



Catalog No. 1728

1 Kings 21:1–29

Fifth Message

John Hanneman

October 17, 2010

THE JEZEBEL WAY

SERIES: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

We have Missions Sunday and Ministry Fair Sunday. Well today is Jezebel Sunday. Years ago I saved a Peanuts cartoon strip that is quite appropriate for our study this morning, a conversation between Lucy and Linus. Lucy tells Linus, “Today my name is Jezebel.” Linus responds, “Jezebel was the evil wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament.” Linus adds, “In 2 Kings it says that her servants threw her out of the window and she landed on her head.” Lucy changes her mind, “Today my name is Susan.”

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet asked, “What’s in a name?” In the case of Jezebel, the answer is: everything. Jezebel by any other name would still be Jezebel. The name “Jezebel” has very negative connotations and for good reason. Today we will see the depth of wickedness in Jezebel, which illustrates the depravity possible in the human heart. We will look at the Jezebel way, which is the wrong way, and be encouraged to pursue another way—the way of Elijah and the way of Jesus.

In the three chapters we have studied thus far in the Elijah narrative, chapters 17, 18, and 19, the main character is the prophet Elijah. We have looked at four stories that take place at Cherith, Zarephath, Carmel, and Horeb. But in the next three chapters, 20, 21, and 22, the focus is on Ahab the king of Israel. There is a prophet in each of these chapters, but Elijah is only found in chapter 21. We will study this chapter in order to deal with Ahab and Jezebel.

Now it came about after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which *was* in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money.” But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food. (1 Kgs 21:1-4)

The story takes place “after these things.” This would refer to the wars with Aram, or Syria, described in chapter 20. Ahab had a winter palace in Jezreel, located in the Jezreel valley. This valley is east of the Carmel highlands and southwest of Galilee. It is the sight of some important battles and some think the future site of Armageddon. The Jezreel valley was, and continues to be, a lush and fertile valley in Israel.

Ahab had a neighbor in Jezreel by the name of Naboth, and Naboth had a vineyard. Ahab coveted his neighbor’s land and wanted to buy it from Naboth in order to have a vegetable garden next to his palace. He offered Naboth a very good price for his property, giving him the choice of either money or another vineyard. This was not a foreclosure sale, although as we will see, it will be a short sale.

Naboth told Ahab that he could not sell the property. His reason was based on religious grounds. The land in Israel was given to the tribes of Israel as an inheritance from the Lord. Naboth did not own the land, but was a steward of the Lord’s gift. Land could not be transferred from one tribe to another (Num 36:7) or sold permanently (Lev. 25:23). Naboth’s response to Ahab is the only speech in the entire story, emphasizing the fact that Naboth was a righteous man living in obedience to the word of the Lord. Once again Ahab is up against the word of Yahweh, familiar territory for him.

Ahab went into a sulk, a deep funk. He lay in his bed like a 3-year-old and stopped eating. The text says he was sullen and vexed. This was the same reaction he had at the end of the last chapter when confronted by an unnamed prophet. God had given Ahab victory over Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. However, Ahab had allowed Ben-Hadad to live even though he was devoted to destruction and should have been killed. Ahab had not obeyed the word of God. Obtaining Naboth’s land might have been a means of comfort for him. We do the same thing sometimes when we are in a down mood. We go buy something to make ourselves feel better.

But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?” So he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” (1 Kgs 21:5-7)

When Jezebel asks Ahab why he is in such a blue mood Ahab tells her the reason. After the Carmel thunder Ahab told Jezebel “all.” But here he leaves out the reason why Naboth could not sell the land. Jezebel questions Ahab’s manhood and ability to be king, asking whether he is a man or a mouse, but then tells Ahab to be cheerful and not to worry. If it is a vineyard he wants, then she will get it for him. Here we see a weak and passive Ahab contrasted with his assertive and forceful wife who has anything but a gentle and quiet spirit. At this point Ahab disappears from the story until the end, just like chapter 18.

So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. Now she wrote in the letters, saying, “Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, ‘You cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” (1 Kgs 21:8-10)

So Jezebel took matters into her own hands. She sent letters to the leaders of Jezreel using Ahab’s name and seal instructing them to frame Naboth for a crime he didn’t commit. Her plan was to proclaim a fast, i.e. a religious gathering for perhaps, the purpose of

forgiveness. The leaders of the city were to seat Naboth at the head of the table and then during the gathering have two worthless men falsely accuse Naboth of a capital offense—cursing God and king (Ex. 22:28; Lev. 24:15-16). The term “worthless men” is literally “sons of Belial,” a phrase used to describe Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, in 1 Sam 2. Paul uses this word in 2 Cor. 6 to describe a person who is the polar opposite of Christ.

So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them. They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people. Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned and is dead.” (1 Kgs 21:11-14)

Everything happened just as Jezebel had planned. Six times in the chapter Naboth is described as a Jezreelite, indicating that he is a well-known, established citizen. The elders and nobles of the city should have known his character. But rather than stand up to Jezebel, they do exactly as she instructed. This is the kind of command-compliance we see with Elijah. However, the leaders are weak. They listen to the word of Jezebel and not to the Lord. When the deed was done they sent word to Jezebel, even though the letters were marked with Ahab’s seal. They knew who was in charge.

We might note that Naboth never speaks. This is cold, premeditated murder. He is like a sheep going to slaughter. We are reminded of another man who was falsely accused of blasphemy, taken outside the city, and killed. His name is Jesus. The chief priests and Pharisees become like Ahab and Jezebel.

When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. (1 Kgs 21:15-16)

The phrase “stoned and dead” is used four times. Naboth is “not alive; but dead.” We get the point. Jezebel tells Ahab to arise and take possession of Naboth’s property. The word for “take possession” is used of dispossessing enemies and taking possession of the land. This is what Israel was to do when they claimed the promised land as their inheritance. In the last chapter Ahab allows Ben-hadad, the Gentile king of Aram who was devoted to destruction, to live. In this chapter Ahab murders an Israelite brother that he should embrace.

Ahab has it backwards. He is living absolutely contrary to God’s design. Idolatry leads to bad ethics. Abandonment of God leads to abandonment of righteousness. The only other time that “vegetable garden” is used in the Bible is in Deut. 11 as a description of Egypt. Israel was God’s choice vine, his vineyard, but Ahab wants to take Israel back to Egypt, to slavery and bondage. God is not going to let this happen.

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down to take possession of it. “You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Have you murdered and also taken possession?’” And you shall speak to him, saying, “Thus says the LORD, “In the

place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours.’” (1 Kgs 21:17-19)

Ahab arose to take possession and now Elijah is to arise and confront Ahab with God’s judgment. We note that Elijah is to confront Ahab, not Jezebel. It is Ahab who is responsible for the murder of Naboth, just like Adam was responsible in the garden. This is a challenging word to us husbands. Non-decisions are indeed decisions for which we are responsible.

Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” And he answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD. “Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. “Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, ‘The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.’ “The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat.” (1 Kgs 21:20-24)

In chapter 18 when Ahab met up with Elijah, Ahab called Elijah the “troubler of Israel.” Elijah told Ahab that he was the troubler. Now it is more personal—“my enemy.” Elijah tells Ahab that he is God’s enemy and gives him the bad news. Because Ahab has done evil in the sight of the Lord, God will bring evil upon Ahab. Ahab’s family line will end just like Jeroboam’s and Baasha’s. Ahab meets his fate in the next chapter and the dogs lick up his blood. Jezebel meets her fate in 2 Kings 9 when she is thrown out of the window onto Naboth’s former land. The dogs eat her flesh and there is nothing left to bury. Jehu destroys the rest of Ahab’s line as recorded in 2 Kings 10.

Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel. (1 Kgs 21:25-26)

Here we get the narrator’s assessment of Ahab’s character, a repetition of Ahab’s evil. His idolatry was on par with the Amorites who God dispossessed from the land. Ahab’s family would be dispossessed; perhaps this is also an indication that Israel would meet with the same fate. But now the story ends with an unexpected twist.

It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.” (1 Kgs 21:27-29)

You might remember a message given by Bernard Bell last August dealing with the question of whether God changes his mind. The fact that God changes his mind is part of the unchanging character of God. Here is a great example of this idea. Here we see evil Ahab responding with humility to Elijah’s word. God relents temporarily from the judgment (the text actually uses the word *evil* similar to Jer. 18:8) that he had planned for Ahab’s family. God was going to end Ahab’s family line immediately. However, since Ahab humbled himself, God said that he would delay the judgment.

Even after all the evil Ahab has committed, God is ready to grant mercy at the slightest sign of repentance. Ahab's response is more remorse than repentance, evidenced by the fact that Ahab dies in the next chapter. But Jezebel and Ahab's children live for quite some time following Ahab's death. This is a remarkable response by God.

Here we see the patience and forbearance of God, not wishing any to perish, not even Ahab and Jezebel. He hates sin and idolatry and he must take action to judge. But he waits and waits and waits, giving men and women every opportunity to turn our hearts towards him. Eventually the window closes, but he delays much longer than we would to bring justice to bear.

Many of us know people for whom we have prayed for many years, apparently without any result. This is a great encouragement to not give up, to love them and pray for them for as long as the Lord gives them time. God will not force them to turn to him, but he loves them much more than we do. He loves them enough to let them make their own choice.

I would have us reflect this morning on the way of Jezebel. Jezebel influenced five kings and two kingdoms. Following Ahab her two sons Ahaziah and Jehoram ruled in the northern kingdom: Ahaziah for two years and Jehoram for twelve. Her daughter Athaliah married Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah and infected him with Baal worship. When Jehoram died, their son, also named Ahaziah, became king in Judah for one year. Ahaziah was killed by Jehu and Athaliah reigned in Judah for six years. She tried to destroy the seed of David and almost succeeded. She murdered all of David's descendants except for one, an infant named Joash who eventually became king. The line of the Messiah was miraculously preserved. Jezebel's daughter almost single-handedly brought down the kingdom of Judah and the house of David. That is Jezebel's legacy. She was a real piece of work.

Jezebel represents a way of life that is opposed to God, a life that is entrenched in idolatry. She is an example of where we can end up if we give ourselves to gods that are not God. This is a way of life that is controlled by lust, greed, power, and fame, a way of life that seeks to exalt self and overpower others in order to advantage self and obtain the desired result. People become objects to use and neighbors become things; everyone is dehumanized and impersonal. Living the Jezebel way, the end always justifies the means. There is never enough—enough land, enough pleasure, enough money, or enough violence. The Jezebel way is destructive and contaminates the souls of others. Sadly, the Jezebel way is the way of the world and characterizes our culture. Eugene Peterson describes the Jezebel way in his translation of James 4:

“Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way. You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way.” (James 4:1–4 the MESSAGE)

It can be very frustrating for us to watch others succeed and prosper by living the Jezebel way. We are tempted to do the same things

since they seem to get away with it or seek to exact our own form of justice on those who do. But we never have to worry about what happens to those who disregard God's patience and forbearance and kindness. God's judgment will come; it is inevitable, it is only a matter of time. Death and judgment are as certain as taxes. God hears the cry of innocent blood and settles the score like he did with Naboth, as Jehu says in 2 Kgs 9 when he dumped Jezebel's dead son onto Naboth's property. “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.”¹ It may take awhile, but we do not have to be the vigilante and take matters into our own hands. “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord” (Romans 12:19 NAS).

Jezebel is an example of what any of us are capable of becoming. There but for the grace of God go I. God calls us to another way—the Elijah way, which foreshadows the Jesus way. Eugene Peterson writes of Elijah: “He held no position, lived a solitary life in obscurity, appeared from time to time without fanfare and disappeared from public view without notice... The essence of the Elijah way is that it counters the world's way, the culture's way. We need continuous help in staying alert and knowledgeable regarding the conditions in which we cultivate faithful and obedient lives before God.”²

God calls us to live counter-culturally in the way of Elijah and the way of Jesus. And this is possible because, as Paul says in Colossians, “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 NAS). The world, the flesh and the devil no longer have authority over our life because we belong to a new king and in a new kingdom. We were born “in Adam,” but now we are “in Christ.”

The Jesus way and the Jezebel way could not be more opposite. The Jesus way means living in harmony with the one true God, accepting his word as authoritative in our lives. It begins by centering our life on God through worship and prayer. The Jesus way is the downward way, making yourself low instead of high, humbling yourself, dying to self, living sacrificially, disadvantaging yourself for the good of another, being other-centered. I have a good friend who was a missionary in Japan for many years. While we were having dinner this week he told me that the Japanese word used in the Bible for “denying yourself” is a word that means, “throwing yourself away.” Self is not an important component in the Jesus way.

The Jesus way means that you live intentionally, personally, locally. It means that you immerse yourself in the lives of others without regard to their status or position. You associate with the lowly, the sick, the dying, and the little people; those who can give you nothing in return. You don't live to gain, but rather to give. You stay hidden.

Living the Jesus way means that you fight the temptation for power, money, fame, and possessions. You fight against the Jezebel way, the default way, the way of our flesh. Jesus said: “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15 NAS). Living the Jesus way means we are satisfied by God—nothing more, nothing less.

Living the Jesus way means we will be misunderstood, maligned, misrepresented, and hated. So it was with Elijah and with Jesus, so it will be with us. We may even suffer the same fate as Naboth. But we take the long view, knowing that God will sort things out in time. We invest in the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of earth, know-

ing that God will raise us up to heaven and to glory. We don't settle for a temporary glory.

James gives us our encouragement, again in the words of the Message:

And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble." So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field." (James 4:6–8 the MESSAGE)

If you are like me, it is a lot easier to envision what the Jezebel way looks like. This is what we see in the world—and often in ourselves—when we don't submit to God. But it is much more difficult to envision the Jesus way. God gives us the story of Naboth's vineyard in order to get it right. The stories of Elijah and Ahab and Jezebel are not given to us to pat ourselves on our back because we are Christians and are not as evil as Jezebel. They are given to us in order to change our lives.

How would your life be different if you lived the Jesus way? How would your marriage be different? How would you relate to people at work? How would you live in relation to your neighbors and your

family? Can we live the Jesus way all alone? Not hardly. But we are not alone. The Holy Spirit lives within us. We rely on his power and strength. As Augustine said, we don't have the power to do, but we have the power to choose. We have the ability to choose the Spirit over the flesh and then trust that God will supply what we need to do the right thing. Everyday we submit our will to his and let him shape our character into the Jesus way. The only question we really need to answer is, Are we willing?

David writes in Psalm 37, our Scripture reading this morning, that we don't have to fret or be anxious about the evil we see in the world; we don't have to be angry or envious because it only leads to wrong-doing. Rather we are called to

**"Trust in the LORD and do good;
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD;
And He will give you the desires of your heart."**
(Psalms 37:3–4 NAS)

1. David Roper, *Elijah: A Man Like Us* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1997), 210.

2. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 126.

© 2010 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino