

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 16, Part 1

1 Kings 21-22, Part 1

© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to our continuing study on the books of Kings. Today, we're looking at chapters 21 and 22. First of all, Naboth's Vineyard.

Before we begin, let's pray together.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your presence with us. We thank you that you are here.

You are with each one of us personally, powerfully, and joyously. And we thank you that you are not simply our little personal God. Thank you that the one who is with us is the God of the universe and that all power in the universe is ours through you.

Thank you. We pray, Lord Jesus, that you will give us that power to live, not somehow, but victoriously. In the middle of world crises, help us, Lord, to live with confidence, with joy, with expectation.

Deliver us from the depression that the enemy would love to press upon us. Enable us in confidence, as Elijah and Elisha lived, knowing that you are in control, that you are our God, and that we, like them, can be men and women of God. Help us, Jesus.

Help us now in this study, we pray. Open your word to us and enable us to grasp its meaning. And more than that, its meaning for each of us. Thank you. In your name, amen.

The land of Israel belonged to Yahweh. It was not Israel's land. It was Yahweh's land. And that became very clear in the book of Joshua.

Over and over again, we're told, take possession of the land I am giving you. Scholars often say, well, there really is no evidence of a massive conquest of the land, archaeologically speaking. I'm not surprised.

That's not what the Bible describes. It describes a series of, if you will, guerrilla actions in which the control structure of the land is broken. And then the task is to take possession.

The land I am giving you. So nearly half of the book, in fact, half of the book of Joshua, is about the distribution of the land. The book of Joshua is not really at all about the conquest.

It's about receiving the land God has given, and then the apportionment of that land. In medieval Europe, there was what was called feudalism, where the kings gave portions of land to loyal nobles in return for their loyalty and their continued support of the king. That land did not belong to those nobles.

It belonged to the king. That's the same in the Bible. That's why a person could not sell his or her land to someone outside of the tribe.

This land had been given to this tribe. Yes, you could sell it to another tribal member. You could sell it to another member of your clan, but you couldn't sell it outside of your tribe.

It wasn't yours to give away however you chose. That's what's going on in this story of Ahab and Naboth in chapter 21 of 1 Kings. Now, the question is, why is this story included? We've seen Elijah's miracles.

We've seen the conflict on Mount Carmel. We've seen Elijah's collapse and then his recovery and his appointment of his successor, the one who is really to carry on Elijah's ministry. I've said this before.

I'll say it again. These are not two different prophetic ministries. This is one prophetic ministry.

From the introduction of Elijah in chapter 17 of 1 Kings until the death of Elisha in 2 Kings chapter 13. It's one ministry. So now we have the story of Naboth's vineyard.

Over and over again as we study the Bible, we need to ask ourselves, why did the Holy Spirit cause this to be included? In our study of Kings, we've said again and again, this is not a full history where every event in the story is covered. It's very selective. It's selective to make a point.

And so, the question that I would ask is, why is this story included here at this point? I'd suggest to you that, in fact, it is precisely over this issue: whose land is this? Is it Yahweh's land? Or is it simply the land of the Israelites who are worshiping whatever God comes to mind? The point that is made in the story is that this is Yahweh's land. So, Ahab sees this vineyard, which is right next to his palace in Jezreel. Remember, Jezreel is on the south edge of the Jezreel Valley, running east and west through Israel there in the northern part.

Jezreel was the summer palace of the Israelite kings. Presumably, there was more air going through that valley, and it was pleasanter in the extreme heat of summer. So, here's this vineyard.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a royal garden there? And I could walk through it in the evening, in the cool of the evening. And wouldn't that be nice? So yes, Naboth, I'll tell you what. I'll give you money for this vineyard of yours.

It's not that big a deal. Or I'll give you a better vineyard than this one. So, give it to me.

Naboth says I can't do that. I can't give you, I can't sell you this palace, this vineyard. You're not from my tribe.

This isn't my land to deal with as I choose. This is Yahweh's land. So, what are you going to do? I think it's very interesting to look at Ahab.

I think this is a classic double-minded man. He is not sold out to Baal, as Jezebel is, as we'll talk about in just a moment. He is one foot in the camp of Yahweh and one foot in the camp of Baal.

And so, when Naboth says, I can't do this. I can imagine him saying, King Ahab, I'd like to. I'd like to get a lot of cash money for this or even better, but I can't.

It's not my land to sell. What does Ahab do? Does he say, look, buddy, I'm the king, I own this land, and I'm going to take it?

You don't like it. It's too bad. No, he goes home and sulks.

We saw him doing this when the prophet convicted him of failing to obey God in allowing Ben-Hadad to live. He went home and sulked. I can't do anything about this.

I want to do something about it, but I can't. Why? Because the old Yahwistic faith is still there. He's not quite ready to sell it out.

Folks, that's a miserable place to live. And many, many church members, many, many Christians are right there—half for Yahweh and half for the world.

And what's the result? Sulks. Misery. You're not happy either way.

You can't be happy sinning, and you can't be happy not sinning. And that's why the Apostle James says that kind of a person is unstable in all their ways. Now, he says a double-minded man.

This is a little bit of the shift between Hebrew culture and Greek culture. Hebrew culture would say a double-hearted person, a person with a divided heart. We instinctively think affections, but no.

It's really talking about the whole personality. Your personality is divided. Now, when you come to the Greek culture, you narrow it down a little bit, and you talk about the way you think.

In the Old Testament, thinking, feeling, willing, they're all part of one complex. And so, when the Bible talked about Asa back in chapter 15 and said he was perfect-hearted, he was whole-hearted, his personality was united for God. Oh, brothers and sisters, that's the only place to live.

That's the only place to live, all out for him, flat out for him, because that's the way to find peace. That's the way to find contentment. That's the way to find fulfillment.

And Ahab is double-minded, but not Jezebel. Oh, no. She says, what in the world is the matter with you? Why won't you eat anything? He says, Naboth won't sell me his vineyard.

She says, what's the problem with that? Now, she does not simply exert her royal authority. She does not simply say, Naboth, I'm the queen. I've got a big army behind me.

I'm taking this land, like it or not. No, no, she's smarter than that. She knows that there are 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed him.

She's a good politician. She knows that she's got to rig the books, which is precisely what she does. She says, look, call a big festival and put Naboth in the seat of honor.

And then put a couple of, and she's very open, a couple of worthless fellows, a couple of guys who can be bought. Put them across the table. And in the middle of this big celebration, accuse them, accuse Naboth of cursing God.

Kill him. When he's dead, have a sheriff's sale. And the king is going to be the only bidder.

Now, what's going on there? What's going on there is the understanding that life is about the acquisition of power, power over people, and power to get what you want in a way that will leave you in power. That's the world of paganism. Power is absolute in that world, shapeless, and nameless.

And the business of life is the acquisition of power. That's the difference between Jezebel and Ahab at this point. Ahab simply can't quite shake his old Yahwistic upbringing.

Jezebel has no problem whatsoever. This is about power, folks. And I've got the power, and I'm going to use it.

And so, she comes in and says, OK, get your land. And, of course, who's at the sale? Elijah. Verse 20: so you've found me, my enemy.

I've found you. Very powerful line there in verse 20, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. Oh, my goodness.

What powerful language. You have yourself for sale. You can decide who's going to be your owner.

Is Yahweh, the God of grace, the God of love, the God of faithfulness, the God of truth, is he going to be your owner? Or is power, power to get your own way, power to do your own thing, power to satisfy your drives, is that going to be your owner? You've sold yourself, Ahab. That's why I'm here. That's why you look at a prophet of Yahweh, a man of God, as it's said over and over again, and see him as a troubler.

Now, he speaks a word of destruction. The dogs are going to devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city.

It's a problem for me, because the Bible doesn't have a very good view of dogs. I like dogs. Dogs are man's best friend, but not as far as the Bible is concerned.

Dogs are the vultures. The dogs and the vultures are going to devour you. Now, look, look what Ahab does.

Ahab, 27, when he heard these words, tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted; he lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Wow, wow, what a word. Even an Ahab can repent to some degree.

Now, it's evident that he did not repent in any overwhelming way because of what comes next. But nevertheless, what did God do? Have you noticed, verse 29, how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he's humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day. I'll bring it to his house in the days of his son.

God will bless anybody who repents. If Satan would repent, God would have mercy on him. That's what Jonah knew.

Jonah knew perfectly well how predictable, no, how consistent God is. He knew that it was possible that even an Assyrian could repent, and if they did, God would have mercy on them. No way was Jonah going to have anything to do with that.

This is our God, folks. It doesn't matter how far gone you are. God, if you genuinely repent, will have mercy on you.

That's the story of Naboth's Vineyard.