

LIVING ON THE EDGE

A series on the
life of
Elijah

Group study guide

Part seven

10th November 2019



Evil is a word which we don't like to use too much, if at all, it is reserved for those people who commit actions that we can all agree on are way outside the bounds of human normality. But what is evil, and where does evil come from, and when it is recognised how should we respond?

In This seventy part of the series, "Living on the edge," Elijah is again clashing with Ahab the king of Israel over his actions, or perhaps in this case over his lack of action. He has abused his power and his privilege as king at the expense of one of the God's people who he is supposed to be protecting not harming.

Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

2 And after this Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money."

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

4 And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said 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.

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

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

7 And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city.

9 And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people.

10 And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death."

11 *And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them,*
12 *they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people.*

13 *And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.*

14 *Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."*

15 *As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead."*

16 *And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.*

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

18 *"Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession.*

19 *And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Have you killed and also taken possession?'" And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.'"*

20 Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. (1 Kings 21:20 ESV)

Commentary

Ahab has his eye on a vineyard owned by Naboth, and desires to have it for his own as it is close to his palace and would be a handy place to grow vegetables. However despite offering Naboth terms of another vineyard or money, but Naboth turns his offer down. Why? Naboth did not turn down Ahab out of sentimentality or loyalty to family tradition, but he turned him down as part of following God's commandment. The land given to families on the conquest of the Promised Land was given in perpetuity and it was not to be transferred or sold out of a particular family.

"The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. (Leviticus. 25:23 ESV)

The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.

8 And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the people of Israel shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers.

9 So no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance."

(Numbers. 36:7-9 ESV)

Commentary

The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people, thrusting them out of their property. He shall give his sons their inheritance out of his own property, so that none of my people shall be scattered from his property.” (Ezekiel 46:18 ESV)

Ahab, rebuffed by Naboth goes home and sulks, but Jezebel coaxes out of her husband the reason for his unhappiness. Isn't he the king of Israel, in her mind the king could claim and do what he wanted but in God's kingdom the king is there to uphold the law and look after his subjects, not abusing his power. A plot is hatched by Jezebel in the name of Ahab to bring about the demise of Naboth through false allegations made at a feast in his honor. The leaders of Naboth's town carry out Jezebel's plan and two "worthless men" make their allegations that Naboth has cursed God and the king, and on their allegations Naboth is put to death.

Ahab on hearing the news of Naboth's demise goes to claim "his" property, but he is met there by Elijah, his "enemy," but says Elijah, Ahab is the enemy for abusing his power as king and not following the commands of the Lord.

Elijah condemns both Ahab and Jezebel for their "evil" actions and pronounces God's punishment on them.

Group Study

Start this week's group by reviewing your responses to last week's study, how you applied them during the week, what you discovered as you applied them. What were the successes and difficulties, and where adjustments will you need to make?

Do you think most people see themselves as good or evil?

Who would people think are evil and why?

What would someone have to do today in order for them to be labeled evil?

How would you explain to someone what evil is?

Why does God put up with evil?

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (Revelation. 6:9-11 ESV)

Discuss the neighbourhood you live in and what evil you see going on around you and how you as a group might address a specific area?

Read Matthew's account of Jesus before Pilate.

So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!"

23 And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."

25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:17-25 ESV)

What do you think Pilate understood was going on?

Why was he so reluctant to take a stand?

Pilate symbolically washed his hands, did he acquit him of his responsibility?

How do we “wash our hands” of standing against evil?

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 ESV)

What would it look like for us to carry out the Lord's instructions?

Personal study

Read the following passage this week and take some time using the REAP method found at the back of this guide to reflect on how your concern for the Lord to do “what is right” when it comes to good and evil.

20 Then the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave,

21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.”

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.

23 Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?

25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

26 And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

27 Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

29 Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.”

30 Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.”

31 He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.”

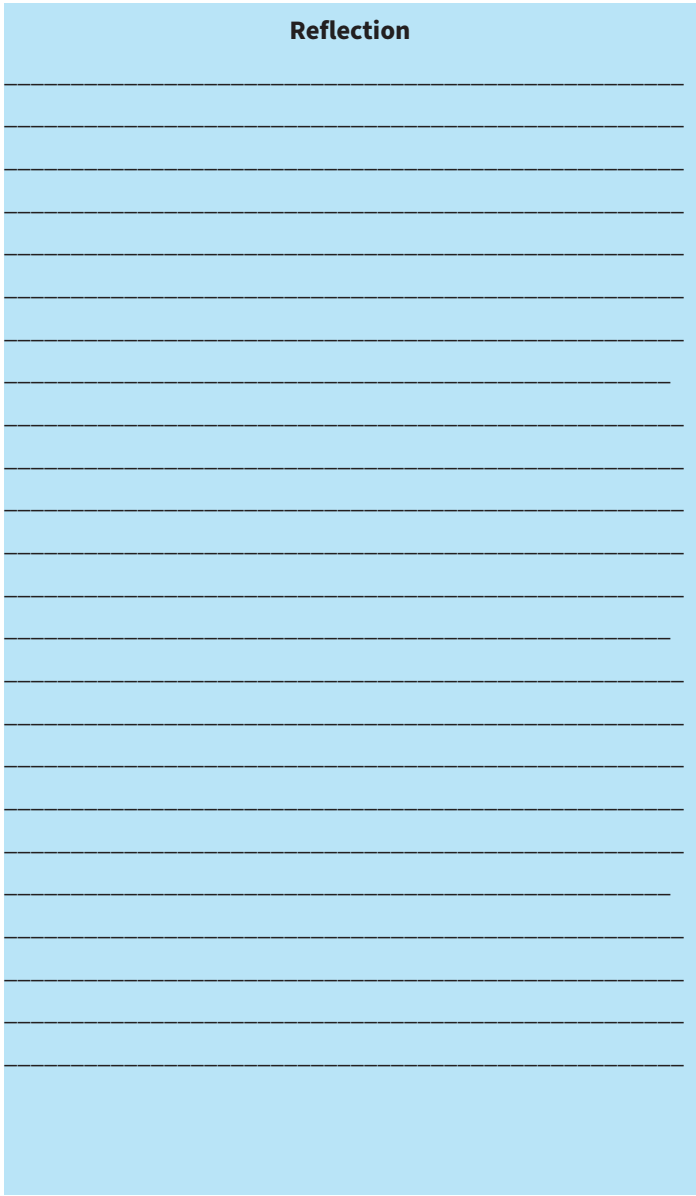
32 Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

33 And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. 33 ESV)

NAME OF THE BOOK

(Genesis 18:27-33 ESV)

Reflection

A large light blue rectangular area containing horizontal dashed lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the blue area, providing a template for a reflection.

Personal study

Read the following passages this week and take some time using the REAP method found at the back of this guide to reflect on what it means for us to be tenants of God's vineyard

There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.

34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.

35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.

36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.

37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'

39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?

43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

(Matthew 21:33-44 ESV)

Reflection on alienation

REAP Method of studying Scripture

READ

Find the passages for today’s reading in the Bible Reading Plan. Read the passages with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction, and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). Underline the verses

that seem important and that God is using to speak to you.

EXAMINE

Spend some time reflecting and writing about what you've read. Write down one or two of the key verses that stuck out to you. Ask yourself these questions and write down your thoughts:

- * What is going on in the passage?
- * Who is writing and whom is he writing to?
- * When was the author writing?
- * What are the circumstances that the author is addressing?

* Does the writer mention anything that might indicate his purpose or intent?

* How do you think the author wants his audience to respond?

APPLY

After examining the passage, apply the text to your own life. Ask yourself these questions:

- * What is God's word for me from this passage?
- * How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?

* What are the things in my life that need to change in light of this truth?

PRAY

Pray through the passage and your application, asking God to change your heart and to change your life, based on the time you've spent in God's Word.