

The king of Israel and Naboth the Jezreelite

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[0 : 00] Thank you. Well, let's turn together to the passage for this morning, which is in 1 Kings 21.!

Help us to be listening, and we pray, Lord, that you would speak and we would be responsive to your word, and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we're in 1 Kings 21. We're going to look at this chapter of the Bible together, which is what we usually do. We're just going to go through it a bit at a time. And to introduce it, I want to ask this question.

Is idolatry a victimless crime? Does it matter which God we serve? And I'm asking that on a sort of national level. Or does society get affected by what is worshipped in that society?

When people turn away from God, when nations turn away from God, when people turn away from God, does God respond in any way? Does that make any difference?

[1 : 36] Is it possible that the people that God counts as his innocent people should suffer? Is the suffering of believers, God's people, is that a possibility? Or is suffering a sign that the individual affected is a bit substandard? So that they're particularly sinful, perhaps, or they don't have enough faith, or they're generally spiritually inadequate?

There's another question that arises from the passage. Do we owe a duty of obedience to our superiors at all? So should you, if your boss at work tells you to do something, should you say, I'm a Christian, I don't let anybody tell me what to do, I'll just do my own thing?

Should you do what your boss at work tells you to do, whatever he says, whatever he or she says, are there any limits to that? Because under all circumstances, or only under some circumstances. Particularly if our superiors put us under a pressure to deny the Christian faith, what do we do then? So these are questions that come up from the passage, and in case I don't answer them on the way through, I think that idolatry does affect society. The spiritual atmosphere in a society affects the social conditions of the society. When people turn away from God, God turns away from them. Do innocent people suffer? Yes, they do. It is incorrect to say, if this Christian is suffering, they must have sinned in some particularly horrible way.

[3 : 36] It's not a sign of spiritual inadequacy, so if you're saying to yourself, I'm having a hard time, therefore God must hate me, you are thinking wrong. Do we owe a duty of obedience to our superiors?

Well, we do, but there are limits to it, and these are all things that we shall see as we go through the passage. Just to set the context, if you're not familiar with the Bible, we're in the Old Testament, the days before Jesus Christ, the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant was geographical, there was a particular land that God was working with. It was ethnic, there was a particular ethnic group that God was working with, the Jews, the children of Abraham, by genetic birth.

And the purpose that God had in working with that particular group for those thousands of years, well, a number of purposes, but one of them is that it acts as a sort of petri dish of experimentation to see if we plant seeds in this petri dish, how do they grow?

And the seeds that grow in the petri dish of Israel's experience are sin. It shows how deficient human beings are. It's not saying that any particular ethnic group is more morally imperfect than any other ethnic group, it's just that one ethnic group is chosen for God to demonstrate this amongst.

[5 : 01] to show in history and biography what in the New Testament is done in theology, so what does sin look like in actual people?

And we'll see that in this chapter. It also shows, the Old Testament in general, shows the goodness and the grace and the gift of God. And in the Old Testament, the gift of God particularly is land.

It's not like that in the New Testament. We inherit something different. But in the Old Testament, it was land. And the Old Testament points forwards to the great resolution of everything in Jesus Christ.

So that's just to, in case you were wondering why we, you've come to a church that's looking at the Old Testament, this is, that's the sort of thing that's happening. In the previous chapter, previously, in 1 Kings, there was, the matter of, King Ahab, failing to kill, King Ben-Hadad, of Aram, the enemy who was doomed to destruction.

And the word for doom to destruction, and we did this on the Wednesday Bible study, the word for doom to destruction is, herem. That's a particular word. We did a little study on it on Wednesday. [6 : 19] The officials of Ben-Hadad said, the kings of Israel are kings of Hesed, of mercy. And Ahab said about Ben-Hadad, he's my brother.

So there's King Ahab, and he says, come up into my chariot to Ben-Hadad. And he says, we'll do a deal. So some money appears in the background.

And they cut a covenant, and they bond themselves together in a covenant, and this is exactly what they shouldn't have done. That was in the previous chapter. That's the sort of thing that Jesus, then he's sent away free.

So he says, we're brothers, I make a covenant with you, we'll never be at war again, we're totally friends now, and I send you away free.

That's what he said to a person that he shouldn't have said it to. Jesus says it to people, and he does it, and he should say it to people. That's the amazing thing, that King Jesus will take people who've offended terribly in this day of the gospel and say, you come to me, you ask for forgiveness, I give it to you.

[7 : 27] You can come up in my chariot, you can ride with me, you can sit on my throne. You can, we will cut a covenant together so that we are bonded together in friendship, and I send you out free.

And that's what Jesus does in this day of grace to those who come asking for mercy. But one day, Jesus will say, the time for those offers is closed, and he will do what Ahab should have done, which is to say, no more chance, no more cutting covenants, no more come up into my throne, no more going away free.

If you have, after all this time, insisted on doing your own thing, never asking for forgiveness, it's too late now. And it's a rather shocking thing. But that's what Jesus will do, and that's what Ahab should have done on that day of judgment on Ben Hadad.

Anyway, that was last chapter, and the word, the key word was herem. I'll just make sure we know that because we're now going to look at the matter of the vineyard, about a vineyard.

Sometime later, there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth, the Jezreelite.

There's the vineyard, and the word for a vineyard is a kerem. Isn't that interesting?

[8 : 54] So I think the writer, herem that chapter, kerem this chapter, I think he's just linking the two together. And this belongs to Naboth, the Jezreelite.

There he is, Jezreelite. And it's a nice agricultural name. It means fruit, fruits, and Jezreel means God sows. So you put in mind a vineyard, a kerem, a man whose name means fruit, fruitfulness, and the city he lives happens to be called God sows.

So it's all about God sowing something and the fruit that comes and the vineyard and you've got all sorts of little echoes in one's head about the way God runs things in the Old Testament.

Do you know, Israel is my vineyard and I've planted them there. Jesus told a story about a vineyard, didn't he? He said, the man planted a vineyard and gave it lots of good things and looked for fruit.

Well, there we are. It's Naboth the Jezreelite and there is the boundary marker which says, this belongs to me. It's got his initials on it.

[10 : 04] NJ, Naboth the Jezreelite. And this happens to be, the vineyard was in Jezreel close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

So close to, he uses two words, close, near. So I think it was just next door. So I've put the wall of the palace there. There's the vineyard and it happens to be, and it doesn't turn out well for neighbor, it happens to be just next door to Ahab's palace, the king of Samaria.

And Ahab, verse two, says to Naboth, let me have your kerem, your vineyard, to use for a vegetable garden since it is close to my palace.

So let's focus on what he's asked. Give me your vineyard for a vegetable garden since it is close to my palace. In exchange, I will give you a better vineyard or if you prefer, I will pay you in silver whatever it is worth.

You're just imagining yourself in that position. You're next door to Amex and they want to expand and your garden is there and they say, we will give you a million dollars for your garden because we need to.

[11 : 29] You'll need that and you're thinking, well, you know, you're thinking, shall I, shan't I? Can I draw your attention to this word, vegetable patch?

It's only used in one other place in the Bible so I rather think that when the writer uses this expression he must bear this in mind. It's used in Deuteronomy 11, verse 10 where Moses, a long time before, says, the land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden.

So he's saying that when you go to the land of Israel they've got a different climate, a different system of irrigation. In Egypt, you did it, say, by foot. You irrigated it by foot.

How do you irrigate by foot? I've no idea how you irrigate by foot. Sorry, somebody will be able to tell me. I'm just imagining you carry a watering can and you sort of squash it with your feet as you're going along. I don't know.

I'm just guessing. But he's saying, you notice that Ahab is saying I want it for this, not a sort of Israelite style garden but an Egypt style garden.

[12 : 46] So I want this vegetable garden and I want to irrigate it by foot because it's so close to my palace. There's the palace. I'll give you a better one or I'll pay you silver. There's the money.

And Naboth says, well, what does he say? Verse 3, Naboth replied, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And sort of more literally, polluted will it be for me before the Lord if I give you the inheritance of my fathers. So he's saying, no, I won't. He doesn't call it a vineyard.

He says it's the inheritance of my fathers. That's the important thing. So there's the boundary marker which tells us that. Now, it all hinges on this and the question is, do you think that Naboth is just being awkward?

Is he a nimby? Is he saying, sort of, not in my backyard or you can't have my vineyard for your backyard?

[13 : 53] Is he just being difficult? I mean, he's being offered a fair price? He's being offered something in exchange or a better vineyard? I mean, isn't he just one of these awkward people like, you know, the one house in the way of a motorway and all the other people sell their houses and the motorway is all ready to go and there's one house remaining and the government compulsorily purchases it.

They say, how stupid for one person to stand in the way of, is he being difficult like that? Well, we need to think of this word inheritance.

Verse 3, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. Now, when he says inheritance, he's not simply saying inheritance in the way that you will possibly inherit something from your parents when they pass away.

He's not just thinking, you know, inheritance is rather sentimental value, you know, like my gran's little silver cup or something like that. It's more important than that because the whole thing that God did in the old covenant was to say to his people, I am giving you land.

And it's sometimes called the promised land. And it's a very special thing in the old testament.

[15 : 24] There are some verses that refer to it. For example, in Leviticus 25, which I'll read to you, in which the Lord makes very strong statements about the land.

He says, the land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine and you are aliens and tenants throughout the country that you hold as a possession you must provide for the redemption of the land.

So I won't go into all the economics of it but it's basically saying, God says, I'm giving you this land, this is my gift to you. Treat it like that. It's a gift.

It's not for you to exploit and do property developing on. It's your tenants of a precious gift that I am giving you this land.

And that's what Naboth is objecting to. I've been given this by the Lord. It's his gift to me.

[16:29] It's even marked with my name. And if anybody is to move that marker, they'd be betraying the Lord. This is my birthright. I am an Israelite.

God has blessed us with this gift. It's my possession. And the word for possession crops up there quite a bit.

In this chapter, 21 verse, no, not 6. I think 26. Just see what it says there.

The Amorites, the Canaanites, the original inhabitants, the Lord drove out before Israel. And the word there is the word to possess. It's used in the sense of dispossess.

So those horrible people had the land. The Lord said, those horrible people can't keep the land. I've given them 400 years of chances and they've just got worse and worse. So I'm kicking them out and I'm giving this land to Israel.

[17:30] He dispossessed to the Amorites and gave it to Israel for their possession. So that's why he's saying, I'm not going to give this up.

So imagine, if you would, that American Express is asking for your little space in your backyard.

So is this saying, as a Christian, that we too should never sell any of our land? And I say, no, that's a completely misunderstanding of how it applies. because for the Christian, the possessions and the gifts that we have been given, we have an inheritance, but it's not land.

We have been brought into his family and we can call God our Father. That's part of being in his family, being inheritors, we can call him Father.

We have the gift of sonship. So, that's for his sons and daughters. Sometimes the Bible is specific to say sonship, meaning sons and daughters, because sons inherit.

[18:49] We are inheritors of God. And we have the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance. So, what do we inherit?

Well, we inherit all the things of God. We possess Christ, everything that Christ has, he shares with us.

And in one place it says, we are inheritors of the world to come. The whole new creation will be ours. And in the meanwhile, we have sort of foretastes of that.

And if you imagine yourself as Naboth, then what the question is, is not so much, will you give me your land, as how much would you accept so as not to be able to call God Father?

How much would you accept so that you can't pray anymore? How much would you accept so that you don't have a hope of heaven set in front of you?

[19:52] that's what this text says. How much is it worth to you to be a Christian? So if you were offered a better job in a place where you know you couldn't really survive as a Christian, would you say, well, it's a lot of money.

I'd be a fool to pass that up. At what point would you say, enough is enough, I'm not giving into this because this is affecting my inheritance in the Lord?

You know, if your friends say to you, come and have a good time with us, we know that it'll mess your Christian life about, you say, well, yeah, just quite a good time.

I mean, where would you draw the line? So Naboth, you see, is drawing a line and saying, no, that's my inheritance from the Lord. No is my answer.

So let's now change the scene because we go into the house and we're sort of looking out of the window at the vineyard. So Ahab went home, verse 4, sullen and angry, which is what he was in the previous chapter, raging, sullen, because Naboth the Jezreelite, the fruitful man in the place where God sows, had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

[21:24] And he's so angry about it, he lies on his bed and refuses to eat. There we are, he refuses to eat. Like that.

And his wife, Jezebel, comes in, there she is, and she says, sweetheart, what's the matter? calm down and tell me in words that I can understand.

So he answers her, because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, give me your vineyard. There's the vineyard, that's the problem. I said, give me your vineyard, and he said, he said, or if you prefer, I'll give you another vineyard in its place, but he said, I will not give you my vineyard.

Actually, that's not what he said, he said, I will not give you my inheritance. It wasn't about vineyards, it was so much about inheritance, wasn't it? Anyway, he's misquoted, but it comes down to the same thing.

He said, I will not give you my vineyard. And Jezebel, his wife, you know, she's a real character, isn't she?

[22 : 42] You know, what's this, sarcasm, irony, you know, this is how you're a king, is it? This is how you rule. This is you kinging it, is it?

Sulking on your bed there, not eating this nice food that has been made for you. That's you as a king, is it? Right. Get up and eat, she says.

Seems to boss him around, doesn't she? Get up and eat, cheer up, arise, I'll give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

And now she goes into action. You have to admire her. She just makes everything happen. And this is her doing it.

She wrote letters in Ahab's name. Signed Ahab. Jezebel, you're supposed to do that. Ahab, signed it with his seal, give us his seal.

[23 : 49] Come on, seal, right, off it goes like that. And she sends, there's quite a bit about sending, same thing that David did in the matter of the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

He orchestrated it all from his laptop. He sent emails here, there and everything, and it all happened very quickly. And this is, and she does this too. She sends and things happen.

She sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth city with him, and this is what she wrote. So there's the letter. And she is just a piece of work, isn't she?

She doesn't care what's lawful. She doesn't care what's right. She's completely ruthless. The speed with which she does this is something amazing.

I'm reminded of the, I've just come to my mind, the head of John the Baptist. Who was the woman who did that? Salome, was it? Salome. And that was quick, immediately, immediately, just quick, quick, quick, and this is her.

[25 : 00] Quick, quick, quick. She takes power over the situation, she takes power over her husband, she takes power over the kingdom. Is this how you're a king? I'll show you how to be a king. That's what she does, isn't it?

And life and death does not matter to her, as we shall see. So she's quite something. yeah. Okay, let's see what now happens.

There's a thing that some Bible scholars have called command compliance. Command compliance. So you say in words what's supposed to happen, and then the compliance says what does happen, and this is often referred to the word of the Lord.

So the word of the Lord came, arise and go to Nineveh, and he arose and went to Nineveh. See, command compliance. This is what we get, command compliance, with the word of Jezebel.

So notice the wording of it. She sent to the elders and nobles, angels, who, now the word dwell is going to crop up here. It also can mean to sit, but if I translate it as dwell throughout, you'll see how it pops up several times.

[26 : 15] They dwelt in Naboth city with him. In those letters she wrote, there's the elders, she says, call a day of fasting. A day of fasting means seriousness, something has gone seriously wrong.

It's not specifically religious, but no food. And seat, dwell Naboth at the head of the people.

So put him in a prominent place. So he's sitting up here on the platforms, everybody's looking at him. What's he done? What's all this about? And dwell, or seat, two scoundrels, two sons of Belial, two sons of destruction opposite him, and have them testify.

So you're telling them what to say, and they're to say, this is what they're to say, this is the command, they're to say, Naboth blasphemed God and the king.

Actually the word is bless, but I think it's used sort of ironically as a euphemism. He cursed God and the king. And then make sure that they accuse him, have, I think that's the word, testify, accuse him.

[27 : 39] And then when all the due legal process has happened, because it's got to be done legally, you make sure that the answer is you take him outside and you stone him to death.

So he's gone from inside and you stone him. Come on. I don't know why this is that bit so slow. But like Achan, remember the troubler of Israel was to be stoned to death.

And it appears later on that it includes his sons, his family as well. So it's like a lynching, isn't it? But it's done in a very organized, legal, proper way.

That's the command and the compliance. So I've got to use exactly the same things. Verse 11, so the elders and nobles who dwelt in Naboth city did as Jezebel had sent in the letters she had sent to them.

They proclaimed a fast. There's the elders, so call a day of fasting. There it is. And dwell Naboth in a prominent place, so put him in a prominent place.

[28 : 46] And the two sandals came and sat opposite him, so get them to sit and do the accusation, the accusation, the accuse that Naboth has cursed God and the king, and then do the next bit, take him outside, they took him outside, they stoned him to death, and he was stoned to death.

So the command compliance thing, exactly what she said, they did it to the letter. They did it to the letter.

They did it to the letter. So let's just reflect on what's happening here. What about these elders and nobles?

So these are the prominent people in the city where Naboth lives. This isn't as though nobody knows him, they've all grown up with him.

And these are the good people, these are the elders and the nobles, these are the city councillors, these are the chief of police, this is the MP, these are the great and the good.

[30 : 07] And they dwelt with Naboth, they've known him since he was a kid. Naboth, our neighbour. They knew what sort of person he really was, but they did what they were told.

Should they have done that? No. But the queen told us to. It's got Ahab's signature on it and it's got his seal.

We should be compliant. I don't think they should have done. Do you? I think at least one of them should have stood up and said we're not doing this. This is not right.

But everybody else is in agreement with it. It's come down from on high. There is such a thing as sin, which is because people don't do anything or just do what they're told.

Think of all the stuff in the BBC about Jimmy Savile. Nobody was able to blow the whistle because it all came down from on high.

[31 : 18] He's a big chap. authority. You can't challenge somebody like that. They should have done. I did some consultancy work at Bishop Bell School in Hastings.

Named after Bishop Bell who was I think if I got this wrong I apologize if I got this wrong but I think he was found out to be a child abuser. And why did nobody say anything?

Why did people just go along with it? It's awful isn't it? That bad things happen because people with a conscience are afraid to do anything apart from what they're told to do.

what about these elders and nobles and they're involved in this and I think these are the elders and nobles are they?

These are the best people it's a disgrace what about Naboth who stuck up for his inheritance so he doesn't say anything does he apart from that we don't get to know very much about him apart from the thing that he said he would not do was give up what God had given to him the precious gift of inheritance in the kingdom of God and what does the chapter tell us the chapter tells us that sometimes God's people suffer sometimes God's people are killed for simply believing what they're supposed to believe and standing up for what they're supposed to stand up for and you could imagine the exiles in Babylon reading this and thinking here we are we're trying to believe we're trying to follow the

[33 : 15] Lord and we get the rough end of the stick we're here in exile is it possible that innocent people get the rough end of the stick and the story says yeah look Naboth did he's a good man a believing man a faithful man look what happened to him so if you get the rough end of the stick doesn't mean that you're not a believer it doesn't mean that you've lost God's smile it doesn't mean that you're outside his will the Bible is full of people like this Abel who was killed by his brother righteous Abel and of course Jesus is the prime example of the sufferer of injustice he too was accused by the elders and nobles of his day he also had two false witnesses giving false testimony against him he also was taken outside the city he wasn't stoned he was crucified

Naboth as far as we can see died pointlessly uselessly for nothing the difference with Jesus is he did not die in vain he did not die for nothing he the innocent sufferer was also the great sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world Jesus followers Jesus himself said they hated me you shouldn't be surprised to be hated as well I think the word reject probably gets at the heart of it I was rejected says Jesus you must not be surprised if in some shape or form you too are rejected for being a believer the rejection might take the form of a little joke about you at the office you go to open a filing cabinet assuming they have filing cabinets these days say one for me while you're

down there he's a

Christian we can make fun of him or it can be like people in Syria in the Middle East who when Boko Haram come or militant Islam say if you're not going convert to Islam we will kill you and your family we should not think that this is a big surprise because they did it to Jesus and we must be prepared if we want to be Christians that it might cost us that it doesn't always necessarily but we should not be surprised we shouldn't say well I never expected that because God is quite specific about it and 1 Peter 3 14 says but if you suffer for what is right you are blessed it's an interesting text because usually we mean by blessed that my emotional state has become more positive that's what we usually mean by blessed and in 1

Peter 3 14 he says your emotional state is probably not particularly brilliant if you're suffering but I want to tell you that you are blessed you are God's favour is on you God's work is going on inside you you are part of God's kingdom if you're suffering for Jesus Christ you are blessed!

It's the sort of blessing that you don't necessarily pray to have is it? But let's just think about the society of those days because it had gone you remember from worshipping the Lord to a perverse worship of God we're worshipping the Lord through these calf idols and then it went over to worshipping Baal so it's really declined and is this simply just taking this rather big picture of it is this simply just a change of religion and what the Bible is getting at here when that sort of spiritual change occurs it affects society as well it affects the social order if people had really been worshipping the Lord you would not have got this in the time of David this sort of thing didn't happen but when you've got a

[37 : 54] Baal in charge of you this is the sort of thing that! goes on the God that people worship affects the society that people produce it's a little bit politically incorrect to say that isn't it because we're supposed to say all societies are equal even if they're frog worshippers and child murderers we're not allowed to criticize because that's their religion but the Bible does in Israel Israel in Isaiah the vineyard of the Lord almighty is the house of Israel and he looks for this indicator of the social conditions he looked for justice and saw bloodshed he saw Naboth being killed he looked for righteousness and heard cries of distress so God is looking at that whole thing not just what you do on a

Sunday but the way society works out the Romans puts it in theological terms they did not glorify God they exchanged the glory of God for images therefore God gave them over to this is the sort of way society works dysfunctional relationships of all sorts envy murder strife deceit malice when people turn away from the Lord we should not be surprised if the Lord turns away from them and society just becomes a right hodgepodge let's go back to Ahab's house in verse 15 as soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned she said to Ahab there she is she's heard she's received a letter that's been sent he has been stoned to death I think it's five times we're told that Naboth is dead he's been stoned to death she said to Ahab get up take possession of the vineyard so I want to use that big arrow to mean take possession taking possession is an important thought here you take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite the one he refused to sell you he is no longer alive but dead so we're told twice when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead so that's three times we're told it he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard he's dead he went to take possession so we've got to verse 17 and there he is taking possession of the vineyard intervention the word of the

Lord see God's been watching this and the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishpate 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 that's Naboth's vineyard but he has taken possession I'm going to use that arrow again he has taken possession of it and the Lord says this is what the Lord says have you not murdered a man and taken possession that's what you've done you've murdered somebody to take possession this is what the Lord says now this is quite strong stuff 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 we don't have dogs licking up blood do we if you've been to I think probably have to go outside the European Union but you wild dogs dogs roaming around in the streets you know you have to be careful they just eat anything that's out there run in the way of cars make traffic accidents unpleasant creatures in the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood dogs will lick up your blood emphasis yes yours and Ahab says to Elijah so you have found me my enemy I have found you he answered because you have sold yourself

[43 : 12] I could never get to the bottom of the selling thought here but anyway that's what he says you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord so the word for evil is reflected back now I am going to bring evil on you and I will consume or destroy your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel slave or free and he uses this expression of how men go to the toilet to describe men I won't spell it out to you but it's an expression that is not very genteel and it's used of other disgraced kings so like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat same expression was used there and Baasha son of Ahijah these people that were just rubbish in my sight you know they're a load of manure so we'll use manure vocabulary about them that's what

I think of them says the Lord because you have provoked me with provocation you really provoked me all that time I gave you and God has spent a considerable amount of time on Ahab hasn't he spoken to him in several different ways over several over a number of instances and all you've done is just provoked me and you caused other people to sin now I think if we had any decency we would tremble at that thought in the New Testament it says judgment will begin at and you think oh I know how that bit is going to end judgment is going to begin at the people who mess around with sexual behavior

God's going to go for them first it doesn't say that it says judgment will begin at the house of God and God says the people who are most likely in this day and age to be the people who provoked me are the people who have been sitting in churches and have heard so much but responded so little those are the people who are likely that God is saying have provoked me I've been in church for 30 years okay that's great but God is saying I hope you've used those 30 years to respond to put your faith in me I hope there's something to show for that I hope you haven't used those 30 years just to get used to saying oh that's a bit more Bible we don't believe that and we don't believe that either and we take all that with a pinch of salt of course that is provoking God and he says you have provoked me so I think we should tremble and what about

Jezebel your lovely wife verse 23 concerning Jezebel the Lord says not just that they will lick her blood they'll eat her to pieces outside where does it say dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel that's horrible isn't it and concerning the rest of your lovely family the rest of your powerhouse of sons and uncles you know how these corrupt regimes operate that so and so will be the president uncle will be the chief of police brother in law will be the in charge of the secret police so and so will be head of the army and it's all in that family together and he says every single one of your family will be disgraced they'll come to a horrible end dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country none of you will be buried you'll all come to a disgraceful end and the author tells us now what he thinks

I think we probably got an idea of this already but sometimes the author just stops to make it perfectly clear and he says verse 25 there was never a man like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord urged on he sold himself I can't quite get my head around that but it says twice he sold himself he gave himself over to evil in the eyes of the Lord urged on by Jezebel his wife and he the NIV says he behaved in the vilest manner and what it is it's to take the word which says the thing which is most hateful to the Lord abominable disgusting that the Lord says that is just the worst sort of behaviour towards me that people can do and it turns it into a verb he abominated he just lived a life which was the vilest manner and it's not it's not a sexual thing it's a spiritual thing who he worshipped what he did with what was known about God how he twisted that and what he exchanged that for it's to do with reverence for God this is the vileness of it and he went after idols so there's

[49 : 20] Baal that's the one in the louvre you can see the little statues about that that big and you took the glory of the God of Israel the richness and goodness of this God and you swapped it for this horrible little statue of Baal with his funny hat who says he rides on the clouds and brings the seasons and all sorts of stuff like that that is abominable and he says you did this like the Amorites now the Amorites were the original possessors of the land of Israel Amorites Canaanites they were awful they were Baal worshippers their society was appalling they were given 430 years by God to put it right but in the end he said the iniquity of the Amorites is full and they were turfed out of the land God kicked them out he says that's what you have become you are the king of the people to whom

God has given the land to take possession of it that was God's rich gift you're the king you're the leader of this they were going to take possession and the Amorites were being kicked out they were dispossessed and what you've done is put the whole thing in reverse you've taken God's beautiful

vineyard with the fruitful man where God plants and you have turned that back into a vegetable garden like Egypt you've turned it back into the land that it was before Canaan God is very very patient but he says at some point enough is enough and this northern kingdom with this king and this track record has got just a limited number of years now before they are swept away no wonder exile will come and the truth is that if you kick out

God he will kick you out it's not unfair if you kick out God you say I don't want this God to be my God I don't want this God to be like he is I want a different God for a little bail type God if you kick out God God will say well you've actually brought this on your own head and I will kick you out and by God's grace you will have many chances and even actually sitting here this morning is one of those chances but judgment will come sooner or later will something that was a significant action and the significance of that action will not be escaped be something that the rapists, soldiers, murderers of extremist Islam ought to know, shouldn't they?

They won't get away with that. Or any other unjust regime, oppressive military force.

Now let's see what happens next. So we've just been told how awful Ahab was and then we come to the most extraordinary verses now.

[53 : 31] Verse 27. When Ahab heard these words he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He even went to sleep in sackcloth and went around meekly.

He tore his clothes, he put on sackcloth, he fasted and it says he went gently. I don't think he's putting this on. I think he really means it.

It's a bit late. But he is genuinely affected by the severity of what God has said is the condition that he's in.

There are cultural signs to show this. He's tearing clothes. He's not saying my clothes don't fit me anymore. It's a way of saying I am deeply sorry. He puts on sackcloth to say I am deeply sorry. He stops eating to say I'm deeply sorry.

And he goes gently. So instead of all this sort of get out of my way I'm the king. He's sort of, excuse me, would you mind? It's changed his whole demeanour. Because one of the points of prophecy is that we should repent.

[54 : 44] When God warns, it's not just to say you're done for. It's a warning to say you've still got time to do something about this. You've still got time to repent.

And he repented. I suspect it wasn't long lasting. I suspect it wasn't particularly deep.

But it was there. And it's fascinating to see that in verse 29 the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite. Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me?

Because God has noticed this. Amazing that God should take notice. You'd think he'd say I'm fed up with Ahab. He's still watching him. He's still, look at that. He's taken some notice.

At long last he's taken some notice. At this late stage this uniquely evil man. And even if it was temporary God took notice. Now it doesn't say that God said okay we won't do judgment anymore.

[55 : 47] He does say there will be judgment but he postpones it. So he does respond to this. And how much encouragement that gives. That God takes notice of the slightest movement towards him.

And maybe you're thinking I'd like to move towards God. I'm not quite sure how to do the whole thing. I can just move a step this week. There's something that I can do to move towards God.

And God will notice that. And say oh look have you seen what so and so's done. That's very encouraging for repentance. There's a story that Jesus tells in the New Testament about somebody who repents who turns back.

It's put in terms of a child who, a young man who leaves the home and goes away takes all the money with him. and his father is sitting there every day looking out waiting.

And the young man says you know I've made a complete mess of this. I am not I've messed everything up. I'm not worthy to be I've sinned against heaven and against my father.

[56 : 57] I'm not worthy to be called his son. I'll go home I'll ask him to make me like one of the hired servants. And the father is watching and as the son comes over the hill the father sees him coming and does something that that that senior gentlemen should not do.

He runs. It's undignified but he runs to his son. That's how much God notices repentance. That's how much he values it.

That's how much he will respond. Somebody turning around I want to come back. Yes. While he was still a long way off his father saw him was filled with compassion for his son.

He ran to his son threw his arms around him and kissed him. And that's what God will do to you if you turn back to him. Let's sing.