

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION TO 1 KINGS 21

In this chapter we have an account of Ahab's design to have Naboth's vineyard, for which he offered him another, or the value of that, but Naboth refusing to part with it, Ahab fell sick, (^{<120>}1 Kings 21:1-4), the reason of which being found out by Jezebel, she devised means to get Naboth put to death under the colour of justice for blasphemy, (^{<121>}1 Kings 21:5-14), and then bid Ahab go and take possession of the vineyard, where he was met by Elijah, who denounced the judgments of God upon him, and Jezebel, and all his family, for his injustice, (^{<121>}1 Kings 21:15-26), but he humbling himself, the evil threatened was deferred to the days of his son, (^{<122>}1 Kings 21:27-29).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass, after these things*, etc.] After the two battles with the king of Syria, in which Ahab was victorious, and after he had let Benhadad, a blasphemer, and injurious to him, go free:

[*that*] *Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel*; of which place (see Gill on "^{<200>}Hosea 1:5") or "who was in Jezreel"; that is Naboth, for the vineyard was in Samaria, (^{<121>}1 Kings 21:18)

hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria; that being the metropolis of the kingdom of Israel, is put for it, who, besides his palace in Samaria, had another in Jezreel; which, according to Bunting^{f443}, were sixteen miles distant from each other.

Ver. 2. *And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs*, etc.] For a kitchen garden to produce eatables of the vegetable kind for his household, or for a flower garden; and perhaps for both, as Kimchi observes, it being customary to have such in court yards, or behind the house; perhaps he might take his notion of an herb garden from his neighbours the Syrians, who were very diligent and laborious in cultivating their gardens, as Pliny^{f444}; hence

“multa Syrorum olera”,

the many herbs of the Syrians, became a proverb with the Greeks:

because it is near unto mine house; lay very convenient for him:

and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seemeth good unto thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money; which seems very well spoken, that he would either give him a better in exchange, or purchase it at its full value; he did not pretend to take it by usurpation, by force, against his will, as it was represented by Samuel kings would do, (^{<0084>}1 Samuel 8:14) as yet such oppression and tyranny was not exercised.

Ver. 3. *And Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.*] The inheritances of families were not to be alienated to another family, or tribe, nor even to be sold, unless in extreme poverty, and then to return at the year of jubilee, (^{<0053>}Leviticus 25:23,28). Now Naboth was a man in good circumstances, and under no necessity of selling his vineyard; and, if he sold it, he might reasonably conclude, it becoming a part of the royal demesnes, would never revert to his family; and therefore, both out of regard to the law of God, and the good of his family, would not part with it at any rate: this shows that he was a conscientious man, and therefore is thought to be one of those that would not bow his knee to Baal, and against whom Ahab had a grudge, and sought an opportunity against him.

Ver. 4. *And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased*, etc.] Just in the same humour he was after the prophet had delivered his message to him, (^{<1003>}1 Kings 20:43), where the same words are used as here:

because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him, for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers, neither by way of exchange nor of purchase: and such a denial he could not bear, since it looked like treating him with contempt, and taxing him with imprudence at least, if not with injustice, or both:

and he laid him down upon his bed; or couch, which might be not in his bedchamber, but in one of his halls, where his courtiers were:

and turned away his face; to the wall, not choosing to have conversation with any of his nobles:

and would eat no bread; the vexation took away his stomach, and he became melancholy, at least sullen.

Ver. 5. *But Jezebel his wife came unto him, and said, why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?*] She perceived he was low spirited, and supposed he had met with something that had ruffled him, and made him so uneasy that he could not eat his food; and she desired to know what it was, that she might relieve him if possible.

Ver. 6. *And he said, because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, give me thy vineyard for money, etc.]* Sell it him at his own price:

or else, if it please thee; if he liked it better:

I will give thee another vineyard for it; as good, or better; and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard; he represents this answer as surly and ill natured, and as the effect of obstinacy, concealing the reason Naboth alleged for his denial.

Ver. 7. *And Jezebel his wife said unto him, dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?* etc.] Art thou not king of Israel? canst thou not do as thou pleasest? hast thou not power to oblige a subject to obey thy commands, and especially in such a trifling matter as parting with a vineyard, and that upon the most reasonable terms? thou hast too much demeaned thyself as a king; thou oughtest to have exerted thy kingly power and authority, and demanded it from him; the Targum is,

“thou now shalt prosper in thy kingdom over Israel;”

thy reign now is prosperous, and like to continue so, having obtained two such victories over thine enemies, and therefore should not be dejected with such a trifling thing as this:

arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: the kingdom being in such a flourishing state; and let not this affair give thee any trouble or uneasiness; I will take care of that, leave it with me:

I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite: without paying any money, or giving another vineyard in exchange for it.

Ver. 8. *So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal,* etc.] He giving her leave, no doubt, to take his seal; though she might not communicate her scheme to him, lest he should object to it:

and sent the letters unto the elders, and to the nobles that were in his city dwelling with Naboth: to the chief magistrates of the city of Jezreel, where Naboth dwelt.

Ver. 9. *And she wrote in the letters, saying, proclaim a fast,* etc.]

Pretending fears of some dreadful calamity coming upon the nation, and therefore fasting and humiliation were necessary to avert it, and it would be right to inquire what crimes were committed by men among them, and punish them for them; and intimated to them that Naboth should be chosen as the great offender, and be accused, condemned, and put to death, R. Joseph Kimchi ^{f445} thinks the phrase signifies “call an assembly or congregation”; convene a court of judicature, from the use of the word in the Talmudic language ^{f446}; and so it is thought it is used in (²⁸⁰⁶Jeremiah 36:6) and indeed it can hardly be thought that Jezebel should have much notion of fasting; and besides, if it was a public fast, why should it be proclaimed only in Jezreel, and not throughout the kingdom?

and set Naboth on high among the people; the court being set, bring him to the bar and arraign him; perhaps in their courts of judicature there was a high place above the heads of the people, where criminals accused used to stand when they took their trials, that they might be seen and heard by all in court.

Ver. 10. *And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him,* etc.] Worthless wretches, that have cast off the yoke of the law, as Belial signifies, lawless abandoned creatures, that have no conscience of anything; “knights of the post”, as we call them, that will swear anything; these were to be set before Naboth, right against him to confront him, and accuse him to his face, and charge him with crimes next mentioned:

saying, thou didst blaspheme God and the king: and so was guilty of death for the former, if not for both, and of confiscation of estate for the latter, which was the thing aimed at; and Jezebel was willing to make sure work of it, and therefore would have him accused of both:

and then carry him out, and stone him, that he die; immediately, without requiring the witnesses to give proof of their charge, and without giving Naboth leave to answer for himself.

Ver. 11. *And the men of the city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them,* etc.] That

Jezebel should contrive so execrable a scheme, and that there should be such sons of Belial among the common people to swear to such falsehoods, need not seem strange; but that the elders and nobles of the city, the chief magistrates thereof, should be so sadly and universally depraved as to execute such a piece of villany, is really surprising. Idolatry, when it prevails, takes away all sense of humanity and justice:

[and] as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them; they punctually, exactly, obeyed the orders in them, as follows.

Ver. 12. *They proclaimed a fast,* etc.] Or called a court, (see Gill on “^{<1209>}1 Kings 21:9”).

and set Naboth on high among the people; placed him at the bar as a criminal, (see Gill on “^{<1209>}1 Kings 21:9”), though Josephus ^{f447} thinks he was set on an high place in the court, because he was of an illustrious birth.

Ver. 13. *And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him,* etc.] Which position showed that they were his accusers, and had a charge against him; it being usual for the accusers and accused to be set face to face, as it was the manner of the Romans in later times, (^{<1256>}Acts 25:16). Josephus says ^{f448} there were “three” men to accuse him; but the Targum, and all the ancient versions, have only “two”:

and the men of Belial witnessed against him, [even] against Naboth, in the presence of the people; both before the judges of the court, and before all the people that filled it, who came to hear the trial; so bold and impudent were they:

saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king; or “bless”, an euphemism; the phrase of cursing God being shocking to the ear, and therefore such a word is used to express it, (see ^{<1305>}Job 1:5 2:9),

then they carried him forth out of the city; without any further process of examining witnesses, and of hearing what the accused had to say in his defence; but immediately they carried him out of court, and out of the city, to put him to death, malefactors being executed always without the city:

and stoned him with stones, that he died; which was the death blasphemers were put to, (^{<1344>}Leviticus 24:14,23), of the manner of which, (see Gill on “^{<1378>}Acts 7:58”), it seems from (^{<1395>}2 Kings 9:26), that his sons were stoned with him.

Ver. 14. *Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead.*] Not only stoned, but stoned to death. This message was sent to her from the magistrates of Jezreel; for though the letters came in Ahab's name, they might be privately informed that this was a scheme of Jezebel's; besides, they knew she had the sway at court, and especially that the news of this man's death would be acceptable to her, and the more if he was of the 7000 that would not bow the knee to Baal.

Ver. 15. *And it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab,* etc.] To whom she communicated the news as soon as possible:

arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead; some think that Naboth was a near relation to Ahab, his father's brother's son ^{f449}; which they endeavour to support from his estate lying next to Ahab's, and from his being ordered to be set in an high place among the people; and Josephus, as before observed, says he was of illustrious descent; and so Ahab upon his death, his sons being also put to death with him, was next heir to his estate; and therefore Jezebel bid him enter on the possession of it, he being dead, and his sons also, and therefore there was nothing in his way to obstruct him: but rather her meaning is, that Naboth was dead, not of a natural but violent death, by the hand of the civil magistrate; as for blasphemy against God, so for treason against the king, in virtue of which his estate was forfeited to the crown, and that Ahab had a right to possess it; and so it was certainly condemned in later times however among the Jews, that if a man was condemned to die by the sanhedrim, his goods came to his heirs, but if for treason against the king, they ceded to him ^{f450}.

Ver. 16. *And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead,* etc.] Of which he was informed by Jezebel:

that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it; if it was in Jezreel, that was sixteen miles from Samaria, and lay lower than that, in a valley, and therefore he is said to go down to it; and which he did very likely in great state and pomp, many of his nobles and captains accompanying him, as we read that Jehu and Bidkar did ride after him at this time, (¹⁰²⁵2 Kings 9:25).

Ver. 17. *And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the prophet,* etc.] Where he now was, when this word came to him, is not certain; nor what he had

been employed in for some time past, since we hear nothing of him since the unction of Elisha, other prophets of lesser note being employed in messages to Ahab from time to time; perhaps Elijah, while Ahab was engaged in war with the king of Syria, spent his time in founding or reviving the schools of the prophets, and instructing and training up those that were in them for public usefulness, since we afterwards hear of them; the word that came to him is, by the Targum, called the word of prophecy, as indeed it was, foretelling the destruction of Ahab and his house: saying; as follows.

Ver. 18. *Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria,* etc.] Whose seat was there, his palace where he dwelt; and Benjamin of Tudela says ^{f451}, that in his time might be discerned in Samaria the palace of Ahab king of Israel, that is, some traces of it; some connect the last clause with Israel, as if the sense was, that Ahab was king over those tribes of Israel, of which Samaria was the head:

behold, [he is] in the vineyard of Naboth: or “will be” by the time thou gettest thither; though the Arabic version is, he is “now” in the vineyard of Naboth:

whither he is gone down to possess it; as if it was his legal inheritance.

Ver. 19. *And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, thus saith the Lord, hast thou killed, and also taken possession?* etc.] Killed in order to possess, and now taken possession upon the murder; some versions, as the Vulgate Latin and Arabic, read without an interrogation, “thou hast killed and hath taken possession”, so Joseph Kimchi and Ben Melech; charging him with the murder of Naboth, and the unjust possession of his vineyard; the murder is ascribed to him, because his covetousness was the cause of it; and it was done by the contrivance of his wife; and it is highly probable Ahab knew more of it, and connived at it, and consented to it, than what is recorded, and however, by taking possession upon it, he abetted the fact:

and thou shalt speak unto him, saying, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine; which was fulfilled in his sons, who were his flesh and blood, (^{<1218>}2 Kings 9:26), for the punishment was respited in his days, and transferred to his sons, (see ^{<1219>}1 Kings 21:29), though dogs did lick his blood, even his blood also, according to this prophecy, though not in the same place, (see ^{<1228>}1 Kings 22:38), wherefore some take these words not to be expressive of the place

where, but of the cause or reason for which this should be done, and read the words, “inasmuch”, or “because dogs have licked”^{f452}, etc.

Ver. 20. *And Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* etc.] So he reckoned him, because he dealt faithfully with him, and reproved him for his sins, and denounced the judgments of God upon him for them:

and he answered, I have found thee; as a thief, a robber and plunderer, in another’s vineyard; he had found out his sin in murdering Naboth, and unjustly possessing his vineyard, which was revealed to him by the Lord; and now was come as his enemy, as he called him, as being against him, his adversary, not that he hated his person, but his ways and works:

because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord; had given up himself wholly to his lusts, was abandoned to them, and as much under the power of them as a man is that has sold himself to another to be his slave; and which he served openly, publicly in the sight of the omniscient God, and in defiance of him. Abarbanel gives another sense of the word we render “sold thyself”, that he “made himself strange”, as if he was ignorant, and did not know what Jezebel had done; whereas he knew fully the whole truth of the matter, and that Naboth was killed through her contrivance, and by her management purposely; and so he did evil in the sight of that God that knows all things, pretending he was ignorant when he was not, and this Elijah found out by divine revelation; so the word is used in (^{<0406>}Genesis 42:6 ^{<0216>}2 Kings 12:5,7), but the former sense is best, as appears from (^{<0215>}1 Kings 21:25).

Ver. 21. *Behold, I will bring evil upon thee,* etc.] Upon his own person, by cutting him off with a violent death, though his family was so numerous, having no less than seventy sons:

and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left Israel; (see Gill on “^{<0140>}1 Kings 14:10”).

Ver. 22. *And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah,* etc.] Two of his predecessors, whose families were utterly destroyed, (^{<0159>}1 Kings 15:29 16:11),

for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin: not only by his worship of the calves, but of the idols of the Zidonians, particularly Baal, and also of the Amorites, (^{<1226>}1 Kings 21:26).

Ver. 23. *And of Jezebel also spake the Lord,* etc.] To Elijah, and by him:

saying, the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel or in the inheritance or portion of Jezreel, as the Targum; Jarchi interprets it, the valley of Jezreel; the fulfilment of this see in (^{<1230>}2 Kings 9:30,33,36).

Ver. 24. *Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat, and him that dieth in the field the fowls of the air shall eat.*] That is, they shall have no burial, (see ^{<1141>}1 Kings 14:11 16:4) hitherto are the words of the Lord by Elijah; next follow the remarks of the historian.

Ver. 25. *But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord,* etc.] Not of any of his predecessors, even those whose families had been destroyed, as his would be, (^{<1221>}1 Kings 21:21).

whom Jezebel his wife stirred up; to idolatry, revenge, and murder, and to whose will he was a slave, and is one instance of his being a captive to sin, and giving up himself to the power of it.

Ver. 26. *And he did very abominably in following idols,* etc.] Which were abominable to the Lord; “dunghill gods”, as the Tigurine version:

according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel; meaning the seven nations that formerly inhabited Canaan, but were driven out for their sins, to make way for the children of Israel, of which the Amorites were one, and here put for all the rest.

Ver. 27 *And it came to pass when Ahab heard these words,* etc.] Delivered in (^{<1221>}1 Kings 21:21-24),

that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon, his flesh, tore off his clothes, and stripped himself of all, even of his very shirt, and put sackcloth on his bare flesh, a coarse cloth made of hair, and such as sacks are made with:

and fasted, how long it is not said:

and lay in sackcloth; in the night on his bed, would have no linen on him day nor night:

and went softly: step by step, as persons mourning, grieving, and pensive, do; the Targum renders it “barefoot”, and so Jarchi.

Ver. 28. *And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite*, etc.] After he was gone from Ahab, and Ahab had been some time in this humble posture; the Targum calls it the word of prophecy, and so it was, as the next verse shows: saying: as follows.

Ver. 29. *Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?* etc.] Which yet was but an external humiliation, to be seen only with bodily eyes, as were all his actions and postures, before observed. Some Jewish writers ^{f453} think his repentance was true and perfect, and his conversion thorough and real: they tell us ^{f454}, that he was in fasting and prayer morning and evening before the Lord, and was studying in the law all his days, and returned not to his evil works any more, and his repentance was accepted: but the contrary appears manifest; we never read that he reproved Jezebel for the murder of Naboth, nor restored the vineyard to his family, which he would have done had he been a true penitent; nor did he leave his idols; we quickly hear of his consulting with the four hundred prophets of the groves, and expressing his hatred of a true prophet of the Lord, (¹¹²¹⁶1 Kings 22:6,8), his humiliation arose from dread of punishment, and not from the true fear of God; however, it was such as was never seen in any of his wicked predecessors, and is taken notice of by the Lord. Luther ^{f455} from these words concluded, and was persuaded, that he was saved:

because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house; this was not a pardon, only a reprieve; the sentence pronounced on him and his family was not taken off, nor countermanded, only the execution of it prolonged; it is promised that the destruction of his family should not be in his lifetime, but after his death, in his son's days, otherwise he himself died a violent death, and the dogs licked his blood, as were foretold; however, this may be an encouragement to those who are truly humbled for their sins, and really repent of them, that they shall receive forgiveness at the hand of God, since he showed so much regard to an outward humiliation and repentance.