

1ST KINGS

Week 34, chapters 21, 22

We stopped in 1st Kings 21 with the unjust execution of **Navot**, the owner of a piece of land that the wicked and self-serving King of Israel wanted for his own enjoyment. This land was adjacent to **Achav's** and Jezebel's favorite palace, which was located in the lush and serene Jezreel Valley.

When King **Achav** approached **Navot** with the proposition of either buying his land with money, or trading with him for another piece of property, **Navot** was indignant and boldly told Israel's king that such a thing was impossible for him because it was the land of his heritage. That is, the vineyard grew on his ancestral family tribal land (land that had been allotted by Moses and Joshua) and the Torah Law prohibited selling such property to someone outside of his clan or tribe. The infantile King went into his palace bedroom, lay sulking in his bed and refused to take food, and this of course drew the attention of his wicked wife Jezebel who promised to remedy the situation for him.

Jezebel was always the stronger and bolder of the royal couple, and her solution was to arrange for a false accusation of blasphemy to be leveled at **Navot** during some kind of contrived religious convocation that involved a fast. The town's leading dignitaries, elders and judges were invited to this gathering for the purpose of carrying out swift justice. In a matter of a few hours, **Navot** lay stoned to death and Jezebel declared the deceased's land forfeit to the state.

The minute King **Achav** was given the good news; he quit his pouting and set out for **Navot's** vineyard to claim the land. However as he drove on his chariot, an old adversary of his suddenly showed up and ruined **Achav's** jubilant mood. Let's pick up at 1st Kings 21 verse 17.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 21:17 – end

The venerable Elijah suddenly returns to the scene and confronts **Achav**. We don't know how much time has passed since **Eliyahu's** encounter with God on Mt. Horeb, when he essentially resigned his commission as a prophet because of a bad attitude. No doubt he has rethought matters, repented, and Yehoveh has allowed Elijah back into the Lord's service, but as a humbled man. It ought to provide us all with great hope when we remember that the Lord did not discard Elijah, Elijah withdrew from the Lord and service to Him. Yet there is also a warning: it doesn't have to be the end of our service to God because we have erred but it is possible and likely that some of the great things that could have been ours to do in God's name will now be given over to another more willing person. And as we move into 2nd Kings we'll see that indeed **Elisha** will become the pre-eminent prophet of his day and accomplish things that Elijah might otherwise have done.

Thus we find starting in verse 19 that the old prophet speaks boldly in the name of the Lord, and no longer invokes himself as having power and authority to bring about calamity (as he did when he proclaimed a drought over Israel that lasted for 3 years and said it would not end until he personally ordered it).

And the message that Elijah brings is a stinging prophecy that begins by calling **Achav** a murderer and a thief. And for doing these despicable things, the Lord's oracle says that **Achav** will die a grisly death and there will be shameful treatment of his corpse, which will be thrown into **Navot's** vineyard and the dogs will lap up his blood. I think it can be fairly said that the Scriptures paint a picture of **Achav** as perhaps the most sinful king ever to rule over Israel. And yet we're going to find that despite all this **Achav** would take to heart his sins, and the Lord would relent to a degree on His ordained punishments, and rather some of his terrible sentence would be carried out upon **Achav's** son (we've seen this pattern before in the Bible). Thus we'll find in 2nd Kings 9 that it was **Achav's** son **Yoram** who had his corpse cast upon **Navot's** former land.

2Kings 9:24-26 CJB

²⁴ *Yehu drew his bow with all his strength and struck Yoram between the shoulder-blades; the arrow went through his heart, and he collapsed in his chariot.*

²⁵ *"Pick him up," said Yehu to Bidkar his servant, "and throw him into the field of Navot the Yizre'eli; for remember how, when you and I were riding together after Ach'av his father, ADONAI pronounced this sentence against him:*

²⁶ *'ADONAI says: "Yesterday I saw the blood of Navot and the blood of his sons." ADONAI also says: "I will pay you back in this field." Therefore, pick him up; and throw him into the field, in keeping with what ADONAI said."*

The great Rabbi Maimonides (called the RamBam) writes that the spilling of human blood in an unjust manner (murder) harms the very fabric of human civilization more than any other crime because it is the ultimate crime of human against human in God's eyes. And one of the many Biblical proofs of this is that despite his serial acts of rebellion and evil, even committing the most determined idolatry, it was only when he murdered that King **Achav** was finally condemned to death by YHWH.

But also notice that **Achav** didn't personally participate in **Navot's** execution nor was he even present at the phony blasphemy trial. Even more, it was his wife Jezebel who thought up this entire plot and ordered it carried out. But **Achav** knew about it and completely condoned it. And as king he was fully responsible for it. It is quite similar to King David when he arranged things so that Bathsheba's husband **Uriyah** would be conveniently killed in battle; that is, it was even an enemy soldier who struck the fatal blow upon **Uriyah**. But David wanted it, orchestrated it, and so **Uriyah's** blood was on David's head. And the price he paid for it was that Bathsheba's first child would die and David would never be allowed to accomplish the thing that David so greatly desired to achieve: the building of the first Temple.

God's kings and leaders bear the greatest responsibility among humans on earth. They also receive the greatest accolades and reap some of the greatest rewards (even heavenly blessings) when they do what is right in the Lord's eyes. And because leadership on earth is so difficult and challenging, and the temptations of power and authority can be overwhelming, it seems as if Yehoveh will often show greater mercy to His kings and leaders. Yet, in the end, these kings and leaders will be held accountable not just for their own sins but for the communal sins of the group or nation they lead, so the sword cuts both ways.

Verse 20 makes it clear that **Achav** sees Elijah as an enemy and adversary; and this is because it seems as though where other kings have prophets that bring them good tidings and

often proclaim happy things, all Elijah ever does is bring divine oracles of judgment upon **Achav**. But the thing is that as Yehoveh's prophet, Elijah is merely bringing God's Word to the King of Israel. And **Achav** hates God's Word because it exposes his sin and rebellion. This is a good illustration of why people of all ages since the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai have found reason to despise or declare irrelevant God's commandments of the Torah. It is because looking into the Torah is like holding a mirror up to our lives, and the reflection is what God sees and sometimes it isn't pretty. We all want to think of ourselves as "good people", righteous people, but most people want to make that evaluation according to our own standards. **Achav** was no different.

So beginning in verse 21 God's condemnation of **Achav** continues by telling him that not only will **Achav's** life be terminated, but so will his dynasty end just as happened with Jeroboam. Further his wife Queen Jezebel will die a miserable death and the wild dogs that always ran in packs around the outside of the city walls would lick up the blood of her wounds. And the divine reason for this is because a) **Achav** has given himself over to evil and b) the wicked royal couple has led the people of Israel into sin (mainly the sin of idolatry).

A terrible epitaph that none of us would ever want to hear read concerning us is proclaimed about **Achav**, King of Israel. I think this is what it's going to be like at the Great White Throne judgment when our lives are laid bare before us from God's perspective, and then we are judged accordingly. Verse 25 says that he was the worst king ever to rule Israel, that he gave in to his evil wife Jezebel, that this led to his worshipping idols, and he did everything that God despised about the Amorites. King **Achav** was a sad, violent man who recognized on the one hand that Yehoveh was God, but at the same time he lived an ungodly life, worshipped false gods, murdered, and behaved like a people (the Amorites) that God essentially wanted wiped out because they were so abominable in His sight.

This is a good teaching moment to remind us all that believing in God is not the same thing as trusting in God. **Achav** believed in God, but he didn't trust in God; rather he trusted in idols and in the ways of the world.

James, brother of Yeshua, addresses this matter head on in one of his more famous quotes:

^{CJB} **James 2:19** *You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too-*

the thought makes them shudder with fear!

Simply believing that God exists essentially only makes one NOT an atheist; but that's about it. No other merit is imputed upon us for mere belief in God; as James said, even the demons believe that.

And so just as the demons shudder in fear at the thought that God is, and yet they are by definition incapable of doing any other than giving their trust and allegiance to the Evil One, so in verse 27 we find **Achav** performing the customary Jewish rites of repentance and mourning: tearing one's clothing and wearing sackcloth. And although this was real, it was also shallow and would be of no long lasting effect and he would quickly return to his evil master.

It is fascinating to me that when Elijah observes **Achav's** dejected demeanor and behavior as a result of God's prophet curse, the Lord now uses this as a teaching moment for Elijah. The Lord says something to Elijah that is not intended to be relayed to the King, but rather is like it was on Mt. Horeb; it was personal between God and Elijah. And what the Lord says is:

CJB 1 Kings 21:29 "Do you see how Ach'av has humbled himself before me? Since he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring this evil during his lifetime; but during his son's lifetime I will bring the evil on his house."

As I mentioned earlier, since **Achav** is King of Israel (a portion of God's people), even though he bears great responsibility and will suffer great accountability as Israel's leader, it seems to be God's way to offer some measure of mercy wherever possible. Even if only for a few brief days **Achav** has humbled himself before God, it is sufficient to delay some of God's sentence upon him and kick the can down the road to the next generation of **Achav's** family. Despite that, the full measure of justice that God promised will happen because God is holy and His justice demands it.

And the Lord is explaining all this to **Eliyahu** who it seems has always had trouble showing mercy and being gentle (remember the symbolism of wind, earthquake, and fire back at Mt. Horeb). Elijah's temperament was to be rigid, severe, and often his first thought was to punish. Thank heavens that is not God's temperament.

Let's move on to chapter 22.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 22 all

The 1st verse says that for 3 years there had been no war between Aram and Israel. That means that the alliance between Ben-Hadad of Syria and King **Achav** of Israel had held firm from the day that **Achav** captured Ben-Hadad in battle, then called him "my brother", and next made a peace treaty with him and freed him, up until the time of our story that begins chapter 22. However, that doesn't mean that Israel (or Syria) had been nations at peace during that same time period.

Israel had only months earlier fought an important war to blunt the aggression of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria (note that Assyria is not the same nation as Syria). In fact Syria and Israel fought side-by-side against Shalmaneser and won the decisive battle at Qarqur, located on the east bank of the Orontes River. Shalmaneser had empire building in mind, and was on the march to gain more territory, and in fact had already conquered a number of smaller nations in Mesopotamia to begin creating his vision of an Assyrian Empire. You'll recall that one of the reasons that Ben-Hadad had invaded Israel's capital of Samaria some years earlier was that Israel was an enemy on its southern border, and Assyria was an enemy on its northern and eastern borders, and such a situation just presented too much of an existential threat for Syria to let it stand. Ben-Hadad had calculated that Israel would be the easier opponent to control, and so invaded them with a numerically superior force but miraculously lost. Ironically, that loss resulted in a peace treaty with Israel and now the two nations worked together to defeat Assyria, the much larger threat to the entire region.

Verse 2 reports that the King of Judah at this time was **Y'hoshafat** and that he paid a state visit to **Achav** up in Israel. Although we aren't told in this chapter how it is that **Achav** and Jehoshaphat had begun these friendly relations, we find out in the book of 2nd Chronicles 18 that they had become allied through marriage. That is Jehoshaphat's son Joram had married **Achav's** and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah. The only purpose for this arranged marriage was to create a strong alliance between Judah and Israel. So what we find is that for many years before **Y'hoshafat** ventured up to Israel, Judah and Israel were on peaceful terms.

But **Y'hoshafat** wanted to cement a yet closer relationship, **Achav** and Jezebel agreed, and so their offspring married.

And again, while the Scriptures don't necessarily give a particular reason for Jehoshaphat making his state visit to Israel, the context seems to indicate that it wasn't merely for pleasure or diplomatic purposes; rather it was to explore a possible plan of battle utilizing their joint forces to take the city of Ramot-Gilead away from Aram. There was nothing in the peace treaty between Israel and Ben-Hadad that specifically said that they had to give Ramot-Gilead back to Israel. However, this was an important city because it was strategically located on the Kings Highway trade route. Whoever controlled Ramot-Gilead controlled commerce along this section of the route. They could extract taxes from the traveling merchants, they could more effectively protect their own merchants and government shipments, or they could ban certain products that they wanted their own nation to produce and control to the exclusion of all others.

Ramot-Gilead was in Gad's former tribal territory on the east side of the Jordan River, so for **Achav** to say that Ramot-Gilead used to belong to "us" meant that it used to be Israeli territory. He was appealing to Jehoshaphat as a descendant of Jacob, not as either a Judahite or as one of the 10 northern tribes and he was saying that Ramot-Gilead was territory allotted by Moses and so it was Hebrew ancestral land. Jehoshaphat was all-in; he agreed to go to war in concert with **Achav**, and said that he would contribute some number of troops from Judah. But, he had one hesitation: he first wanted to seek the word of Yehoveh. In other words, **Y'hoshafat** wanted to use either a priest or a prophet to discern the will of God so that he would know the outcome in advance. That was completely typical for a Middle Eastern monarch in that era.

King **Achav** agreed to this and in verse 6 called for an assembly of 400 of his prophets in order to divine an answer. Should I attack Ramot-Gilead or not he asked them and they unanimously said, "Attack! The Lord will hand it over to the king". The Hebrew word used for Lord here is **adonai**, a generic term meaning lord or master. So we should not think that they necessarily had Yehoveh in mind, but might have (or at least they perhaps had in mind their own perception of who or what Yehoveh was). These 400 are not related to the 400 prophets of Ba'al or Astarte that we heard about in earlier chapters. This is yet another group of prophets from another unidentified prophet colony. Most Hebrew scholars say that these were golden calf worshippers who viewed those golden calf idols of Dan and Beit-El the same way Jeroboam had a few decades earlier: as representations or molten images of Yehoveh.

Interestingly, King **Y'hoshafat** wasn't comfortable with either the prophets or their answer and wanted to know if there wasn't at least one old-school prophet of Yehoveh still around in Israel

(as opposed to all these new politically correct groups of prophets who were basically just “yes men” for their king and queen). Apparently Elijah hadn’t resurfaced yet, so even as the most obvious choice King **Achav** didn’t mention him because he had no idea where he was. So he did think of one prophet of Yehoveh, a fellow named **Mikhayahu** son of **Yimlah**; but I really don’t like that guy, says **Achav**, because he always says bad things are going to happen. Jehoshaphat told **Achav** that he should not say things like that about a true prophet of Yehoveh and so **Achav** relented and called for an officer to go get Micaiah.

It’s important that we understand that pagans (and no doubt **Achav**) believed that prophets didn’t only announce the will of the gods, they also influenced the gods and could even get the gods to do the will of the prophets. **Achav** hated **Mikhayahu** because he wouldn’t get on the team and tell the king what he wanted to hear. The King believed that when Micaiah prophesied something bad, he could bring it about by getting God to do his will. Thus, the King had imprisoned Micaiah so he couldn’t prophesy bad things to the King and therefore (in his muddled thinking) bad things wouldn’t happen.

When **Mikhayahu** arrives, the two kings are sitting together on their thrones near the city gates of Samaria (**Shomron**). Apparently this area was also used as a threshing floor because of its flatness and hardness. Although it also served as the town square where court was held and deals were concluded, it was located just outside the city gates where a breeze could blow through in order for grain to be winnowed. But in the hot summer (which is probably the season of this story) it was much cooler than being inside the walled city that blocked any breezes. The 400 prophets were all there prophesying, meaning they were chanting and swaying and engaged in all manner of ecstatic activity. One can only imagine the noise and chaos.

Suddenly one particular prophet emerges: **Tzidkyah** son of **Kena’annah**. Whether he was the head of this particular prophet guild or from another we aren’t told, but he invokes the name of Yehoveh and uses rather standard prophet protocol by saying, “these are the words of Yehoveh”. He had fashioned a pair of animal horn symbols using metal and used them as a metaphor; he said that Israel would gore Syria until they are destroyed. This line of thought was, no doubt, taken from the Torah. In Deuteronomy 33 we are told this:

Deut 33:15-17 CJB

¹⁵with the best from the mountains of old, with the best from the eternal hills,

¹⁶ *with the best from the earth and all that fills it, and the favor of him who lived in the [burning] bush. May blessing come on the head of Yosef, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.*

¹⁷ *His firstborn bull- glory is his; his horns are those of a wild ox; With them he will gore the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth. These are the myriads of Efrayim; these are the thousands of M'nasheh."*

Well, here they were in the territory of the Joseph tribes Manessah and Ephraim (Ephraim-Israel as it was now starting to be known), and they were about to go attack an enemy. So **Tzidkyah** borrows the metaphor of the wild ox horns from the Torah and uses it as a sign from God of victory over Aram. We probably would be right to assume that the two kings knew of this Scripture verse or it wouldn't have had much impact. The other prophets agreed in unison with Zedekiah and once again invoking Yehoveh's name repeated that Israel would win handily at Ramot-Gilead.

Needless to say, King **Achav** was thrilled since these prophets were echoing what he wanted to hear. He was no doubt feeling his oats because over the past few years **Achav** had known 3 miraculous and unlikely military victories: twice over Aram, and once over that growing behemoth called Assyria. The name of **Achav** would have carried much fear and admiration in the Middle East. So by combining his forces with Jehoshaphat's Ramot-Gilead was bound to be a push over, and besides he was feeling invincible.

The guard who had fetched **Mikhayahu** from his prison cell saw what was happening, and knowing that the king hated Micaiah because he always seemed to be a wet blanket, tried to give him some friendly advice: just go with the flow. Can't he see that these 400 prophets are making the king happy by predicting a grand victory? Just say what they're saying....say something GOOD for a change. But that party-killer Micaiah told the guard that he was going to say whatever Yehoveh told him to say. One can imagine the guard heaving a big sigh about now and shaking his head in disgust at Micaiah when if he'd only compromise, the king would be happy, those 400 prophets would be happy, and Micaiah might get released or even rewarded.

Let's end today's lesson with this thought: it is man's way to compromise, not God's. It is man's way to be a people-pleaser, not God's. But this human desire to compromise has significantly infected and affected the modern church such that to **not** compromise is today seen as mean spirited, intolerant, and perhaps backward and unintelligent. So many Pastors and preachers operate their congregations today by compromise and consensus so as not to rock the boat. Others are concerned with not using God's Word to chastise or offend their

flock, but rather to go-along to get-along so that people will keep coming and everyone will be happy. I'm Ok, you're OK. No one wants to hear that their behavior or theology is wrong minded or that what they call good is evil or vice versa.

But when I refer to the negative effect of compromise on the Body of Christ, I'm not referring to issues and decisions that involve but human preferences. What color do we paint the building? Do we have carpet or tile on the sanctuary floor? What times and days do we have meetings and services? Should we have free coffee, or should we charge a little bit for it? Should children be allowed in with the adults in the main service or should they be separated?

Rather I'm speaking about moral matters of divine Biblical command that ought never to be compromised even if half the congregation left or it created dissention. Do we acknowledge Yeshua as Savior, or could it be another? Is there one way to salvation or might there be many paths to God? Is Israel still God's chosen people or has the gentile church replaced them? Should we see the Palestinians as victims of Israel and side with them, or should we stand with Israel and declare their inalienable right to their own land? Is Yehoveh God, or is Allah God, or are they one in the same? Is one religion's holy book as worthy as the other?

To compromise on preference is to seek godly peace.

To compromise on God's immutable laws and principles is sin.

Micaiah would rather spend the rest of his life in prison, or even lose his life altogether, than to compromise on God's Word so that he can get along better with the world or even his peers. May it be so with each of us as Messiah's followers today.

We'll continue next time.