

A DIVIDED RESPONSE

CORE PASSAGE: 1 KINGS 21:17-29

CONTEXT

After Elijah's victorious showdown on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal, whom Elijah executed, the Lord sent torrential rain on Israel for the first time in three years. The drought was over. Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done, and she swore an oath that she would kill Elijah. Some time later, Jezebel found Ahab pouting because his neighbor Naboth would not let Ahab buy his family's vineyard. So she hatched a plot to bring false accusations against Naboth that led to his execution. Then she told Ahab to take what he had wanted. All this incurred the wrath of the Lord against Ahab and Jezebel.

KEY CONCEPT

God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

As you examine 1 Kings 21:17-29:

- Recognize that Ahab and Jezebel thought they could get away with false witness, murder, and theft.
- Marvel at the mercy God showed to Ahab because of his humble response to Elijah's proclamation of judgment.



TIMELINE

Wicked Ahab Becomes
King in Israel and Marries
Jezebel (1 Kings 16)

Elijah Challenges the Prophets of
Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)

SESSION STUDY:
Elijah Declares God's Judgment for
Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)

Elijah Prophesies a
Famine (1 Kings 17)

Elijah Flees from the Threat
of Jezebel (1 Kings 19)

Ahab Dies in Battle,
Fulfilling Prophecy (1 Kings 22)

Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 21

☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 22

☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 17–18

☐ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 19–20

☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 1

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 58



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN INJUSTICE WILL BE JUDGED (1 KINGS 21:17-26).

Underline the reasons the Lord gave for bringing destruction to both Ahab's and Jezebel's legacy and lineage.

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: **18** "Get up and go to meet King Ahab of Israel, who is in Samaria. He's in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. **19** Tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you murdered and also taken possession?' Then tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, the dogs will also lick up your blood!'" **20** Ahab said to Elijah, "So, my enemy, you've found me, have you?" He replied, "I have found you because you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD's sight. **21** This is what the LORD says: 'I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your descendants: I will wipe out all of Ahab's males, both slave and free, in Israel; **22** I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and caused Israel to sin.' **23** The LORD also speaks of Jezebel: 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel: **24** Anyone who belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds will eat.'" **25** Still, there was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD's sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. **26** He committed the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had, whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

King Ahab wanted a vineyard that belonged to his neighbor Naboth, offering a better vineyard in its place or its value in silver. But Naboth, obeying the law of the Lord (Lev. 25:23), was unwilling to give his ancestral inheritance to the king for any price. Ahab pouted at his rejection, but Jezebel orchestrated events to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy so they could claim the vineyard after his execution (1 Kings 21:1-16).

Ahab and Jezebel thought they could get away with stealing, false witness, murder, and exerting unjust power over others, but Elijah found them out by the word of the Lord. Elijah pronounced a stark message of judgment against the power couple—death, disgrace, and destruction to their house and descendants—making it clear that those who participate in injustice will be judged by the Lord.

LEADER NOTE: The pronouncement that Ahab's blood would be licked up by dogs (1 Kings 21:19) and that Jezebel's body would be eaten by dogs (v. 23) signified that there would be no honor in death for anyone connected to Ahab. Jezebel had unjustly set up Naboth

to be stoned to death, and dogs licked up his blood outside the city (v. 19). God's punishment for Ahab and Jezebel would be poetic justice for what they had done to Naboth.

How are you challenged and comforted by the truth that God sees and will judge all injustice?

God's announcement of judgment on Ahab recalled His judgment on the houses of Jeroboam and Baasha, two early kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:9-11; 16:1-4). But as bad as those kings were, they had nothing on Ahab, who was notable for all the wrong reasons. The Lord had sent His people into the promised land to conquer it, in part, to judge the current inhabitants because of their extreme wickedness. Ahab led Israel in that same type of wickedness.

Proverbs 13:20 says, "The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm." Ahab allowed Jezebel to influence him and the people of Israel to do evil. Ahab followed his wicked wife rather than the Lord, and both Ahab and Jezebel were judged by God for their evil.

LEADER NOTE: The Bible has plenty to say about our relationships and the company we keep. Some friends need to be closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). We need some other friendly relationships for the purpose of making new disciples (Matt. 9:10). But not even Jesus entrusted Himself to everyone (John 2:23-24), and neither should we.

What qualities should we look for when deciding who influences us?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Do not be an Ahab and covet a neighbor's possession. Let not Jezebel dwell with you, that deadly avarice that persuades you to bloody deeds; that restrains not your desires but urges you on; that makes you sadder even when you gain possession of what you desire and that makes you destitute when you are rich."¹

—Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397)

Notes

GOD SHOWS MERCY WHEN SINNERS HUMBLE THEMSELVES (1 KINGS 21:27-29).

Highlight how God responded to Ahab's humility.

27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth over his body, and fasted. He lay down in sackcloth and walked around subdued.

28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: **29** “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? I will not bring the disaster during his lifetime, because he has humbled himself before me. I will bring the disaster on his house during his son's lifetime.”

Ahab humbled himself before the Lord, putting on sackcloth and fasting, basic outward displays of repentance and mourning in ancient Israel (see 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Sam. 3:31; 12:16,22). Receiving word of a punishing famine upon the land didn't faze him. Seeing the Lord light up a sacrifice from the sky, followed by the execution of his favored prophets, didn't sway him. But to Elijah's message of judgment for his injustice against Naboth, Ahab reacted with humility and the marks of repentance.

LEADER NOTE: Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable, a stark contrast to the clothing of a king. Fasting was going without food for a time to show God that the petition or repentance was more important than daily nourishment. Ahab would have had unlimited food and drink at his beck and call, but he refused those to help communicate the state of his heart.

Not only did Ahab put on sackcloth and fast, he also took on a “subdued” attitude, reflecting an inward change in his demeanor (1 Kings 21:27). Ahab's self-humiliation was prolonged and heartfelt, not just a pretend act of manipulation.

What are some ways we might display repentance for our sin before God?

God had told Ahab that he and his whole family and dynasty would be wiped out (vv. 21-24). But in response to Ahab's humility, God showed him mercy! God would delay the disaster for a few years to fall upon his sons (2 Kings 1; 9-10). God's patience and mercy make no sense from a human mind-set. Ahab was the worst and most wicked king of Israel, and yet, because he responded to the Lord with humility, God had mercy on him.

Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

Notes

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Ahab, a thief, a murderer, and one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history, had earned God's judgment, yet he humbled himself before the Lord, and God mercifully delayed that judgment. Like Ahab, we all have earned death as the wages for our sin, but those who humble themselves before the Lord, who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus, will never be condemned and will receive God's gift of eternal life with Him.

Such mercy doesn't make sense until we recognize that all of us are "the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15-16). God is perfect in His justice—sin will be judged—yet He loves to show mercy when sinners humble themselves and believe in Him. We see a picture of this in God's response to Ahab's humility, but we see the fullness of God's mercy in His gospel to save sinners who repent and believe in Jesus for eternal life.

LEADER NOTE: Though Ahab humbled himself and received God's mercy, judgment still came. In 1 Kings 22, Ahab's death was foretold by a lone prophet of the Lord whom Ahab despised. God brought his death to pass with a stray arrow, after which his blood was licked up by dogs. For those saved by grace through the gospel, Jesus takes upon Himself the judgment due our sin. We will still experience discipline and death, but we are saved for eternal life with God.

How does God's mercy extended to Ahab help you to grasp the gospel of Jesus?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS MERCIFUL: Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God's withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As people arrive, give each person two sticky notes and a pen. Direct them to label one sticky note “100% Me” and the other “100% Not Me.” Encourage them to hold up the appropriate sticky note as you read the following statements: “I think people who do not signal before changing lanes should lose their license”; “I keep some money with me to give to homeless people I may encounter”; “I judge parents with misbehaving kids in the store or restaurant”; and so forth.

TRANSITION: Today’s Scripture might be challenging to your sense of right and wrong. You may come to a point of having to choose between holding on to your sense of justice or learning to see events and people through the lens of God’s mercy, even when it does not match your long-held value system.

CONTEXT

SAY: After the confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal. Jezebel responded to the loss of her prophets by threatening to have Elijah killed within twenty-four hours. Elijah ran for his life and was ready to give up and die. But God sustained him and spoke to him as he stood at the entrance of a cave in the wilderness. The Lord assured Elijah that He was not done with him and that he was not alone in serving Him. The Lord declared that seven thousand people in Israel had remained faithful to Him, and in addition to those faithful, the Lord commanded Elijah to anoint Elisha to take his place once he was gone (1 Kings 19).

RECAP

SUMMARIZE: Some time later, King Ahab desired a vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth. Ahab wanted to buy it from him, but Naboth would not sell it. It was his God-given right to retain the land that had belonged to his family through generations. Because of that, Ahab sulked. Jezebel, Ahab’s wicked wife, came up with a scheme to have Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death. After Naboth was killed, Ahab went down to possess the vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16).

ASK: Think about the events of the Bible passage you read this week. If you were in charge of everything and knew what had happened, what would you do to Ahab? What do you think Elijah felt Ahab deserved?



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Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Notes

CHART: Direct your group to page 48 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find “What We Deserve.” Recreate this table on a board to record the group’s responses as they interact with Scripture. Divide your group into two halves. One half will contribute to the arguments for judgment on the table, and the other half will contribute to the reasons for mercy.

What We Deserve	
Read 1 Kings 21:17-29. Write down what was deserved and what was received in each square.	
AHAB DESERVED JUDGMENT BECAUSE ...	AHAB RECEIVED MERCY BECAUSE ...
I DESERVED JUDGMENT BECAUSE ...	I RECEIVED MERCY BECAUSE ...

READ: Call on a volunteer to read 1 Kings 21:17-26.

RECALL: Invite the judgment team to list reasons Ahab deserved judgment for his actions. Permission is granted to recall from the previous session and the daily readings of Scripture. Record responses on the table. Then discuss why we deserve judgment for our actions as well. Write answers on the board.

READ: Call on a volunteer to read 1 Kings 21:27-29.

ANALYZE: Invite the mercy team to list the reasons God extended mercy to Ahab. Permission is granted to draw from other places in Scripture that speak to the attributes and character of God on this point. Then discuss why God extends mercy to us as well. Write the answers on the board. Allow a moment of quiet reflection for individuals to answer more personally in their PSGs.

REVIEW: Invite your group to be transparent if anyone has a hard time accepting God’s mercy toward Ahab, but be sure to uphold God’s perfect justice and His perfect mercy. Say: “Ahab deserved God’s judgment. His offenses

Notes

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against God were egregious: ‘There was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD’s sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. He committed the most detestable acts by following idols’ (1 Kings 21:25-26). But we aren’t any more holy than Ahab on our own, so we are just as deserving of God’s judgment. Yet God is also merciful, and that is an undeserved grace of God. As we see in part from God’s response to Ahab, the Lord ‘will not despise a broken and humbled heart’ (Ps. 51:17).” Pass out copies of **Pack Item 6: Signs of Repentance** and review it with your group to discuss what true repentance might look like today.

DEBRIEF

What does this passage teach us about God’s concern for justice? About God’s delight in showing mercy?

SUMMARIZE


God will not ignore injustice among His people, nor will He ignore injustice from any of His image-bearers, and we are all guilty of sin and injustice against Him and others. Ahab was complicit in lies, murder, and theft amongst other sins; our may differ by degree but are no less offensive to God. And yet, the Lord is merciful. He responds to the humble and broken hearts of sinners. Ahab received a reprieve, a postponement of his judgment. Under no circumstances could we say he deserved this from God. But even greater, through the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, taking upon Himself the judgment we deserve, those who believe in Him and repent of their sins are graced with forgiveness and eternal life. In Christ, the justice and mercy of God meet and are satisfied.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 49). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: In Exodus 20:13-17, the Lord says, “Do not murder. . . . Do not steal.

 Do not give false testimony against your neighbor. Do not covet your neighbor's house . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Ahab and Jezebel broke God's law and earned God's just judgment, but for his humility, Ahab also received a measure of mercy.

How do you reconcile God's perfect justice and His perfect mercy?



HEART: Ahab was the worst king of Israel, having done more evil to anger the Lord than any before him. Yet a change of thinking led to a change of and thus, he humbled himself before the Lord, for which he received mercy.

How does it feel to know that mercy is found just by repenting and turning to the Lord?



HANDS: It is easy to look at others who may live in open sin as being “the worst” or unworthy of God’s mercy. But as a common phrase says, “You bring nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” All of us are the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16); we all need to trust Jesus for salvation.

How will you reach out to unbelievers, knowing that the Lord delights in showing mercy to all who repent?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read James 2:13 and prayerfully plead with God to make mercy a greater trait in your life than judgment.
- Be aware of opportunities to help people change through loving them, pointing out the sin that kills and holding out the mercy of Christ (Eph. 4:15).
- Call one acquaintance of whom you have been judgmental, ask them to forgive you, and offer to help when they feel trapped by their circumstances.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 49 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 58:10-11 with your group, acknowledging and rejoicing in God’s certain justice, and also acknowledge and rejoice that no one is righteous and rewarded but by the mercy of God through the perfect obedience and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

References

1. Ambrose, On Naboth, 11.48-49, in Marco Conti and Gianluca Pilara, eds., 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 130 [Logos].

Notes

