

# Traveling with Elijah

Seven lessons from the life of Elijah



Created by  
Rev Dr Jos M Strengholt

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# Lesson Six:

## **Doing Business**

1 Kings 21:1-28

### **1. Biblical text**

#### **Naboth's Vineyard**

21 Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 And after this Ahab said 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 a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." 4 And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. 5 But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" 6 And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not

give you my vineyard.'" 7 And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city.

9 And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people.

10 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." 11 And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, 12 they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. 13 And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the

people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.

14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "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." 16 And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

### **The Lord Condemns Ehab**

17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 "Arise, go down to 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 And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Have you killed and also taken possession?"' And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."'" 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

21 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. 22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. 23 And of Jezebel the Lord also said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.' 24 Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat."

### **Ahab's Repentance**

25 (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel.) 27 And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. 28 And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "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."

## 2. Meaning of the story

### 2.1 Setting Goals (1 Kings 21:1-5)

King Ahab wanted to add the vineyard of Naboth to the lands of his palace, to use it for growing vegetables. Maybe the designers of the palace gardens had made him aware of the nice plot of land. So King Ahab asked Naboth to sell him the land for a good price. King Ahab asked Naboth to sell it, because the use of force was out of the question. He was constrained by the laws of Israel. (See for instance Deuteronomy 17:14-20) If he had acted against these laws, people would have spoken badly about him.

Naboth, being a pious man, did not want to sell the land of his forefathers. God had given all the land to the families of Israel "as a lease", and therefore Naboth felt responsible for his own plot, in accordance with Israel's faith. (See for instance Leviticus 25:23)



[Picture 1, Ahab sulking]

King Ahab realised he had to accept the decision of Naboth, but he was not pleased. Because he did not get what he wanted, he felt bad and behaved rather foolishly. "He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat". [Picture 1]

### QUESTIONS:

- Was it wrong with Ahab trying to buy the land of Naboth?
- (How) do we set our goals in life? (See Proverbs 29:18, 2 Corinthians 5:9)
- What are our moral or other parameters? (See Luke 10:27)



## ***2.2 If things don't work out (1 Kings 21:6-16)***

When King Ahab cried in his pillow, his Queen Jezebel asked him whether kings of Israel should act like that. Of course kings should not, and actually nobody should, whether king or beggar. Sulking in such grief over missed opportunities is not the way to react to disappointments.

The alternative of Jezebel, however, was worse. "I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth" she promised. And sure enough, by very devious means, she got Ahab his vegetable garden. The cost of the garden was high. Naboth had to die for it.

Queen Jezebel forced some leaders of the city of Naboth to give false testimony against him. They said he cursed both God and the king. According to the law of Moses capital punishment was demanded. (See Leviticus 24:15-16)

By arranging this 'just punishment' of Naboth, King Ahab could take his land without being criticized by his people. The punishment of Naboth was done strictly in accordance with regulations. (See also Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15, Exodus 20:16, 23:7) Except, the accusations were false.

Naboth was stoned in his own field and his sons with him, so as not to leave any inheritors who could claim the land in a Year of Jubilee or at any other time. (See 2 Kings 9:21, 26)



### **QUESTIONS:**

- How do you react when your plans do not work out? Sulking? Manipulating? Accept?
- When do you accept that one of your goals was wrong altogether?

## ***2.3 The wrath of God (1 Kings 21:17-28)***

Elijah is sent to King Ahab to announce the judgement of God on what Ahab and Jezebel had done. [Picture 2] The secret had come out. And the punishment for Ahab was merciless. King Ahab is to die in the place where Naboth died. Also all posterity of Ahab will die, so his family will be cut off from Israel's future. The gruesome details of the death of Ahab and his family are punishment for him having killed Naboth.



[Picture 2, Elijah confronts Ahab]

Never did Elijah or any other prophet come with hard words like these to condemn king Ahab, so he must have been shocked. 'For one man only'?

But King Ahab took the predictions of Elijah seriously, and repented. "He went around meekly." This again brought grace of God, for the Lord decided to postpone the punishment to the generation after Ahab. Ahab's son Joram suffered a dreadful death, and his body was thrown in the field of Naboth. (2 Kings 9:25-26) King Ahab was killed in battle, and dogs licked the blood from his chariot. (1 Kings 22:29-38)

### QUESTIONS:

- Why was God's wrath upon King Ahab greater this time than at any time before?
- What does this teach us in respect to how we try to attain our goals and fulfil our plans?
- What does this teach us personally about our behavior to people we have power over?
- What do we learn about God from this story?

