

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [265]

One Who Avenges His Zealotry Destroys His House (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 102b)



Background to Our Story

Naboth



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naboth>

Naboth (Hebrew: נָבוֹת) "the Jezreelite" is the central figure of a passage from the first Book of Kings in the Hebrew Bible. Queen Jezebel arranged to have him judicially murdered because her husband, King Ahab coveted Naboth's land. This action set in motion the ultimate destruction of the Omride dynasty.

Ahab



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahab>

Ahab (Hebrew: אַחָזָב, Ah'av) was the seventh king of Israel since Jeroboam I, the son and successor of Omri, and the husband of Jezebel of Sidon, according to the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew Bible presents Ahab as a wicked king, particularly for condoning Jezebel's influence on religious policies and his principal role behind Naboth's arbitrary execution.

The Biblical Background

Naboth's Vineyard

I Kings 21

¹ Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. ² Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close

to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

³ But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors."

⁴ So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

⁵ His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

⁶ He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

⁷ Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him.⁹ In those letters she wrote:

"Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. ¹⁰ But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them bring charges that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

¹¹ So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. ¹² They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. ¹³ Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. ¹⁴ Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned to death."

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead."¹⁶ When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ "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. ¹⁹ 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!'"

²⁰ 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. ²¹ He says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. ²² I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.'

²³ "And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'

²⁴ Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country."

²⁵ (There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. ²⁶ He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)

²⁷ When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

²⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹ "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

Micaiah Prophecies Against Ahab

I Kings 22

¹ For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel. ² But in the third year Jehoshaphat king of Judah went down to see the king of Israel. ³ The king of Israel had said to his officials, "Don't you know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and yet we are doing nothing to retake it from the king of Aram?"

⁴ So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?"

Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." ⁵ But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the LORD."

⁶ So the king of Israel brought together the prophets—about four hundred men—and asked them, "Shall I go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?"

"Go," they answered, "for the Lord will give it into the king's hand."

⁷ But Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there no longer a prophet of the LORD here whom we can inquire of?"

⁸ The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."

"The king should not say such a thing," Jehoshaphat replied.

⁹ So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, "Bring Micaiah son of Imlah at once."

¹⁰ Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the entrance of the gate of Samaria, with all the prophets prophesying before them. ¹¹ Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns and he declared, "This is what the LORD says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"

¹² All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the LORD will give it into the king's hand."

¹³ The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably."

¹⁴ But Micaiah said, "As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me."

¹⁵ When he arrived, the king asked him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?"

"Attack and be victorious," he answered, "for the LORD will give it into the king's hand."

¹⁶ The king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"

¹⁷ Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

¹⁸ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"

¹⁹ Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. ²⁰ And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?'

"One suggested this, and another that. ²¹ Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.'

²² "By what means?" the LORD asked.

"I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets," he said.

"You will succeed in enticing him," said the LORD. 'Go out and do it.'

²³ "So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you."

²⁴ Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the spirit from^[a] the LORD go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked.

²⁵ Micaiah replied, "You will find out on the day you go to hide in an inner room."

²⁶ The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son ²⁷ and say, 'This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.'"

²⁸ Micaiah declared, "If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me." Then he added, "Mark my words, all you people!"

Ahab Killed at Ramoth Gilead

²⁹ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. ³⁰ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

³¹ Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel."³² When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, "Surely this is the king of Israel." So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat cried out, ³³ the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him.

³⁴ But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded." ³⁵ All day long the battle raged, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died. ³⁶ As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army: "Every man to his town. Every man to his land!"

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

³⁹ As for the other events of Ahab's reign, including all he did, the palace he built and adorned with ivory, and the cities he fortified, are they not written in the book of the annals

of the kings of Israel? ⁴⁰ Ahab rested with his ancestors. And Ahaziah his son succeeded him as king.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 102b

אמר רב נחמן: אחאב שקול היה, שנאמר: "ויאמר ה', מי יפתה את אחאב ויעל ויפל ברמות גלעד? ויאמר זה בכה וזה אמר בכה".

"ויצא הרוח ויעמד לפני ה' ויאמר אני אפתנו. ויאמר ה' אליו, במה? ויאמר, אצא, והייתי רוח שקר בפני כל נביאיו. ויאמר, תפתה וגם תוכל, צא ועשה כן".

מאי רוח? אמר רבי יוחנן: רוחו של גבות היזרעאלי.

מאי "צא"? אמר רבנא: צא ממחיצתי, שפן פתיב: "דבר שקרים לא יפון לנגד עיני". אמר רב פפא: היינו דאמרי אינשי: דפרע קיניה מת ריב ביתיה

"And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab that he may ascend and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And this one said in this manner, and that one said in that manner" (I Kings 22:20)

...

With regard to God's search for a volunteer to entice Ahab, it is written: *"And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said: I will entice him. And the Lord said to him: With what? And he said: I will go out, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He said: You shall entice him, and also prevail; go out, and do so" (I Kings 22:21-22).*

What spirit was that?

Rabbi Yoĥanan says: It was the spirit of Naboth the Jezreelite, who sought to take revenge against Ahab.

What is the meaning of the term "go out" that God instructed the spirit? Ravina says that it means: Go out from within my partition and do not return, as so it is written: *"He that speaks falsehoods shall not be established before My eyes" (Psalms 101:7)*. The spirit that volunteered to lie may no longer be before God.

Rav Pappa says that this is in accordance with the adage that people say: One who avenges due to his zealotry destroys his own house.



Explaining the Story - What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Naboth volunteer to entice Ahab?

? Where was Naboth before he went out to entice Ahab?

? Why did God want Naboth out from within His partition?

Extra Bonus ? Why did God allow Naboth to volunteer if He believes that those who speak falsehood *shall not be established before His eyes*?

Bonus ? Naboth was wronged by Ahab and he was thirsty for revenge. What would you tell Naboth if he were to come to you for counseling?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! When you are wronged, the highest form of revenge is to move on with your life and to be happy.

