

# Kings Series #10 - "The Church & State" 1 Kings 21

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Elections

1. It seems that every few years, as we approach the elections, Christians are moved to consider how their faith impacts their vote
2. It seems that we're inundated by the news media with reports of polls and the positions of the candidates on this and that issue
3. Every commercial break carries at least one ad about this or that proposition
4. The result of all this exposure to the arena of politics is that believers are challenged to ask themselves some tough questions: Like . . .
  - a. how would Jesus vote on the propositions?
  - b. who would He cast his ballot for in the elections?
  - c. which party most clearly represents biblical values?
5. All of this joins together to force a larger question: Just what is the relationship between the Church & the State
  - a. by which I *don't* mean, what does the *world* say that relationship should be?
  - b. but what does the bible say about the Church's relationship to the State?

### B. The Constitution & Bill of Rights

1. There have been some marvelous books and videos done by several organizations which address this issue from the basis of what the Constitution and Bill of Rights say
2. But I will not be dealing with this issue from that perspective this morning
3. Rather, I'd like us to take a bit of a different slant on it today
4. A Biblical slant - from 1 Kings 21
5. What I'm going to share isn't an exhaustive treatment of the subject either, just an important perspective gleaned from the life of Elijah

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-4

{1} And it came to pass after these things *that* Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

{2} So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it *is* near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. *Or*, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money."

{3} But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!"

{4} So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the

**inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food.**

1. Though the capital of Israel was in Samaria, Ahab and Jezebel had a palatial retreat they had built for themselves in the north at Jezreel
2. One day as Ahab was out enjoying the palace grounds, he saw a plot of land that bordered the palace
3. He realized it would make a great spot to grow some veggies, so he determined to buy it
4. The owner's name was Naboth, and when Ahab asked for it, Naboth refused
5. His reason was that the land belonged to the family
  - a. it had been his father's and his father's father's for time out of mind
  - b. in fact, it had been their original lot when the nation had first entered Canaan and the land had been divided among the tribes and families of Israel
  - c. the law clearly stated that land could be neither bought nor sold - it had to stay with the family
  - d. to sell that plot to Ahab would have been a gross violation of the law of God [\[1\]](#)
6. Ahab, like a sullen and spoiled little brat ran home and threw himself into bed
7. He turned his face toward the wall and refused to either talk or eat to anyone
8. Well, eventually Jezebel caught the news of Ahab's behavior and went to see him

### **B. Vs. 5-7**

**{5} But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?"**

**{6} 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 *another* vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"**

**{7} Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."**

1. Once again we see who really wore the pants in the family - Jezebel!
2. She asked him what was up
  - a. and when he told her about his run in with Naboth,
  - b. her reply was, "Aren't you the King of Israel?"
  - c. "Get up and act like it then."
  - d. "Leave Naboth to me."

### **C. Vs. 8-10**

**{8} And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth.**

**{9} She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people;**

**{10} and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.**

1. Using Ahab's authority, Jezebel started a conspiracy against Naboth
2. She wrote a letter to the elders of his city, commanding them to proclaim a solemn fast
  - a. this was something leaders would announce only when some heinous sin had been committed
  - b. out of fear of God's judgment,
  - c. they would call for a public day of fasting and repentance to try to avert it
  - d. so they called for a fast, but didn't tell the people why, or what sin had been committed
3. When everyone was assembled, and Naboth was seated in a noticeable position, they were to bring out some hired false witnesses
  - a. these men were common criminals
  - b. scoundrels, rascals
  - c. the kind of guys who would do or say anything as long as they got paid
4. They were to accuse Naboth publicly of speaking evil of both God and the king
5. These were crimes punishable by death by stoning

#### **D. They Comply**

1. The elders did just as Jezebel had ordered and Naboth was executed
2. 2 Kings 9 tells us that not only was Naboth killed, but so were his sons
3. Since the goal was to secure his land, it stands to reason his sons had to be removed from the scene as well, since it would have gone to them as an inheritance
4. This was clearly an example of government corruption from the highest levels to the lowest
  - a. from the royal palace to city hall
  - b. from the king to the city council
5. It was a gross abuse of authority on Jezebel's part
6. But she did it without compunction because she was "the queen"
  - a. along with her husband, she sat in the highest seat in the land, *she thought*
  - b. she was accountable to no one, *she thought*
  - c. power was hers to wield any which way she chose, *she thought*
7. When news was sent to her that the deed was done, she went to Ahab with the happy news
8. The plot was his; he could now take possession of it
9. So Ahab went out to survey his new plot of ground
10. But unseen to either Jezebel, Ahab, or those corrupt elders, God was intently watching all their affairs
11. Their sin and corruption would not go unanswered . . .

#### **E. Vs. 17-22**

{17} Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

{18} "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who *lives* in Samaria. There *he is*, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it.

{19} "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 dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.'" "

{20} So 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:

{21} 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free.

{22} '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 made Israel sin.'

1. The last time we saw Elijah was during his depression
2. Several years at least have passed and during their entire time, Elijah seems to drop from the story
3. But here he is again
4. And again, as before, we find him face to face with Ahab, rebuking him for his sin
5. The words are bold and certain
6. God will judge both he and his wife, as the next 2 verse reveal
7. They were the king & queen, at the summit of Israeli society
8. But they would end as mere garbage, eaten by the wild dogs which roamed the country sides as scavengers

#### **F. *Elijah As Model***

1. That's the simple exposition of the text
2. But there is one particular thing I'd like to focus on in the time left to us today
3. Notice the position taken by Elijah as he stood before Ahab
4. I believe there is tremendous insight to be gleaned from this passage as we consider the relationship between Church and State today
5. God's word came to Elijah telling him what had happened & what to do
6. Elijah went and did exactly was the Lord had instructed him
7. He condemned his sin, and spoke of the judgment to come
8. Elijah represented the Lord while Ahab represented the State
9. Elijah, as prophet, spoke the Word of God clearly, and boldly Ahab

#### **G. *The Church***

1. Elijah presents for us a model of what kind of relationship we are to have with the government
2. The Church is to speak prophetically to the State and the World
  - a. the Church is supposed to represent God
  - b. she is supposed to speak His words clearly and boldly
3. The Church's role in terms of relationship to the government isn't to be a religious political action committee, or a lobbying group, or an inside

- policy maker
4. The Church is to stand as a prophet of God, apart from the government, continually upholding the Standard of God's word --
  5. No matter how corrupt or godly the government itself may be

#### **H. Of Concern**

1. It's of much concern to me that there are so many Christian groups today who are seeking to insinuate themselves into the political sphere and use the power of the State to accomplish the ends of the Kingdom of God
2. The reason for my concern is that Jesus Himself said that His Kingdom was not of this world
3. His Kingdom *will not* and *cannot* arise from His followers wielding political power
4. His Kingdom is manifest in the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling those who look to Him in faith
5. No where in the NT do we see that the Church's mandate is to infiltrate and redeem the institutions of man
6. Our task is to be salt and light by virtue of our presence and our witness to the Word of God
7. Society is reformed when men and women are reformed by the power of the Holy Spirit

#### **I. The Balance**

1. Now, please, let me make sure everyone understands me
2. I am *not* saying Christian shouldn't vote or be concerned about what is taking place in the Laws and Government
3. On the contrary; as people who have been given the precious gift of citizenship in the United States of America, it is our solemn *duty* to vote and to vote intelligently, with consciences informed by the Word of God
4. If there is anyone who should study and be informed, it's us since we take our stewardship seriously
5. But we must be wary of allowing ourselves to slip into the mentality which believes the use of *political power* will ever accomplish the objectives of Kingdom of God
6. Understand this, because it's fundamental to this whole issue
  - a. worldly political power and Kingdom power are two utterly different things
  - b. worldly power is about force; it's about making others do what they wouldn't normally want to
  - c. the power of the Holy Spirit is the ability to change that "want to"
    - 1) it isn't coercion or force
    - 2) it isn't manipulation or wheeling and dealing
    - 3) it's love; deep, profound, life re-orienting love
7. Think back to your conversion
  - a. it was love that won you and changed you
  - b. not force, not pressure, not political power

- c. it was God's love that broke through our thick headedness, reached in to the very core of our lives and changed us
- d. and with that change came a whole new way of seeing the world, including politics and government
- 8. In Luke 9 we read how Jesus was passing through Samaria and sent some disciples on ahead to make preparations for a place to spend the night
  - a. but they returned with the report that none of the villages would welcome them
  - b. James and John fumed at this refusal and asked,
  - c. "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"
  - d. Jesus turned and rebuked them, saying that they did not understand what manner of spirit they were to operate in as His followers
  - e. He hadn't come to destroy lives, but to save them
- 9. His love for those disciples overwhelmed the sin and evil of their lives and made them new men
- 10. Just before His ascension into heaven, He told them they were to go and do with others what he had done with them
- 11. This is still the church's task; to overwhelm evil with love
- 12. Rom 12:17-21

**{17} Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.**

**{18} If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

**{19} Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.**

**{20} Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."**

**{21} Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

- 13. Let me use an example here so everyone understands what I mean . . .
  - a. it seems every time you turn around this or that Christian ministry is calling for a boycott of this or that company because of their support of or stand on this or that issue
  - b. the boycotts are an attempt to *force* the company into making a change by hitting it in it's pocketbook
  - c. now, some might say, "What's wrong with that? If it gets them to stop doing something evil, it's worth it."
  - d. Really? Do the ends justify the means?
  - e. as Christians we have to remember that before God, the means are the end He is concerned with
  - f. the result is up to God, we are simply called to be faithful
  - g. and once we start down the path of worldly power, it's very difficult to stop

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  - h. you or I may find out about a company's support of something indecent and immoral
  - i. and we may deem it to be entirely appropriate to avoid their product or service, not in an attempt to force them to change
  - j. but out of a deeply held conviction that we are stewards who have been given our finances as a resource to invest for the glory of God

- k. if buying their product is going to fund their ability to do that which is abhorrent to the Lord, then that is an issue of horrendous stewardship
  - l. it would even be right to send a letter to the management of the company and tell them why you will no longer do business with them
  - m. by doing so, you are fulfilling your role as prophet, proclaiming the Word of God
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- n. to all outward appearances, a boycott to apply economic pressure and a simple refusal to do business with a company look identical
  - o. but the real issue is the inner motivation of the heart

## **J. The Danger**

- 1. The Church is being seduced by political power
  - 2. Several rather high profile groups have managed to rally hundreds of thousands of Christians to apply pressure in the political arena
  - 3. The leaders of these groups have been invited by government officials to take part in addressing current issues
  - 4. One group was even instrumental in affecting the platform of one of the major parties
  - 5. But it came at a heavy price
  - 6. The group had to compromise several of its dearly held convictions in order to be included in the discussion
  - 7. Now, this group, which goes by the label "Christian" has become so closely allied with one of the parties it is perceived by many that to be a Christian, means to be a member of and vote for that party exclusively
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- 8. Political power is terribly seductive
  - 9. And many are those who have justified their compromises on issues of conscience under the rationalization that at least they would have an opportunity to effect real change for good in society
  - 10. The old adage is oft quoted but rarely heeded: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely
  - 11. Even a casual study of history shows that at every point when the Church became entwined with the State, it was ruinous for the cause of Christ
  - 12. The Church became corrupted by worldly power and lost its Prophetic Office
  - 13. Because the world came to despise the compromise and corruption it saw in the Church
    - 14. History tells a consistent story - the Church is its strongest, its purest, and it grows the most rapidly when it stands apart from the State, not in alliance with it

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[1] Lev., 25 & Num. 36