

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 4:** 2 Chronicles 19–20

☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 22

☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 1

☐ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 17–18

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 58



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Scripture passages.

THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN INJUSTICE WILL BE JUDGED.

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.

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



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 (Leviticus 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.

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.

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)

PERSONAL PREPARATION

1 KINGS 21:27-29

GOD SHOWS MERCY WHEN SINNERS HUMBLE THEMSELVES.

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.”

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.

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



Ahab humbled himself before the Lord, putting on sackcloth and fasting, basic outward displays of repentance and mourning in ancient Israel (see 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 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.

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.

Such mercy doesn't make sense until we recognize that all of us are "the worst" (1 Timothy 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.

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 (Ephesians 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.

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 ...

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

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



HEAD

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

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Pray through Psalm 58. Recognize the innate and true desire to cry out for God's justice and entrust your need and desire for justice to His perfect will. But also pray for the Lord to convict you of your own injustice against Him and others and pray for His mercy and forgiveness in Christ.



HEART

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

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HANDS

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

