

Elijah Confronts King Ahab about Naboth

1 Kings 21:17-29

1 Kings 21:17-29 – *“Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, ‘Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’” And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.’”’ So said to Elijah, ‘Have you found me, O my enemy?’ And he answered, ‘I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD: ‘Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin.’ And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’ The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.”*

But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

Background Notes

It was several years since King Ahab had seen Elijah. Back in 1 Kings 19, when Elijah ran away from Jezreel because of Jezebel's threat, Ahab probably thought he'd never see Elijah again. At least that's what he hoped!

But guess what? Just as Ahab was about to start enjoying the vineyard that he had obtained by robbery and murder, who should show up but the prophet Elijah? God directed Elijah, His re-commissioned servant, to confront King Ahab once again. And where did he confront King Ahab? Right there, in Naboth's vineyard (v18). And notice - God did **not** call it "Ahab's vineyard." God called it "Naboth's vineyard." As far as God was concerned, it was still Naboth's vineyard.

Elijah was to tell Ahab: “*This is what the Lord says, “Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?” Then say to him, ‘This is what the Lord says: “In the place where dogs licked Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood – yes, yours!’”* That prophecy will be fulfilled in 1 Kings 22.

Furthermore, God would bring an end to Ahab’s dynasty: “*I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.*”(v21-22). The house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha were former royal dynasties in Israel. God brought those dynasties down because of their sin. In like manner, Ahab’s dynasty was also to come to a violent end.

Finally, a prophecy was pronounced against Jezebel: “*And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country.’*” That prophecy was fulfilled in 2 Kings 9 - right down to the very details.

Doctrinal Points

1. Every person is responsible for his or her own sin.

The Bible certainly teaches that every person is responsible for his or her own sin - and it teaches that for sure here in 1 Kings 21! The word of the Lord to Ahab was, “*Thus says the Lord, ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’*” Notice - Ahab wasn’t allowed to say, “Wait a minute, I didn’t do it; Jezebel did it. I didn’t personally do it. I didn’t know Jezebel had arranged all this.” **God held Ahab responsible.**

God directed Elijah to say, “*Thus says the Lord: “Have you murdered a man, and also seized his property?”* Even though verse 25 says that Ahab’s wife Jezebel stirred him up, still we see that God held Ahab responsible for his actions - including the robbery and murder of Naboth. Every person is responsible for his own sin.

These days, it’s popular to blame everyone and everything for our wrongdoing. “It’s my background. It’s my upbringing. I was an abused child. I came from a dysfunctional family. It’s because of repressed memories.” It’s always the fault of other people, or of this syndrome or that syndrome. There may be some truth in all of these factors, but what does God’s Word teach? Every person is responsible for his or her own sin.

In Ezekiel 18, the Jews of Ezekiel’s day tried to blame their sins on their forefathers. But the Lord said, “You can’t do that. The one who sins is the one who will die.” In other words, every person is individually accountable to God for the disobedient, sinful choices that he or she makes.

Every person is responsible. I'm responsible to God for my own sin. You're responsible to God for your own sin. We can't blame our sin on someone else or something else. There may be all kinds of negative factors in your background, but you can't blame your own sinful choices on that. Every person is responsible before God for his or her own sin.

2. It's never too late to repent.

After Elijah pronounced judgment on Ahab, *"he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning"*(v27). Finally Ahab repented! Finally the most wicked king in Israel (up to this point) repented.

Even though Ahab's repentance was short lived, God still honored that repentance. Look at verses 28-29: *"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.'"* All the prophecies of judgment about Ahab's dynasty were definitely fulfilled, but they were delayed for about twelve years.

God responded to Ahab's repentance. It's never too late to repent. Certainly that's taught in this portion of God's Word.

It's never too late for you to repent. Maybe you're not a Christian, and you think you're "too far gone" in your sinful lifestyle. You've committed too much sin. You think God would never listen to you. Let me ask you: do you think you're as wicked as Ahab? The Lord Jesus died for your sins. You can have salvation! It's never too late to repent.

A day will come when it will be too late to repent - but right now it's not too late! Why don't you take the opportunity today to confess your sins before God today? Repent and trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. It's never too late to repent.

Practical Applications

1. You can regain your courage.

Remember how bold Elijah was when he confronted Ahab (chapter 17), and when he confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (chapter 18)? But he ran for his life when Jezebel threatened to kill him! He ran from Jezreel, but here he is in that very same place! Elijah was back in Jezreel - back in Jezebel's territory! He was re-commissioned by God, and he had regained his confidence and courage.

You, too, can regain your courage. Are you a Christian who is afraid to witness for the Lord? You're scared. When you were a brand new Christian, you told everyone! You told your neighbors, friends, people you work with, people you sat next to on the bus, the train, a plane. You were courageous - but now you've lost your courage. What happened? Maybe somebody made fun of you, or threatened you in some way.

Well, here's the good news. You can regain your courage, just as Elijah did. You may say, "I can be like Elijah? No way! He was a prophet of God. I'm no prophet!" But what did James 5:17 say about Elijah? "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.*" In other words, Elijah was an ordinary person. Elijah didn't have some kind of advantage over us. He ran away scared because he took his eyes off the Lord. He stopped depending on the Lord. But then God spoke with him, and brought him back. God restored and re-commissioned Elijah. Elijah was now depending on the Lord, and his courage was back. And we, too, can regain our courage!

Let's face it - we're all different. Some of us are not as bold as others. But if we're fearful about sharing our faith with our neighbor, or a fellow student, or with that person sitting next to us on a plane, we can be sure of one thing - we're not totally depending on the Lord. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear.*" Fear does not come from God - it comes from self.

"*God has not given us a spirit of fear.*" Well, what's the answer then? Just in Elijah's case, depend on the Lord and you can regain your courage.

2. Don't be surprised if the world hates you.

That title is actually a verse of Scripture. 1 John 3:13: "*Do not marvel if the world hates you.*" And that truth is taught in 1 Kings 21. When Elijah confronted him, Ahab said, "*Have you found me, O my enemy?*"

Even though Elijah had actually tried to help Ahab by bringing him the word of the Lord, and tried to help him turn to the Lord all the way through his reign, Ahab called him an enemy! Back in 1 Kings 17 Ahab called him a "*troubler*" - and here he called him "*my enemy.*" Don't be surprised if the world hates you.

Sometimes we Christians think that if we're nice and loving and try to help people, somehow the world will respond positively, and will think highly of us. Well, that may be true if we're only doing good and socially helpful deeds! However, if we verbalize the gospel, and start to share the truth of the Word of God, we will experience anger, scorn, and even hatred from the people around us. "The world" will hate us.

Just as Ahab hated Elijah, even though Elijah was seeking to help him, so the world will hate us even when we're seeking to help them in every way, both physical and spiritual. Don't be surprised if the world hates you.