suburbs of Chicago in modern times. In fact, for a prime example of a horrible sin with an attempted cover-up, we can go all the way back to **1 Kings 21**. The passage that we are about to study describes something that was done roughly 850 years before the time of Christ. The passage describes something that happened during the reign of King Ahab and his wicked wife, Queen Jezebel.

As I was doing the research for this morning's lesson, I ran across an interesting discovery. **\*\*PPT\*\*** Apparently, archaeologists have discovered an intricate seal that is suspected to have belonged to Queen Jezebel. Jezebel, of course, was not an

Israelite—she was an outsider, and so you might be able to see that the seal borrows some common figures from the land of Egypt. I have put additional information in the cubbyholes this morning, but the point is: We are looking this morning at an historical account. Jezebel was a real woman. She is an historical figure.

At this point in history, due primarily to the influence of Jezebel, the worship of Baal was widespread throughout the land of Israel. The account we are about to study this morning takes place roughly three years after Elijah's challenge on Mt. Carmel. You might remember that in spite of drenching the altar with water, God's fire came down and consumed the sacrifice. Elijah won the challenge, but had to go into hiding and is not heard from again until the passage that we are about to consider.

**I. If you will, please look with me at the first sixteen verses of 1 Kings 21 as we notice THE BASIC SIN THAT IS COMMITTED RIGHT HERE AT THE BEGINNING. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

Please notice the word of God from 1 Kings 21:1-16...

***<sup>1</sup> Now it came about after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. <sup>2</sup> Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money." <sup>3</sup> But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." <sup>4</sup> So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food. <sup>5</sup> But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?" <sup>6</sup> So 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 pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.' " <sup>7</sup> Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." <sup>8</sup> So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. <sup>9</sup> Now she wrote in the letters, saying, "Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; <sup>10</sup> and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, 'You cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death." <sup>11</sup> So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them. <sup>12</sup> They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at***

***the head of the people. <sup>13</sup> Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before 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 word to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." <sup>15</sup> When 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> When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.***

As we consider Ahab's sin, we notice in the first few verses that Ahab merely **wanted** a vineyard that belonged to his next-door neighbor, a man by the name of Naboth. We know that Ahab was merely visiting in his winter palace. This was the king's place to get away for a few days here and there, and so as King Ahab is visiting in the village of Jezreel, he apparently looks over the wall and decides that he wants the vineyard next door.

King Ahab, therefore, approaches his neighbor, and Naboth's response to the king is very interesting. His only words ever recorded in the Bible are these, "**The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.**" Well, that seems rather simple. But when we look into it a little bit, we suddenly realize something about this man by the name of Naboth. Apparently Naboth was referring to the Law of Moses.

We find the ruling in **Numbers 36:7**, for example, "**Thus no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.**" We find God's reasoning in **Leviticus 25:23**, where God said, "**The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.**" And so when Naboth refused to sell his land to the king, he was not just being difficult, he was not just trying to make the king mad, he did not do this because he disliked the king, but he was standing firm on the word of God.

When King Ahab realized he was not getting what he wanted, we notice in **verse 4** that he went back home and basically started pouting. Perhaps he realized that Naboth was more righteous than he was. It has been said that if you are trying to prove how crooked a stick is, the easiest way is not to debate it or argue about it, but the easiest way is to lay a straight stick next to it. Maybe that is what happened to Ahab. And so he started sulking. He started moping. He laid in bed and would not eat. I think we might say that King Ahab was consumed by the sin of greed. In his own mind, he absolutely had to have his next-door neighbor's vineyard. Perhaps some of you have heard the answer that John Rockefeller, one of the richest men in America, once gave to the question, "**How much money do you need?**" His answer, "**Just a little more.**"

And really, the sin of burning with desire for something we cannot have goes back all the way back to the beginning of time. We remember God's only negative command in the Garden of Eden. There was only one thing they could not do. They were not allowed to eat from one particular tree. They could walk up to it. They could look at it. They could touch it. They could smell it. I'm assuming that they could have chopped it up and used it for firewood if they had wanted to do so. But whatever happened they were not allowed to eat the fruit from that one tree. And we know how that story ended. They did the one thing that God had specifically commanded them not to do. They wanted something that they were not allowed to have.

It is interesting that we are still tempted in the same way even today. This past Friday afternoon I was working on this lesson, I was getting the PowerPoint presentation ready to go, and I went out to the street to check the mail. I want you to look very carefully at this picture I had already picked out, and then I want to show you what came in the mail... **\*\*PPT\*\*** Do you see any similarities? Amazing! If you notice in the lower right-hand corner, this is an offer that has been prepared exclusively for the **"Exum Household."** Here is this beautiful woman longingly looking over the fence, wanting the yard that her neighbors have! As the text says, **"If we want a lawn like that, we better call TruGreen."** They point out here that **"Your Lawn Means More."** And for only \$29.95 we can have that beautiful lawn that she is looking at on the other side of her fence. The grass is greener on the other side. I would suggest that God's word is as up to date as this morning's newspaper!

But as we get back to King Ahab, **\*\*PPT\*\*** the question really is: What happens when we do not get what we want? Can we tone it down (can we live with ourselves, can we be content), or does it escalate? Unfortunately, King Ahab lets it escalate. When we do not get our way, sometimes we also react by whining...or even worse. Sometimes we set off a downward spiral, and that is exactly what Ahab does here. We are reminded here that the king is a weak man who is domineered by a strong and evil woman. In my opinion, I think King Ahab knew exactly what was about to happen. And so he tells the story to his wife. She bumps it up a notch. She takes it to the next level, and we find that she immediately comes up with an elaborate scheme to actually murder Naboth for holding to the word of God.

I realize that Jezebel is the one who actually arranges the murder, but don't you think that Ahab probably knew what was about to happen? After all, this is the same woman who just a few chapters earlier had just killed all of the preachers in the country except for the 150 who were hiding in the caves. Ahab knew what was about to happen. And I say this because of his reaction.

In **verse 15**, Jezebel went to her husband and said, **"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."** And then in **verse 16**, the Bible says that, **"When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it."**

We have no reference to Ahab being the least bit curious. When Jezebel tells him that, **"Naboth is not alive, but dead,"** Ahab never says, "Oh really? What happened? Was he sick? Was it an accident?" Ahab never asks what happened, because he knows. He knows the woman he married. Blinded by the sin of greed, Ahab moves forward and goes down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. As Ahab goes down, perhaps he starts to make plans, "I will cut down these grapes, and maybe I will put some onions over here, and potatoes over here, and some tomatoes over here..." But we find (starting in **verse 17**), that Ahab is interrupted by the prophet Elijah.

**II. As we consider GOD'S JUDGMENT, I'd like for us to look at verses 17-29. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

**1 Kings 21:17-29...**

<sup>17</sup> 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 down to take possession of it. <sup>19</sup> "You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?'" And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours."'" <sup>20</sup> Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>21</sup> "Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; <sup>22</sup> and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. <sup>23</sup> "Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' <sup>24</sup> "The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel. <sup>27</sup> It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. <sup>28</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, <sup>29</sup> "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days."

Elijah, therefore, approaches the king, and even before the confrontation, Ahab starts out with a question, **"Have you found me, O my enemy?"** And so Ahab does not protest that he is an innocent man—he knows why Elijah is there, but he accuses the man of God of being his enemy. We remember Paul's question to the churches of Galatia in **Galatians 4:16**, **"So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"** In a similar way, King Ahab saw God's prophet not as a friend, but as an enemy.

Just a short time earlier, it looked like a pretty good deal to murder Naboth in exchange for a vineyard. After all, he really wanted a vegetable garden. Perhaps Ahab and Jezebel thought they could get away with it. But they failed to remember the words of Israel's wisest king in **Proverbs 15:3**, **"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good."**

Every time he heard a dog bark, I wonder if Ahab thought about that prophecy. Certainly that would have taken just a little bit of joy out of that new vineyard—knowing that the same dogs that licked up the blood of Naboth would some day lick up his own blood.

Several days go by, and then months, and after some time King Ahab goes to battle. He is disguised as a regular soldier, and seemingly out of the blue we are told that an enemy soldier shoots an arrow in no particular direction. The Bible tells us that the arrow came down and hit King Ahab between the sections of his armor. He bled profusely until the blood covered the floor of the chariot. He died later that evening, and when it was all over they took the chariot aside and washed out the blood. We are told that it was a place where the prostitutes went to do their bathing. And when they had washed out the blood there was so much of it that the dogs came and licked it up, just as Elijah had promised.

Jezebel takes a little longer. About twenty years later there is a new king on the scene, and he gets a message from God that he needs to go wipe out the house of Ahab once and for all. He goes down to Jezreel, he goes looking for Jezebel, and when he gets there, the Bible says that she paints her face—perhaps she thinks that she will seduce the new king. But when the new king gets there, he sees her up in the window with some of her servants. In **2 Kings 9**, starting in **verse 32**, King Jehu calls out and says,

**"Who is on my side? Who?" And two or three officials looked down at him. He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot. When he came in, he ate and drank; and he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." They went to bury her, but they found nothing more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. Therefore they returned and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'In the property of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse**

***of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel, so they cannot say, "This is Jezebel.""***

Those officials who knew her best were the ones who threw her out of the palace window. The blood splattered up on the wall, and King Jehu ran her over with the chariot. He went inside to eat, and when he sent someone out to bury her, there was nothing left but her skull and her feet and the palms of her hands. She had been eaten by dogs, just as Elijah had promised.

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

As we think back over what we have learned this morning, we might say to ourselves: That's disgusting! Why are we studying this? Why does this matter? We learn this morning that God is just. God hates sin. God hates evil, and He will not put up with it! When God says that there will be a consequence, there will be a consequence—right down to the very last detail!

We also learn from this passage that God will punish sin, but He would rather forgive. And thankfully, right at the end it seems that Ahab had a change of heart. We may not know how permanent this change was, and yet it did cause God to delay the punishment. And so there was at least a glimmer of hope even for a man who had been convicted of a terrible sin. In **1 Timothy 2:4**, we find that God, ***"...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."***

Certainly the danger for us this morning is that we may read this whole passage and think to ourselves that we could personally never be caught in sin as King Ahab and Jezebel were. But we have sinned! We live in a time when you can hire a company to make up an alibi. But God sees through it!

Maybe we think that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. But then we come to **Hebrews 10:26-27**, ***"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES."*** This is a passage from the New Testament!

But thank God, Jesus paid the price for our sins, and we respond to the offer of Christ by throwing ourselves at His feet. We turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of what we have done in the past. If you have any questions about God's plan, we would love to study the Bible with you. But if you are ready to obey the good news about Jesus right now, you can come to the front as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)