

157–NABOTH’S VINYARD

(1 Kings 21)

Next to King Ahab’s palace in Jezreel¹ was a beautiful vineyard belonging to a man named Naboth, which he had gained by inheritance. Ahab desired to have Naboth’s vineyard for an herb garden, and he asked Naboth to give it to him. “If you will give it to me,” Ahab told Naboth, “I will give you a better one. Or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever money it is worth.”

“Jehovah forbid me from doing so!” answered Naboth. “For I cannot give you the inheritance I have from my fathers.”

Ahab, who was accustomed to having everything he wanted, was displeased and dejected by Naboth’s answer. He lay on his bed with his face to the wall and would not eat. When his wife, Jezebel, saw Ahab’s great sadness, she asked him, “Why is your spirit so sad that you will not eat?”

“Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite about his vineyard,” Ahab answered her, “and he will neither sell it to me for money nor take other land in exchange for it.”

Jezebel was shocked that her husband would let such a thing deter him. After all, he was the king. “Do you not govern Israel?” she asked. “Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be merry. I will give you Naboth’s vineyard.”

Jezebel’s plan for obtaining the vineyard was simple and devious. She wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with Ahab’s seal, and sent them to the elders and nobles of Samaria. Her letters contained this message: “Proclaim a fast among the people of Israel and seat Naboth the Jezreelite in a high position. Once he is seated, have two sons of Belial² come before him to bear witness against him, accusing him of blaspheming the names of God and the king. Then, with these accusations, take him out and stone him to death.”

The elders and nobles, trusting that Jezebel had written the letters with the king’s authority, did as they were requested. They proclaimed a day of

¹ Though the capital of the kingdom of Israel at this time was Samaria, and had been since the reign of Ahab’s father Omri, Ahab had a palace in Jezreel and made it his chief residence.

² “Son of Belial” is a derisive term used many times in the scriptures. It simply means a worthless and lawless person.

fasting and seated Naboth in a high position among the people. Then, according to Jezebel’s instructions, they brought in the two worthless men to witness against Naboth in the presence of all the people. And, when Naboth had been accused of cursing God and the king, they took him out and administered the punishment specified in the Law of Moses—they stoned him to death,³ both Naboth and his sons.⁴

When Jezebel received the news of Naboth’s death, she said to Ahab, “Arise now and take possession of Naboth’s vineyard that he refused to give you, for Naboth is now dead.” And King Ahab went down to the vineyard and claimed it as his own.

When this great injustice had been done, the word of Jehovah came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, “Go down to meet King Ahab in Naboth’s vineyard, for he has gone to possess it. Ask the king if he has killed Naboth to take possession of his land. Then tell the king of Israel that in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, they shall also lick up his blood.”⁵

Ahab considered Elijah his enemy. So, when Elijah came and found him in Naboth’s vineyard, Ahab said to him, “Have you found me, O my enemy?”

“Yes!” replied Elijah. “I have found you because you sold yourself to work evil in the sight of Jehovah.” Then Elijah told King Ahab all that Jehovah had told him. “Behold,” he said, “Jehovah will bring evil upon you and will cut off all your male posterity. Because you provoked Jehovah to anger and made Israel to sin, your house will be like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah.⁶ Dogs shall eat him who dies of your family in the city, and he who dies in the field shall be eaten by the fowls of the air. And in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, they shall also lick up your blood. Know

³ See Leviticus 24:16.

⁴ Although 1 Kings 21 says nothing about Naboth’s sons, 2 Kings 9:26 indicates they were also stoned to death.

The practice of killing the guilty party’s family was common in ancient Israel. The benefit of this procedure was that there would be no one to come back later and complain of injustice.

⁵ For the fulfillment of Elijah’s prophecy, see story “158–King Ahab Is Slain in Battle.”

⁶ See story “148–Prophecies against Jeroboam and Baasha Fulfilled.”

also that the dogs shall eat your wife, Jezebel, by the walls of Jezreel.”⁷

Although Ahab was wicked and selfish, he was not without feeling. Being greatly humbled by Elijah’s rebuke, he tore his clothing, wore sackcloth

against his flesh, and fasted. Then the word of Jehovah came to Elijah saying, “Because Ahab has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the promised evil upon his house in his days, but in the days of his son.”

⁷ The fulfillment of this prophecy against Queen Jezebel is told in story “172—The Beginning of the End for the House of Ahab.”