

# Naboth's Vineyard

AHAB was a wicked king, and his wife Jezebel only made him worse. The Bible account of their dealings with a man called Naboth shows just how wicked they were.

Naboth had a vineyard in Jezreel, which was next to the palace of Ahab. This must have been a summer palace, as Samaria (the capital) and Jezreel were about eighteen miles apart. Ahab thought Naboth's vineyard would make an excellent spot to have a vegetable or herb garden, and the attraction of locally grown fresh vegetables would be very great. He wanted it.



## Illegal from the Start

Ahab had forgotten the Law God gave through Moses, if he ever knew it: *“The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me” (Leviticus 25:23).*

The Law made very clear provisions, not wishing for the rich to begin to accumulate large amounts of land at the expense of the poor. Essentially the land was God's, and they were to remember this.

*...So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers (Numbers 36:7).*

Even if Ahab knew only the Ten Commandments, he should have known:

*You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's (Exodus 20:17).*

When he approached Naboth about his idea his offer appeared to be very generous. Ahab offered either a better vineyard, or its value in money. On the face of it, this was an excellent choice, but Naboth knew the Law, and would not go along with Ahab's proposal.

Naboth's reply might have seemed a little abrupt, but it was only what Ahab should have expected.

*The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you! (1 Kings 21:3).*

This completely surprised Ahab, who went home "sullen and displeased". He went off to his bed and refused to eat. Perhaps he should just have been left there, sulking on his bed, but Jezebel was not one to do so.

## The Cruel Mischief Maker

Here was an opportunity for mischief, and perhaps to establish the kingdom more securely for Ahab. Having discovered the source of the trouble, Jezebel began to arrange things so that Ahab could have the vineyard he coveted.

Telling her sulking husband to get up and have a meal, she made plans to remove Naboth from the scene. Knowing his wife, Ahab should have been alarmed.

Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab's name, using Ahab's seal to confirm what she wrote. The letters were to the elders of Jezreel.

*Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honour among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die (v9-10).*

Naboth was to be removed without compassion, just because he stuck to God's Law, which conflicted with what the king wanted.

Jezebel wielded sufficient influence in Israel for what she demanded to be carried out unquestioningly. The cruel plot was carried through and she received the message, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead" (v14).

Even then it was not right for Ahab to attempt to claim the vineyard, despite the fact that he had killed both Naboth and his heirs (as we find later). But such niceties were not for Jezebel, who went straight to Ahab with the message:

*Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead (v15).*

## A Familiar Figure

So Ahab went off to Jezreel to claim the vineyard, knowing that it was most unlikely that any of his subjects would stand in his way.

He had forgotten that the Lord God, Who had given the laws for him to obey in the first place, also sees all that goes on. He was about to make sure that Ahab knew about that.

The Lord had a task for his prophet Elijah and sent him down to meet Ahab as he arrived at the vineyard. You can imagine the scene, Ahab arriving at the vineyard, pleased with his new possession, suddenly stopped short by the sight of the unmistakable figure of Elijah the prophet. Elijah's dress was very distinctive, and there would be no doubt who was waiting quietly in the vineyard for Ahab to arrive.



Jezebel was also to be punished for her wickedness.

*The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel (v23).*

## Ahab Repents

It was not a pleasant prospect, but even kings and queens cannot break God's law with impunity. All men and women are subject to Him.

The Bible text includes a comment about the way that Ahab had broken God's laws like no one before him, and the role of Jezebel in it:

*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 (v25).*

Given what we know of Ahab, his response to all this was particularly remarkable.

*When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning (v27).*

The terrible condemnation by Elijah really does seem to have worked and produced repentance in this wicked man. What is especially encouraging is the Lord God's response. He delayed implementation of the sentence until Ahab's son's days. If Ahab could be forgiven, then so can we.

Jezebel however did not repent and suffered the unpleasant death that Elijah had foretold, as we shall see later.

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Ahab's heart must have sunk, and he greeted Elijah with, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" (v20). Ahab seems to have thought that his troubles came directly from Elijah, not seeing that they really came from God, because of his own wickedness. In reality Elijah was a messenger from God. This was the message:

*Thus says the LORD: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?... In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours" (v19).*

It was a damning indictment of Ahab's behaviour, though he would probably try to claim that it was not really him at all, but Jezebel who had been at work. The sentence established a principle that, if he knows what his wife is trying to do, a husband may be just as guilty as the wife herself, and vice versa. As Elijah continued, Ahab must have begun to tremble.

*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 (v20-21).*