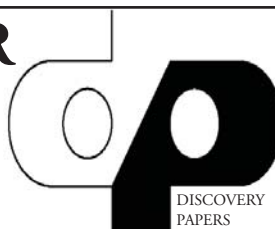


# DEATH AND DISHONOR

**SERIES: FIRE FROM HEAVEN**



Catalog No. 5203  
1 Kings 21:17-26;  
22:37-39  
4th Message  
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October 1, 2006

Jesus said that unless you receive the kingdom of God as a child, you will not receive it at all, and he invited us to learn from the simple faith of children (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14-15; Luke 18:16-17). The opposite end of the age scale is also highlighted in Scripture for our instruction. I want to emphasize the opportunity to learn from those who have walked with the Lord a long time and who are much nearer to the end of their lives than the beginning. The book of Hebrews says this: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

Last summer we gathered as a church more than once at the death of a great saint, remembering, thanking God, and preaching the gospel. Those brothers and sisters who lived many decades in their walk with Christ bore important testimony for the rest of us.

We’re studying 1 Kings and in this message we’re going to look at a couple of texts in chapters 21-22. Our main interest in this series is to learn from the lives of Elijah and Elisha. These important prophets lived in the 900s B.C., serving the Lord in the kingdom of Israel. Their lives were dramatic and powerful. But in this message we’ll turn our attention to Ahab and Jezebel, who were the antagonists of Elijah for most of his life. This evil pair ended their lives in tragedy. As we “consider the result” of their choices, we should be warned and should seek out those God has put in our lives who can serve as models of righteousness.

In 1 Kings 21-22, some time has passed since drought-ending rain returned to Israel (Catalog No. 5201 and No. 5202). These final chapters of the book record events of the reign of Ahab. They tell of his efforts to wage war, to issue edicts, to promote himself—stories of chest-thumping parlays among regional potentates, drunken military commanders, superstition, cowardice, pouting, and treachery. Ahab imagined himself important, but in fact was much less than he believed himself to be, much more foolish than he could see.

One story, although small in scope, is revealing. Chapter 21 tells the story of Ahab’s coveting of Naboth’s vineyard, in which his greed and weakness are made plain. It is ruthless Jezebel who acquires the vineyard through perjury, character assassination, and the execution of Naboth, an

innocent man whose blood was carelessly spilled on the ground. Ahab is displayed as a self-indulgent, greedy, and ineffective ruler; Jezebel as a treacherous and violent queen.

God calls for Elijah to go and speak again to these destroyers of the nation, to tell them that their days are coming to an end.

1 Kings 21:17-26:

**<sup>17</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: <sup>18</sup>“Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth’s vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. <sup>19</sup>Say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?’ Then say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!’”**

**<sup>20</sup>Ahab said to Elijah, “So you have found me, my enemy!”**

**“I have found you,” he answered, “because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. <sup>21</sup>I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. <sup>22</sup>I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin.’**

**<sup>23</sup>“And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’**

**<sup>24</sup>“Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country.”**

**<sup>25</sup>(There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. <sup>26</sup>He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the**

## Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)

What are we to learn from the word spoken by Elijah?

### Weighed and found wanting

First, this is not an imminent judgment. The day of reckoning will not occur for some time, in Jezebel's case a considerable time. One of the problems for people of faith is that the just punishment that is promised by God is often far off. We wonder why God doesn't act quickly to stop what's wrong, set justice in place, and put down the wicked.

Second, Elijah is not talking about eternal judgment in this pronouncement. Eternal judgment is a fact of Scripture. We know the time is coming when we will step through the door of death into the presence of God, and there will be an accounting. Remember the story Jesus told about the rich man who was preening himself before his possessions (Luke 12:16-21). A voice from heaven came: "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you ..." (v. 20). Jezebel and Ahab will face eternal judgment—all of us will, but that is not what Elijah predicts in these verses.

The judgment that Elijah is talking about is this: someday the life you have lived—the content of it, all you've stood for and believed in—will be evaluated, without cover-ups and propaganda, by those who come after you in history. Most of us want to live lives that are worth something in this world, even as we anticipate the next. We want the evaluation of what we've done and thought and cared about to be positive. We don't want to end up with only regret.

In the book of Daniel a terrible vision is given to Belshazzar during a feast. A hand starts writing on the wall, and the translation is given: "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27). That's the kind of judgment that Elijah pronounces on both Ahab and Jezebel.

Time passes, perhaps years in Ahab's case and a good many years in Jezebel's case. Ahab continues on in his way, alternating between feeling sorry for himself and ruining the lives of others. In chapter 22 he foolishly orders his army into battle, though in an act of cowardice he disguises himself. A random arrow finds its way through a chink in his armor, and he begins to bleed to death. In this condition, unobserved, apart from the battle—neither a warrior nor a king—he dies without honor.

1 Kings 22:37-39:

**<sup>37</sup>So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there. <sup>38</sup>They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the LORD had declared.**

**<sup>39</sup>As for the other events of Ahab's reign, including all he did, the palace he built and inlaid with ivory, and the cities he fortified, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?**

Wild dogs, despised in that culture, lick up what is left of his blood. And to make the shame even more acute, the washing place is the bath of prostitutes.

Ahab was a pretender all his life. He blustered and threatened, he was cruel, he attacked others when they were weak, he promoted himself, but inside he was nothing. He was a fake. His wife knew it and ridiculed him for it. He was less a man than his father and less a man than his wife, pretending to be somebody significant, a hollow man with a façade of royalty.

We read that Ahab's deeds were recorded in the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*. That document no longer exists. It says that he built cities and palaces. The cities and palaces no longer exist. In another prophecy, Amos said: "I will tear down the winter house / along with the summer house; / the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed / and the mansions will be demolished" (Amos 3:15).

Everything Ahab built—his palaces, his cities, his life, his deeds—all are lost to history and utterly forgotten. He left no progeny. The end to Ahab's story is only this: the dogs licked up the blood washed out from the chariot in which he died. In his death he was discovered to be a nobody.

Ahab's story may sound a particular warning to those in "midlife crisis." You can't keep up the image. You're desperate—pretending, promoting a fiction, hoping no one will find out, but the truth will be discovered in the end. A day is coming when whatever our lives are worth will be "weighed on the scales" and the results will be known.

Jezebel died years later. We have to jump to 2 Kings 9 to read about her death. She and Ahab had sons who

were finally killed. Jehu, the man who killed the last of her sons, approached the palace in which Jezebel was living. Though she was past middle age with adult children, she attempted to seduce her enemy. She was a tragic figure who had lived her life counting on sex, violence, religion, mystery, hardness, and treachery to make an impact on the world. If Ahab was a hollow man, she was the hardest and most brittle of characters, frozen cold. If his life collapsed, hers shattered. Eunuchs threw her from the window and she was trampled by the horses. Her blood also was spilled on the ground. This is the end of Jezebel: But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands. They went back and told Jehu, who said, "This is the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh. Jezebel's body will be like refuse on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'" (2 Kings 9:35-37).

This is horrifying, isn't it? A terrible end to a terrible life. Most of the Bible isn't quite this graphic. But it's graphic in order to be a warning. The warning is about who we are becoming, what our lives will amount to and what they will be judged to be at the end.

But if we are warned by Ahab and Jezebel, we are invited by those whose lives are holy and beautiful to imitate their faith. We are called to become something beautiful, now and forever. It's no good to sound warnings without giving alternatives, so let me end with a word from the gospel.

## A beautiful life

Over the course of my life many definitions of manhood have been claimed with certainty. A good man is strong—no, a good man is sensitive. A good man is a provider—no, a good man is a partner. A good man leads his children—no, a good man walks beside his children. Money is the measure—personal authority is the measure—emotional awareness is the measure. And the challenges for women are even more diverse.

So what does the gospel say? Recall the death of Naboth, Ahab, and Jezebel. The gospel centers on another One whose blood was spilled on the ground, who died in shame.

Jesus died not because he was a victim like Naboth, or because he was a tyrant like Ahab and Jezebel, but because he loved us. He died to end the reign of death, and he was raised by his Father to glory. Jesus' resurrection overturns the tragedy of his death. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:42b-43, "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ..." The death of Jesus becomes the path to life.

The core of a life worth living is willingness to die to ourselves, to find our identity in Christ. The shifting definitions of success and changeable promises of fulfillment invite us to build our lives upon sand rather than rock (Matthew 7:24-27). Our identity is in Christ. Our life direction is given to us by his Spirit.

Don't depend on positive circumstances and the world's values. Remember, Jesus said that the two coins given by the poor widow were worth more than the great sums of money given by those who were wealthy and arrogant (Mark 12:41-44).

Just before Paul died, he wrote these words: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

If someone were to write down the last chapter of your life, what would the title be? Where are you headed? We're called to imitate the faith of those who have gone before us to honor God, and we're warned by those who have gone before us to dishonor and ruin. We would do well to remember that our lives will be weighed in the balance, and to choose life in Christ.

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