

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 15**

**THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS**

**CHAPTER 21**

**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reveals the extent of the spiritual and moral decline of the nation Israel under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. It shows us the devastating influence of Jezebel and her religion on the community life of the people and on the personal life of Ahab. When the heart of covetousness is served with power and cruelty, it will result in oppression and destruction. In such times, when man sacrifices what is right and true for his selfish and covetous gains, he will call evil good and good evil. When a person gives up truth, he believes in lies. Then, he starts loving lies and eventually he would be controlled by lies.

This chapter also reveals that God is not unaware of the affairs of men. He is in the midst of them. He is watching and waiting. He will ensure that in the long run His judgement will prevail and justice will be carried out. We are reminded of Moses' warning to the Reubenites and Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh, "be sure your sin will find you out" if they sinned against the LORD by refusing to help

their fellow brothers across Jordan (Numbers 32:23). The truth that the Lord our God cares for His people, whom He loves, is a great comfort.

**OUTLINE**

1. Ahab covets Naboth's land (vv. 1-4)
2. Jezebel plots the murder of Naboth (vv.5-14);
3. God's judgement and condemnation of Ahab through Elijah (vv.15-29).

**COMMENTARY**

**Ahab Coveted Naboth's Land**

**—21:1-4**

The event in this chapter followed after what had taken place as recorded in the previous chapters. Naboth is introduced as a farmer who lived in Jezreel whose vineyard was very near King Ahab's palace. Ahab saw the land and he wanted it for his garden of herbs. He made an offer to Naboth. He would give Naboth a better vineyard than his present one or alternatively if he wished, Ahab would compensate him with money. Naboth gave a simple and forthright response, "The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee" (v.3). Naboth was very correct. Since the day Israel entered the Promised Land, they were told that they were tenants and God was the real owner. They were not allowed to sell their land at all. It was regarded as their inheritance from the LORD. To

sell the land was to despise the inheritance that the LORD gave to them. Ahab, though an idolater, knew this and he returned to his palace like a helpless lamb. He lay down on his “bed” (a couch). In the home of an Israelite, this couch was usually placed beside the eating table. He had his face turned to the wall. He was “heavy and displeased”. In other words he was upset, sulking and throwing a royal tantrum.

We pause here to make some comments. It was not wrong for Ahab to desire to have a garden of herbs. But he was wrong to offer Naboth an alternative vineyard and in his words, a better one and also to compensate Naboth with money. Ahab demonstrated foolishness in his offer to Naboth. It shows how far gone he was in his sin by marrying Jezebel. But when Naboth said “no” to him, he should accept Naboth’s right to refuse his offer. He should then forget about his project and live in his own palace. Instead he was angry and displeased. As the king of Israel, he should know better. He should love his people and study God’s Word so that he can rule God’s people justly.

Now Naboth gave Ahab a religious and legitimate reason for refusing his generous offer. He gave the reason that the LORD disallowed him to part with the inheritance of his forefathers. Naboth was familiar with the laws of the LORD; no man should ever sell his land, which was considered as given by God to His

people.<sup>1</sup> Naboth considered the land given by the LORD to them as sacred and would not allow even the king to acquire it. If he sold the land, he was threatening the peace and family ties and life of his community.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, it was against God’s will.

Moreover, he could have also remembered what his forefathers told him on the warning given by the prophet Samuel concerning a king (1 Samuel 8:14): *And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.* Be that as it may, there was an absolute prohibition to sell the land.

According to the Law, a land could be sold under certain extenuating circumstances like an unpaid debt but must always be

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25:23 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land *is* mine; for ye *are* strangers and sojourners with me.

Numbers 36:7 So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. 8 And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers. 9 Neither shall the inheritance remove from *one* tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 27:8 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. 9 And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. 10 And if he has no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. 11 And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses.

available for redemption by the next of kin at any time. According to Leviticus 25:25, an Israelite could sell his land provided he was very poor. It was like a lease hold rather than a freehold concept. This was not the case with Naboth. Naboth therefore had perfect right to refuse Ahab's offer. It is interesting to note that Naboth upheld the sacredness of God's laws in an environment that was hostile to the worship of the LORD God of Israel. There must be many more Naboths. Remember, God has His remnant.

### **Jezebel Plotted the Murder of Naboth – 21:5-14**

Ahab's demeanour that day could not escape Jezebel's hawk-like eyes. Jezebel asked him why he was so sad and why he was not eating his food. Ahab complained to her that Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to him. Observe that Ahab conveniently left out the religious and legitimate reason which Naboth gave for not selling the vineyard to him. How true of the heart of the covetous and the wicked to withhold pertinent information that might not be in their favour! The way in which Ahab put to Jezebel made Naboth's refusal to sell his vineyard seem harsh and unreasonable. This was far from reality.

Jezebel's response was provocative. Literally in Hebrew, "you now do kingship over Israel." This sentence could be understood in a few ways. It could be just a positive affirmation from Jezebel to her despondent husband, "You are the one who exercises authority over

Israel." Or she could have been sarcastic, "Look at you, the king of Israel!" Yet another understanding could be, "You now, do as a king of Israel should act." The "you" addressed to Ahab is emphatic in the original Hebrew script. The latter of the three is most likely considering the character of Jezebel. She considered Ahab a weak king. In addition, she came from Phoenicia. Her Gentile view of kingship was different from that of Israel. The Gentile kings were known for their self-exaltation and despotism. As king, they could do what they liked. But the king of Israel should act as an instrument of the LORD God to rule the country according to God's laws.

Jezebel told him to get up and eat and be glad. She pledged that she would give Naboth's vineyard to her husband. She lost no time in making plans to get the land for Ahab. She used Ahab's letterheads and wrote a letter addressing to all the elders and the nobles who were living in the city where Naboth lived. In other words, these leaders whom she called would know Naboth, who presumably was a well-known Israelite in his city. In the letter, she called for "a fast" and that means a religious assembly to resolve important matters. She mentioned that Naboth would be invited and accorded the highest seat of honour. She then got two men, "sons of Belial" to testify against Naboth. The word "Belial" comes from two words, "beli" which means "without" and "ya'al" which means "worth". Put them together they mean "without worth". So the term "sons of Belial" means "sons of worthlessness" or the useless ones. In

the cities, there would be such people who would do anything for money. They were bribed to testify that Naboth had blasphemed against God and king. Such a charge carried the death penalty by stoning. This procedure was in accordance with the Law of God.<sup>3</sup> She sent the letters to the elders and nobles of the city where Naboth lived. She sealed the letters with King Ahab's seal. In those days, letters of a king were written by a scribe in the name of the writer who was depicted in the third person. The seal was the wax-imprint of the king's ring. In other words, Ahab knew about the plan because she had to get Ahab to fix the seal or his permission to do so. This was a very vicious scheme. The charges were lies and she made use of the very laws which she despised to give legitimacy to the charges. It looked like a water-tight murder plan.

The men of the city, and the elders and nobles, who lived in that city, did as Jezebel had written to them. They knew well enough that Jezebel would not take "no" for an answer and therefore it was important

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<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 24:16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, *and* all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, shall be put to death.

Deuteronomy 17:6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. 7 The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you.

to be subservient to her. We see the extent of the influence Jezebel had on the people of Israel, in spite of the fact that they had witnessed that the LORD (YAHWEH) their God is the living and true God. They proclaimed a fast. The people assembled. They put Naboth up on an honoured seat to give an appearance of impartiality. The two "sons of Belial" performed their job by testifying against Naboth before the whole assembly. The judgement on Naboth was summarily pronounced. Naboth was taken out of the city and stoned to death. This was a kangaroo court exactly like the one that the religious leaders staged against Jesus Christ before the high priests in the New Testament (Matthew 26:57- 68).

### **God Pronounced His Judgement on Ahab – 21:15-29**

Naboth died. The news of his death was told to Jezebel and not to Ahab. This clearly shows who the real power in the royal family was. It was a dastardly deed by all concerned. The days of Ahab's rule over Israel was characterised by wickedness and spiritual darkness in the high places of authority and affluence in the land. Jezebel went to Ahab to inform him that he could now take possession of Naboth's vineyard because Naboth was dead. Ahab went to Naboth's vineyard and claimed the vineyard. At times we tend to cry out, "O God, why did You not stop them from killing Naboth? You who have a passion for justice, do You not care? Why Lord?" We must admit that this is a mystery. It is because we are human and not God that we cannot understand or be

contended to accept the situation as it is. But God does care. In fact, He is watching and waiting and will in His own time mete out His judgement on the wicked. So, we can take comfort in this truth.

God sent Elijah again to confront Ahab. Elijah went to Samaria and found Ahab in the late Naboth's vineyard. Ahab must have been very elated to have the land he coveted. While he was beholding the vineyard, all the wonderful things that he wanted to do must have crossed his mind. It was so gratifying to him. As instructed by the LORD, Elijah charged Ahab for murder in order to possess the land. Although Jezebel was the main force in carrying out the wicked scheme, Ahab was as guilty as if he had planned and committed the murder. Ahab was not totally ignorant of Jezebel's wicked scheme. He could have asked her what she intended to do when she pledged that she would give the land to him. Did he not give her permission to use his ring to give the mark of authority? Ahab was king! God never makes a mistake. Ahab was caught red-handed standing in the late Naboth's vineyard. Elijah pronounced the LORD'S judgement on Ahab, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (v.19). Ahab said to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" The last time they met, Ahab called him a trouble-maker of Israel (18:17). Now they met again, and Ahab became personal and called Elijah "my enemy." Ahab cried out in dismay when confronted by Elijah again. Elijah continued to tell Ahab that

he had sold himself to work evil before the LORD. God would bring judgement upon him and all his descendants and all his sons. His end would be like that of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat and also that of Baasha, the son of Ahijah. Both of them had sinned against God and brought about His wrath on them. God would also punish Jezebel. The dogs would eat her flesh by the wall of Jezreel. The judgement indeed was harsh but it fits the crime. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

An interesting turn of events develops at this juncture. The inspired writer summarises Ahab's character and reign in Israel.

Ahab had succumbed to Jezebel his wife to commit acts of wickedness before the LORD. He had worshipped idols like the Amorites (a name for the Canaanites) whom the LORD detested and abhorred and whom the LORD cast out before Israel. Israel had witnessed the holiness and judgement of God. In other words, Ahab had no excuse for all the wicked deeds which he had committed. His judgement was sealed. When Ahab heard the judgement which Elijah pronounced upon him, he repented. He rent his clothes indicating his remorsefulness, he put on sackcloth showing that he was repentant; he fasted and went about mourning to show that his humility and repentance would be for real. The LORD noted his humbleness and pronounced the postponement of His judgement on Ahab. The LORD did not cancel the judgement. Ahab was given another

reprieve to genuinely repent. Time would prove it. The mercy and kindness of the LORD God is everlasting!

**PRACTICAL VALUE**

Ahab’s covetousness is a warning to us. All people, not just Christians, must take heed of the Tenth Commandment of God. The commandment was given to man for his well-being so that he might live in harmony, peace and joy among his fellowmen. We have witnessed the devastating effects of breaking the commandments. God’s prescription to man is that “godliness with contentment is great gain”. Godliness must precede contentment. A person who is under the influence of the sin of covetousness will never be contented nor have peace in his heart. He craves more and more and finally he destroys himself and others with him.

We learn that those who would uphold the Word of God and do what is *right* in His eyes must be prepared to pay a heavy price for their stand. A similar incident could happen with us just as it happened with Naboth. Those who are angry with us because we do what is right in the eyes of God, will not leave us alone, but lie and misrepresent us and gather support for their cause against us. When we are victims of such maligning, we can take comfort that God our Father in heaven watches and waits, and will bring about justice to His people who have been wronged and judgement on those who wrong others. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** 1 Kings 21:1-4; Matthew 19:14-30; Psalm 119:36.

**TUESDAY:** 1 Kings 21:5-14; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Proverbs 6:16-19.

**WEDNESDAY:** 1 Kings 21:15-16; Luke 12:15; Mark 8:36.

**THURSDAY:** 1 Kings 21:17-24; Proverbs 29:18; Exodus 3:7-8.

**FRIDAY:** 1 Kings 21:25-29; Numbers 32:23; Revelation 20:11-15.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What did Ahab offer Naboth in exchange for his land? What reason did he give? Was it a fair deal? Why did Naboth refuse the king’s offer? What do you think of your home, church, and personal belongings in the light of this truth?

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2. Consider the parts played by Ahab, Jezebel, the elders and the two false witnesses in the murder of Naboth. What was the guilt of each of them?

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3. Would you take something that is not yours? Have you taken by force or with stealth something that is not yours?

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4. Would you say that Ahab was genuinely repentant at the end of his life? Was God's reply to Ahab an act of grace?

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5. How does Scripture sum up Ahab's character? Observe the expression which is twice used in these verses concerning him.

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6. Have you encountered people like Jezebel who take things by force in your work place, church or home, etc?

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7. Can one be justified in suggesting that the evil works by humans in this chapter was Satan inspired? Explain.

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8. How do you see Jezebel's powerful evil influence on Ahab? What motivated her? What was foremost in her mind? How can a wife be an influence for good to her husband?

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9. What is the most valuable lesson(s) you could learn from this chapter to help you in your life?

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