

December 11

Scriptures: Read 1 Kings 21 & 22

Key Verse: “Have you murdered and also taken possession?” (1 Kings 21:19)

Overview

The vineyard of Naboth was in the Jezreel valley, about 30 kilometers north of Ahab’s capital city of Samaria. Ahab coveted the adjoining property of his palace which was owned by Naboth, but could not get him to sell it. This caused him to sulk like a spoiled child. That land would have been in Naboth’s family since the time of the conquest under Joshua, when the land was allotted as a lasting inheritance. It was not to be sold permanently. Therefore, according to Levitical law, Ahab could not rightfully own that land. This was the grounds of Naboth’s refusal (Leviticus 25:23-28; Numbers 36:7).

As a pagan foreigner, Jezebel probably would have mocked this law. In her homeland of Phoenicia, if her father the king wanted something, he merely took it. Jezebel saw Ahab’s behaviour as weakness and took the matter into her own hands to show him that a monarch should get what he desires. She claimed, and Ahab believed, that he was the authority in Israel. They were to soon discover, however, that God was the highest authority.

Jezebel devised a cruel plan of deceit and conspiracy. She, who was adamantly against the worship of God, used religious grounds for Naboth’s mock trial and execution. With two false witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6), he was accused of blasphemy against God and treason by cursing the king, both were punishable by death (Leviticus 24:15-16; Exodus 22:28).

Clearly, Ahab and Jezebel were evil. They had an innocent man murdered to satisfy their greed and pride. Ahab, as the king, would have had plenty of wealth and land, but yet he desired or lusted after what he could not have. They broke several commandments: not to murder, steal, bear false witness against a neighbor, or covet (Exodus 20). Ahab and Jezebel were truly corrupt, having neither honour nor desire for truth and justice. Ahab did indeed get the vineyard, and though his sin seemed to have paid off, in the end sin never pays, and the sinner is the loser (Psalm 37:1-2).

God sent His prophet Elijah to confront Ahab with his sin and declare the divine punishment that he and Jezebel would suffer. This sin would cost Ahab his dynasty (21:21-22; 2 Kings 10:7), and Jezebel would die a dishonourable death (21:23; 2 Kings 9:33-37). Naboth had no one left to take vengeance, for as another account reports, Ahab and Jezebel also had his sons killed (2 Kings 9:26). Naboth was left without anyone to inherit his land, and therefore the take-over appeared to be legal, as did the trial; but nothing is hidden from God. The Lord Himself would take vengeance, and for Ahab this was a fearful thing (cf. Hebrews 10:30-31)

Elijah was brave to face the king with such harsh words. Without fear for his life, he declared, “dogs shall lick your blood” (21:19; 22:38). He spoke with the voice of truth, power, and divine authority, which reminds us of the “Elijah” of the New Testament, John the Baptist (Matthew 11:9-14; 14:3-4; 17:11-13).

With this grievous news, Ahab could no longer enjoy his new vineyard. He humbled himself before God in hopes that He might lighten his punishment. Though he only temporarily turned from sin, God mercifully consented that the horrible punishment for his sin would not happen during his lifetime (2 Kings 9:24-26).

In chapter 22, we read of the visit of Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, to Ahab, the most wicked king of Israel (The contents of this chapter will be further discussed in 2 Chronicles 18). When they made an alliance and joined forces against Syria, God fulfilled the prophecy of the true prophet, Micaiah: Israel saw defeat and Ahab did not return alive (22:17, 28). Micaiah may well have been that unnamed prophet who foretold his death as judgment for letting Ben-Hadad live (22:8; 20:42). We again see that evil will never prevail.

Prayer

Lord, your Word declares, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Keep us living moral lives before You and before all. Please show us any wrongs of which we may not even be aware, so we can make them right. We bow reverently in Your Holy Presence and worship You.