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Speaker: Bro. John Martin

The Vineyard of Naboth

Reading: 1 Kings 21

My beloved brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and our dear young people.

I don't think there's any doubt, brethren and sisters, that in the first of Kings 19, with the still small voice, Elijah had reached the very climatic peak of his life. Not only of his life, but certainly, of his education. And I don't think it's without doubt significant, that from this point onwards, he only appears spasmodically in the record which is set before us. And even then, brethren and sisters, there doesn't seem to be, in the events in which he appears, any distinct pattern or purpose of action. And it would appear to me, that when Yahweh sent him back, to go back on his way from Mt. Sinai, after his education, that it was almost as if, his work had come to an end. He was to prepare the younger man Elisha, for the great work which lay ahead of him, and as far as Elijah was concerned, more importantly, he was to meditate upon the great things that he had learnt, and in the very manner in which he was taken out of this earth, there is the heavy suggestion, brethren and sisters, that a very great and a very dramatic future is in store for our great prophet from Gilead.

Now whilst there may not be, any distinct pattern in his subsequent life, there certainly is in the story of the vineyard of Naboth! One of the most fascinating stories in the Old Testament scripture, because I believe, brethren and sisters, it is extremely important as it relates to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Almost as if it was deliberately written there, that we might understand the great work which He would perform, and how He would be betrayed in the house of His friends, and how the church and state would combine together, in order to stamp Him out of the earth. And in this story, we have these characters, strong characters, brethren and sisters, who are setting before us, the prototype of what was to come after. We have Naboth, who preeminently in this story, is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Ahab, of course, as the prototype of the kings of the earth, who commit fornication with that great whore, Jezebel, who of course, is preeminently the prototype of that Roman harlot system of all things which we see in the earth today. And this story today, is extremely important in that regard, that it seems to be deliberately written that we might understand those things, which they did to our Lord, and why they did those things to our Lord, and that we might see, brethren and sisters, that at His second coming, He might put down all rule, all authority and all power, especially that which is vested in the Great Whore system, given its power and its force, by the dragon kingdoms of this world. And certainly this story here, has that

type permeating through the whole record.

Let's pick up that record, brethren and sisters, and in the very first verse, we have the whole thing set before us, as it were, in the name and the place in which Naboth had his vineyard. The record says here, 'That it came to pass after these things'; a war had taken place between the time that Elijah had left Sinai until we come down to the story of Naboth's vineyard. So it was sometime after those things, that this story has its place in history. And we learn about Naboth, the Jezreelite, who had a vineyard in Jezreel. And I want you to notice, brethren and sisters, how the fulness of his name and place is given immediately at the beginning of this story.

Naboth's name means 'fruits'; fruits, and he is in this story set before us, as an Israelite indeed, who had brought forth 'the fruits of the spirit'. And how do you produce the fruit of the spirit? Fruit, brethren and sisters, is the result of planting seed. Fruit only comes at the end of a process; the peaceful fruit of righteousness only appears in the mature man's life, at the end of the process which begins with God. And if the fruit that is produced is to be the 'spirit's fruit' it obviously has to come from the spirit's seed, for 'what a man soweth that shall he reap', and he lived in Jezreel 'God sows'. So here was a man set before us, immediately set before us in this story, who is a man who brought forth the fruit of the spirit because he lived in a locality where God sowed. And the apostle Paul told us in the 6th chapter of Galatians, 'that God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap'. If he sows to his flesh, then the fruit will be comparable; he will of his flesh reap corruption, because that's what the flesh produces. But if he sows to the spirit, says the apostle, he will also reap that which is comparable, he will reap everlasting life because the spirit word of truth is life, and this man lived, brethren and sisters, where God sows. He brought forth fruit; what a wonderful man is here presented to us, in these few words.

And what sort of fruit did he produce? Well, of course, he produced grapes, didn't he? He had a vineyard; but what is so important about that? Well, brethren and sisters, if the fruit of the spirit is the peaceable fruit of righteousness, which takes a lifetime of maturity to produce, then the last thing that was ever brought in from the field, during the course of Israel's season was the grape. You opened the year, of course, with Passover with the barley; you followed on with the feast of Weeks or Pentecost with the wheat; and the feast of Tabernacles was to celebrate the ingathering of all the harvest in the seventh month, when they brought in the pomegranates, the figs and finally the grapes. So here was a man, who had grown the 'fruit of the spirit' because God had sowed the spirit of truth in his heart, and he brought forth that final harvest, which brethren and sisters, speaks so eloquently to us, of the principle of fellowship. And because the vine, as Ezekiel 15 points out, has one singular virtue; 'Will a man, he says, take a branch of the vine and make a pin with it, a peg for the wall? Will he use it for any other purpose, to make furniture?' What is the use of the vine, brethren and sisters, apart from producing fruit? And here's the remarkable thing that whilst the vine has a singular virtue in producing fruit, the fruit that it produces grows in clusters! So, it has a singular virtue, but it grows in clusters, and that's what our fellowship with each other is all about. We have no other purpose in life, brethren and sisters, but to bring forth the

fruit of the spirit. Our bodies our hearts and minds apart from that purpose, are fit for nothing but to be burned, and when we bring forth the fruit of the spirit it is impossible to bring it forth singularly, we've got to do it together! And so, when the spies went into the land, and they came out with those bunches of grapes, it said in the record, 'there were two men bearing one cluster of grapes'. So there were two men and they were linked together by a pole with one cluster of grapes, and they got it at a place known as Hebron, which means 'fellowship'.

'I am the vine; ye are the branches', said the Lord Jesus Christ; and He urged His apostles 'to bring forth fruit unto God'. And when He finally presented them, brethren and sisters, with that little glass of wine, He said in the record of Luke, 'share this among yourselves'; and when you think about a bunch of grapes, crushed to produce the blood that went into the glasses, and all the singular grapes gave forth of their blood, that it might run together (how on earth could you ever separate one grape from another?) share that, He said, among yourselves. And that's what we've got to do, brethren and sisters, to share His life between us all, having a singular purpose in life, to bring forth fruit to God, we do it together! That's the whole idea of that figure; and here set before us immediately, is the wonderful symbology of that; but there's something else about a vineyard that's extremely important as far as this story is concerned, because as you see we all know the story so well, that Naboth was determined to hang on to his inheritance.

Now, the vineyard is a wonderful symbol of the inheritance! Why is it? Well, if you look at Amos chapter 9, you'll see here, brethren and sisters, one such reference where the vineyard is used as a symbol of inheritance. And I say, one such reference because there are many of them; in chapter 9 of the prophecy of Amos verses 14 and 15, 'And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Yahweh thy Elohim'. You see, brethren and sisters, the vineyard there is used as a symbol of an inheritance, but not on its own; it says 'they will plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them', now why does it say that? Well, because the whole idea of the vineyard is that it takes a long while to establish it. There's much to be done; by the time a vineyard is in full production, the man that's got that vineyard has been rooted in that land, because of all the labour that's gone forth into that vineyard. And they say that no vineyard is worth anything under about seven years, and Isaiah 5 (which we won't turn to now) presents the picture. 'My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; he took out all the stones and carried them away; he ploughed up the ground; he planted his vineyard; he built a tower; he built a winepress; he built a wall around the vineyard', and what Isaiah is painfully presenting, brethren and sisters, is years of labour and toil, and by the time that vineyard grew to full production, that man was rooted in that soil. 'They will plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof', meaning they were going to be there for a long time. 'I will give her her vineyards from thence' said Hosea the prophet, speaking about the future of Israel's inheritance. On the way down to the Philistines to marry a girl outside the truth, Samson came across a lion in the vineyards of Timnath, and Timnath means

'the inheritance'. So time and again, we get that impression that the vineyard is a wonderful symbol of the inheritance.

What a marvellous verse of scripture opens up the first of Kings 21! You know, brethren and sisters, it's a wonderful spiritual exercise to follow through the productivity of the vineyard. I'll never forget, when we drove down to the southeast of this country, down towards Mount Gambia, during a preaching weekend with our young people. It was winter; in the scriptural terminology, it was night! and although, of course, literally it was the daytime, it was the night of the season. And there on either side of the road, stretched out the vineyards without their leaves, and as the car flashed along the road, when the vines would side on to us, everyone of them, with its thick stem and its thinner branches stretched out, hanging on that wire, row after row after row, I could see, brethren and sisters, in that the tragedy of the One who was divine, when it was night, and they hung Him there, didn't they? And it just seemed to be drooping down and you know, the vine is terribly dependent upon the cultivation of mankind; he needs to tend it with very great care and as it goes through the long winter night and the springtime comes around and sets the buds and the late summer begins to set forth its leaves, and the fruit appears. You go out today, as we did the other day, to Angaston, and did you see the vineyards? Magnificent, brethren and sisters! Nothing like they looked in the winter; now dressed with their leaves, the uncomely branches are covered up, the ugly wood cannot be seen, and the brilliant green of that vine, as it gives its life for man, to make him cheerful before his God. What a wonderful symbol it is, and all of that is set before us, in this story of Naboth the Jezreelite!

Ahab wanted to change all that, brethren and sisters; it was hard by the palace of Jezreel. That's where Jezebel loved to be, and he dearly wanted that vineyard for himself. WHAT FOR? What for did he want it? He didn't want it for a vineyard; look what he wanted it for in verse 2. 'And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for WHAT? for a garden of herbs'. A garden of herbs, what would be a garden of herbs? Well, let's come back to the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy, brethren and sisters, and see what a garden of herbs stood for! and if we're not impressed with the contrast between these references, well then we'll never see the significance of the first of Kings 21, but have a look at the contrast here! And in the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy we read this in verse 10, 'For the land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh in the water of the rain of heaven: A land which Yahweh thy God careth for: the eyes of Yahweh thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year'. So the land which Israel went to, brethren and sisters, was not like the land of Egypt. What was the difference?

Well, the land of Egypt was as flat as a table! and because the delta, the Nile delta, is almost river level, irrigation is no problem, and it's bred a race of lazy indolent people, who water the ground with their feet, and in those circumstances, men learn to grow exotic gardens, like a garden of herbs. For no other reason than pure sensual delight.

But the land Israel went to, brethren and sisters, as they went across the top of the escarpment of Gilead, wound down to the Jordan valley, 3,000 feet below, when you take in, of course, 1392 below sea level. Cross the River Jordan and then up we go again to another 2500 feet above sea level. And there are all the hills of Judea, and there are all the hills of Samaria, and they steeply fall away again to the Mediterranean Sea, who's going to irrigate those hills with their foot? And Yahweh says it's a land which I tread upon, as the word means in the Hebrew there. His foot is necessary, and the waters of the rain of heaven come, and what for? TO GROW VINEYARDS, which take a long time and a lot of work, to bring into production, but which produce, brethren and sisters, character! Active, powerful, wonderful characters, and like the fruit of the vine, as it appears the last thing in the season for Israel, so the character, brethren and sisters, is the final thing that matters, and Ahab wanted that ground to make it a garden of herbs! like they do in Egypt.

What a remarkable contrast there is between the two men, in this story. But, he couldn't get it for money, could he? He made a proposition in verse 2, that either Naboth accepted a better vineyard than it, or he would give him the money for it. Now, brethren and sisters, I want you to notice the objection which Naboth had to selling his vineyard; he never complained that there could be a better vineyard than it. No doubt there were better vineyards somewhere than the one he had, though doubtless it was wonderful because it was in a very fertile valley; but he never made that point! nor did he complain that Ahab wouldn't pay him enough for it. That never entered into his mind at all; his rejection of the offer was totally, brethren and sisters, on the basis of spirituality and nothing else. He said, 'Yahweh forbideth me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee'. He never mentioned money; he never said a word about that; he wouldn't have cared if Ahab had offered him the kingdom, brethren and sisters. That wasn't the point! The point was that what Naboth had was beyond price, and in the 36th chapter of the book of Numbers, we have the basis of his objection to selling that property.

It was a spiritual objection, brethren and sisters, money had nothing whatever to do with it. And so in Numbers 36 we read concerning a man's inheritance in verse 7, 'So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself (or as the margin says, cleave to) the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers'. He would cleave to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers, how many brethren and sisters have sold their inheritance for a morsel of meat like Esau? unthinking and uncaring, brethren and sisters, for the depth of spirituality that belongs to the inheritance which we have! And we do have an inheritance! How many brethren and sisters, move away from the precincts of the ecclesia, to go into their country residence, with every good excuse in the world, that they might hear the birds of God's creation or the babbling brook which He has made? Miles from the inheritance of the ecclesia! and with every other reason other than that which is spiritual because they want to make a garden of herbs. They wanted to live like Egypt! A tragic situation, brethren and sisters.

That's what Yahweh had given Naboth, that's what he was going to stay with! And don't

ever tell me that Naboth enjoyed living next to Jezebel; and no doubt, if we'd been in his situation, and had some of the parties that went on in that place, brethren and sisters, which makes what happens in the world today look like a Sunday School picnic, no doubt if we had that going on around about us, we'd be glad to sell the place. But no way in the wide world, would we move away from Baal. Money never got mentioned; another vineyard of equal value never got mentioned; it was purely a spiritual objection that he had; and do you know something? Ahab recognized that! We know that because, look what the record says; just have a look at what happened in verse 4, 'And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased (the RSV says, vexed and sullen). Now why was he vexed and sullen? because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread' (like a great big spoiled kid!). King of Israel, brethren and sisters, but you see what was stopping him? What stopped him from taking that vineyard was not the lack of might or power, brethren and sisters, it was his conscience because that vexed, sullen individual who went in there and acted like an overgrown schoolboy, had put his face to the wall and laid and moped about it. He kept thinking to himself, for he hath said I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers and he knew, brethren and sisters, that no might or power exercised by him, could ever overcome the power of God's word! He had enough truth in him to know that, and he kept repeating that; for he hath said I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. I want you to notice that because it's very important to this story; Ahab fully recognized the spiritual value of that objection, that is, when he was on his own.

But that didn't last very long; because when in verse 5, we read, 'that Jezebel his wife came to him', and brethren and sisters, she was his wife! Not only because perhaps they'd gone through some form of legality, but because he deserved her and she deserved him. They owed each other, each other. They belonged to each other, she was in every sense of the word, his wife, and she ruled him with a rod of iron. And what did she say? 'What's wrong with you?' You can just imagine the strength of that character, coming in and seeing this individual, and you can see what's going through her mind because it all comes out later on as to what she's saying. 'Well, what's wrong with you?' 'Goodness me, you're the king of this place; wrench it out of his hands. Goodness, what's wrong with you?' And you know, brethren and sisters, as he laid there on his bed thinking to himself, 'Boy, he had said I will not sell the inheritance of my fathers'; when he answered her he didn't say that at all! In verse 6, 'And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard! THAT'S AN ABSOLUTE LIE! And you see, brethren and sisters, the difference in the man once that wife presented it to him! On the bed, 'darn him and his religion; ah, darn Numbers 36 and verse 7, darn, I know it's right; I'd like that vineyard but I can't go beyond that! Why did the bible say that?' And when she walked in, 'Oh..he just said he wouldn't give me his vineyard.' Totally different with that woman! Every vestige of religion flew out the window before her eyes. Naboth never said that, but that's how he reported it to her; and in verse 15 we have the confirmation of that, brethren and sisters, for at the end of that verse, where Jezebel

understood that 'he refused to give that vineyard to Ahab for money', when he refused to give thee for money; and it's not true, he didn't at all! See the difference in the man? the man on that bed and the man before that woman? And you know, the world is full of men like that, brethren and sisters. Full of men like that, men who when you isolate them from those who dominate them, are quite reasonable even though they don't want to be, they have a certain reason about them; they can have logic and you can appeal to them. They can see the logic of what you're saying, but when Miss Muffet turns up and stands alongside of them, brethren and sisters, logic flies out of the window, in the very fear of that character that's along side of them, and they don't want to say anything that's going to offend her. Nothing whatever will offend her! and we'll couch our language in language we know she'll accept, even if we have to lie about it! The world is full of men like that, absolutely full of them.

But she had a plan! Not only did she have a plan, brethren and sisters, that would get that vineyard from Naboth, but knowing the character of her husband as weak as it was, she implemented it herself. 'Don't you worry about it, I'll handle the matter', and in verse 7, 'And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite'. Now look what that verse is telling us; look at the contempt that was in the mind of that woman for that man. Whatever other attractions he had for her, what a great contempt! because in that verse there's rather an anomaly because she says on the one hand, 'Aren't you the king of this nation? Aren't you, never mind dear, you go and have a little drink. Dear, you just get yourself a bit blot out, and I'll fix it up for you! You've got the power, but let me handle it.' 'You go and have a little drink and I'll fix it up'; what is this, brethren and sisters, but the 18th chapter of the Apocalypse, listen to these words from Revelation chapter 18, Jezebel is the prototype of this great system, and hasn't this great system ever acted in character like she acted? And speaking of the great Babylon, the whore system, which we know and understand today, is on the earth, we read in verse 3, 'For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication' (Go have a little drink and let your heart be merry) and the kings of the earth (like Ahab) have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies'. Verse 7, 'How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow'. Verse 9, 'And the kings of the earth that have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning'.

Isn't that Jezebel, brethren and sisters? committing fornication as it were, with the King of Israel, though she was his wife, in that sense of the word; but what an unholy alliance it was, telling him to run away and live and have a good time while she 'fixed up' all his problems, and a woman who had no doubt in her heart whatever; she didn't vacillate like he did; she wasn't hopping between two opinions, she said in her heart, I am queen, and she believed it. There was not a shred of doubt in her mind where she stood; I am queen, I will know no widowhood, I will live deliciously and no one will stop me! And she is, brethren and sisters, a remarkable prototype of all that we read in Revelation, 'for in her was found all the blood of the prophets', and as I've told you, the first recorded

incidence of civil persecution against saints is in Jezebel's reign.

So there she is, and what does the Roman Catholic church do today? When you had a Mussolini on the throne in Italy, some bad tempered individual he was; weak and insipid and yet with a great bellowing voice that in public, you'd think he could bring down all heaven around your ears, and yet he was as weak as dishwater, and what did the Roman Catholic church say to him? 'Get over there into Ethiopia and get those people that will stand behind you! Join up with Hitler'. What did she do with the third Reich, brethren and sisters, who tried to exterminate the Jewish people? Held her peace, mind me and when she did speak, she made vile threats against the enemies of the third Reich. Goes with every wind that blows, that would put her on the high places of this earth, who sits in the middle of the Italian peninsula and says, 'I'm a queen and I'll never see sorrow', who takes you into her basilica of St. Peter's cathedral and walks you down the aisle, (which we were told was exactly 660 feet long and I reckon there's a little porch somewhere that measures 6 feet extra) and down the aisle (you can't believe this, but I saw it with my own eyes and was sick the next day, brethren and sisters, in bed sick with it all!) built into the aisle there were rows of tiles and it says, 'St. Paul's is only this long, St. Sophia is only this long, St. Mark's is only this long' (We are the greatest, in other words!) until the Yankees went and built the church of St. John the divine, good on them, and they made it longer than St. Peter's! You know, it's absolutely tremendous, and the Lord says, 'they're full of dead men's bones' and right there, hardly, almost within touching distance of the great brazen altar, all of brass, which is in the middle of that place, there's a glass coffin with a skeleton in it; full of dead men's bones, and you walk through a door like that, right out of the holy place of St. Peter's itself, you walk through a door like that, into the shop to buy all your souvenirs, and there they all are for you to buy. Women undressed, little statuettes in provocative poses, blessed by his holiness, and on the steps leading from the square into the street, on the steps were rows of men handing you out white cards, with the addresses on them. You'd want to go there at night, if you're a sensual sort of person, you'll find what you're looking for! On the very steps of the place! And there she sits astride that peninsula, and lives deliciously with all the fornicators of this earth, who bow and scrape and kiss her shoes. What a day, brethren and sisters, when the smoke of her torment will go up, and here in this chapter, is the prototype of them all, headed up in that woman Jezebel!

Well, she fixed it up, of course, no problem to her, verse 8, 'She wrote letters and forged his name', no problem whatever! Wouldn't have been a tremble in the finger, brethren and sisters, sealed them with his seal' (no king would ever let his seal out of his grasp; that was his authority, and he'd never let it out of his sight, except Ahab. She kept it in her purse. How incredible!) 'sealed it with his seal, and she sent letters, brethren and sisters, unto the elders and the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth'. And verse 11 repeats it; and 'the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city; in Naboth's city. You see, brethren and sisters, he was wounded in the house of his friends.

See how the story begins to unfold; he was wounded in the house of his friends' those

that were dwelling with Naboth. The elders and the nobles, and what were the Pharisees and the scribes in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ? Weren't they, brethren and sisters, but a further development of the Roman Catholic apostacy? You might say, 'Well, we could guess that they were', forget about guessing! the bible says they were. Because Zechariah's prophecy (chapter 5) had shown us the vision of the stork, the unclean bird, and the talent, the measure of lead; the inferior measure of lead, and in that measure there were two women, and they had filled up the measure of the father's iniquities and had come out of the dross of lead, as Ezekiel said (chapter 23). The two women of Israel and Judah, Aholah and Aholibah, the stork picked them up in his wings and carried them into a place called the land of Shinar, 'the enemies tooth', and there established those two women on their own base, and built a house in the land of Shinar, and Roman Catholicism, brethren and sisters, is nothing more or less than Judaism in Latin terms. And in the days of our Lord, there was the Jezebel system! There she was, in all her pomp and ceremony, and she gave the authority, did she not? with the kings of the earth at that time, and brought Pontius Pilate into her pay, brethren and sisters, to crucify God's Son who'd brought forth the fruit of the spirit, because He had been sown from the womb, in the words of John 'God's seed remained in Him' and because it did, He brought forth the fruit of the spirit. And yet the Jezebel system of that day, combining with the kings of the earth, brought about His death, in the house of His friends.

And Jezebel went cleverly about it; in verse 9 a remarkable plan, brethren and sisters. It might read very simple but it's quite remarkable, because in verse 9 she wrote in the letters saying, 'Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people'. Now, you say, what was the point of that? Well, you see, everything that was done on this day was done with an appearance of Jewish law. Quite remarkable what she did! She stuck close to the letter of the Law, although of course, it was an absolute travesty of justice. Now the purpose of proclaiming a fast, brethren and sisters, was sometimes obvious, and oft times not obvious. For example, if some great tragedy had happened in Israel, they proclaimed a fast, and when you did that you would know why you were fasting. But there were other occasions when the people didn't know that there were tragedies happening, and the prophets of God had to call for a fast, in order to impress the people that something tragic had happened which they didn't know about! For example in the first chapter of John, 'Proclaim a fast' saith the prophet; what for would the people want to know? But this they'd know, brethren and sisters, when that fast was proclaimed, it soon would be revealed that something very tragic had happened. Now here a fast had been proclaimed but nobody knew why; but immediately that the feast was proclaimed, all in the city of Jezreel would be shaking in their boots, and saying 'What has happened?'

See how she sets the drama and the scene for the rejection of Naboth! She has already got the people into a very great state of excitement and trepidation. Now the next step in the plan is that during the course of that fast, Naboth should be set forward as an example of piety! He should be set forward as an example of piety; so two things are happening. People are trembling inside with fear and trepidation as to what has happened and in the midst of that feeling there's one man that stands out as different from them all, set up out of all the people as an object of their admiration and wonder

and of his piety. Imagine, brethren and sisters, that when two men come in and say, 'Do you know where the trouble lies; No, we have no idea! You wouldn't believe it, you'll never believe it; IT'S HIM.' And of course, the drama was set, wasn't it? And all their admiration, in the spirit of fear and trepidation of which there were many, would be catapulted into the opposite effect, and they would hold him in the greatest of horrors.

A master player; much like they did to our Lord, brethren and sisters; the Herodians, who of course, backed the Romans; and the Pharisees who hated the Romans and the Herodians got together and they had plans, didn't they? and it always was the same. In the midst of some great drama, of our Lord's healing power, or of His teaching methods; one of them would step forward and say, 'Good Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God', and when all the attention of the people was riveted upon Him in that sense, there was the endeavour to discredit Him to the opposite extreme. Very clever tactics, if they work, brethren and sisters!

And because Jezebel knew that she had to stick hard and fast to the Law, she wanted two men in verse 10 as witnesses. You can't put anybody to death under the Law of Moses, with less than two witnesses. And they did the same to our Lord, they procured false witnesses; the men that she got of course, were men of Belial. Who else? Worthlessness. Belial, you know, comes from a root word which means 'a failure to a sin'. It's not the meaning of Belial but it comes from a root which has that meaning, 'a failure to a sin'; they were men of the earth, they didn't care much, brethren and sisters, for principles other than that which was above the gutter. They never got their noses out of the gutter; they're the sort of people that she got as witnesses. And the accusation, well, they were to bear witness saying, 'thou doest blaspheme against God and the king' and they are the exact accusations that they made against our Lord. And do you know something, brethren and sisters, that was a clever accusation. Do you know why? Well, if there were only objections to this accusation against Naboth, say the witnesses had said, 'he blasphemed against God'. Well, they would say, Now wait a minute; it could have been said he's been an object of piety, where did he get that reputation from? Where has he blasphemed against God?' But you see, when she cleverly put with that, the blaspheming of the king, there could have been a case made out of it, if there were any objections, that he had blasphemed the king because he refused to sell his vineyard and there could have been a whole lot of lies told about that, brethren and sisters, of the feeling that would have been generated between the king and between Naboth. And what did that matter? Well, it mattered like this, that in Exodus 22 and verse 28, the ruler of God's people was never to be reviled, never to be treated with disrespect, because he ruled for God. Blaspheme the king, you blasphemed God! And do you know what happened in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ? You know what happened! You know what finally procured His death, brethren and sisters. What was it? Well, before their councils, blasphemy against God, so they said. 'I adjure thee, art thou the Son of God? Thou sayest that I am!' What further witnesses do we need, they said, we've heard the blasphemy against God. But Rome wouldn't accept that, brethren and sisters. Rome wasn't interested in Israel's God; not one whit interested, and in the 19th chapter of John, when the Jews saw their chance, slipping from their grasp, they shifted their tact and they said, 'He hath committed treason against Caesar'. And you

know what the Romans thought about Caesar? He was a God-King.

Verse 13, 'and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died'. He suffered without the gate, that's interesting isn't it? he suffered without the gate, and not only did he suffer, brethren and sisters, but if you turn to 2 Kings chapter 9, you'll see that they did also. They killed all his sons, verse 26, Jehu is talking to Bidkar his captain, and he says, 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith Yahweh', so you see what they did, 'come let us kill the heir and let us seize upon his inheritance', and because Naboth had children and sons in particular, Jezebel got rid of the lot of them. Now the vineyard's theirs, isn't it? Now we can have it!

When we come back to the first of Kings 21, brethren and sisters, you read the callous record, the way this was reported to Ahab. Absolutely terrible! And in verse 15 of 1 Kings 21, 'And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead', and you notice, brethren and sisters, almost as if like the prophet Baalim, that Yahweh put a word in her mouth, and she gave him his full title. 'The man, whose name is 'fruit' where 'God sows' in the midst of his inheritance, is dead'. The man whose name is the 'fruit of the spirit', the one that God has sowed in the earth, that He might be the vine, and we might be the branches, is he dead? By no means, brethren and sisters! Naboth is not dead but sleeping! What a dreadful shock in the day of resurrection, what a fearful shock that will be, and fancy, giving him his full title announcing his death. It's almost like that superscription isn't it? THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS! They put that over His cross, supposing that He was dead. That's what Pilate wrote there, and he wrote it with determination.

Well, what did Ahab do? 'It came to pass, in verse 16, 'when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it', do you know when that was, brethren and sisters? Do you know how long it took him to get over his conscience? It was the next day. We read that in 2 Kings chapter 9; 'yesterday' was the indictment upon Ahab, 'yesterday you did that'. He couldn't wait, could he? Conscience is now gone, he never queried Jezebel how it happened, he got no report of the details, none was given and none was asked for. He knew his wife, brethren and sisters, he knew what she was capable of, and he didn't care. Any qualms of conscience that he had, went out of the window, when he saw in his mind's eye, a garden of herbs. And so he went down to visualize his garden of herbs, and as his eyes swept around that vineyard, drinking it all in, in that majestic spot on God's creation, seeing all the vines with their orderly rows, tendered and cared for with loving hands that Naboth would most surely have done. Seeing the tower that was there, the watchtower, for the animals at night; seeing the wine press spic and span, and everything in its place; and seeing in his mind's eye, brethren and sisters, the wonder of his garden of herbs, Ah.....! what's that? And there in that vineyard, brethren and sisters, the shaggy prophet of Gilead!!!! And he never visualized that, did he?

And do you know something, brethren and sisters, when men get into circumstances like that, they know exactly where they stand. No words needed to be spoken by Elijah; nothing had to come out of his mouth; the words came pouring out of Ahab's mouth. YOU FOUND ME, MY ENEMY! My enemy! and to that point Elijah hadn't said a word. Yes, he found him, brethren and sisters, alright. And Ahab was absolutely correct; he was his enemy. I wonder, I wonder, when we go to the judgment, to take our inheritance that means so much to us, or does it? I wonder what sort of an inheritance we've been visualizing? If we want to cease to wonder about me, let me tell you that I have awful trouble, in making the visions of my head, something in the future, as against something in the present. I am an idiotic sort of person when it comes to thinking about imagining things; if it wasn't for the study of this sort of work, brethren and sisters, which forces me to the imagination of things spiritual, I don't know where I'd finish, as a matter of fact, I don't know where I'm going to finish now! I sometimes wonder if I'm sane, and I wonder when I go to the judgment seat, and I see that glorious One; He won't look like the prophet from Gilead, but He'll be even more awe inspiring. And I wonder whether that character will fit all that I've been visualizing, or whether in my mind's eye, as all the mad imaginations of wealth and luxury and living easily and restfully in this life, whether or not I'll see that man out of character with all that! I wonder which will prevail? It frightens me! and I hope brethren and sisters, for all of us, that when we get there, and we see Him as He is, (that's a wonderful statement) we'll see Him as He is, (because He can't be anything else) and we'll either be like Him or we'll be unlike Him. And I couldn't imagine two people in their garden more unlike each other than Ahab and Elijah.

And when he saw him, he saw him nothing more or less than 'an enemy'. The story is so typical, brethren and sisters, that it's hard to escape the exhortation that comes down to us, in very practical and real terms. I just wonder! And Elijah left him in no doubt as to where he was going to finish. In verse 19, 'Thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Yahweh, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?' You see, brethren and sisters, he couldn't escape his responsibilities, could he? He couldn't say, 'The woman which thou gavest me, she killed him'; honour, he's the head of the house, 'HAST THOU KILLED?' Wasn't it his signature? Wasn't it his seal? He can't escape that responsibility. Hast thou killed and taken possession? 'And thou shalt speak unto him saying, Thus saith Yahweh, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine'. You know they didn't, brethren and sisters, because Yahweh changed it later on! You see, Ahab had sold himself, we read in verse 20, 'Ahab sold himself to work wickedness', we read it again in verse 25, and if someone sells something, they've got something to sell, and he, therefore, had been, brethren and sisters, a better spirit; he had a better side to his character, not inherent of course, from flesh. He'd known the truth, it had affected him at times, and when he was isolated from his wife, there was a semblance of truth in him.

And the indictment had sent him into deep mourning of abject humility as we read, of course, at the end of that chapter, as our bro. Adrian read it for us. And because of that, in verse 29, Yahweh changed the indictment, He said, 'Seest thou how Ahab humbleth

himself before Me? because he humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house'. And Jehu rode into that vineyard, brethren and sisters, with the body of Jehoram draped over his chariot, with Bidkhar, and he said, 'Do you know what Elijah told him, Bidkhar, what would happen to his sons?' Well, here he is, and they got hold of him and they flung him into that vineyard, brethren and sisters, a lump of meat; and it landed on the ground and all the dogs came yapping around it, and ate him up.

So it did happen to his son, and you might say, 'Well, that left Ahab pretty free of his indictment'. Did it? You know, brethren and sisters, he suffered an even more poetic justice than that! In 1 Kings 22 verse 37 and 38, we read of the death of Ahab. A man drew a bow at a venture, shot an arrow into the sky, aiming at no one in particular; the arrow guided by the angel found a chink in his armour, and in verse 37, 'So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; and they buried the king in Samaria. And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of Yahweh which He spake'. Now the word of Yahweh is not recorded, brethren and sisters, about that, not so much in words that is, not so much in letter but as in spirit, because you see, in the Hebrew, as the RV has it, and the RSV has it, and as Rotherham has it, we read verse 38 like this. And this is how the RV renders it, 'And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and in brackets, (where the harlots of the city went to wash)'.
According to the word of Yahweh, and brethren and sisters, if ever we've seen poetic justice in the end of Ahab, there it is! Yahweh had not said that specifically, but that word of Yahweh, had branded him, because he lived with a harlot; he lived with the queen of harlots, and because he lived with the queen of harlots, his blood (and the life of all flesh is in the blood), was mingled in the water of the pool of Samaria, the scum of which was the filth from harlots' bodies, according to the word of Yahweh. And we can be sure, brethren and sisters, that whatever judgment God brings upon the earth, be it national or individual, it will be poetic! It will be both just and poetic! If the boast of Jezebel was that 'she would never be a widow', he made her a widow. If she said she'd sit a queen and see no sorrow, in a moment of time He smashed her brains out on the pavement under the wheels of the chariot of Jehu. If a man lived with harlots, he'll die with harlots! If we, brethren and sisters, succumb to the allurements of this world, we'll perish with the allurements of this world. If we take the sword we shall with the sword perish, and whatever our life is, and whatever rules our life, that's our master! It's our Baal, and we will die poetically and justly.

And that's how he died; he lived that way, he died that way! We face, brethren and sisters, destiny, every single one of us, and it could well be, tomorrow! Let us never forget the story of Naboth the Jezreelite, who had a vineyard in Jezreel. Let's not make the mistakes, brethren and sisters, that Ahab made or that Jezebel made. Let's stick close and hard to the inheritance of our fathers, and haven't we got wonderful fathers! Chief among whom is our Heavenly Father; but there are others who have trod this earth, brethren and sisters, who have manifested Him to us, in varying degrees. We have Abraham to our father, the father of the faithful because God shared with him, the father of faithfulness. We have our Lord Jesus Christ, whom many like to call our 'elder

brother', but that's His prerogative; He is not ashamed to called them 'brethren', but rather, brethren and sisters, in the next verse, I and the children which God hath given Me; it's our prerogative to see Him as 'our Father', because He was the supreme manifestation of our Father. And we have had other fathers, brethren and sisters, raised up by God, spiritual fathers. Bro. Thomas, a marvellous father, a fightful father, a determined father, a courageous father, an intelligent father. And bro. Robert Roberts, brethren and sisters, who followed him, deeply emotional, deeply touched by the inspiration of God's word, and affected by the life of His Son, who wrote so wonderfully those things concerning the Atonement and the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We've had some remarkable fathers! Who among us is going to fill, or change for that matter, the inheritance which God has given us from our fathers? Never let us do that, brethren and sisters; but let us come to see that the vineyard of Yahweh's planting, has taken a lot of work to establish. It's been established over many years, and I believe in the age and generation which we live, I think we can safely, if not humbly say, that we are today seeing, and benefitting from some of the fruits of that vineyard even now! Never let us despise it, brethren and sisters, and never let us forget, that the vineyard has but one singular purpose, it is useful for nothing else, but to produce fruit. And having fixed that in our mind, never let us forget that that fruit grows in clusters, and let us grow together. And we can only grow together, if as individuals we've allowed God to sow in our hearts, that incorruptible seed of the Word of life; that ultimately, finally, like the last harvest of the season, it will bring forth that peaceful fruit of righteousness, unto those that are exercised thereby!