

## 2 VIOLENCE DESCRIBED

### This study expands some of the themes of chapter 4

Because it is so deeply rooted in the story of people groups and societies, we should expect the Old Testament to include description of acts of violence: interpersonal violence, group violence and national conflict. The key things we have to do, as interpreters of the Bible, are first to notice when violence is being described but not endorsed, and then to identify the purpose the story is serving in the narrator's wider theological intention.

From chapter 4, 'Violence described', p. 66

#### Opening question

Do you agree that it is important for scripture to portray violence that happened? Why, or why not?

#### Case study

Read 1 Kings 21:1–16.

What is your immediate response to Jezebel's actions? What clues can you detect in the story to help?

#### Digging deeper

Our narrator gives us a number of clues to help us decide whether or not this violence is endorsed by God. We'll look at them one at a time.

##### 1 Characterisation of Ahab

While it is Jezebel who directly acts to cause Naboth's murder, the text is curiously silent about what Ahab thought about it all. Read verses 7 and 15–16 again. Do you detect any hints?

Now take a look at 1 Kings 20:43–21:4. How does Ahab seem to you?

##### 2 Characterisation of Jezebel

Read verse 8. Here, we need to suspend the 21st-century commitment to gender equality and imagine how this would seem when read by the original audience. How do you think they would have viewed Jezebel's actions?

##### 3 The law

There are several laws which touch upon this story. First, read Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 19:16–21. How does this story relate to these laws?

Now read Leviticus 25:8–15, 23. Does this shed any light upon Naboth's refusal to sell?

##### 4 Reading beyond the text

I deliberately asked you to stop reading at verse 16. But if we read on, it becomes clear that God is very displeased with Ahab. Read 1 Kings 21:17–24.

Not all texts have such a clear response by God so immediately. But even if we didn't have this conclusion, there are clues in the wider scripture to help us. In passages before and after this one, Jezebel is clearly shown to be wicked. Look at 1 Kings 18:13 and 2 Kings 9:7.

And in the wider Bible, read Revelation 2:20. Here 'Jezebel' is used as a metaphor – a code, really – for unfaithfulness to God. The New Testament writer does this because his readers would have widely understood that Jezebel was wicked.

Sometimes these connections are hard to make. This is where a good study Bible or a commentary can come in useful.

Now you are in the position to think about the second question. Why do you think this story is given to us in scripture? What is the narrator doing with it?

Can you think of other instances of violence in the Old Testament which are described but not endorsed?

### **For further study**

Not everything that is reported in scripture is being endorsed. This is even true for characters that we might generally consider 'heroes'. You might like to think a bit more about this. For example, consider David's dying words in 1 Kings 2:8–9 (the background is in 2 Samuel 16:5–10 and 19:18–23).

How will this shape the way that you read scripture?