

When God Delays His Judgment

1 Kings 21:17-29

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Greg L. Price

The skeptic loudly proclaims that because he does not see immediate judgment poured out upon the wicked (as in the case of Ahab and Jezebel), but to the contrary it is those who are good that unjustly suffer (like Naboth), that God cannot be sovereign and yet good. If God could have prevented the murder of Naboth, He is not good (they proclaim). If God couldn't have prevented the murder of Naboth, He is not sovereign (they reason). If God allowed the wicked scheme of Ahab and Jezebel to prevail, God is neither good nor just (they conclude). And yet God declares that He is good (Psalm 119:68), just (Zephaniah 3:5), and yet sovereign (Daniel 4:35). God is not merely love. God is holy, righteous, and just. He brings His righteous judgment upon those who hate Him. That is not simply an Old Testament doctrine, but Jesus Himself spoke of judgment as much if not more than anyone else (John 5:22,27).

Dear ones, God is not impressed by our efforts to tone down His righteous judgment and to make Him less than He is in order to preserve His justice in the eyes of a world that hates Him. There are those who think they can rescue God from the attacks of the world by removing His justice and making Him more pleasing to man. However, we ought to be more concerned with what God thinks than we are with what the world thinks, more concerned about the approval of God than we are about the approval of man. God makes no apology for who He is and neither should we. Will the creature judge the Creator? Will we who are but dust tell God who He must be? God forbid! Let us bow with faith, love, and reverence before the almighty, sovereign, and just God as He has revealed Himself to us in Holy Scripture.

Today we shall see that though God's judgment upon the wicked and His reward of the godly may be delayed, the sovereign, good, and just God that created and controls everything will not fail to administer His justice upon His enemies who hate Him: (1) God Vindicates Naboth (1 Kings 21:17-19); (2) God Judges Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21:20-26); (3) God Delays His Judgment (1 Kings 21:27-28).

I. God Vindicates Naboth (1 Kings 21:17-19a).

A. After the wicked conspiracy against godly Naboth was accomplished by Ahab and Jezebel, and Naboth lay dead from the unjust stoning that amounted to murder, Ahab had no thought other than to seize Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:16). That which he had coveted was now his, and he could just take it and enjoy it for himself. However, not all was said and done; for Almighty God had seen and had something to say. And what He says is that no matter what Ahab coveted and stole by this murderous plot, the vineyard was still Naboth's (1 Kings 21:18). No matter if Naboth was now dead, he was vindicated by the Lord—he had not sold his inheritance—it was more his than ever (the reality was his).

B. The Lord commands Elijah to meet Ahab for an unscheduled appointment in the very vineyard Ahab had coveted, murdered to obtain, and now had traveled from Samaria to Jezreel to seize (1 Kings 21:17-18). The divine words of judgment against Ahab are given to Elijah (1 Kings 21:19). Notice the following in this verse.

1. Ahab had deceived himself into believing God did not see and God did not know the murderous conspiracy he and Jezebel had wrought against faithful Naboth. However, the Lord saw and knew all that Ahab did and all that we do (Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 139:7). There is no way of escaping His all-seeing eye. That is a comfort to all whose heart belongs to the Lord, but is a nightmare to all whose heart belongs to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Ahab thought he had pulled off the perfect crime (as did Jezebel). When are you more likely to do that which you know is evil—when you know what you do is in the broad daylight of

God's all-seeing eye or when you have deceived yourself or have forgotten this truth and act as though no one sees in the darkness and privacy of that secret place? Let that truth be your sanctification.

2. Since Ahab had not actually pulled all of the strings in this murderous conspiracy, perhaps he thought he could excuse himself—it was actually Jezebel that had originated the plot and executed it. But the Lord sends Elijah to bring this word of judgment to Ahab, for Ahab was a party to this wicked plot; it was his covetousness that had led to murder; and he did not try to stop it, though he had the authority to do so as king. No, Ahab was an accessory to murder—he was a partaker of Jezebel's sin. He showed he was a partaker of sin by now seizing Naboth's vineyard.

3. Dear ones, what we see here with Ahab and Jezebel is where socialism leads. Socialism takes what belongs to others by force and claims to give it to others, but truly steals property, money, and labor, in order to make the Ahabs and Jezebels of this world wealthy and powerful. The Green New Deal of the socialists, the unlawfulness of eminent domain, and the threats of stealing property of farmers in South Africa are simply the plot of Ahab and Jezebel lived out in the present time (it begins with covetousness, then by might seizing the property of others, and then murder if necessary). Ahab was discontent in a palace; and the Apostle Paul was content in a prison (Acts 16:25—praising the Lord in prison). In whose steps would you follow? There are faithful Naboths that are suffering because they will not sell out their inheritance to the Ahabs and Jezebels (or to the world, the flesh, and the devil). As you stand faithful to the Lord and His truth, the Lord will vindicate you as He did Naboth here, and you will reap an everlasting inheritance that no man can steal (Matthew 6:19-20).

II. God Judges Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21:19b-26).

A. Ahab's bubble of excitement is popped as he meets Elijah, and the first words out of his mouth and from his guilty conscience are: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Ahab may have buried his murderous sin beneath his covetousness and thrill over gaining Naboth's vineyard; but now it was clear to Ahab that as Elijah had found him, so the Lord who sent Elijah had certainly found him out (Numbers 32:23).

1. Dear ones, here is a dangerous place for any of us to be spiritually, i.e. when the Lord sends His just rebuke through a fellow Christian and we consider that brother or sister to be our enemy. We would rather attack the messenger than listen and apply the truth of the message to us. Rather than being easily entreated (the wisdom from above in James 3:17), we go to war because we would rather protect our pride than confess our sin.

2. Lashing out in anger when we are confronted by others is almost a sure sign that we have put our fingers into our spiritual ears (Psalm 141:5—that is a true sign of spiritual maturity). To attack those who correct us is to act like Ahab. It is easy to point out the sin of Ahab in not receiving the just rebuke of the Lord through Elijah, but what about your own unwillingness and stubbornness to hear and repent?

B. Elijah responds, "I have found thee" and more importantly, God has found thee. Why had God found Ahab? Elijah says because Ahab had sold himself to work that which was evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings 21:20,25-26). Whereas faithful Naboth had refused to sell himself or his inheritance for money or the approval of the king, Ahab willingly sold himself to covet, conspire, murder, and seize that which he wanted. It matters not in whose sight such wicked plots may be justified (even if it is the majority—it is not the majority that rules, but God that rules—might does not make right). What mattered was this: "in the sight of the Lord".

C. God's judgment is now revealed to Ahab through Elijah (1 Kings 21:19,21-26). The fulfillment of God's judgment against Ahab (1 Kings 21:19) had both a near fulfillment (Ahab's blood) and a more distant fulfillment (the son of Ahab, Jehoram's blood). The near fulfillment will be realized in 1 Kings 22:37-38. The more distant fulfillment will be realized in 2 Kings 9:25-26. The fulfillment of God's judgment against Jezebel

will be realized likewise in 2 Kings 9:35-37. God's judgment was also that He would destroy all Ahab's royal seed (1 Kings 21:21-22). A king's legacy was in his posterity succeeding him on the throne, but there would be none. Ahab's name through his posterity would perish.

1. Evil people may prosper and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; however, their punishment will come when they receive the wages of their sin. The God of justice never fails to bring punishment for wickedness, whether it is sooner or later. Might may prevail against right when powerful people use their positions to take what they want; however, the mighty who abuse power will be judged and punished by God.

2. Who among us would ever declare that we have only had injustice brought against us by others, but have never initiated injustice against anyone else? Such a claim would be folly. And if against others, how many times every day have we done that which was unjust against Almighty God in thought, word, and deed in violation of His holy commandments? In light of all the injustice and unfairness that we have wrought against God and our neighbor, how humbled we should be before the Lord and how softly we should walk when addressing with others how unfairly we believe we have been treated by them.

3. Dear ones, the glory of the gospel is that God is just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:26). God did not unjustly wink at our sin and sweep it under the carpet. He took all of the sin of His elect and placed it upon His Son. Jesus bore all of God's judgment for you who trust in Him and when you rest in Jesus alone as your righteousness, God justifies you and declares you to be absolutely righteous in His sight. This is not an incentive to sin all the more, but to the contrary, to live to the glory of Jesus Christ who delivered us from God's all-consuming and just judgment that will fall upon God's enemies.

4. The favorite verse of all who hate and despise God's justice and judgment is "judge not that ye be not judged (Matthew 7:1-5; John 7:24). Let us remember mercy who have received such mercy from the Lord (Habakkuk 3:2; James 2:13).

III. God Delays His Judgment (1 Kings 21:27-28).

A. Upon hearing the great and overwhelming judgment that the Lord had promised to bring upon Ahab, he shuts his mouth, tears his clothing as an outward sign of mourning, clothes himself in rough and itchy sackcloth as an outward sign of his misery, fasts and goes without food as an outward sign of weakness and sinfulness before God, and walks softly in his bare feet as an outward sign of humility (1 Kings 21:27).

1. Ahab knew what to do to outwardly show his sorrow, misery, sinfulness, and humility before God, but whatever the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting Ahab of his sin, it was not a work of special grace, but a common operation of the Spirit in even the heart of a reprobate king that led not to a repentance unto life, but rather only granted to him a delay in God's judgment. Listen to *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (10:4) on this very subject:

Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit....

2. This was a common mercy shown to Ahab wherein he outwardly conformed to the matter of God's commandments though it was not a genuine repentance (1 Kings 21:28-29).

Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others.... (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 16:7)

This was clearly not a true and special work of God's grace in the heart of Ahab, for there is not the fruit of true repentance in restoring Naboth's land to his family, in reproving his wicked wife; in falling upon the mercy of God and seeking God's forgiveness, in turning from his idolatry and bringing reformation to Israel, but in the

very next chapter you find him hating again the Lord's prophet.

3. We have the account of a very wicked king of Judah who may have even exceeded Ahab in wickedness—Manasseh, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 33:1-10). God brought severe judgment upon Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:11). Through this judgment, God humbled the heart of Manasseh so that called out to the Lord in earnest supplication (2 Chronicles 33:12-13), and the Lord restored him to his throne in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 33:13). But notice in King Manasseh the fruit of genuine repentance which was absent altogether in King Ahab (2 Chronicles 33:14-16). Dear ones, this is written for your instruction and encouragement. Do not be like Ahab that goes through certain outward actions of repentance and that may have some feelings of conviction for sin, but then does not evidence a heart that looks in faith to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus and does not endeavor reformation or new obedience out of love and thanksgiving in heart and life. To follow the example of Ahab will lead to your destruction ultimately in the Lake of Fire. To follow the example of Manasseh by God's rich grace in Christ Jesus will lead to everlasting life (Romans 2:3-4).

4. If the Lord showed a common mercy in delaying His righteous judgment upon an Ahab that outwardly conformed and showed some common work of sorrow, misery, sinfulness, and humility, how much more will the Lord show His mercy to you who confess you deserve God's holy judgment for your sin, who hate your sin and love the righteousness of God, who are ashamed of your offense against a holy God, who eye the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and who in love and thankfulness for God's mercy to you desire and endeavor to give yourself to Him and live for Him in striving to keep His commandments? Dear ones, where sin did abound, grace did much more abound. Amen.

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