Leader guide

In this lesson:

SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 21

TAKE HOME TRUTH

FFCA - In every way God is indescribable and incomprehensible but loving enough to be personal and knowable. The same God who created us is the same God who became like us in order to save us.

FFCB - Our King is all powerful, all knowing and supremely gracious to those who humbly submit to His rule over their lives.

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Our Incomparable King



OVERVIEW

Fake news. Collusion. Corrupt leaders. Cover up.

Yesterday's news?

No. This is what is happening in 1 Kings 21. The writer of 1 Kings wanted to make sure we understand how deeply flawed and evil King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, were in their time.

The story we look at this week has all of the drama and intrigue of the worst case of government corruption. The center of the drama is a godly man by the name of Naboth, a vineyard owner in Jezreel. In many ways, Jezreel is the Northern California of Israel. It is a beautiful, rich region that was in many ways the bread basket of Israel. Isaiah referred to it as the "fertile valley" (Isaiah 28:1). The name "Jezreel" in Hebrew means "God will sow."

It was in Jezreel that Ahab chose to build his summer palace. In choosing the hill to build upon, he built next to Naboth's vineyard.

This is where the story begins.

Before we conclude Chapter 21, Naboth will have been executed and Ahab is the new owner of the vineyard.

We will see parallels between King David and King Ahab in this chapter, both men who had everything a man could desire except for that one thing he didn't have—in David's case, a woman, and in Ahab's case, a vineyard.

This is a sad, sorry story, but one that underscores for us again why Ahab and Jezebel were described as the most wicked leaders in Israel's history. Yet, this story also has a surprise ending, one that shocks us even to this day.

MEMORY VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

Philippians 4:11–Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

INTRODUCTION

Is there an area of your life where you struggle with contentment? Can you share what it is that always seems to drag you to wanting just a little more?

What characteristics do you think best describe a corrupt leader in our day and time?

Looking back at your notes from this week's sermon, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

Make sure you ask this question this week. It gives people the opportunity to discuss questions or issues that come up beyond the written questions. People's responses can often lead into one of the questions in the "Digging Deeper" section. Also, some weeks this question will result in a lot of discussion, other weeks, not so much.

READ THE TEXT

Elijah had just experienced a great victory over the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40). Elijah then predicted the coming rain after a long drought, and God responded with rain (vv. 41-46). But when Elijah was threatened, he became discouraged and afraid—in spite of God's presence and power in those great victories. Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. NOTES

NOTES

DIGGING DEEPER

In this section, feel free to develop your own questions to help guide your group's discussion. Below are some suggestions. Remember, if you are hearing from everyone in your group, chances are you won't have to time to discuss every question. You may start with one that catches your attention so you don't run out of time. For example, it's not odd to start with Question #6, then go to Question #5 and if you have time come back to Question #4.

Next to Solomon, the writer of 1 Kings spends as much time describing the life of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel as any other monarch in the Northern Kingdom's history to this point. Ahab ruled over the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 874 to 853 BC. He began to reign at the conclusion of Asa's reign in Judah and during most of the reign of Jehoshaphat (873-848 BC). He followed his wicked father Omri and was followed by his son Ahaziah. Elijah and Micaiah prophesied in Israel during his reign.

Describe what is happening in 1 Kings 21.

1 Kings 21 provides a close look at the true evil nature of King Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel. We emphasize his wife because the Bible emphasizes this unfortunate fact (in vs. 5, 7, and 25). The biggest mistake of Ahab's life happened when he was a young man and married this pagan, godless, evil, controlling woman. In this chapter we see what happens when selfishness (Ahab) marries corruption (Jezebel).

This is often the case with the elitists of the world, even today. We still see the tragedy that comes from political leaders who marry selfishness and corruption. It is never good for the people of the country.

In this infamous chapter of the Bible, we see Ahab's theft of Naboth's vineyard. This gripping narrative epitomizes the whole spiritual situation in Israel during the days of Ahab and Jezebel.

The murder story is told with such attention to detail that the characters come alive. Ahab is so keen to get Naboth's vineyard–a choice piece of property near the king's summer palace–that he is sick with envy.

Naboth will not sell.

Domineering Jezebel steps in with a devious scheme to get her husband what he wants. In a mock trial, paid witnesses bring trumped-up charges against righteous Naboth, and he is found guilty and executed.

As is common with corrupt authority, in this case, Jezebel, she is careful that the letter of the law is followed concerning the mock trial and execution of Naboth while completely ignoring the law that prohibits the acquisition of a neighbor's property (see Leviticus 24:14-16 and Leviticus 25:14-16).

In spite of their careful planning, Ahab and Jezebel's crime will not go unpunished. With the perfect timing of poetic justice, Elijah arrives on the scene just as Ahab is taking possession of Naboth's vineyard. The prophet utters one of the most chilling condemnations anywhere in Scripture: Ahab and Jezebel will be completely cut off. They will not even have the dignity of a decent burial, for the dogs will lick their blood.

Surprisingly, the chapter ends with a narrative reversal: Ahab repents in sackcloth and ashes, and the Lord responds mercifully by promising not to destroy Ahab's family until after the death of the man himself.

Why did Naboth refuse to sell his vineyard?

Naboth would not sell his land because it was the inheritance of his fathers (vs. 3). As such, was not to be sold or traded out of his tribe. Numbers 36:7-9 clearly stated that land was not to be transferred from one tribe to another. Each tribe was to hold on to their inheritance. The law in Leviticus 25:23 also said the land could not be sold permanently. Naboth saw Ahab's proposal as against the word of the Lord ("the Lord forbid") and considered it a sin against God to sell his inheritance.

As an order of first principles, the Jews viewed the land as belonging to God who brought Israel into the land and allocated it to each tribe as an inheritance. Laws were put in place to protect a family's heritage and economic sustainability.

What makes this case so unsavory is that God established the laws, and His laws were to be enforced by the authorities, whether this was in the times of the judges or kings. Here, we see one of the classic signs of corrupt leadership: laws are enforced at will, meaning when it is to the advantage of the leaders, they will enforce the law and when it is not in their favor, they will ignore the law.

SIDE NOTE: We see the same level of corruption in America today. Laws are either enforced or ignored depending on the political agenda of those in authority. Progressives argue that immigration laws must be ignored because it is against the dignity of the human beings involved. Consequently, they refuse to enforce what they consider to be inhumane laws and create "sanctuary cities" or "sanctuary states". At the same time, Progressives argue in favor of strict federal gun laws. Why? If federal immigration laws do not matter, then why do they want to see strict gun laws?

The problem with this kind of legal climate is that the power of the law is greatly diminished. We are living in a time when everyone can do what is right in his/her own eyes.

If you had to identify Ahab's root sin, what sin would you name?

First, let's define "root sin." Theologically, this would be the core of our sinful nature from which all other sins grow and blossom.

Donald Grey Barnhouse accurately defined the root sin this way:

The worst of all sins is to want one's own way. All other sins are the outgrowth of this one root sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." In simplest terms, man's own way is hostility to God's way. Man is an enemy because he wants his own way instead of God's way. (Donald Grey Barnhouse, God's River: Romans 5:1–11 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 192.)

We know this root sin today by various names, but the simplest and most succinct word is "pride." This is the root sin.

Pride bears fruit in all of our lives in different ways and through different means. A man can appear humble on the outside but wrestle with pride on the inside. In the case of Ahab, his pride is personified by his covetousness and his desire to possess even that one thing that is not his, but he believes it is his right to possess it because he is king.

Perhaps one of the more stunning admissions of this kind of hubris came from Bill Clinton during an interview with Dan Rather on CBS' 60 Minutes.

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When asked by Rather why he had an affair with 22-year old intern Monica NOTES Lewinsky, Clinton simply replied, "because I could." Source: CBSNews. com Power and pride are a deadly duo. Ahab's life is the picture of what happens when a man lets his desires, his selfish ambition, and his position of authority merge to create a perfect storm of personal destruction. What comparison and contrast can you draw between King David and his pursuit of Bathsheba and King Ahab and his pursuit of Naboth's vineyard? David's sin with Bathsheba is the darkest moment of weakness in this man of God's life. The comparison with King Ahab's pursuit of Naboth's vinevard is obvious: both kings were wealthy and had more possessions than any human could fathom, but they were not content. both kings desired that which they did not possess. both kings used their position to get what they wanted regardless of the cost...because they could. both kings killed their adversary in order to take possession of the object of their desire. both kings sinned greatly in the eyes of the Lord. both kings were confronted by a prophet of the Lord. That's where the comparisons end. It is at this point that the two kings diverge, one leading to repentance and restoration, the other leading to destruction. In the previous question, we identified pride and selfishness the defining sins of Ahab's life. By the time we come to 1 Kings 21 and Naboth's vineyard, we are not surprised at the how low he can go to get something as trivial as his neighbor's vineyard. In the case of David, however, the sin with Bathsheba stands in contrast to much of his life. Consider the following : When Saul possessed the throne after he had been rejected as king, David refused to take it by force but waited on the Lord to give it to him. When Ornan the Jebusite offered to give him the threshing floor where Abraham had sacrificed Isaac, he refused to take it without payment, being unwilling to worship God with that which cost him nothing. When his mighty men were moved by his longing to drink from the well in Jerusalem and risked their lives to fetch water for him, instead of guzzling it down, he pours it out as an offering to the Lord in recognition of their sacrifice. When preparations were being made to build the temple, it was David who took the lead, starting the project with a gift of 100,000 talents of gold and 1,000,000 talents of silver as well as innumerable quantities of bronze and iron, timber and stone (1 Chronicles 22:14).

Then, in addition, he gave a second offering of 3,000 talents of gold and 7,000 talents of silver (1 Chronicles 29:2-5).

Henry David Thoreau rightly observed, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone."

Obviously, David was not possessed by his possessions. In his prayer for the temple, he revealed his heart: "... who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand, we have given Thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

What a contrast is this example of Ahab! Like David, his view of possessions reflected his heart, and what a different heart it was.

This is most clearly seen in how the two kings responded when confronted by the Lord's prophet. David's immediate response to Nathan the Prophet's accusation of stealing Uriah's wife was to the point: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13).

In contrast, when Ahab saw Elijah the prophet approaching him, he said, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" After hearing God's judgment against Ahab, he did display repentance, but Matthew Poole observes,

> This humiliation or repentance of Ahab's was only external and superficial, arising from the terror of God's judgments; and not sincere and serious, proceeding from the love of God, or a true sense of his sin, or a solemn purpose of amendment of his life, as appears, because all the particulars of his repentance here, are external and ritual only; nor is there the least intimation of any one sign or fruit of his true repentance, as that he restored Naboth's land, or reproved his infamous wife, but in the very next chapter you find him returning to his former vomit.

The Lord acknowledged Ahab's act of humility in v. 29, but the text implies that Ahab's temporary repentance brought temporary deliverance from the Lord's judgment. In the end, the Lord promised to bring calamity on the house of Ahab. Three years later, Ahab was dead.

Looking at our own cultural history, what inheritance have we been given that we must faithfully preserve for the next generation?

As we have observed, Naboth stood on the principle of law when he refused to sell his land to Ahab. He was not only thinking about his own well-being but understood his land to be "an inheritance" from his fathers and to his sons. He was only a custodian, or steward, of this inheritance. Therefore, when Ahab offered to buy the land, Naboth's response was quick and clear: "the Lord forbid!"

We need to look at the great inheritance we have received from our fathers, that is an inheritance from the Lord. What is this inheritance? A godly heritage. We received from our fathers the Bible, a vibrant church in America, freedom of worship, moral and ethical standards, etc. We need to remember that these gifts are not ours, nor can they be taken for granted. This godly heritage was fought for and our forefathers struggled to win these freedoms for our country. They passed them on to the next generation, who passed it on to the next, and so on.

We are merely custodians of this godly heritage today. We are caretakers who must pass on this inheritance to the next generation.

NOTES

Like in the time of Ahab, however, the world is seeking to "purchase" this godly heritage from us. Each time we exchange a freedom for a promise to replace it with an equal or better freedom, we give up a portion of our inheritance. Like Naboth, we need to stand in strong opposition to authority when authority seeks to take these freedoms from us. "The Lord forbid" should be our cry when the government seeks to take a part of our godly heritage.

What can we learn from this chapter in Ahab's life?

- 1. Our God is a patient God. Repeatedly, we have witnessed the deep level of Ahab's wickedness and evil, and we have seen many opportunities for true repentance. In nearly every encounter with Elijah, Ahab is given evidence of God's mercy on his life, yet he continued in his wicked ways.
- 2. Our God has limits on His patience. Chuck Swindoll says this well: "Don't be fooled into thinking that His longsuffering is everlasting suffering." There are many examples in the Bible (Sodom & Gomorrah, Israel's fall to the Assyrians and Judah's fall to the Babylonians, Herod Agrippa, Ahab, and Jezebel) where God drew a line and said, "Enough!" We don't know when God chooses to draw that line, but we know that God's patience can, and does, run out.
- **3.** Our God is a just God. It is common for mankind to believe we can escape judgment, but if life proves anything, it is this simple principle: you will reap what you sow. Ahab lived his life according to his own terms and saw no reason to change. Why should he? Yet, in the end, he faced the judgment of God. Remember, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man sows, that will he reap (Galatians 6:7).

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER

"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices; Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." – Isaiah 56:7.

Prayer Focus for the Week of April 29

Close your group time this week by praying for the next generation at First Family Church. There are 300-plus young people, 18-years and under, who are growing up in our church, watching us, and learning from us. May we take our job seriously as stewards of the godly heritage passed on to us by the generations before. Pray specifically for these young people, and pray that we will be found faithful in how we shepherd this generation into adulthood.

NEXT STEPS

Questions to consider as you continue to reflect on what you learned this week:

• **Take Action:** Are you investing in the next generation? As we noted above, First Family has some 300 kids asking you to pour into them. You can start making a difference right now by signing up to help with VBS coming June 3-7. Just use the online form: https://vbspro.events/p/events/ffc2018

• Take Courage: As we learned a couple of weeks ago, no matter how bad the culture seems, God will preserve a remnant for His purposes. Pray for revival in your own heart and life before you start to think about revival in our church, city, state, or nation.

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Work to memorize this week's memory verse: Philippians 4:11–Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

This week's Core Belief is Stewardship (1 Timothy 6:17-19): We believe that everything we have, including our very life, belongs to God.

Remember to use the Daily Bible Reading plan as part of your walk with Christ, taking the time to reflect on each passage and what it means for your lives.

COMING DATES THIS SPRING

05/13/2018 - Mother's Day

05/25/2018 - Lighthouse Semester Ends

05/27/2018 - Summer Break Begins

09/09/2018 - Lighthouse Fall Semester Begins