

## **Payday Someday 1 Kings 21:1-29**

The heading in your Bible for this chapter might say something like “Naboth’s Vineyard.” At first glance, the title may not interest you unless you like gardening, enjoy grapes, or your name is Naboth. You might assume this story has little relevance for modern readers. However, that assumption would be incorrect. This chapter makes my blood boil because of the tragedy contained here, and because of how relevant it is. This is not a story about grapes; it is a story about the (in)justice of man and the justice of God. We read about what it is like to suffer injustice, what it costs to do justice for the sake of the oppressed, how much we long for God’s justice, and how we can be made right with God the judge.

Chris Wright tells the story about a young man from India who read the Bible for the first time. For whatever reason, the first passage he read was the story of Naboth’s vineyard. Wright met this young man at a conference, where Wright was teaching on the Old Testament. The young man told Wright that he became a Christian by reading the Old Testament, and he was particularly thrilled that they would be studying the Old Testament in the sessions. Wright tells how this young reader was drawn to the God in the story of Naboth’s vineyard:

He grew up in one of the many backward and oppressed groups in India, part of a community that is systematically exploited and treated with contempt, injustice and sometimes violence. The effect on his youth was to fill him with a burning desire to rise above that station in order to be able to turn the tables on those who oppressed him and his community.... He was contacted in his early days at college by some Christian students and given a Bible, which he decided to read out of casual interest, though he had no respect at first for Christians at all.

It happened that the first thing he read in the Bible was the story of Naboth, Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21. He was astonished to find that it was all about greed for land, abuse of power, corruption of the courts, and violence against the poor—things that he himself was all too familiar with. But even more amazing was the fact that God took Naboth’s side and not only accused Ahab and Jezebel of their wrongdoing but also took vengeance upon them. Here was a God of real justice. A God who identified the real villains and who took real action against them. ‘I never knew such a God existed!’ he exclaimed. He read on through the rest of OT history and found his first impression confirmed....

He then went on, he told me, to read the books of the law, and his amazement grew. ‘God!’ he cried out, even though he didn’t know who he was talking to, ‘You’re so perfect! You think of everything!’ .... He found himself praising this God he didn’t know. ‘God, you’re so just, you’re so perfect, you’re so holy!’ he would exclaim, believing this was the kind of God that answered the need of his own angry struggle.

Then he came upon Isaiah 43:1, and came to an abrupt halt. ‘But now, says the Lord....’ It’s a beautiful word in Telugu, apparently. It means, ‘yet, in spite of all that’. The end of Isaiah 42 describes Israel’s sin and God’s just punishment. But suddenly, unexpectedly, God is talking about forgiveness and pardon and love. ‘I couldn’t take that,’ he said. ‘I was attracted to

the God of justice and holiness. I ran away from a God of love.' But he couldn't. For as he read on he found such a God more and more—still in the OT! It was about then that the Christian friends came and explained more about the fullness of God's justice and love on the cross, and he came at last to understand and surrender to the God he had found in the OT and his life was transformed through faith in Christ.

... 'I never knew such a God existed.' But he does—not just in the past of ancient Israel, but in today's world. Are we afraid to discover him? (Chris Wright, *Themelios*, Jan. 1992)

I love that response: "I never knew such a God existed." Let us (re)discover this awesome God in this Old Testament story.

There are four characters in this story: Naboth, Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah. We read of Ahab's coveting and sulking, and of Jezebel's manipulation and destruction. I take my sermon title from a famous sermon by R.G. Lee, who preached a sermon from this passage entitled "Payday Someday." He introduced to Ahab as "the vile human toad who squatted upon the throne of his nation—the worst of Israel's kings" and he called Jezebel a snake "coiled upon the throne of the nation." We meet Naboth, the faithful Israelite who models obedience to us. Remember when God told Elijah that he had "seven thousand in Israel" who did not bow to Baal? (1 Kings 19:18). Here is one of them - living just outside the palace of this evil king! He has a little vineyard that he cherishes, which had been in his family for years. We finally have a rejuvenated Elijah appearing before Ahab, reminding him that you can hide nothing from God's sight, and your sin will surely find you out (Num 32:23). Let us consider three exhortations drawn from this story.

### **#1: Be prepared to suffer for the sake of righteousness (21:1-16)**

This story makes me think of the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus finished the eight beatitudes, which describes the life of a servant of the kingdom, he said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matt 5:10). Then he adds a further line to this beatitude (unlike the other seven beatitudes) saying, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (5:11-12). Jesus tells us being persecuted for righteousness sake, that is, for displaying Christ-likeness, is an inevitable part of kingdom life. The persecuted are also "blessed" and should "rejoice." And finally, their future reward will more than compensate for present sufferings.

As we read these sixteen verses, we have an example of being persecuted for righteousness sake in Naboth. And we see the nature and destiny of those who inflict such injustice on them in Ahab and Jezebel.

This story also reminds us of a parable of Jesus about a vineyard. It served as an allegory of the whole history of Israel (Matt 21:33-46), a nation who persecuted their prophets (the servants tending the vineyard), and rejected and killed Jesus. However, such persecution did not go unnoticed by the Owner of the vineyard, who would inflict miserable punishment on the unrighteous ones. Such is the story of Naboth. The unrighteous kill the righteous, but the true Owner of the vineyard is not unaware and he will judge.

***Ahab's Covetousness (1-2).*** Had he been alive today, Ahab would have subscribed to *Better Homes and Gardens* and enjoyed "House Hunters" on HGTV. His gown palace may have been on "MTV Cribs." He loved building his palaces and he loved enlarging his gardens. He had a summer palace in Jezreel (1). After having some hard years of draught, now things were going pretty well for him in many ways. Rain could water his plants. Desiring now to expand his comforts, and add to the beauty of his palace, he took interest in the vineyard of Naboth. He makes an offer 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 what seems good to you, I will give you its value in money" (2). Even though it was a nice vineyard, Ahab wants to turn it into a vegetable garden. Thus, he offers him a sweet deal. He offers Naboth "a better vineyard." Or, if Naboth is finished with the vineyard business, he says that he will just pay him what it is worth. Sounds generous, right?

But there are problems with this offer. Consider his desire to turn it into "a vegetable garden." This proposal would have been significant for an Israelite. We read about a "vegetable garden" in the same chapter of Deuteronomy where we read about the famine being a punishment for idolatry (chapter 11). God told his people, "For the land that you are entering is not like the land of Egypt, for which you have come, where you sowed your seed and irrigated it, like a garden of vegetables. But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for." (11:10-12a). The vegetable garden was a reminder of Egypt. It required human care, whereas the Promised Land relied on God's care. Add to this the fact that Israel was known as "a vine under God's care" (Ps. 80; Isa 3:13-15; cf., Mark 12:1-12; John 15:1-17), and you can see that Ahab's desire is to turn Israel back to Egypt. Israel's kings had already turned the people back to Egypt with their foreign wives, and here Ahab continues this trend by making this proposal. This is more than a little story about a vineyard. It is a battle of the kingdom of God verses the kingdom of darkness.

Further, Ahab falls into the sin of covetousness. It happens when you desire something that is not yours, like possessions, one's wife, one's success, or one's body, just to name a few. It is often associated with possessions, as in this case. Ahab has so much, but now he wants someone else's property. God gives him a land with milk and

honey and vineyards, but he wants more. He surely knew that this property was off limits since the land belonged to God and the families were not to sale their land, yet Ahab wants it anyway. His appetites were beastly. He was like a bear looking to lick a bit more honey; a lion looking for a piece of cheese; an overstuffed bull looking for a bit of grass outside his own pasture (Lee).

Ahab's course of action illustrates James' words on the nature sin's progress: "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). Ahab's desire gave birth to sin and eventually lead to death. Ahab's story is not new. He is like David, he desired someone else's wife, and then murders an innocent man (2 Sam 11-12). Ahab is like Cain, killing his brother in Israel. He is like Adam, taking forbidden fruit.

It is important to note that covetousness (or "greed") begins in the heart, and it leads to other sins. Idolatry always leads to further sins. Paul says, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim 6:9). Is this verse not expressed in Ahab's tragic story? Sinful desire leads to harmful desires and destruction. Is it not also seen at the crucifixion of Jesus? Covetous men testified falsely against him, betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver, and ultimately nailed him to the cross.

Do not take covetousness lightly. We must watch out for greed in our hearts. Paul says there should not be a hint of it in our lives (Eph 5:3). Jesus said, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Jesus tells us to watch out because we may be greedy. Why do we have to watch out? It is because greed is sneaky. We know when we commit other sins, like stealing, but what about coveting and greed. Rarely, do people think they are greedy. They can go through their whole life investing in their own comforts without any thought to the kingdom. Jesus called that man in the following parable "a fool." So let me ask you, "Are you watching out for greed in your heart?" Jesus said one of the reasons the word does not take root in hearts is that the "deceitfulness of riches" and the desire for other things" chokes the word (Mark 4:19). How can you guard against greed?

Let me mention two antidotes to greed. First, remember that covetousness is a worship problem. All sin is a worship problem, but Paul says of this sin in particular, "Covetousness is idolatry" (Col 3:5). When abandon God, you will inevitably abandon righteousness, and fall into all sorts of sins. Instead we must learn to trust God and find our ultimate joy in him. Do you believe that God will provide, and do you believe that his presence is your highest good? Later in Luke 12, Jesus talks about not being anxious, but instead trusting in the Father who cares for you. Then he says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (12:32). You have no need to fear. Trust God. The writer of Hebrews says, "Keep your life free from the love of

money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (13:5). Are you trusting in God? Are you content with what he has given you? Is his presence satisfying you, or are you looking for satisfaction elsewhere?

Another antidote to greed is generous giving. Giving generously frees you from the power of greed. If you are serious about killing this sin in your life ("put it to death," Col. 3:5), then do a simple check of where your money is going. Have you considered how much you have given this year to your local church, to the cause of mission, and to the poor? Jesus said that how you give reflects where your heart truly is (Luke 12:34). Do not think greed does not affect you, especially in materialistic America. We are more like Ahab than we want to admit. Giving frees you from the power of greed.

***Naboth's Righteousness (3).*** Enter the faithful Israelite. Oh, the difference in Naboth and Ahab! Naboth responds to Ahab's proposal saying, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (4). Naboth is theologically motivated, not financially motivated. His god was not money, but Yahweh. Naboth knew the Old Testament understanding of land; that is, land ultimately belonged to God who gave it to the families. He knew that God brought Israel into the land fulfilling his word to Abraham (Gen 17:8), driving out the previous residents, and through Joshua had it allocated to the tribes as their inheritance (Josh 13:1ff.). Naboth knew that selling the land was not an option, and that there were laws established that kept the land in the families (cf., Lev 25; Num 36:7-9). Under certain emergencies, an Israelite might sell land (Lev 25), but they did not apply to Naboth's situation here. We read later of how the prophets spoke against the neglect of property laws, saying "Woe to you" (Isa 5:8; Mic 2:1-2). We read of Ezekiel looking forward to the day in which the rulers would not oppress but would allow the rightful people to possess the land according to their tribes (Ez 45:8).

What a picture of righteousness. Think about it. Naboth could have been richer. He could have perhaps negotiated a bit more, and worked his way up the royal ladder. But Naboth lives by the Word of God and for another world. Notice, this is the only time we hear him speak. He simply says, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Righteousness involves saying, "The LORD forbid." Even though the culture might accept something does not mean the Lord favors it. In the words of Paul, Naboth "abhors what is evil, and clings to what is good" (Rom 12:9). When presented with some unrighteous temptation, may the Lord give you power to say, "God forbid" (cf., Rom 6:1-2).

Your theology will determine your biography. What we believe drives what we do. These men have two different theologies, and consequently, they have two different biographies.

***Ahab's Sullenness (4).*** Like a spoiled child, who throws a fit when not getting a trinket while they have a room full of toys, we read that Ahab "went into his house vexed

and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him” (4). This attitude appeared in the previous chapter, after Ahab received the news that he would have to pay for the life of Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:43). Look at this picture of a king! Crying and refusing to eat because he did not get what did not belong to him! He is whining like a sick hound (Lee). He probably had servants trying to cheer him up, musicians playing music, and entertainers trying to put him in a better mood. But the pouting potentate refused it all.

Sulking is not just childish, it also exposes something other than greed. Sulking exposes this about your heart: you are not content with the providences of God. In the heart of the disciple is a deep trust that God is in control, and while things may not be going super well, you can go on with out throwing a fit and refusing dinner.

This story is also sad when you consider that Ahab and Jezebel had God-given abilities. Their minds and skills, however, were used for evil not for good. Look at how quick Jezebel could devise a plan to kill Naboth! She could have put her skills to used for the kingdom - for the poor, the orphan, the widow instead of murder. How tragic it is to see people blessed by God, using their gifts for the things of this world, instead of the kingdom of God. Ahab should have been out caring for the nation, instead he is crying in his bedroom over a little vineyard. How small his vision was; how cold his heart was. Beware of the self-centeredness of Ahab.

***Jezebel's Sliminess (5-7).*** Throughout Ahab's reign, we have observed his weak passivity and Jezebel's snake-like influence. She asks Ahab what is wrong (5), and he proceeds to tell her of Naboth's refusal (6). Only Ahab does not report the story correctly. Naboth did not say, "I will not give you *my* vineyard" (6b, my emphasis). The whole point was that the vineyard was not Naboth's to sell in the first place! He actually said, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (3).

Jezebel asks him, "Do you now govern Israel?" "Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth and the Jezreelite" (7). Did she mean this as a question, or was she as a sarcastic exclamation? We cannot be sure, but it seems to be the latter. She seems to be calling him out as a wimpy crybaby. As a result, she decides to take care of the matter since her weak husband cannot demonstrate power. Perhaps she compared her weak husband to her kingly-father, who would not allow his subjects to refuse him, and this enraged her (cf., 18:31). She had influenced Ahab to act like pagan kings, but he was not demonstrating their force in this episode, so she decides to take over. She will get the land without paying a dime.

Jezebel, like Eve in the garden, has no regard for God's authority. She will do what she want taking forbidden fruit, and her passive, Adam-like husband stands passively by. Jezebel also has no sense of royal honor. Instead of using royal power to bless others, she uses her power to abuse others (contrast with Deut 17:14-20).

This is a classic case of “injustice,” which can be understood as “the abuse of power.” Sadly today the powerful often manipulate, abuse and torture the weak, through bribery, corrupt legal systems, intimidation and force. Land grabbing remains a serious matter around the world. One of the organizations we partner with is International Justice Mission. While many know them mainly for their incredible work to fight human trafficking, they also fight to give land back to the vulnerable. In many places, the vulnerable have their land and livelihood violently taken from them. Often perpetrators will come in the middle of the night and cut down crops, burn the house, or even push it over onto those in the home, and sometimes they beat them. What makes it worse, is that often, the local officials will not help. I recently watched a story of a Ugandan widow named Grace. Grace’s husband became ill and died, leaving her with the five children. She then became a victim of property grabbing. She walked 25 miles to local officials ... over and over for two months. But she got nowhere in the process. Of course, she was asked to pay money for the help. It got so bad that she said, “I envied death. I became weak by walking so much. I wondered what would happen to my kids if I died.” Fortunately, IJM lawyers took up her cause, and advocated for her for nearly three years. After hours of work, she got her land back, and rebuilt her home brick by brick (“Grace’s Story” <http://www.ijm.org/node/1499>).

If God ever gives you influence, remember why you have it. It is not to satisfy your selfish desires. It is not to trample on others, or glorify yourself. You have influence so that you can bless others in general, and those with no influence in particular. In Proverbs 31, we read of these words to the king, “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all her are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (8-9). Such godly character is nowhere to be found in Ahab and Jezebel, and sadly it was not found in the leaders of Naboth’s town either.

**Collective Wickedness (8-14).** Jezebel goes to work. She writes letters with the king’s letterhead to those in charge of Naboth’s town (8). She gives specific instructions, “Proclaim a fast, 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” (9). Each line was like another stone with which to stone an innocent man.

Such plan sounds familiar: an innocent man, false witnesses, and false accusations, being killed outside the city (cf., Matt 26:57-68).

Then we read of the cold story. The writer says that the men of the city follow Jezebel’s plan (11-13). They “took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones” (13b). Corrupt judges submit to Jezebel’s demands wickedly. Here is an example of a legal system becoming a tool for devilish politicians. Notice how easily this

passes through the system. Such a process shows how corrupt this collective group of leaders was.

Then they send the word back to Jezebel, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead" (14). Notice that all of this injustice is done in the name of religion. A day of prayer was observed on the same day that this faithful Israelite was executed. They also followed the law of having two witnesses (cf., Deut 17:6-7; 19:15; Num 35:30), and the appropriate penalty was then applied for cursing God (cf., Lev 24:13-16).

Ahab and Jezebel had no interest in following God's Word, but when it allowed them to get what they wanted, and then they considered it. They used God to get what they wanted. And they apparently thought, they could get away with this.

How sad it is that millions have died in the name of religion. Muslims take innocent lives of Christians in many places, such as Nigeria. Christians have killed in the past as well. We must never take such an action, and we need to tell our friends that such actions in the past do not reflect Scripture. We should also remember that atheism has also led to the slaughter of millions. Non-religion and religion can be used to satisfy one's covetous desires. Jesus came not to kill, but to lay down his life for those who were weak and desperate. He came as a servant leader, and sacrificial lamb. He was the king that Israel never had. And he will come again, to correct all injustice once and for all.

***Temporary Happiness (15-16).*** When we get to verses 15-16, it appears like the game is over. Jezebel tells Ahab that Naboth is dead (15a). Then she says, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but alive" (15b). If you glance over to 2 Kings 9:26, you see that Naboth's sons were also taken out, in order to remove any other interferences with family rights of the land. Perhaps she laughed and mocked her husband. "Look what I've gotten you for free." Her conscious seems unprovoked by the fact that an innocent man has died, and surely members of his family were weeping.

Perhaps this incites righteous indignation inside your heart. It does mine. If so, you can resonate with Psalm 73, as the Psalmist laments over the "prosperity of the wicked" (3). He talks about all that they enjoy, while he is "stricken and rebuked every morning" (14). Then we read, "But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went to the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." In other words, the Psalmist realized that the happiness of the wicked is temporary. It will not last long. For the unbeliever, this life is as close to heaven as you will get. There will be a "pay day someday." Do not envy the wicked. Instead, place your faith in Jesus and live for another reward. Say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth I desire besides you" (73:25). Ahab will enjoy his little vineyard for a brief time, but he did not kill the true Owner of the vineyard.



**Faithful Witnesses.** As we stand over the grave of Naboth, we can find encouragement and instruction on being faithful in the midst of suffering. His story reminds me not only of the Beatitudes, but of Peter, who according to tradition also suffered for righteousness sake. If I could preach Naboth's funeral, I may use this passage:

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And  
"If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"  
19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Peter tells us that about nature of suffering for righteousness sake. He reminds us that we should be prepared to suffer verbally, if not physically ("insulted," 14). He tells us it might happen because we are simply following Christ ("as a Christian," 16; "share Christ's sufferings," 13), and it may come when you are simply "doing God's will," or that which is "good" (19). In light of these reasons he encourages his readers with six points.

First, *do not be surprised by persecution* (12). The godly are often objects of injustice, whether it is from oppressive governments or individuals. Paul said, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). Jesus told his disciples, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20b). (Incidentally, here is one reason why we do not believe in the prosperity gospel. The righteous person should expect suffering, not expect health, wealth and prosperity).  
Second, *we should rejoice* (1 Peter 4:13a). Those who rejoice now are giving evidence that they will rejoice later when "glory is revealed" (13b). Our reward is coming later. Our suffering in Jesus' name never goes unnoticed, ever how small it might seem. Third, *Peter reminds us that we are "blessed,"* because "the Spirit of the glory and of God rests on us" (14; cf., Matt 5:10). We experience the presence of God in a particularly powerful way in suffering, which enables us to endure. Like Naboth, God empowers us to endure injustice. In the midst of idolatry, Naboth lived a godly life by God's power, and so can we. Fourth, *we get to glorify God in our suffering* (16). We get to live out our ultimate

purpose in life, to show forth the glory of God. Fifth, *he reminds us that suffering for righteousness is sanctifying and temporary, while the unrighteous' suffering will be horrific and eternal* (17). Remember, in your suffering that this is all you will receive, but those who do not embrace Christ, will suffer eternal suffering. "Scarcely saved" does not mean you will barely make it, but rather "with difficulty," meaning you will suffer as a believer. But just know, this refining fire has a good purpose and it is short lived. Finally, *Peter tells us to entrust our souls to God* (19). God will not abandon you in suffering, and God is sovereign over it.

Jesus modeled suffering for righteousness, and entrusting our souls to God. Peter says earlier in his letter, "He committed no sin, neither was their deceit in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:22-23). We have a Savior, who understands human suffering for he was the ultimate righteous sufferer. For the story of an innocent scapegoat is not on the periphery of the Bible, it is the central message of it (Leithart, 157). As Jesus endured such suffering, he was making a way for us to escape God's ultimate judgment, and empowering us to live in the present as believers in him. Peter says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (2:24).

## **#2: Be willing to sacrifice for the sake of the oppressed (21:8-16)**

I draw this point from the inactivity of the people in Naboth's city. Where are the protesters? Nowhere. Not one single person steps up to defend Naboth? The leadership of Naboth's city do nothing, the people do nothing, and that is exactly the reason injustice goes on today. As it is often quoted, "All is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing" (Edmund Burke). I am not sure I want to call these "good men" but I am sure that injustice prevailed because the people did nothing.

The reason they complied with Jezebel's wishes was that they were afraid of the consequences of refusing her. We can understand their fear but we cannot condone their actions. They do nothing to stop the death of a faithful Israelite, and apparently allow the death of his sons to happen without raising their voice. Like Jesus, he was killed "at the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).

As noted previously about Ahab and Jezebel's lack of concern for blessing others, especially the weak, as kings were to do, so here is another example. The leadership in Naboth's town should have used their influence to protect the weak, instead they crumbled under pressure. They feared a woman and her mafia, more than they feared God (cf., Matt 10:28a).

Do not just shake your head at the people in Naboth's city. Let us beware of our own passivity, and indifference to the great problems of our day. What are you doing about poverty, land grabbing, abuse, trafficking, and spiritual lostness of our world? We must repent not only of our sins of commission, but our sins of omission. C.S. Lewis said, "The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference." Are you unmoved by the Naboth-like stories of our world?

Serving in Jesus' name will inconvenience us. It will cost us. But love acts. Are you using your influence, time, and talent for the sake of those in need? Do not confuse sympathy with love. Feeling sorry for the orphan, the widow, the abused, and the lost does not help them! Love acts. If God gives you any influence, use it to protect and bless those in need. Sacrifice by spending time in prayer for victims of injustice. Give financially for the good of others. Go to the nations to speak the gospel to those who have never heard it before. Do it knowing that though suffering awaits you, Jesus is with you, and he will bring you safely into his heavenly kingdom.

In the movie 42, Harrison Ford, who plays Branch Rickey, gives a stellar performance. I was moved by how he gave a glimpse of what it looks like to suffer on behalf of another. Rickey brought Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers, making Robinson the first African-American player in the Major Leagues. In one scene, Rickey opens up a filing cabinet to show Pee Wee Reese, who was complaining about a few personal threats, a filing cabinet full of threats. Obviously, Robinson had to endure mockery and criticism, but Branch Rickey may have received even more. Near the end of the movie, Robinson presses Rickey as to why he has submitted himself to the whole painful ordeal. In reply, Rickey tells how when he was in college, the best player on his team was a black man named Charlie Thomas, who was ultimately broken by racism. He then looks at Robinson and says, "There was something unfair about the heart of the game I loved and I ignored it. But a time came when I could no longer do that. You let me love baseball again. Thank you."

Rickey was unhappy with his apathy and indifference and sought to do something about it. Maybe you have stood back long enough from fighting on behalf of the oppressed. Let me encourage you to play ball. Speak up. Get involved. Act.

### **#3: Remember that there will be a payday someday (21:17-29)**

Everything seems to be wrapped up. Ahab is enjoying the herbs from his vegetable garden, and Jezebel is probably planning her next scheme, which she gets pampered in the palace. But then someone appears! It is the "Hillbilly from Tishbe!" Elijah is back! We read of that familiar phrase again, "Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah" (17). Then God says, "Arise, go down and meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession" (19). Twice we read where Jezebel told Ahab to "Arise" (21:7; 15); now God tells Elijah

to “Arise.” For every Jezebel who tells an Ahab to “Arise” and do injustice, God has an Elijah to whom he says “Arise” and speak justice.

Because of Ahab’s murder and wrongful acquisition of land, the Lord tells Elijah to say, “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood” (19). God will step in to defend the defenseless. Ahab will reap what he has sown. God was not unaware of this story. The writer of Proverbs says, “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch over the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3).

Elijah obeys and goes to meet Ahab. The king asks, “Have you found me, o my enemy?” (21:20a). Previously, Ahab called him a “troubler” (18:17), but now he calls him “his enemy.” He was Ahab’s enemy because Ahab had become an enemy of God. Elijah goes on to say, “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” (21:20-21). God will destroy Ahab’s royal dynasty because he has provoked the Lord to holy anger, and Ahab will suffer the same fate as Jeroboam and Baasha (21:22). Elijah also tells Ahab that God will also execute judgment on his serpent-wife, Jezebel. He said, “The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel” (23).

These prophecies were fulfilled eventually. It took a little while. We read of three years of war with Syria and Israel before we finally read of Ahab’s death (22:1). His story is vivid and terrifying. Against the counsel of the prophet Micaiah, Ahab went into battle against Syria at Ramoth-gilead (22:13-29). The writer says he went out into battle and disguised himself, thinking he would go unnoticed (22:30). The Syrians were looking to take out Ahab, but only found Jehoshaphat, whom they let go (22:32). Then an unnamed warrior shot an arrow at Ahab, without knowing it was Ahab, implying the shooter was ultimately the sovereign God (1 Kings 22:34). The warrior hit Ahab between his armor and the breastplate (22:34). Ahab was then propped up in his chariot until he died (35). The blood of Ahab flowed into the bottom of the chariot (35). When his body was brought back to Samaria, his servants were washing the blood off the chariot, and we read, “the dogs licked up his blood” (38).

What of Jezebel, the snake coiled upon the throne of Israel? Her execution is told in 2 Kings 9:30-37. Years after Elijah’s prophecy, an army captain named Jehu, obeying the God’s word, had all of Ahab’s descendants killed. He also gave an order to have Jezebel, who had put her make up on anticipating the arrival of Jehu, thrown down from an upstairs window. She died from the fall. When Jehu sent men to bury her, they found only traces of her body, which had been eaten by dogs, fulfilling Elijah’s prophecy

The Lord delayed judgment, but it came. It came swiftly and sovereignly. Perhaps Ahab thought Elijah was not telling the truth. Perhaps Jezebel mocked her husband

every time they ate out of Naboth's vineyard, mocking Elijah for his prophecy. "Did he not say judgment was coming!? Where are the dogs?" But I agree with R.G. Lee, who said that Ahab jumped every time he heard a dog bark!

The wicked may prosper for a short time in this life, but the arrow of God's judgment will strike and God, the righteous judge, have the last word. Ahab may have been able to manipulate corrupt judges, but he could not manipulate the ultimate Owner of the land of Israel and the judge of all the earth.

This passage gives suffering believers great comfort. Though Christians may suffer around the world today, not one single unjust action goes unnoticed by God. No one had to report this event to God. Davis says, "Jezebel's letters had already been put through the shredder at city hall; none of the shady details came out in the papers. Elijah himself apparently didn't know until Yahweh told him.... Yahweh did not let it pass. He saw and intervened (cf., Ex 3:7-8a)" (Davis, 304). Just like in the Exodus narrative, God "heard, saw, and knew" about their suffering and then he brought judgment on Egypt.

The question we might have in the story is why did God wait so long? Naboth is already dead. We like the fact that God pronounces judgment, but what of Naboth? The mystery of God's timing in judgment appears throughout Scripture. Moses is spared, but others die at the hands of wicked Pharaoh. The toddler Jesus is spared though others die at the hands of Herod. John the Baptist is put to death by the heartless king Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-29); Herod Agrippa kills Peter, but Peter experiences an amazing jailbreak (Acts 12). How can we make sense these stories? While we will never understand the mysterious ways of God, the text still stands as a great comfort for us (as the opening story of the young man from India interpreted it). The flow of the story is intended to show us that God defended Naboth. As Davis says:

The Naboth episode, we can say, is no guarantee of immunity, only of justice – and that not necessarily this October. But come it will, for 1 Kings 21 is a preview of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7. We have the narrative in 1 Kings 21; we have the doctrine in 2 Thessalonians 1. God will intervene to bring justice to his wronged people. We mustn't allow our quandary over the timing of Yahweh's justice to eclipse our comfort over the fact of it; indeed, the way Yahweh takes up the cudgels here for his wronged people is what, in part, makes him such an attractive God. (Davis, 304)

God defends the weak. God knows. God sees. God will judge the unjust in his own timing.

What we read next surprises us. We might expect Ahab to respond to this message with more evil deeds, or God to act immediately. Yet, Ahab actually "tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went about dejectedly" (27). This act was a sign of

repentance. God then speaks to Elijah 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” (28). Though Ahab will die violently in battle, his dynasty will go for a while under the reign of his sons. Judgment is delayed but not canceled. There is a difference in a rain delay and a cancelation. In Scripture, God often delays judgment when people repent. The prophecy of Huldah to Josiah is an example of this principle (2 Kings 22:8-20).

Was Ahab’s repentance authentic? He did humble himself and God granted him delayed judgment, so there seems to be reason to accept it as genuine. But then again, true repentance involves restoration. We do not read of any actions of king Ahab in trying to restore what he broke. He does not give the vineyard back, or admit his wrongdoing. True repentance looks like Zacchaeus, who after coming to Jesus, returned what he owed to others four-fold (Luke 19:8). I would call this a merciful act of God, but not true repentance. In the midst of wrath, God remembered mercy. God’s display of mercy was an invitation for Ahab to go deeper into repentance; that is, to live a life of repentance obedience to him. It was an invitation to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Matt 3:8)

What kind of God could show such mercy? He is the God who has shown us mercy. For you see, we deserve to be punished for our sins, also. While we may not sin exactly like Ahab, we are guilty of sinning against God. Jesus tells us likens anger to murder in the Sermon on the Mount. There is only one who is ultimately righteous: Jesus. And there will be a payday someday for everyone. How can we escape God’s just judgment? Hear R.G. Lee:

And the only way I know for any man or woman on earth to escape the sinner's pay-day on earth and the sinner's hell beyond—making sure of the Christian's pay-day on earth and the Christian's heaven beyond the Christian's pay-day— is through Christ Jesus, who took the sinner's place upon the Cross, becoming for all sinners all that God must judge, that sinners through faith in Christ Jesus might become all that God cannot judge.

My friend, you need a substitute. That is what you have in Jesus. God provided the righteousness we need in him. The hymn writer said:

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
in my place condemned he stood;  
sealed my pardon with his blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Judgment will fall. Either Jesus takes your judgment, or you will face it. We cannot hide from God. He knows our sins – in thought, word, motive, and deed. We

have one solution: we must be hidden in Christ. In Christ, we are safe. In Christ, we are righteous. In Christ, we are loved. In Christ, we do not have to fear impending judgment. In Christ, we have power to stand up for the oppressed, and look forward to future reward in his kingdom. Jesus paid it all; all to him we owe.

All of this is made possible by the greatest story of the innocent sufferer, Jesus. For Naboth's story calls our attention to Jesus' story. We read in Matthew:

59 Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" 62 And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

Matt 26:59-68

Jesus' enemies conspired against him, falsely accused him of blasphemy, mocked and beat him, and eventually and took him outside the city to kill him (cf., Heb 13:10-13).

Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel and the blood of Naboth (Heb 12:24); for their blood cries out for vengeance, but Jesus' blood cries out with forgiveness to everyone. He is the innocent scapegoat offering salvation to the world, and promising that one day the cries of the martyrs will be heard, and their blood will be avenged.

Do you know that a God like this exists? If you do, then trust him. Rejoice in him. Anticipate the day in which the King greater than David, greater than Ahab appears in glory to establish his kingdom, filled with shalom, where peace and righteousness dwell forever. Fill your mind with this glorious future, while you suffer in the present. C.S. Lewis said, "If you read history you will find that Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next" (Mere Christianity, 116). Someday. Someday the wicked will be justly punished. Someday those who are in Christ will see the Savior in glory. Let us think of the next world, as we live faithfully in this one.

