



THE STORIES ABOUT NABOTH THE JEZREELITE

A Source, Composition,
and Redaction Investigation of
1 Kings 21 and Passages in 2 Kings 9

PATRICK T. CRONAUER, O.S.B.



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ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>The New Brown-Driver Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979.
Dtr	Both the Deuteronomist and Deuteronomistic
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
DtrN	Deuteronomistic redactor with nomistic/legal interests
DtrP	Deuteronomistic redactor with prophetic interests
fasc.	fascicle
GK	W. Gesenius, <i>Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910.
LXX	Septuagint
LXX ^A	Codex Alexandrinus
LXX ^B	Codex Vaticanus
LXX ^L	The Lucianic Version/s
MT	Masoretic Text
NK-B	L. Kochler and W. Baumgartner, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: The New Koehler-Baumgartner in English</i> . Edited and translated by M. E. J. Richardson. Revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
Rd	redactor
RSV	Revised Standard Version

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INTRODUCTION

Most people, when they hear the name “Naboth” from the Bible, rightfully recall the story of Naboth’s Vineyard in 1 Kgs 21. This is by far the primary and the largest text concerning Naboth, but it is not the only text. We also find reference to Naboth, to what we might call the “Naboth Affair,” in 2 Kgs 9:21, 25–26. These two texts represent the only material in the Bible concerning Naboth and neither is without its difficulties.

The sources and origins of the texts about Naboth and his death have long been an object of scholarly and non-scholarly interest. The story of Naboth’s Vineyard in 1 Kgs 21 (MT) is one of the best known and most popular stories of the Old Testament. It is a story that speaks to the heart and soul of anyone who has ever suffered injustice at the hands of those in authority or power. The story teaches that injustice, racism, hatred, and murder (whether physical, psychological or spiritual) will not be allowed to go unpunished. The story speaks of political and judicial corruption and of collusion at the highest levels of government and religious institutions. It is a story that speaks of the basic human and religious rights of people being totally disregarded by others who are greedy and unscrupulous. As such, it is no surprise that it is so popular. I believe that its universal applicability is part and parcel with the intention of its author. It is this very “universality” which indicates that what we are dealing with in this story is not an “historical account” of an actual crime, but rather, an account whose purpose was to teach moral, ethical, and religious lessons; it is a *didactic parable*.¹

Perhaps because of mention by name in this parable of the historical characters, Ahab and Jezebel, some scholars have succumbed to the temptation to find the historical locus for the sources and origins of the story in the actual period of the Ahabite dynasty (873–842 B.C.E.) or the period of their usurper Jehu’s dynasty (842–745 B.C.E.).² The fact that the story also mentions Elijah

1. This is not to say that this story was not, perhaps, based upon some actual event concerning the murder of a certain Naboth, but, in my opinion, this actual event was then taken by a gifted artist and created into a story which offers strong warnings to all those who might be tempted or “seduced” by foreign “women” (i.e. foreign gods, or power, or greed) to misuse their authority and power against the innocent and faithful people under their “care.”

2. See, among others: O. H. Steck, *Überlieferung und Zeitgeschichte in den Elia-Erzählungen* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 40–53; P. Welten, “Naboth’s Weinberg (1 Könige 21),” *EvTh* 33 (1973): 18–32 (31); S. DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 116, 131–32; B. P. Robinson, *Israel’s Mysterious God: An Analysis of some Old Testament Narratives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1986), 52. See also the presentation of the scholarly opinion of the question of the oldest layer of the tradition in Appendix 1.

(vv. 17–20a) has bolstered this attempt to date the story to the time of Elijah, whose tenure as prophet in the Bible matches the reigns of Ahab and his first son and successor, Ahaziah.

The search for the historical “locus” of this story is further complicated by the fact that it is also found within the so-called “Deuteronomistic History” (DtrH). More specifically, because a substantial portion of 1 Kgs 21 (vv. 20b–26) is comprised of recognizable Deuteronomistic terminology, many scholars consider the story as a whole to have come into being during the composition of this DtrH.³

First Kings 21:1–20a has also caused a great deal of scholarly debate concerning its sources and origins, since it contains very little, if any, recognizably Deuteronomistic language. Alongside this fact, there is also a great imbalance between the two halves of the story in 1 Kgs 21 in terms of responsibility for the crime committed. In vv. 1–16 Jezebel is the main mover; it is she who arranges the death of Naboth and the taking of his vineyard for Ahab. Ahab, meanwhile, was in his bed. In vv. 17–26, however, it is Ahab who receives the “lion’s share” of the accusations and condemnations. Jezebel is never directly accused for the murder of Naboth. In fact, in many ways, the two halves of the chapter appear to have precious little in common.

The central problem in the history of scholarly interpretation of 1 Kgs 21 has to do, therefore, with the sources and origins of the account as it is currently found in the Bible and with the complex history of its composition. The present work contributes to this ongoing search, debate, and conversation. The main thesis of this work is that there is sufficient textual, thematic, and linguistic “evidence” which would allow us to hypothesize a much later dating for the origins of the story in 1 Kgs 21:1–16 than is normally attributed to it, namely, to post-exilic, Persian-period Jehud. I maintain that a Persian-period Jehud writer took a text which was already found in the DtrH (1 Kgs 21:17–29), which contained both an account of a crime committed by Ahab against Naboth—what I call an “Elijah–Naboth Fragment” (vv. 17–19a, 20a)—and Deuteronomistic accusations and condemnations of Ahab and his dynasty, supposedly for this same crime (vv. 20b–26), and expanded and filled out this composite text with the addition of a parable of his own creation (1 Kgs 21:1–16, 23, 25bα).

In this new story the author created a fictional account, a didactic parable, in which he described in detail the crime against Naboth, and in which he shifted the blame for this crime from Ahab to Jezebel. By means of his interventions, this author changed the entire focus and purpose of the older and shorter Dtr text.

3. See, among others: S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (5th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894), 196; C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903; repr., New York: Ktav, 1970), 207; M. Noth, *Übertieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, vol. 1, *Die sammelnden und bearbeiteten Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (Schriften der Königsberger gelehrten Gesellschaft. Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse; 18 Jahrgang, Heft 2; Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1943), 120–21 (78–79) (note: there are two sets of page numbers found in this text); T. Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (AASF 198; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1977), 91–92.

The presentation of my research into the text and history of 1 Kgs 21 will proceed in a certain “chronological” order. In Part I, I will first discuss the oldest layer of the tradition concerning Naboth, namely, the Elijah–Naboth Fragment. I will then investigate what I call the “Jehu-Apologetic Redaction” of the account of Jehu’s overthrow of the Ahabite dynasty found in 2 Kgs 9–10. This is then followed by a consideration of yet another layer of redaction which I call the “Anti-Jezebel Redaction.” All of this will call for the need to analyze the use of the “prophecy-fulfillment” pattern in these texts.

In Part II, I will consider the accusations and condemnations made against Ahab and Jezebel now found in 1 Kgs 21:20b–29. I will then present an analysis of the Deuteronomistic composition of 1 Kgs 21:17–29 and its relationship to the Jehu-Apologetic Redaction in 2 Kgs 9.

Having studied 1 Kgs 21:17–29 and its relationship to 2 Kgs 9, in Part III I turn my attention to the story of the acquisition of Naboth’s vineyard found in 1 Kgs 21:1–16. In this part, I will present what I have called an “expository reading” of the text in which I will engage scholarly opinion on a wide range of issues in each act and scene of the narrative drama found in this text.

In the final section of the book, Part IV, I present my hypothesis concerning the sources and origins of the story of Naboth’s Vineyard in 1 Kgs 21:1–16. Here I propose answers to the questions of when, where, why, how, and by whom the story of Naboth’s Vineyard was written.

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Part I

**AN OLD “ELIJAH–NABOTH FRAGMENT”
AND THE “JEHU-APOLOGETIC REDACTION”:
1 KINGS 21:17–29**

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Chapter 1

1 KINGS 21:17A α –19A β AND 20A α –B α : AN OLD “ELIJAH–NABOTH FRAGMENT”

In 1 Kgs 21:17–19a β and 20a α –b α is found what I maintain is an old “Elijah–Naboth Fragment.” I designate the Elijah–Naboth Fragment in this way since it forms a separate layer of tradition within 1 Kgs 21 which might well be the oldest element of that chapter.¹ This fragment is obviously not a complete story in itself, but appears to be merely the ending of an earlier story that had been either excised from a no-longer extant text, or that had somehow survived the loss of its original context and was now being reused by a later author. This fragment, together with the remainder of its original context, was probably a part of the ancient oral tradition of the books of Kings by the time the Deuteronomistic historian compiled his history, or at least it was a part of a pre-Dtr edition of the tradition. The same is probably true in the case of a similar, but independent, tradition found in what I refer to as the “Jehu–Apologetic Redaction” in 2 Kgs 9:21b γ , 25–26.

These two old and originally independent fragments are now linked together by means of the Deuteronomistic “oracle of transferal” found in 1 Kgs 21:27–29. Because of the very strong Deuteronomistic “dynastic” emphasis found in the accusations and condemnations in 1 Kgs 21:20b–22, 24–26, there was a need on the part of the compiler to facilitate the “transfer” of the clearly individual and personal punishment designated for Ahab, found in the Elijah–Naboth Fragment, to a punishment that would include the whole of Ahab’s dynasty. The Deuteronomist was able to accomplish this by transferring the “accomplishment” or fulfillment of the oracle in the Elijah–Naboth Fragment to Ahab’s last son, Joram, in 2 Kgs 9. This was achieved by the addition of the “oracle of transferal” found in 1 Kgs 21:27–29.

1. Steck (*Überlieferung und Zeitgeschichte*) maintains that vv. 17–18a and 19–20b α form the oldest layer in 1 Kgs 21, what he calls “den Grundstock der prophetischen Nabothsüberlieferung” which he claims is the “ältesten Elia-Naboth-Überlieferung” (p. 52). Steck maintains that 1 Kgs 21:27–29 come from around the same time as the Jehu story—namely, from the beginning of Jehu’s reign (p. 45). R. Bohlen, *Der Fall Nabot* (ITS 35; Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1978), 172–87, also refers to vv. 17a–19d as a “Fragment.” He maintains “dass 17a–20d die früheste literarische Schicht des Nabotkapitels” and he claims that the earliest time for it was towards the end of the reign of Jeroboam II—namely, 784/83–753/52 (p. 302). He assigns 21:27–29 to a post-Dtr hand (pp. 304–9).