

Away Day Talk 1: 1 Kings 21

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[0 : 00] So 1 Kings 21, which in my Bible is page 363, so that may not help. Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria.

And after this Ahab said to Naboth, Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house and I will give you a better vineyard for it.

Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money. But Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And Ahab went into his house, vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him. For he had said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. But Jezebel, his wife, came to him and said to him, Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?

[1 : 05] And 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 please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.

And he answered, I will not give you my vineyard. And Jezebel, his wife, said to him, Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful.

I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal. And she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city.

And she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a farce and set Naboth at the head of the people. And set two worthless men opposite him and let them bring a charge against him, saying, You have cursed God and the king.

Then take him out and stone him to death. And the leaders of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them.

[2 : 08] As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a farce and set Naboth at the head of the people. And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him.

And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth cursed God and the king. So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.

Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned. He is dead. As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard at Naboth and the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money.

For Naboth is not alive, but dead. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria.

[3 : 15] Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, Have you killed and also taken possession?

And you shall say to him, Thus says the Lord, In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick your own blood. Ahab said to Elijah, Have you found me, O my enemy?

He answered, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring disaster upon you.

I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Basha, the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin.

And of Jezebel the Lord also said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel. Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat.

[4 : 25] And anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat. There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.

He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel. And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days.

But in his son's days, I will bring the disaster upon his house. Laura, thank you for reading for us. Do keep your Bibles open there, 1 Kings 21. There's a little handout as well, and you can follow along.

[5 : 34] And can I say just what a delight it is to be here with you. Thank you. Well, the invitation didn't come from any of you, it came from Simon, but nevertheless, it is still a privilege and a joy. I don't know whether you found yourself watching those videos this week of Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un meeting up.

It was certainly on the BBC. It was all a little odd, certainly very staged. And it's led to some observers commenting that we're just drifting into another world war, East versus West. People perhaps being alarmist. Maybe folk are being naive. But it begs the question, who is actually pulling the strings? Who's governing and ruling and in control?

Just yesterday, I was chatting with a sweet lady in our church. Her husband died two years ago, and now her youngest daughter has just died of cancer, still in her 30s.

It is gut-wrenching. Who's governing? Who's ruling? Who's in control? Thousands upon thousands, killed, missing, or having lost their homes in Libya and Morocco.

[6 : 44] Who's governing? Who's ruling? Who's in control? It would have been a very painful question for the first readers of 1 and 2 Kings. And we're diving into the middle of what is really just one book.

It didn't fit on one scroll, so it's been divided into two, but it's one book. And written to a people who've been thrown out of their land. They've lost their inheritance. They're under God's just judgment, and it's not clear who's at the wheel.

It looks and feels like God is not in control. And so if you look down to verse 7, page 363, at least in this Bible, we'll see that's exactly the issue we're faced with this morning.

Jezebel, one of the worst wives in the Bible, says to Ahab, verse 7, Do you now govern Israel? That's the key question. And on the surface, the answer looks like yes.

Ahab ultimately gets what he wants, and Naboth ends up stripped of his inheritance and dead. But the passage gives us the same answer it gave to God's people in exile when it was first written.

[7 : 48] The Lord God governs Israel. He's in control. He was then. He is now. Even if at first glance, it doesn't look like it. And so we realise it is the same issue that we face today.

There's a bombardment, isn't there, in the media. Gender fluidity, same-sex marriage, massive intolerance against anyone who doesn't toe the cultural line. It looks and feels very much like the liberal elite, the progressive media running the show.

And it is why I found it such a refreshing reminder to come back to this passage again. At first glance, though, it seems a bit out of place. If you look down, you can see either side.

It's flanked by chapters, all to do with massive battles between Israel and Syria. Two chapters where we have prophets who aren't Elijah coming to the fore. Two chapters where Elijah is absent. And on the face of it, chapter 21, sandwiched in the middle.

It seems out of place. Just a minor domestic incident. But when we remember 400 years of history, longer than the history of the USA, are being covered in something half the length of a novel.

[8 : 53] Well, it shows us the author must have thought this is really important, really vital to include it. The writer's being super selective. So chapter 21, it's not just a cautionary tale.

We don't need this passage to tell us greed, murder, deceit, and so on are wrong. It seems a small matter, particularly compared to the huge events in the preceding chapters.

But the issues raised are eternal. It may not look like it, but we need to know God is governing. He's still in control through his perfect king.

And so you'll see our first point on the outline there. A weak-willed king, but a hidden governing God. God is governing. As the passage was read, I wonder if we spotted just how much Ahab features.

It's all about the king. In fact, the kings who receive the most attention in one and two kings are those whose reigns veer most from God's word or stick to it. And it's no surprise Ahab is one of the former.

[9 : 53] Just look at verse one again. Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And after this, Ahab said to Naboth, give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it's near my house and I'll give you a better vineyard for it.

Or if it seems good to you, I'll give you its value in money. Ahab is sunning himself in his holiday home in Jezreel and he thinks that the one thing that it's lacking is not a swimming pool or a tennis court.

It is a vegetable plot. And at first glance, his request doesn't seem unreasonable, does it? If someone comes and offers to exchange something for us for a better model, we probably say, yes, you know, you've got your old weathered Nokia and someone's got the brand new iPhone 15 Pro. Is that the latest one? Yeah, yeah. You think, oh, thank you very much. I'll swap. That's great. You've got an old battered out car. Of course, you accept a new one. So perhaps Naboth is just being stubborn and unreasonable, verse three.

Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers. Now, we could think Naboth's being unreasonable until we remember verses like Numbers 36, verse seven.

[11 : 01] Every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And Leviticus 25, 23, where God says, the land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is mine.

You see, Naboth has a very legitimate reason not to sell. The land doesn't belong to him. It's not his to sell. Now, that word inheritance is the sticking issue. It's the word used in Joshua of the whole land.

Now, the land is the Lord's and not Naboth's. and not Ahab's. In fact, the author may have already hinted at Ahab's ungodly grasping with the fact that the only other place this phrase vegetable garden is used is to describe Egypt.

And whereas a vineyard is always used to describe Israel. And so Ahab's request is rightly declined. Naboth sticks to God's word. And so we read on, Ahab accepts it like a grown man and found another plot of land.

Well, of course, that's not what happens, is it? Verse four. Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him. For he'd said, I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.

[12 : 13] And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. I mean, it's priceless, isn't it? Ahab, just like the previous chapter, in fact, he throws all of his toys out the pram and like a spoiled child.

I want, I want. And then sulking when he doesn't get his way. It is like a toddler having a tantrum, except this is meant to be the king of God's people.

And so things take a sinister turn as Jezebel slides onto the scene and asks why Ahab's in such a funk. And in verse six, you see, Ahab misquotes Naboth. He leaves the Lord out of the picture, makes no mention of that word inheritance, probably to make himself look better.

And certainly because he knows Jezebel won't care about either. And so Jezebel responds with the ominous words, I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite. Jezebel thinks Ahab should be just like her dad.

And back in chapter 16, we learn she's the daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians. Their kings ruled through might and oppression. So her question in verse seven, it's not meant so much as a question, more of a stinging rebuke to Ahab.

[13 : 23] Do you now govern Israel? Come on, man up, you're the king, just take what you want. Look, I'll do it for you if I have to. And so it looks like Ahab, or at least Jezebel, is governing.

But of course, the message to the original readers in exile to us today, we know the answer to verse seven. We know the land is the Lord's. We're meant to think, no, of course Ahab doesn't govern

Israel.

He's governed by his wife. Of course, you know, the Lord governs in Israel. He's in charge. He's ruling. What a reassurance to those in exile.

Particularly, what a reassurance when they're under the cosh. And it brings us to our second point this morning. As we move to verses eight to 16, God is ruling. He is governing even when the righteous suffer.

And as we turn to verse eight, it swiftly becomes clear, Ahab's problem has now become Naboth's problem. Jezebel writes letters. She photoshops in Ahab's signature. And what's her plan? Verse nine. And she wrote in the letters, proclaim a fast, set Naboth at the head of the people and set two worthless men opposite him and let them bring a charge against him saying, you've cursed God and the king.

[14:36] Then take him out and stone him to death. It is as simple as it is brutal. And Jezebel is shown to be a proactive murderer. She clearly thinks nothing of God's word.

Did you spot how many of the ten commandments are broken by Jezebel and Ahab? At least one, six, eight, nine and ten. She does know enough of God's word though to know what warrants the death penalty. She knows that God's word says, you shall not revile God nor curse a ruler of your people.

Leviticus 24 demands death for anyone blaspheming the name of the Lord. She's well versed enough in scripture to know that you need two witnesses. For a verdict. And say from verse 13 onwards, it reads almost like matter of fact.

Jezebel's plan works like clockwork. Using religious and legal injustice, she delivers on her word to Ahab. And Jezebel is thorough. If we read on in 2 Kings 9, we read she killed all of Naboth's sons as well.

Just to make sure the inheritance was free from any interference. Five times in verses 13 to 16, it's underlined Naboth is dead.

[15:49] Team Ahab, one. Team Naboth, nil. by the end of verse 16, Ahab has exactly what he wants and all at the cost of a little whinge to his wife and a postage stamp.

And Naboth, he stands up for God's word. He ends up dead, stripped of his inheritance. And that is that. Or is it?

You see, the resounding victory we had if we'd been reading through 1 Kings back at Mount Carmel in chapter 18 shows there is only one true God and he is the Lord God of Israel.

But you see how that is quite a contrast or complementary with this chapter. What about life when there is no fire coming down from heaven? I take it in our office as we're waiting to pick up the kids from school or down at the gym or in the form room.

We can't just call fire down from heaven during a chat with someone to prove the God of the Bible is real. Anyone done that recently? No? Isn't life much more like chapter 21?

[16:53] People disobey God and his word with impunity. God seems to allow injustice to triumph. In fact, standing up for Jesus means we will suffer.

That's one of the things these verses are reminding us. And God's people are to still obey God's word even when it's costly. In fact, obedience to God's word will always be costly. True believers will obey God, will obey his word and they will face persecution and suffering as a result.

It's true for Naboth and it's true for us. In 2019, you may have seen in the news, Felix Ngole was studying for an MA in social work at Sheffield University.

On his personal Facebook page, he posts Bible verses just supporting the traditional view of marriage and so the university expelled him, thrown off his course. He was allowed back after appealing but then I noticed his name popped up in the news this summer.

He'd been offered a job as a mental health support worker and then he had his offer withdrawn because they found out about these posts four years ago. God's people will be persecuted and will suffer.

[17:59] Are we ready for that? Back in chapter 20, verse 34, Ahab even treats the king of Syria, Israel's enemy, better than righteous Naboth. He lets Ben-Hadad go free even though he's guilty and innocent Naboth is murdered.

Might it be we can expect to be treated even worse than criminals in the future? Certainly it's true in other countries. So is that it? God's people will face persecution and death for standing up for God's word and even though God's in control well everything just carries on.

Well of course that's not it. We have a God who is just, who hates evil and it's why our third point this morning is completely true and a massive reassurance.

God's just judgment will come even if not immediately. Verses 17 to 29. Precisely the fact God is governing the fact he's ruling means judgment will come on the wicked.

So far in this chapter Elijah has been conspicuous by his absence. We haven't heard from him since the end of chapter 19 but now he springs back onto the stage. Verse 17 the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying arise go down to meet Ahab king of Israel he's in Samaria behold he's in the vineyard of Naboth where he's gone to take possession and you shall say to him thus says the Lord have you killed and also taken possession and you shall say to him thus says the Lord in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.

[19 : 32] God's word breaks into proceedings to remind us he's really in charge and God's word is as clear as it is fair in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick up your own blood.

God's justice is definite he cares about injustice he will judge it and God's word is clear about sin. Ahab might have tried to pretend to himself what he did was okay he might have tried to persuade himself Elijah's only out to get him but God won't let the guilty get away with it.

In verse 20 Ahab said to Elijah have you found me O my enemy he answered I have found you because you've sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord behold I'll bring disaster upon you I'll utterly burn you up and will cut off from Ahab every male bond or free in Israel.

I don't know if you're following the World Cup at the moment I think probably one of four teams is going to win but really I don't really know who's going to win the World Cup and we can say with absolute confidence God's just judgment will come we'll see it more as we look at two kings later on today but what are we to make therefore of the final three verses as you're listening did they strike as a bit of a curveball Ahab this awful wicked weak murderous king repents in fact we're reminded just how awful he was in verses 25 and 26 we get a reminder as if to highlight the shock of verse 27 when Ahab heard those words he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly there are hints it's a bit like verse 4 again a toddler tantrum but there must be more to it than that when we look at how God responds verse 28 the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite saying have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me because he's humbled himself before me

I'll not bring the disaster in his days but in his son's days I'll bring the disaster upon his house well despite the the round condemnation of verses 25 and 26 is Ahab just let off the hook well not entirely you see God's just judgment is postponed and not cancelled it might look like the wicked are getting away with it especially to a people in exile but God's just judgment won't be cancelled if we read on to the following chapter and then 2 Kings 9 and 10 we see God does keep his word in a split fulfilment in chapter 20 Ahab's blood is licked up by the dogs and then in 2 Kings Jehu assassinates Ahab's son Joram throws his body onto Naboth's vineyard Jezebel is eaten by dogs after being killed and Ahab's 70 sons are all killed until finally we read these words he struck down he struck down all who remained to Ahab in Samaria till he had wiped them out according to the word of the Lord that he spoke to Elijah so it's not like waiting for the number 8 bus where I used to live in London does anyone still get the number 8 bus

[22 : 50] I remember once deciding whether I needed to get the tube or the bus home so I checked my phone and it said the next number 8 bus was seven minutes away I thought that's not too long I can wait that long and anyway I was chatting with a friend ten minutes later I checked my phone again at this time the number 8 bus was due in eight minutes it was positively kind of reversing travelling back in time I thought still not too long to wait I wait another ten minutes checked my phone again one last time at this time magically the bus was now 20 minutes away positively fleeing from my location God's just judgment is never capricious never unfair but it'll never dissipate either and again wouldn't it be a reassurance to those in exile God is just he will punish those who reject his word even if it looks like that judgment is delayed it's never cancelled when God's people are persecuted in North Korea and when thousands are killed for standing up for Jesus all over the world God is just and his judgment is coming and when Christians lose their jobs when they're publicly vilified when they're shunned ostracized hated

God's just and his judgment is coming now this passage doesn't explain why God doesn't intervene now but it tells us one day he will and nothing is going unnoticed if not even the king is exempt then no one will be exempt his judgment God is governing but if he doesn't rule through a king like Ahab

then how does he rule well in 1 Kings chapter 2 we're given the type of king we are to want one who in David's words will keep the charge of the Lord your God walking in his ways keeping his statutes his commandments his rules his testimonies as it's written in the law of Moses to walk before the Lord in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul in other words a perfect king who perfectly keeps God's word and if Israel had that kind of king well he would prosper and his kingdom would have no end we know we don't want a king like

Ahab but actually as we read on we discover exactly the king we need so keep a finger in 1 Kings 21 it's the only cross-reference we'll make and you can turn to Mark 6 page 1014 in this Bible in front of me it might be different than yours Mark 6 we're going to look pretty briefly just I'm not going to read it all for us but verses 14 to 44 Mark 6 page 1014 so Jesus has just sent out the 12 in verse 7 they've gone about preaching repentance and backing this message up with miracles which has further bumped up Jesus' renown and so verse 14 it catches Herod's attention he begins to panic worrying John the Baptist has come back from the dead and so Mark gives us this flashback of John's death this sordid account of Herod's niece dancing before Herod and his cronies the price of a lap dance in Herod's day well just the cost of the head of John the Baptist on a platter and what's really interesting at least to me and I hope to you is how Mark describes this account so although Herod isn't actually a king Mark calls him a king in verse 14 he even refers to his kingdom verse 23 we're deliberately being given a contrast between two kings two ways of ruling King Herod versus King Jesus King Herod who was neither an Israelite nor of David's line reigns over the Israelites in a manner very similar to Ahab a reign distinguished with opulence moral depravity weakness and murder and so the way Mark writes he deliberately draws parallels between King Herod Herodias John the Baptist and the passage we've just been looking at King Ahab Jezebel and Elijah a king who's not the real king of God's people or at least failing to rule as he should a weak king manipulated and controlled by his wife a wicked woman who arranges for the murder of an innocent man a prophet who's not afraid to confront an unjust king who's only interested in grabbing for himself a prophet who is ultimately opposed by the king and his wife see King Ahab King Herod they show us just what an amazing king Jesus is how brilliant it is to be part of his kingdom the book of one and two kings it's written to explain why Israel are in exile and in no small part they're in exile because they just like the Amorites their kings abused power refused justice and so bad kings lead to bad things but also the opposite is true one and two kings leaves us longing for a king who will undo the exile so in Mark 6 you see verse 34 Jesus has compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd they're words from the very next chapter in 1 Kings where Ahab's failure to rule according to God's word leads to disaster at the result of being with King Jesus do you see that in verse 42 fullness and satisfaction they all ate and were satisfied do we see the contrast going on at 1 Kings 21 is really an anti-king who abuses his power he uses it to grasp and take what is not rightfully his he takes an inheritance that doesn't belong to him and so it makes us long for one who will use his power even relinquish his power for the good of his people one who gives an inheritance to a people that they don't deserve

[28 : 49] Naboth's inheritance is forcibly taken away from him our inheritance is given to us in Jesus Christ and is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for us it is guaranteed so if you look at the outline again on the talk do you see how all three points in this talk point us to the cross and Mark 6 shows us how it's at the cross we see most clearly God ruling even when it doesn't look like it even as the righteous suffer and actually as his judgment comes and we've seen in 1 Kings 21 the picture of one who unjustly dies at the hands of the unrighteous we've seen that the trumped up sham trial of a righteous person with two false witnesses leading to an unjust murder of course it points us to the trumped up false trial of the righteous person leading to his murder at the cross that is how Jesus rules

God governs through his king who is compassionate unlike Ahab who gives his life for his people the opposite of Ahab Jesus really is the best king the perfect king and he's in control and so of course we can serve him with joy whatever the cost and Ahab's death points us to the cross but the cross is also the template for us to follow we can live like that the cross shaped life because God will ultimately rescue the righteous and so the cross gives us supreme confidence when it least looked like God was in control it is actually the pinnacle of salvation when we begin to doubt whether God takes sin seriously we look to the cross and know he does people today debate whether Rishi Sunak is really in control how much longer has he got left being in control but whoever we have leading this country they can't fix everything and the wicked still seem to get away

with it maybe it's our boss maybe it's someone we know at school maybe it's a false teacher in a nearby church leading people astray someone on the PTA protesting against the mention of Jesus in school assemblies 1 Kings 21 rings with the truth God is in control and he governs through his perfect king God's rule is real and so we can rely on him and we can serve him with confidence and so this reminder God is in control over all things through his appointed king it gives me the confidence to speak of him so you know Monday morning I speak of Jesus at work and it results in me losing my job which means I fall behind on my mortgage which means I lose the house and 1 Kings 21 says it's worth it isn't that a huge encouragement and God is still in control through his perfect king even when it doesn't look like it those made righteous through Jesus' death and seeking to follow him will suffer it will seem as if the wicked are getting away with it but God is just he will not let the guilty go unpunished he is faithful and we will never lose our inheritance in Jesus let me lead us in a short prayer loving heavenly father we thank you for this reminder that you are in control and that you are ruling over all things and thank you that even when it doesn't look like it we can have this confidence and thank you most of all that you are ruling through your appointed perfect king our lord Jesus Christ we praise you that he is a king who although innocent gave his life for us thank you that he has given us a guaranteed eternal inheritance that can never be taken away from us please help us respond by confidently living with Jesus as our king knowing any injustice we suffer for living according to your word is never overlooked and never forgotten by you and please would you make us more grateful for having Jesus as our king we ask it in his name and for your glory amen you you you you you you you