

Elijah and Elisha Class 10
1 Kings 21

Homework: 1 Kings 22. Remember there will be no class on November 23. We will have dinner and then at 6:30 we will have our Thanksgiving Eve service.

It is important to recall that prophesy is primarily judicial in nature. Verses 1-16 function as the substance of the trial. The details of the violation of the covenant are detailed. The special circumstances are explained. Now the stage is set for adjudication and the application of the sanctions.

Elijah has apparently returned to the northern kingdom reinvigorated and prepared once again to face down the king and queen for their abuse of their offices and consequent abuse of God's people.

Vv.1-16 The incident of Naboth's Vineyard.

Why does this appear in the Bible do you think?

What is the big deal?

What is Naboth's objection?

What is Jezebel's view of kingship and how does it differ with the office of king as described in Deuteronomy 17?

Of all Ahab's failings the text had not accused him of oppression or brutality against his own people until now. Naboth refuses the king because he understands that the land is not his to sell in perpetuity. Ahab is unhappy at having his offer rebuffed. He knows he is to be merciful to both sojourners and his own subjects Deut 17:14-20. The kings of Israel were not to be like the ancient Near Eastern despots. So Ahab feels he has lost and goes back to the palace to sulk.

There may be a bit of a play on words or allegory going on here. Israel is referred to repeatedly as a vineyard. The word for vegetable garden only appears one other place in Deut 11:10

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where a contrast between Egypt (a vegetable garden requiring human care) is made to the Promised Land (a vine under Yahweh's special care see Is 3:13-15).

Jezebel is dismayed at Ahab and tells him to go out and act like a king...take what you want...you are the king! Then she conspires to remove Naboth as the obstacle to Ahab's desire. She writes letters in Ahab's name and seals them with his seal to gather the elders of Jezreel to the palace for a solemn fast. Naboth is honored but seated between two false witnesses who accuse him of blasphemy and treason against the king. So the crowd/elders took Naboth out and stoned him to death. Then the queen sent word to Ahab saying, "Naboth has been arrested, convicted and executed." The vineyard is yours now! As soon as Ahab heard Naboth was dead he went right down and took possession of the vineyard...did not search for family or heirs but simply stole the vineyard as his own.

Vv.17-29 The Lord condemns Ahab

God speaks...to Elijah and commands him to go and confront Ahab in Samaria and catch him red-handed in the vineyard of Naboth. Elijah seems to have recovered from his despair and fear. Renewed, he goes directly to confront the king with this latest outrage.

Ahab greets him much as before, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" Elijah responds much as he did earlier in chapter 18 saying he is not the king's enemy except as the king commits his way to do evil. A unique term is used here, 'you sold yourself to do evil in the sight of Yahweh.'

Elijah pronounces the judgment of God upon the king. What the king has done will be done to the king. He will die an accursed death. His dynasty will come to an end. The dogs will eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel where she conspired to have Naboth murdered. Dogs were seen as unclean animals so to have dogs eat or lick one's blood is a cursed and publicly disgraced death. The implication is that she would be denied burial.

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The final declaration of guilt is pronounced in v. 25. This is now the second and pronouncement 20:41ff and it represents an intensification; but in v. 27 Ahab quite surprisingly repents. This is the most positive act of Ahab recorded in scripture. So God speaks to Elijah to note his repentance and notify the prophet that the sentence, while not denied, would be delayed.

What an amazing expression of grace...grace is unmerited favor. If ever there was a picture of unmerited favor, this is it. Ahab is the proverbial bad king. He is described as the worst of the worst...and yet Yahweh is prepared, at the first sign of repentance, to show mercy.