

**Land, Power and Justice in South Africa in  
Dialogue with the Biblical Story of Naboth's Vineyard**

By

**ROWANNE SAROJINI MARIE BTh (Hons.) Theology & Development**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Masters in Theology and Development, in the School of Theology & Religion,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

**SUPERVISOR: Dr. E Farisani**

December 2004

## DECLARATION

I, Rowanne Sarojini Marie, hereby declare that this whole dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, represents my original work.

I declare that I have not otherwise submitted this dissertation in any form for any degree purpose or examination to any university.

Signature

Date

*RS Marie*  
.....

*15 APRIL 2005*  
.....

**Rowanne Sarojini Marie**

As supervisor, I agree to submission of this thesis.

Date

.....

.....

Dr E Farisani

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am indebted to acknowledge many people for their contribution and support in writing this dissertation.

Firstly, I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. E Farisani, for his input in my dissertation. I am thankful for his continuous encouragement, assistance, patience and guidance. It was through his supervision that I was able to accomplish this academic task.

Secondly, I extend my appreciation to the University of KwaZulu Natal for financial assistance.

Thirdly, I record my heartfelt appreciation to my husband, Pastor T S Marie, as well as my son, Braydon Reece, for their love, support, patience and encouragement during months of working on this dissertation.

Fourthly, I would like to acknowledge my colleagues at ESSA (Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa) for their support, love and prayers.

Last, but not least, I express my gratitude to Dr. Steve de Gruchy for impacting, motivating and challenging my life as a student of Theology and Development.

## **ABSTRACT**

The land issue is one among the many challenges faced by South Africa. In this work I look at dispossession of land in the South African context, and reflect on the biblical account of Naboth's vineyard. Naboth was dispossessed of his vineyard through the abuse of power and the lack of justice.

In like manner, people of colour in South Africa were dispossessed of their land by a very powerful minority. The legal system did not protect the weak and vulnerable – hence many injustices occurred.

The aim of this dissertation is to remind ourselves of land dispossession through the abuse of power and the lack of justice. Through this reminder, I encourage and challenge the church of its responsibilities in the land discussion. The church has a biblical mandate to speak out prophetically and to become proactive in correcting the injustices of the past.

Through the church responding in this manner, it will directly assist in poverty alleviation and will drive toward an improved quality of life for all human beings.

**Dedicated to**

**Victims of dispossession of land in South Africa.**

**“When the divine owner takes possession of a property, He has a twofold objective: intense cultivation and abounding fruitfulness”.**

**Norman P. Grubb**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
0.1 Introduction	1
0.2 Aim of Research	3
0.3 Motivation – Personal and Academic	3
0.4 The Method of Research	4
Chapter 1 – Dispossession in South Africa	
1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 The Land Acts	
1.1.1 The 1913 Land Act	6
1.1.2 The 1936 Land Act	6
1.2 Apartheid	7
1.3 Removals	10
1.3.1 Forced Removals	10
1.3.2 Black Spot Removals	11
1.3.3 Labour Tenant Removals	12
1.3.4 Consolidation Removals	12
1.4 The effects of forced removals	13
1.5 Conclusion	17
Chapter 2 – A literary study of 1 Kings 21	
2.0 Introduction	17
2.1 The text of 1 Kings 21	18
2.2 The story of Naboth’s vineyard	19
2.3 Character Study:	21

2.3.1.	A look at Jezebel	21
2.3.2.	A look at King Ahab	24
2.3.3.	A look at Elijah	26
2.3.4.	A look at Naboth	28
2.4	Conclusion	29

### Chapter 3 – A sociological study of 1 Kings 21

3.0.	Introduction	31
3.1.	The advent of the divided Monarchy	31
3.2.	The Dynasty of Omri	35
3.3.	The significance of land in the Northern Kingdom ✓	36
3.4.	The use of power by the Kings ✓	39
3.5.	How was justice administered by the Kings ✓	40
3.6.	The Prophetic view of God's justice	41
3.7.	Conclusion	43

### Chapter 4 – A closer look at land, power and justice

4.0.	Introduction	44
4.1.	Land ✓	44
4.2.	Power	47
4.3.	Justice	52
4.4.	Conclusion	55

### Chapter 5 – Relevance and Application

5.0.	Introduction	56
5.1.	The relevance of 1 Kings 21 to the South African context	56
5.2.	Space for church intervention	59
5.2.1.	Our role in redistribution	59
5.2.2.	Our role of stewardship	60
5.2.3.	Toward an Agrarian Reform Strategy	64
5.2.4.	The Church as Advocate and Helper	66

5.2.5. The Church's Ministry to Women regarding land	69
5.3. Conclusion	72
Conclusion	73
Bibliography	75

## 0.1. Introduction

“Land means self respect and security. It enables poor people to start planning for their future. When disasters come, they can lose almost everything, but they still have their land” (Davidson, 1992: 57).

The land issue is a complex one. As pointed out by Philpott:

Getting land reform right is fundamental to the broader project of healing South Africa’s hurtful history and transforming the country into one where all enjoy at least the possibility of a life of dignity and abundance. For the church this is not just a responsibility thrust on us by history, it is integral to biblical mission (2004:2).

Land is rooted in the culture of indigenous people. Land is seen as a provider of life and sustainer of life. Most rural people also have a deep attachment to the land. Elements in some cultures view the ownership of land more as a source of status or prestige than as a means of livelihood. For some in the African context, land is their very identity. It speaks of who they are. Sadly, this identity was stripped away when land of the indigenous African was heartlessly taken away by unjust means. There is hardly any story in the African’s life that can be told without an overwhelming sense of dismay, of injustice and of exasperation. The story of land-grabbing and the evil of human displacement is no exception.

In addressing the usefulness of land, Pheko comments:

Land ownership is the basis for wealth. Land is the source of mineral and agricultural products and all kinds of raw materials for human use and development. Land is the source of food, houses, employment, means of education, pastures and graveyards. A landless nation is no nation. Liberation without land is no liberation” (Pheko in Harley, 2000:19).

Hence, the base for all kinds of human development is land itself.

In their book *Down to Earth*, Marcus et. al (1996), write about the land demand in the New South Africa. Their research found a great demand among Black people for rural and urban land for a range of purposes, which are closely linked, to people’s

well-being and development. Certainly all of these demands come down to a better quality of life.

The story of dispossession in South Africa is one that displays an abusive power structure that lacked a strong justice system. This has left a majority of South African families displaced, and has been a contributing factor to the poverty experienced by the masses. There are many people of colour, (and I write from my own Indian context as well), who believe that their economic status has deteriorated from much (this was due to ownership of land) to almost nothing (by the process of dispossession). Many tell the story of the struggles they experienced concerning land. Unfortunately some were not able to get a grip of their lives after this devastating experience, and for this reason, many live in abject poverty, with the need for an improved quality of life.

The reality of the poor being exploited by the rich and powerful remains a reality. It is something that can be traced throughout history, and it all comes down to power – who is in possession of it and how is it being used. However, I do acknowledge that much has changed in the last decade. We are now ten years into our new democracy – surely by now we should have learned much from the errors of the past, and have become careful not to repeat those mistakes. We have become more aware of the need for all to move toward an improved quality of life!

According to Haugen, justice occurs on earth when power and authority between people is exercised in conformity with God's standards of moral excellence (1999:72). There is always a distribution of power among people in every human society – some have more, some have less. All kinds of power are distributed: political, economic, social, moral, religious, cultural, familial, coercive, intellectual and so on. To say that God is a God of justice is one way of saying that he is concerned about whether those who have power and authority over others are exercising it in accordance with his standards. When power is exercised in a way that violates those standards, we call this an injustice (Haugen, 1999:72).

Bearing this in mind, I have chosen to look at the aspect of dispossession of land in the South African context through the abuse of power and the lack of justice. I will also draw from the Biblical account of Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29) who suffered a similar injustice of having his land dispossessed by a very powerful Jezebel. My

reason for selecting this particular text is that Naboth's experience carries many similarities to that of the South African situation. It was in the hands of the rich and powerful that Naboth was dispossessed of his heritage.

## **0.2. Aim of research**

Land is viewed as an important resource given to all as a gift from God. Landlessness results in devastating poverty. This has been the experience of people of colour in the South African context.

As in the story of Naboth's vineyard, the loss of land was closely associated with the abuse of power (in this story, the power of Jezebel and Ahab), and the lack of justice. The story of Naboth's vineyard relates how Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, used her position of power to dispossess Naboth of his land. This was done by unjust means, whereby she colluded with the city elders to bear false testimony against Naboth. The history of Black South Africans carries a very similar setting where land was forcibly taken away from them.

Unequal power relations and a corrupt 'justice system' is the very thing that led to an unequal distribution of wealth and resources, which in turn, calls for the need for development – that process of moving toward an improved quality of life.

Using the see, judge, act approach, I aim to look at the problem of land in South Africa, draw from the experience of Naboth, looking at lessons from his experience, and finally suggest possible solutions and ways ahead, giving attention to space for church intervention. I will do this in the light of power and justice, since in the South African context, one cannot separate dispossession of land from these aspects.

## **0.3. Motivation – Personal and Academic**

The history of dispossession is one that is rooted in the lives of many that I know on a personal level. This inhumane act of being dispossessed of their very inheritance has brought about traumatizing and devastating effects, and, in many cases, has stripped people of their very livelihood.

As one studying theology and development at the University of KwaZulu/Natal, I have been challenged and have come to understand that a number of development

issues are in actual fact associated with unequal power relations, which in turn, makes one question our system of justice.

The story of land – grabbing is a real part of our South African history. Dispossession was possible only because there was one group of people that was more powerful than the other. In addition to this, our ‘justice system’ at that stage did not allow for the protection of those less powerful people.

In the Naboth vineyard story, it was only after Naboth was stoned to death (1 Kings 21:1-29), that the prophetic utterance of Elijah caused King Ahab to repent. I am motivated to highlight these issues so that we are able to reflect on the dangers of power abuse as well as a justice system that is not in keeping with the standards of God.

#### **0.4. Method of Research**

As stated earlier, I will use the see, judge, act approach for my research.

Chapter one of my paper will highlight the problem which is landlessness in South Africa, providing some historical background to this problem. I will also look at various aspects that contributed to landlessness and dispossession in South Africa.

Chapter two will give attention to a literary study of 1 Kings 21:1-29, bringing out the issues of the story. This will be the beginning of a theological reflection to my research, helping us to understand the events of the story of Naboth’s vineyard.

In Chapter three I will proceed to conduct a brief sociological study of the story of Naboth’s vineyard, looking specifically at land, power and justice in the setting of Jezreel (this is where the story of Naboth’s vineyard was set). How did this community use land? Who had rights to land ownership? I will also look at the power structure and the administration of justice during this period.

I will then proceed to give a detailed study of the aspects of land, power and justice. This will form chapter four of my dissertation.

In chapter five, being the final chapter of my research, I will look at the relevance and application of these aspects to the South African context. I will also give attention to space for church intervention.

# **Chapter One**

## **Dispossession in South Africa**

### **1.0. Introduction**

Since 1913, Black people were either forced to move from where they lived, or were not allowed to buy land in most places in South Africa. This is one of the reasons why most of the land is owned by a smaller number of people. Therefore, land reform is a way of changing this so that all people, irrespective of colour, could buy land to live on, or to work on, anywhere in the country.

Land is the most basic need for rural dwellers. The Land Acts of 1913/1936, the Group Areas Act and the apartheid policies pushed millions of Black South Africans into overcrowded and impoverished reserves, homelands and townships. In addition, capital-intensive agricultural policies led to the large-scale eviction of farm dwellers from their land and homes. The abolition of the Land Acts cannot redress inequities in land distribution. Only a tiny minority of Black people can now afford land on the free market. I will discuss some of these aspects in brief, giving adequate attention to apartheid in order to substantiate my discussion on power abuse and the lack of justice. These aspects will lay the foundation of the land issue in my research.

### **1.1. The Land Acts**

#### **1.1.1 The 1913 Land Act**

The Natives' Land Act was passed in 1913. This was the first legislative attempt to divide the Union of South Africa into areas for Blacks and areas for Whites. According to Letsoalo, in terms of this 1913 Natives Lands Act No. 27, certain areas that were then in Black occupation were "scheduled" – i.e., segregated. Blacks were prohibited from acquiring land from Whites in parts of the country and in parts of these reserved scheduled areas (1987:35). This powerful piece of legislation formed the basis on which South Africa was and is divided. Letsoalo highlights that a significant feature of this Act was that of unequal distribution of land between Blacks and Whites. The area for the White minority population was "ten times larger than

that of the Black majority population” (1987: 35). The loss of land by Blacks through this Act was a severe blow for the Black peasantry.

As pointed out by Harley, this Act divided land into areas where Black people could own land (called reserves) and the rest of the country, where they could not.

Only 7% of the total land surface of South Africa was set aside for ‘Native Reserves’ throughout South Africa. The schedule of land accompanying the Act was based on existing reserves and locations established during the colonial period (1999:13).

The three main reasons as suggested by Harley for the passing of this Act include the principle of territorial segregation, the increase of the provision of cheap African labour (White farmers saw segregation as a way of increasing land and labour for White agriculture), and reduction of competition of African peasant farmers.

It is clear that these reasons all have the underlying factor of greed and power. This Act did not benefit Black South Africans in any way, but it contributed much to their struggles and it uprooted their original way of life.

#### **1.1.2. The 1936 Land Act**

This Act is said to have “released” certain areas for Black occupation. According to Letsoalo, the reason for releasing “more” land for the Blacks was that a very large proportion of land was occupied and owned by Europeans – only 7,3 percent of the total land area of the country was scheduled for Black occupation, that is, reserves, locations, and privately owned rural land (1987:39).

The Act made provision for areas to be set aside for Black South Africans and added to the 1913 scheduled areas. The Act potentially increased the size of land of Black South Africans from 7,3 percent to 13 percent. This Act placed an absolute limit on land that would be made available for Black settlement and provided the basis for future forced removals.

The above two Acts were the marked beginnings of major land problems in South Africa. These were followed by other Acts such as the 1945 Black Consolidation Act, which related to the control of Blacks in urban areas and the provision of residence for Blacks in these areas. Then there was the 1950 Group Areas Act, which divided land according to race. By the time the National Party came into power in 1948, the

urban and rural land in South Africa was divided along racial grounds. The year 1948 marked the beginning of Apartheid in South Africa.

Having given this brief historical background, I would now discuss the aspect of Apartheid.

## 1.2. Apartheid

The Apartheid years are known to be 1948 – 1990. Apartheid is seen as South Africa's unique system of legally prescribed racial segregation and White domination. It made the country a major focus of international attention since 1960 (this was the time when the state of emergency was declared and the black political movements were banned).

During the Apartheid era, the skin colour white was immediately associated with power. The social, economic, political and even military power possessed by White South Africans made the segregation process an easy one, and it is this that led to the disempowerment of those in the majority.

I concur with Alexander who considers the attainment of a liberal democratic dispensation in the land of Apartheid to being one of the most significant events of the twentieth century (2002:1).

How do people define or describe Apartheid? Boesak describes apartheid as follows:

Apartheid means that the most important thing about a person is not that he or she is a human being created in the image of God with inalienable rights, but his or her racial identity. It means that racial identity determines, with an overwhelming intensity, everything in a person's life...(Boesak in VillaVicencio, 1988:5).

Hence, this definition suggests that people were not seen for who they were, but rather, they were defined according to the race group they belonged to.

Makula notes that Apartheid refers to a system or policy of segregation or discrimination on the grounds of race. Makula observes: "The segregated way of life among the various population groups in South Africa is a living testimony of the Apartheid policy that was implemented by the former government of this country for over forty years" (2001:5). Hence, from the above observations, apartheid is a system based on the race group that individuals belong to.

The Apartheid era, from the triumph of the National party in the 1948 elections to the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners in early 1990 saw the creation of the most elaborate system of economic and social discrimination in world history. Discrimination was not new in South Africa, however, having been a feature of this part of the African continent since the arrival of the first European settlers in 1652. What was new in 1948 was the systematic thoroughness with which discriminatory legislation was pursued. The results were evident at every level of society, permeating all facets of everyday life. In the end, the economic costs of the system were huge: low efficiency, low growth, isolation from the international economy, and low incomes, malnutrition, ill health, bad housing and inferior education for the Black majority. Ellison explains:

Socio-economic segregation is particularly pronounced in South Africa, where apartheid's racist policy of 'separate development' created a socio-economic hierarchy of quasi – 'racial' population groups and actively segregated those within geographically distinct residential areas. To make matters worse, apartheid legislation prescribed which 'groups' worked in the least healthy occupations, which lived in the least healthy residential environments, which received the least education and which had the least access to affordable health care (Ellison in Maharaj, 1999:137).

It was under this system that the South African economy developed structures which ensured a grossly unequal distribution of economic resources, distorted industrial development, wide-spread poverty, low living standards for the majority of South Africans, an inefficient public service with a racially skewed pattern of delivery, and an extremely segmented labor market.

According to the report of the 1997 September Commission on the Future of the Unions, South Africa is said to be "one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of its income distribution" (September Commission, August 1997:2). Only countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Guatemala are comparable. Ninety-five percent of all African households live below the poverty line. Unemployment is high and a large number of those who do have jobs earn poverty level wages.

Lewis states:

Indeed, the decades of the 1950s and the 1960s, during which South Africa experienced exceptionally rapid economic growth, were precisely the years when political repression was the greatest and the basic institution of apartheid became most highly developed (1990:1).

Certainly there was rapid economic growth, but who was it that enjoyed the fruit of this economic growth? At what cost was this exceptional rapid economic growth experienced?

For more than forty years the rights and economic opportunities of the majority of South African population were constrained by the National Party government. All available indicators tell an identical story: there was an enormous gap between Whites and Blacks, with Asians and Coloureds somewhere in between. It was during this era that a very powerless Black people suffered many inhumane injustices in the hands of a very powerful White people. One cannot remember those apartheid years without thinking about an abusive power structure and an unjust legal system

The Land Acts that were put in place, together with the Apartheid policy, gave way to removals. This will be the next aspect of my discussion.

### **1.3. Removals**

#### **1.3.1 Forced Removals**

The 1913 and 1936 land acts as well as apartheid, as discussed above, led to forced removals. As observed by Harley:

People are driven from their homes, loaded onto trucks and transported to relocation sites, their sites are numbered and expropriated, their houses are demolished by bulldozers and they are prevented from entering certain areas, all in terms of the law. Legislative sanction exists for every one of these procedures (Harley , 1999:36)

It is further pointed out by Harley that between 1960 and 1983 over 3.5 million people were forcibly removed. They were moved under different laws, and under different circumstances, but all of this was part of the same political plan of creating entirely

separate 'states' for non-white people (1999:37). It has been estimated that some 750 000 of those moved were in Natal.

The following table, as reflected below, represents the estimated number of removals in Natal (currently KwaZulu/Natal) from 1948-1982. I agree that the whole of South Africa has been affected by removals, but for this particular section, I will look at Natal, since this is where I am from, and best understand the setting of this particular province.

Categories of removal	Moved	Under Threat
<b>Black Spot removals</b> From freehold or church-owned lands to African reserves.	105 000 109 African freehold areas 14 missions	245 000 189 African freehold areas 13 missions
<b>Farm Removals</b> From white-owned farm land	300 000	?
<b>Homeland consolidation</b> To link broken pieces of Homeland territory.	10 000 Reserve 6; part of reserve 4	300 000 Reduction of 48 scheduled and Released reserve areas to 10
<b>Urban Relocation</b> Through abolition of townships and elimination of squatter camps	17 000 Danhauser, Estcourt, Umlazi, Glebe, Harding, Howick, Harrismith, Margate, Newcastle, Utrecht	61 000 Cedarville, Chesterville, Colenco, Dannhauser, Emergency Camp, Dundee, Glenco, Greytown, Howick, Ladysmith, Mooi River, Paulpietersburg, Klaarwater Stanger, Umzinto, Vryheid, Weenen, Winterton.
<b>Infrastructural</b> To make way for dams and game reserves	15 000	?
<b>Strategic</b> As part of defense strategy	3 500	?
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	450 000	606 000 + ?
<b>Group Areas Act</b>	295 000	?
<b>TOTAL</b>	745 500	606 000 + ?

(Harley, 1999:38)

According to Harley, removals can be categorized under three main sub-headings, namely, black spot removals, labor tenant removals and consolidated removals. I will now look briefly at these three types of removals.

### **1.3.2. Black Spot Removals**

This is the term used to refer to all African freehold land outside the scheduled and released areas of the Land Acts. It was the intention of the National Party to eradicate all black spots on coming to power, but there was not enough land acquired to allow them to relocate people. In the region of Natal, during the early 1950's, the government embarked on a detailed survey to investigate the extent of the black spots. This survey showed that there were 165 black spots in Natal. Regarding these individuals in the black spots, Harley states: "Many of the people owning and living on the land had been there for generations and had a strong connection to the land." (1999:39)

Although removal of black spots began in the early 1950's, there was a concentrated effort in the Northern Natal, during the 1960's. Since these black spots were areas where Black South Africans held title, much outrage was expressed at these forced removals.

### **1.3.3. Labour Tenant Removals**

The past government's strategy to abolish the 1936 Trust and Land Act left labour tenants insecure. In addition, their attempt to abolish labour tenancy led to an increasing number of evictions of tenants, and the "removal of 'squatters' (all people living on land they did not own whether or not they had the owner's permission) from both white and African-owned farms" (Harley, 1999:41)

An estimated 340 000 labor tenants and 753 000 squatters were removed between 1960 and 1970. A further 400 000 were removed between 1970 and 1974. Just in Natal alone, 300 000 people were evicted from farms between 1948 and 1982, under labour tenant removals.

### **1.3.4. Consolidation Removals:**

It was the homelands consolidation policy that contributed to the removal of 10 000 people in Natal by 1982, and a further 300 000 were under threat of removal. It is a sad fact that under this category of removal, people were not just threatened about physical removal but also about losing their status as South African citizens through incorporation into the homelands.

It is without doubt that the above kinds of forced removal have had devastating and traumatizing effects on the lives of those displaced families.

As stated by Harley:

The removal had enormous psychological, social and economic effects on the people and communities moved. People not only had to leave the land and homes that they had been living in for generations, but they were often moved to places with almost no facilities and with much further to travel to their places of employment. Part of the brutality of removals policy was often appalling conditions in the relocation sites (1999:43).

For the many who recall the account of being forcibly removed from their homes and land, this is done so with a deep sense of anger, pain and bitterness. For some, their land was their very livelihood, it was the very thing that shaped their identity, it was the place of their ancestors, it was their birthright, it was the very thing that gave them a sense of belonging and dignity.

For this identity to have been stripped away in the ruthless manner that it was, is considered inhumane and heartless – it is a typical act that has gone on for generations – the act of oppression and exploitation of the poor by the rich. The act of the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor. The very act of an abuse of power by the so-called superior, elitist class of society, causing Black South Africans to be treated as people of no account. Many of these people were forced into returning into a tribal way of life after they had originally and intentionally abandoned it.

Segal states “Today belongs equally to yesterday and tomorrow” (1967:33). For us to understand where we as South Africans are going to, it is essential that we know where we’ve been! For us to understand the pain, anger, bitterness, and a variety of other emotions embedded in Black South Africans, it is imperative that we listen to their stories, as told by them. We have far too often been listening to the narratives of those who have told a one-sided, biased version of this historical account, but now the time has come for Africans to tell their own stories with the hope of reclaiming their heritage and reconciling with their past.

For many, their present situation has been deeply affected by their past. Forced removals have had devastating effects on many Black South Africans. I will now look at some of the effects of forced removals.

#### **1.4. The Effects of Forced Removals**

Forced removals in South Africa have had devastating effects on families and communities. It has shown to have emotional, economic, social and psychological (among other) effects on individuals and families. As stated by Nash: "If you are black you can be moved-and probably will" (1980:1).

Nash goes on to discuss some of these effects, stating:

A huge majority of blacks constitute the rural poor, cut off from access to the common wealth built up by the people of South Africa during a century of mineral and industrial development; bearing too large a share of the poverty and unemployment endemic in South Africa; their condition aggravated by the continuing removal of one million blacks from 'white' areas to 'resettlement' areas in or alongside overpopulated 'homelands' in which people are already starving (1980:10).

This system highlights the benefit of the few at the cost of the many who still struggle with the trauma of being forcibly removed.

The South African Council of Churches and the Southern Catholic Bishops Conference compiled a report in 1984, highlighting the effects of removal on family and community life. Among their numerous findings I wish to highlight five of them:

- Removals uproot families and destroy homes.
- They frequently induce hopelessness and damage people's self-esteem both personally and as a family.
- Removed people feel threatened, powerless and unable to cope with their bewildering predicament.
- People's basic survival is threatened, and this leads to great strain in the family. It weighs heavily on parents if they are unable to care for their children.
- To avoid destitution some family members become migrant workers, but this splits the family and causes further stress (SACC, 1984:61ff).

No family should have to face this kind of displacement. No person should feel threatened and powerless to the extent of hopelessness. This is a cruel, inhumane act, an act of injustice and the abuse of power. It is an act of manipulation and control.

Removals also cut across both the informal education that takes place within the family and formal schooling. Many are simply unable to cope. Aggravated poverty leads to fatalism, or to antagonism towards those who still have resources. Although many relocated families do overcome their dazed condition and survive all these threats, it is due to their own resilience or community support, and not because of the State caring for them. Forced removals and dispossession has left people disempowered and traumatized – many died without being able to pick up the pieces of their lives.

Thus far, I have been telling the story of pre-apartheid South Africa. We are now living in a post apartheid era. Much, but perhaps not enough, has taken place since our first democratic elections in 1994.

It is encouraging to note that since then the Land Reform Programme has been put into place with respect to the land issue in South Africa

In land reform programmes, which are run by the government, there are three major sub-programmes, which are Land Redistribution, Land Restitution and Land Tenure.

Land Redistribution makes it possible for poor and disadvantaged people to buy land with the help of a Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant. Land Restitution involves returning land, or compensating victims for land rights, lost because of racially discriminatory laws, passed since 19 June 1913. Land Tenure Reform is the most complex area of land reform. It aims to bring all people occupying land under a unitary legally validated system of landholding. It will provide for secure forms of land tenure, help resolve tenure disputes and make awards to provide people with secure tenure.

Weber suggests that there must be a fundamental reform on the land. “Land must be redistributed in such a way that ownership is as broadly distributed as possible, through either moderate size-holdings or communal church holdings” (1987:100). He goes on to emphasise the importance of land being used in such a way that it is carefully conserved and restored so that the earth might regenerate herself and care for future generations of life forms that are dependant on her. I strongly believe that this should always be kept in our minds. We should be careful not to become so caught up in our struggle and fight concerning land issues that the land itself is neglected.

Land restitution aims to restore land and provide other restitutionary remedies to people dispossessed by racially discriminatory legislation and price, in a way as to provide support to the vital process of reconciliation, reconstruction and development.

With land reform now being one of the priorities on the agenda of government, the greater challenge lies ahead of us. How can we use this land to improve the quality of lives of the poor, oppressed and marginalized?

The Government of National Unity has implemented the Reconstruction and Development Programme whose policy framework is stated as follows:

The RDP must implement a fundamental land reform programme. This programme must be demand-driven and must aim to supply residential and productive land to the poorest section of the rural population and aspirant farmers. As part of a comprehensive rural development programme, it must raise incomes and productivity, and must encourage the use of land for agricultural, other productive, or residential purposes”(Reconstruction and Development Programme, 1998:1)

The Government of National Unity has been left with the responsibility of striking a balance between the rich and the poor, the have and the have-nots. It has to address the needs of all sections of our society. What this government inherited was a system that did not allow growth to occur, did not create jobs and did not allow the redistribution of resources around the country (Ginsberg, 1998:24).

In the years that passed between President de Klerk’s decision to open the democratic process to all South Africans, irrespective of race, and the 1994 elections, the scope for and the economic limitations on redistribution were thoroughly examined by South African economists. The verdict was fairly unanimous: unless drastic measures were resorted to, scope for a static redistribution of income was small. If the visions contained in the RDP were to be realized, the economy needed to grow at a much higher rate than before. The inter-racial distribution problem has been better analyzed than virtually any other economic problem that South Africa faces.

Lundahl argues that for redistribution to take place effectively, growth is essential. He says: “Though the Reconstruction and Development Programme is fundamentally

a basic needs programme, it was realized that without growth, the scope for redistribution and poverty reduction would be extremely limited” (1999:128).

I strongly agree with Lundahl that for redistribution to become workable, growth is essential. The apartheid legacy cannot be driven away overnight. It requires much work from the side of every person. Bridging the gap between the rich and the poor is a process, which calls for growth. It is essential that we grow as a nation and shoulder this mammoth task of trying to reduce poverty and inequalities, which have been brought on by various Land Acts as well as the apartheid era, which was in the interest of a minority.

## **1.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the South African situation of land, focusing on factors that contributed to landlessness. This chapter focused on the historical events surrounding the land situation in South Africa. This issue continues to take the front line in our present day South African context. There has been the emergence of the Landless People’s Movement. According to the National Land Committee,

**The Landless People's Movement (LPM)** is a national movement of landless people in South Africa formed on 24 July, 2001 following a meeting between emerging regional and provincial landless people's organisations. The LPM is supported by the National Land Committee - a national network of nine land rights non-governmental organisations working with landless communities struggling to access land reform across South Africa - but it is a completely independent grassroots structure of landless people (NLC, 2001).

In addition to this, there have been other concerned bodies as well that seek to effectively address the land issue in South Africa. This concern continues to present unresolved dispute and conflict in South Africa.

Looking at our history, it was under the circumstances of injustice and the abuse of power that Black South Africans became impoverished and disempowered. Naboth in the account of 1 Kings 21:1-29 suffered a very similar kind of tragedy where he was dispossessed of his land through the abuse of power and unjust legal practice.

In the next chapter, I will give attention to his situation and examine those aspects that led to landlessness in his context.

## **Chapter Two**

### **A literary study of 1 Kings 21**

#### **2.0. Introduction**

Having looked at the South African account of landlessness and dispossession, I will, in this chapter, do a literary analysis of the text of 1 Kings 21:1-29. One might wonder about my reason for selecting this particular text. As stated earlier, Naboth suffered a very similar injustice of his land being dispossessed into the hands of the rich and powerful. His story carries many similarities to that of the South African context. Those victims of dispossession could easily identify with the experience of Naboth.

#### **2.1. The text of 1 Kings 21**

- 1 Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria.
- 2 And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seem 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 my ancestral inheritance."
- 4 And Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.
- 5 His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?"
- 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 you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"
- 7 His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food and 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; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city.

- 9 She wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly;
- 10 Seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death."
- 11 The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them
- 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly.
- 13 The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people saying, Nabth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.
- 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, "Go, 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 As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out 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 Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession of it.
- 19 You shall say to him, "Thus says the LORD: Have you killed and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, Thus says the LORD: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick your 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
- 21 I will bring disaster on you; and I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free in Israel
- 22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin.
- 23 Also concerning Jezebel the LORD said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel.'
- 24 Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone who dies in the open country the birds of the air shall eat."

- 25 (Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD, urged on by his wife Jezebel.
- 26 He acted almost abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD drove out before the Israelites.)
- 27 When Ahab heard those words he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly.
- 28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite:
- 29 “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster on his house.”

(New Revised Standard Version)

## **2.2. The Story of Naboth’s Vineyard**

The scene is laid in Jezreel in the Great Valley. Dentan suggests that Jezreel, situated in the fertile Plain of Esdralon, seems to have been a second capital for the Northern Kingdom (1964: 67). According to Montgomery, this town lay on the ridge between its eastern and western watersheds, and was of strategic importance being the royal countryside residence (1967:330).

Here Ahab, who is entitled King of Samaria, has ambitious plans to enlarge his palace. In order to fulfill this plan, he had to acquire the family vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he wanted to incorporate within the grounds as a vegetable garden. He visited Naboth with a plan to purchase the land from him, offering him beneficial terms (v2). The offer was that Naboth would receive either money or a larger place in a better situation.

His terms were exceedingly generous and it did not occur to him that Naboth would be “foolish” enough to refuse these terms. However, Naboth did refuse King Ahab’s proposal, with his response being “The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance that was passed down by my ancestors” (v3).

The attitude of Naboth regarding his ancestral land reflects the solidarity of the family among the Palestinian peasants. Gray states: “To have accepted Ahab’s proposal, fair as it seemed, would have prejudiced his own status and that of his family, relegating them to the status of royal dependants” (1980:439).

Naboth's refusal is based on the fact that this is patrimonial inheritance, and his position was not only one of sentiment but of responsibility to his family. Regarding Naboth's refusal, Montgomery states:

Desiring to enlarge his estate King Ahab offers a fair bargain to a local neighbor for purchase of the vineyard. The latter (Naboth) refuses, as it is his *patrimonial inheritance*, and his position was not only one of sentiment but of responsibility to his family (1967:330).

Hence, his refusal is not based on his independent feeling, but rather, it is based on his responsibility to his family.

Ahab knew that he had been a fool even to think of making such an approach to Naboth, and this left him feeling humiliated and sullen. His refusal to eat or talk gave his wife Jezebel the indication that something was wrong (v4). After hearing his complaint she reminded him that he was the king and assured him that she would take over this matter. Her assurance was that she would get him what he wanted (v7).

Jezebel devised a plot to have Naboth killed. Her plan was carried out with the assistance of the elders and leaders. She wrote out letters to them in the name of King Ahab, instructing them to call all the people together for fasting and prayer, and at this occasion, Naboth should be given a place of honour (v8-9). They are then to find two scoundrels who will accuse Naboth of cursing God and the King, an offense, according to Lev. 24:16, punishable by death. These instructions were carried out accordingly, and Naboth was taken outside the city and stoned to death (v11-13). Word was then sent to Jezebel that Naboth was dead, who, in turn, took word of Naboth's death to King Ahab (v15). His immediate response was going down to the vineyard to claim it. However, the story does not end on this 'positive' note.

The Lord spoke to the Prophet Elijah to go to King Ahab and tell him about God's dissatisfaction with what he had done. Elijah told Ahab that the Lord was going to bring disaster to him and sweep him away, and that his family was going to suffer the consequences of his actions. On hearing this, King Ahab immediately repented before the Lord (v17-28).

Finally, a second message came from the Lord to Elijah, promising that because Ahab has humbled himself, all of what was promised would not take place in his lifetime but in that of his sons (v29).

Having told the story of Naboth's vineyard, I will now look at the various characters highlighted in this event.

### 2.3. Character Study

In this section I would reflect on the various role players highlighted in the story of Naboth's vineyard. In order for us to understand those responsible for the dispossession of Naboth's vineyard, it is important for us to understand something about their character. Those that would be examined are Jezebel, King Ahab, the Prophet Elijah and Naboth.

#### 2.3.1. A look at Jezebel

Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and the wife of Ahab, who was the son of Omri and the King of Israel (1 Kings 16:29-31). According to Freedman, the biblical texts present a thoroughly negative picture of this undoubtedly powerful woman (2000:848). She became the influential queen of the Northern Kingdom as the foreign wife of Ahab. Jezebel "fostered the worship of Canaanite fertility deities, supporting four hundred and fifty prophets of baal and four hundred prophets of the goddess Asherah at her royal table (1 Kings 18:19)" (Freedman, 1992:848). She imported from Phoenicia a great number of *baal* prophets and supported them out of the public treasury. There is also evidence from 1 Kings 18 that she ruthlessly persecuted the rival prophets of Yahweh, causing them to go into hiding. As pointed out by Anderson, Jezebel "began an aggressive campaign to cut off the prophets of Yahweh" (1988:272).

Hoerth suggests that the frequent term *baal* simply means "lord", and it is difficult to determine which deity is meant in any given case. *Baals* are often associated with mountains: *Baal-Saphon*, *Baal-Lebanon*, *Baal-Hammon*, etc., in each instance the meaning is "lord of" a place or attribute (1994:202).

In his attempt to make his new bride feel at home in the new capital, Samaria, King Ahab built a temple for *Baal*, equipped with an altar and an image of Asherah, the mother goddess (1 Kings 16:32-33). Anderson suggests that the *baal* in this case was *Baal-Melqart*, the official protective deity of Tyre (1988:272).

Jezebel was plainly not content to have a private shrine where she herself might practice her own religion. She appears to have organized the worship of Melqart on a fairly large scale and maintained a large staff of cultic officials, who enjoyed positions of influence at court.

Anderson goes on to describe Jezebel as a proud, domineering woman who would stop at nothing to achieve her desired objective (1988:272).

We find this to be true in the story of Naboth's vineyard. Jezebel was able to easily and skillfully accomplish dispossessing Naboth of his vineyard. Her advantage was that she had local authorities under her power. The irony was that though she despised the law of Yahweh, she now used it. As stated by the law (Lev. 24:16, Deut. 17:16 and 19:15) that if it could be proved on the evidence of two witnesses that anyone is guilty of blasphemy, that person was to be stoned to death.

As pointed out by Exodus 22:28, to curse the King was also a capital offence. To understand how serious it was, one must remember that to the ancient mind a curse was not merely a form of words but a powerful magic weapon, the effects of which could be obviated only by equally powerful counter-measures. (In 1 Kings 2:8-9 we read of David's order that Shimei be destroyed for having uttered just such a curse). Since such a curse against God is too dreadful even to be mentioned, the Hebrew Bible has substituted the word "bless" euphemistically where the English text says "curse" (Dentan, 1964:67).

In order for her to accomplish her plan of falsely accusing Naboth, Jezebel wrote out letters, executed her plot, and within a few weeks Naboth was dead. Gray suggests that the stoning of Naboth was outside the city (according to 2 Kings 9:25, in Naboth's own field), to avoid ritual pollution (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:36) (1980: 441). As in the case of Achan (Josh. 7:22ff), Naboth's family suffers with him. According to 2 Kings 9:26, his innocent sons were also executed. In default of heirs, Naboth's property reverted to the crown. Ahab himself was not directly engaged in this plot, it was only later that Jezebel came to him with the news: "You know the vineyard Naboth wouldn't sell you? Well you can have it now! He's dead!" (v.15)

Jezebel was crafty, unscrupulous and merciless.

Ahab was a weak tool in her hands, and Jezebel was certainly a woman of power. Looking at Mann's understanding of power as the "ability to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of one's environment" (1986:6), which is described as *social*

power (this aspect will be discussed further in chapter four), I see Jezebel as possessing this type of power. This is the kind of power that is exercised over other people. In the case of Jezebel, she did attain her goals by the use of her social power. From the text, one could see clearly how 'her environment' (being the wife of the King), was conducive to her attaining her goals. Jezebel exercised power firstly, over her husband – the fact that she convinced him to leave the matter to her – and he did.

Dentan says this of Jezebel:

She despised the simple, backward, 'democratic' ways (to borrow a modern term) of the people among whom she had come to live, and she wished to impose upon them the autocratic government to which she was accustomed and which was characteristic of the other civilized nations of the ancient Near East world (1964:66).

Secondly, she exercised her power over the elders and other leaders who followed the instructions as set out in her letters to them. I suppose that if Jezebel was some ordinary citizen, the elders and leaders would not have taken her instructions seriously, but because of who she was – the wife of King Ahab, because of her position of power, her request was adhered to. Seemingly, each of these elders and leaders were more than willing to meet with the request of Jezebel, because this would have put them in good scoring with the King – each of them, in their own way, were looking to increase the level of their own power. The text does not suggest any kind of reward for these people who were a part of Jezebel's plan, so we could assume that their willingness to assist was based on the idea that this would put them in good footing with the King's wife, and in turn, with the King himself. Their assistance to Jezebel would put them in a position of power.

Thirdly, Jezebel exercised power over Naboth, although this was not in a direct form. There is no indication in the text that Jezebel had any contact with Naboth, but she worked via her agents. It was her abuse of power that led to the death of an innocent man.

Hence, Jezebel was undoubtedly a powerful woman, who abused and manipulated her power to attain the vineyard of Naboth.

### 2.3.2. A look at King Ahab

Epp describes Ahab as an infidel, a blasphemer, even though he was the King of ten tribes of Israel. It was apparent that his strong-minded wife, Jezebel, ran his life. This is clear through the very fact that she imposed her religion on her husband and his kingdom (1965:61).

The account in 1 Kings 18:5-6, where Ahab goes in search for food for his cattle, horses and mules, showed that he had no concern about God. During this period the country had seen three and a half years of famine and this was brought about by his sin and the sin of his household and by Israel's apostasy, but still Ahab had no concern of his own sin and no thought of repentance before God.

One would think that Ahab, being king of Israel, would have been more concerned about his people ahead of his animals. This, however, was not the case, which makes one realize that accumulation of material wealth and possessions was more important to Ahab, than was life itself.

We find this coming out clearly in the account of Naboth's vineyard. When he received news of Naboth's death, King Ahab showed no concern about this matter. Instead he immediately went down to the vineyard to claim it! (v16). However, it was not long before he was confronted by the prophet Elijah. When Ahab heard the words of the prophet, he tore off his clothing, dressed in sackcloth and went into fasting, a sign of repentance. At the conclusion of this story we learn that another message came from the Lord to Elijah informing him that because Ahab had humbled himself, He would not do what was promised during the lifetime of Ahab. However, it would happen to his descendants (v29).

Gray suggests that Ahab may have genuinely repented. He had so much of respect for Israelite tradition that he felt obliged to accept Naboth's refusal, and probably only acted or allowed Jezebel to act, stung by her taunt that his rule was not effective. It may well be that Ahab did not know of the measures taken by Jezebel, as vv15f. suggest, and in fact, may have been himself in Samaria when the tragedy was contrived at Jezreel (1980:443).

This, however, does not excuse his part in the dispossession of Naboth's vineyard. When informed by Jezebel that she was able to obtain the land that he wanted, there is no record of King Ahab questioning the method used to obtain this property.

Inasmuch as there is claim that he was not directly involved, it is clear that he played a passive yet significant role in Naboth being dispossessed of his land.

Surely, as the King of Jezreel, he must have had knowledge of the stoning of Naboth. Why was it that King Ahab did not pursue the course of justice at that given moment? Furthermore, I am of the opinion that because he was one who revered Israelite tradition, Ahab's repentance before God could have been more out of concern for his own soul, than out of remorse for the unjust and inhumane act that was committed against Naboth.

As king of Jezreel it was incumbent upon him to ensure that justice was carried out for every inhabitant of his kingdom, however, King Ahab did not rule with justice. Instead, he was obsessed with ways in which he could enlarge his territory. Because Ahab had sold himself to the work of evil, God said through Elijah that he would bring evil upon him and upon his posterity and cut off all the male members of his household. However, we are told that Ahab postponed his own death through partial repentance. We are told that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth (1 Kings 21:27). Because of this, the Lord said, "I will not bring the evil in his days: but in sons days will I bring the evil upon his house" (1 Kings 21:29).

Ahab's death was, nonetheless, a violent death. Some three years later he was severely wounded in battle and died as a result. The record is:

An Aramean soldier, however, randomly shot an arrow at the Israelite troops, and the arrow hit the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. 'Get me out of here!' Ahab groaned to the driver of his chariot. 'I have been badly wounded!' The battle raged all day and Ahab was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wounds ran down to the floor of his chariot, and as evening arrived he died. Just as the sun was setting, the cry ran through his troops: 'It's all over – return home!' So the King died and his body was taken to Samaria and buried there. Then his chariot was washed beside the pool of Samaria, where the prostitutes bathed, and dogs came and licked the king's blood, just as the Lord had promised" (1 Kings 22: 34-38).

God's judgments are sure. All that he had spoken through the prophet Elijah had come to pass. The 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Kings tells how Ahab's family was destroyed:

“And it came to pass ... that they took the kings sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads into baskets, and sent them to Jezreel”. This was under the instruction of Jehu, the new king of Israel.

So we find that God despised the injustices of King Ahab. He is a God of justice who is always looking out for the well being of the poor, the oppressed and those who suffer injustices in the hands of the rich and powerful!

### 2.3.3. A look at Elijah

Elijah's name by interpretation means, “My God is power, or Jehovah is my strength” (Epp, 1965:9). He is first introduced to us as the Tishbite in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Kings. It simply tells us that he was an inhabitant of Gilead. He came from the mountains of Gilead on the other side of the Jordan, from a group that was something of an outcast group. As suggested by Epp, he might have been from the tribe of Manasseh, for the area had been given over to Manasseh's descendants (1965:10). They were a hill people, strong and rugged, and Elijah was said to be a powerful man physically, a person strong of mind and earnest in spirit.

He and his followers were surrounded by enemies who were idol worshippers, but of Elijah we read, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty” (1 Kings 19:10). We gather from this that he was a man who was set apart to God and desirous of seeing God exalted. Epp suggests that he must have had a thorough knowledge of the then existing Scriptures among them being the five books of Moses, Joshua, and the Psalms of David (1965:10). In his youth he must have pondered over the blight of sin that had degraded his people. Then, in his mature manhood, he saw how Jezebel, the ungodly wife of King Ahab, brought *baal* worship into Israel.

This was probably one of the darkest hours of Israel's history. As stated earlier, Jezebel killed all the prophets of Yahweh she could get her hands on. Others had to flee for their lives. At one time, Elijah thought that he was the only one left until God told him that there were seven thousand others who had not bowed their knees to *baal*. However, they were in hiding, and were not working in the open for the Lord. Hence, these were the circumstances surrounding Elijah when he began his ministry in Israel. In 1 Kings 18 we read of Elijah's encounter with King Ahab, who saw him

as a troublemaker of Israel. This was in the light of Elijah announcing a drought in the name of Yahweh, so as to show that *baal* was powerless, and that Yahweh has authority over fertility, and also to affirm that people's lives were wholly in Yahweh's hand. In 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah challenges the people saying, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if *baal* is God, then follow him!" Anderson suggests that the contest between the *baal* prophets and the solitary prophet of Yahweh is one of the most dramatic accounts in the Bible (1988:273). The people, according to the prophet, have been hopping on one foot, then on the other. They wanted to keep one foot in the traditional faith of Israel and the other foot in the worship of *baal*. "This policy of syncretism had already had a long history, and had been encouraged among the people by Jeroboam's religious innovations. Finally Israel has come to the fork of the road, owing to the program of Jezebel" (Anderson, 1988:274).

The object of the contest between King Ahab and Elijah was to determine then and there who was Lord and who had the power to control rain, fertility and life itself. We find Elijah as one who always challenged those things that were not in accordance with Yahweh's standards. We find this coming out very strongly in the account of Naboth's vineyard. King Ahab had little time to go to Naboth's vineyard and gloat over his new possession before Elijah stood before him. Faithful to the trust committed to him by God, Elijah wasted no time in presenting himself before the King. Ahab's first words to him were, "So my enemy has found me" (1 Kings 21:20). The prophet replied, "Yes, I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the Lord's sight" (1 Kings 21:20).

Jezebel and Ahab may have thought that they had covered up their crime quite well, but God had seen what they had done, and Elijah was used as the vessel to denounce this sin and injustice that had occurred against an innocent man.

Hence, we realize that the prophetic voice of Elijah was powerfully used to correct a situation of injustice. It brought about repentance and acknowledgement that an innocent person had been wronged. Elijah was most definitely a man who possessed religious power.

#### 2.3.4. A look at Naboth

Naboth was a Palestinian peasant. According to Gray, the name Naboth may be derived from a root cognate with Arabic *nabata* ('to grow') used of plants or people. It may signify 'offspring' (1980:438). It is suggested by Gray that Naboth was a man of substance and therefore he refused King Ahab's offer, which in actual fact was worth considering. However, his attitude regarding his ancestral land reflects the solidarity among the Palestinian family (1980:439).

The fact that he was given a place of honor at this occasion of fasting and prayer that Jezebel called for in the name of the King, suggests that he was a representative figure, the head of an influential local family. On the other hand, Gray suggests that the place of Naboth at the head of the people is not a place of honor, as at a feast, but the place of the accused, and the two reprobates are set before him not to accuse but to support the accusation by false evidence (1980:440). According to 2 Kings 9:25, the stoning of Naboth was outside the city, in his own field. This was done in order to avoid ritual pollution (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:36). Not only does Naboth suffer, but also his family suffers with him (2 Kings 9:26).

To Naboth, his ancestral land carried much value for him. When King Ahab asked Naboth to sell him his vineyard, his response was: "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance that was passed down by my ancestors." (1 Kings 21:3). Marshall suggests that in the Old Testament there are two basic roots for inheritance, *nahal* and *yaras*. In each case the emphasis was much more upon possession generally than upon the process of succession, though the idea was not altogether absent (1996:505). The words are said to occur only rarely in Genesis and Exodus and are more frequent in Numbers and Deuteronomy; and are used in the context of the allotment of land. The law of inheritance was that land belonged to the family rather than to an individual. The eldest son received a double portion and the others equal shares. If a man died leaving no sons the inheritance went to his daughters; if no daughters, to his brothers; if no brothers, to his father's brothers; if no father's brothers, to the next of kin (Num. 27:8-11) (Marshall, 1996:505).

Freedman points out that most Old Testament references to inheritance concern land. Freedman states:

According to one strand of biblical thinking, which may have roots in the society and economy of early tribal Israel, land is not individually owned, and

cannot be sold away in perpetuity (Lev. 25:23). Particular individuals or families obtain usufruct of the land by virtue of their membership in a larger kinship (or pseudo-kinship) community, such as a lineage, clan, or tribe (2000:636).

Naboth could have easily taken up the offer of King Ahab, but this would have robbed him and the generation to come of their ancestral heritage. In this case, Naboth did not individually own the land, but it also belonged to all those who were to come after him. It is in the light of this that we could understand and identify with his refusal to King Ahab.

In this story, Naboth is the true hero. He is the one that suffered in the hands of the ungodly and unjust. He was not prepared to compromise and give up that which he truly believed to be his inheritance. Unfortunately, we find that not much is written about him and his family. Stories of this nature always focus on the rich and powerful rather than on those who were oppressed and marginalized in the hands of the rich and powerful. This man of substance played his role in trying to fight off exploitation and manipulation. Unfortunately, he stood alone, and was not rich enough or powerful enough to defend himself and prevent his death. He died a painful and unnecessary death, but he died a hero. His legend lives on for us to use as a point of reference and become aware of the consequences and effects of injustice and power abuse

## 2.5. Conclusion

The story of Naboth's vineyard is one of dispossession. It conveys a message of exploitation of the poor and helpless by the rich and powerful. It shows how wealth and power has the potential to corrupt and overthrow the system of justice, thus making it not so just. Set in a context of centuries ago, the story highlights very relevant challenges that we confront in our present context. I take note that in the experience of Naboth's vineyard being forcibly taken away from him, there stood out a strong prophetic voice in the person of Elijah. It was Ahab's encounter with Elijah that brought conviction to the King, causing him to see the need for repentance.

This story highlights the fact that Naboth's vineyard was taken away from him by unjust means and by the use of power. In this case it was King Ahab and his wife Jezebel who were in possession of power.

I concur with Anderson who states:

The Naboth incident provides an excellent preface to the social message of the prophets of a later period ... Yahweh had created a covenant community in which every person stood equal before the law – whether rich or poor, king or private citizen. The whole community was responsible to the sovereign will of Yahweh as expressed in the absolute laws that had been handed down from the wilderness period and refined by legal usage. And when the justice of a member of the community was downtrodden by the powerful, Yahweh intervened to defend the weak and the defenseless and to restore the order and familial solidarity of the covenant community (1988:278).

God is concerned about all those who suffer injustices of variegated kinds. His word provides a solid foundation that his hand of justice stretches over every person in his kingdom, irrespective of colour, creed, economic status and the like.

The very fact that he sent the Prophet Elijah to intervene highlights that he was displeased with the actions of King Ahab and Jezebel. It highlights the fact that God would not allow injustices to be overlooked. It is a fearful reminder that justice will be served – sometimes at very costly measure! Inasmuch as He is a loving Father, He is also the one who ensures that justice is carried out over the earth!

## **Chapter Three**

### **A sociological study of 1 Kings 21**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

Having told the story of Naboth's vineyard, giving attention to the various role players of this story, I will now do a brief sociological study of 1 Kings 21:1-29 in order for us to have an understanding of land, power and justice in this account.

This chapter will provide some historical background to the Naboth's vineyard account just as chapter one of my research provided a historical background to the South African experience. I will also discuss how land, power and justice were viewed during that period.

#### **3.1. The Advent of the Divided Monarchy**

In order for us to locate King Ahab, and the setting of this story, it is necessary for us to trace the history of the Israelite kings. Saul, David and Solomon reigned over the united monarchy. The death of Solomon (c. 930 BC) coincided with the collapse of David's empire, and was followed by the division of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah itself (Bruce, 1997:27). David and his son Solomon had ruled this united kingdom for more than seventy years. Soggin suggests that on the death of Solomon, the united kingdom, which had existed for two generations, will have needed a ruler endowed with more than the usual capacities. Instead, it collapsed, leaving traces only in the memory and imagination of posterity (1985:189). Soggin observes: "So from the death of Solomon, which took place in 926 or 922, we find Israel and Judah again as two separate entities, and this situation lasted till the end of the northern kingdom" (1985:190).

The one side of the Kingdom, Judah, confirmed Solomon's son, Rehoboam, as king. The northern tribes chose the rebel, Jeroboam 1, to rule Israel. De Vaux suggests that the notion of state was rather different in the two kingdoms. In Israel, the charismatic aspect of Saul's period was revived. The throne was promised to the first king, who was Jeroboam 1. This was done so by a prophet speaking in the name of Yahweh (1 Kings 2: 31,37); later, Jeroboam was acknowledged by the people (1 Kings 12:20). In the same way Jehu was named as king by Yahweh (1 Kings 19:16), anointed by a

disciple of Eliseus (2 Kings 9:1f), and acclaimed by the army (2 Kings 9:13). God himself made and unmade the kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:7f; 16:1f). On the other hand, the kingdom of Judah presents a striking contrast. There, the dynastic principle was admitted from the outset. Once the choice was made for a king, the succession followed human rules.

The following below, as illustrated by Gardner (et.al), shows what the divided monarchy looked like (1981:110).

**United Kingdom**

Saul (the first king of the United Monarchy)

David (c. 1000-961)

Solomon (c.961-922)

**Division of United Monarchy**

**JUDAH**

Rehoboam (922-915)

Abijam (915-913)

Asa (913-873)

Jehoshaphat (873-849)

Jehoram (849-842) m Athaliah

Queen of Judah (842-837)\*

Ahaziah (842)\*

Joash (837-800)\*

Amaziah (800-783)\*

Uzziah (783-742)

Jotham (742-735)

Ahaz (735-715)

Hezekiah (715-687)

Manasseh (687-642)

Amon (642-640)\*

Josiah (640-609)

Jehoahaz      Jehoiakim

(609)            (609-598)

Jehoiachin

(598-597)

Zedekiah

(597-587)

**ISRAEL**

Jeroboam 1 (922-901)

Nadab (901-900)\*

Baasha (900-877)

Elah (877-876)\*

Zimri (876)\*\*

Omri (876-869)

Ahab (869-850)

Ahaziah (850-849)

Jehoram (849-842)\*

Jehu (842-815)

Jehoahaz (815-801)

Jehoash (801-786)

Jeroboam 11 (786-746)

Zechariah (746-745)\*

Shallum (745)\*

Menahem (745-738)

Pekahiah (738-737)\*

Pekah (738-732)\*

Hoshea (732-724)

**FALL OF SAMARIA (721)**

**FALL OF JERUSALEM (587)**

\* = assassinated

\*\* = suicide

Hence, as located from the above table, we find that Ahab's reign was from about 869-850B.C. It is important to note that the policies used by Ahab were those that were first implemented by his father Omri. In the light of that, I will now discuss the dynasty of Omri.

### 3.2. The Dynasty of Omri

Omri was the father of King Ahab. According to Gardner, Jeroboam's son Nadab was assassinated by Baasha; Baasha's son Elah, by Zimri – who committed suicide after a week on the throne. The house of Omri lasted little more than three decades (1981:110). The civil war in the Northern Kingdom which followed the assassination of Baasha's son in 884 BC came to an end with the victory of Omri, commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Bruce points out that Omri reigned only eight years after his triumph, but during his brief reign he gave his kingdom a direction, by internal consolidation and foreign conquest and alliance, which it continued to follow during the forty years that his dynasty lasted (1997:32).

Gray suggests that the name Omri is unique in Israel and has been thought to be of Arab origin, and it is thought that he was the governor of Moab under Baasha (1980:364). It was Omri who was responsible for building the city of Samaria, which was seven miles north-west of Shechem. According to Bruce, Samaria had the same central advantages as Shechem and Tirzah, but it also occupied a strong strategic position and its natural strength was increased by fortification. The wisdom of Omri's choice was shown on several occasions during the remaining century and a half of the Northern kingdom's existence, when Samaria resisted several sieges conducted by well-equipped armies (1997:32).

Bruce further suggests that Omri renewed Solomon's policy of alliance with Phoenicia, which was confirmed by the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of the Phoenician priest-king Ethbaal (1997:32). Although this alliance had great commercial advantages for Israel, its religious consequences were very serious. Indeed, the prophetic party considered Omri a greater offender against Yahweh than any of his predecessors, surpassed only by his son Ahab himself.

Carpenter describes Omri as a politically competent king who failed in the religious realm (1992:404). During his reign he moved his capital from Tirzah to the

strategically located site of Samaria, where it remained throughout the northern kingdom's existence. Furthermore, he undertook significant building projects, formed an alliance with Syria, pursued a general course of conciliation with Judah and Phoenicia, and exercised control over the territory of Moab. Carpenter further suggests that Omri's influence reached such proportions that an Assyrian text dating to the reign of Menahem, over a hundred years after this time, referred to the land of Israel as "Omri-Land" (1992:404). Hence, we find that Omri was a powerful and an influential person and it was in this setting that Ahab ruled over Israel where our story is located.

How then did they view land? I will discuss this in the light of the divided monarchy since this is where the story takes place.

### **3.3. The significance of land in the Northern Kingdom**

For this study, whenever I refer to Israel, I am referring specifically to the Northern Kingdom, where the story of Naboth's vineyard is located.

From the above discussion, we find that in the case of Israel a new era started with the introduction of the monarchy. Whereas up to then, before the monarchy, a principle of equality (especially in terms of land ownership) was practiced, a new phenomenon suddenly came to the fore, namely different social classes. Two groups were involved: the king and his officials on the one hand and the farm families on the other hand (Strydom, 1995:407). Strydom further suggests that because of this, many of the kings came to believe that they were above the law of God and sought to concentrate more power and land in their own hands (1995:407). Those from the higher social classes misused their power for personal gain and benefit. This had led to a situation of economic exploitation.

Wood suggests that it was common in the ancient East for kings to be large landowners. They administered such land directly or granted them to people as fiefs in return for rent or service rendered. In Egypt, there were periods when the majority of the land belonged either to the king or the priests (Gen 47:20-26), while in Israel, all the land belonged to God (Josh. 22:19), and God granted parcels of it to Israel's families, with the stipulation that those parcels always remain in the same family (Wood, 1979: 114).

But what happens in the case of a person who dies childless? In this case his land was to go to his nearest kinsman (Num. 27:8-11). According to the book of Ruth 4:1-10, the brother of a deceased husband was obliged by levirate law to marry the widow, that children might be raised up for the deceased and the inheritance passed along and kept in the family. Wood further reminds us that a year of jubilee was to be declared every fifty years, when all the land that had for some reason been transferred, should return to the original owners, and the patrimonies might be continued as instituted at the beginning by God (Lev. 25:8-17; 23-55) (1979:114).

Wood suggests that it was on the basis of this patrimony system, which was a common practice in the Northern Kingdom, that Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to King Ahab (1 Kings 21:3) (1979:114).

One of the fundamentals of life to the Israelites was land. A large proportion of the people in Israel were agriculturalists and lived off the land. As pointed out by Wittenberg, ownership of land is protected by Israel's God, Yahweh, in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." He suggests that this commandment does not refer only to the physical building, but it equally refers to the land on which the house is situated. He further suggests that in Old Testament texts, land is called the *inheritance of the fathers*, this being the property which is handed on from generation to generation. It is this that provides the basic foundation for the life of Israel's peasant community (1990:58).

According to Wittenberg, in the early period after the Israelites had settled in Palestine, the whole population had equal access to land (the settlement period). Each Israelite tribe settled in a certain area. Tribal custom was developed to ensure that the land stayed with the tribes. However, the advent of the monarchy and the shift from a rural agricultural economy to an urban money economy led to a movement of dispossession and disruption of ancient Israelite society, and this in turn undermined the old social order (1990:59).

De Vaux suggests that in Israel the power of the king over the estate of his predecessor certainly remained in force in the northern kingdoms where usurpations were frequent. In Judah, where the dynasty succession was uninterrupted, the transmission of estate presented no problem (1978:124). In Israel, the king could increase his estate in many ways such as buying or exchanging. This started during the time of the united monarchy and continued to be practiced even during the time of

the divided monarchy. We see this in the case of David who bought the threshing-floor of Araunah (2 Sam. 24:24), and Omri who acquired the hill of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24) (De Vaux 1978:124). In like manner, King Ahab tried to buy Naboth's vineyard or to obtain it by exchange, but this did not go the way he planned (1 Kings 21:2).

According to De Vaux, this was Naboth's *nahalah*, 'heritage'. This ancestral estate often contained the family tomb (1 Kings 2:34), and it was defined by boundaries, which were strictly forbidden by law to remove (Dt. 19:14; 27:17). For this reason the peasant was deeply attached to the piece of ground he had inherited from his fathers (1978:166). Naboth refused to surrender his vineyard at Jezreel to Ahab, and the King could not legally force him to do so (1 Kings 21), hence there was the need to resort to unjust means of acquiring the piece of land.

Folk describes laws concerning land management and economics that the prophetic community of Israel held to, including the following:

- i. God is the Lord of the nation and sovereign over all dimensions of its life.
- ii. God wants to create a community truly different from Egypt – a community whose institutions reflect its faith in the God of the Exodus by serving the cause of justice, community, solidarity and freedom.
- iii. God is the owner of all things, including the land, and insists that property be managed in a way that promotes economic justice and equality.
- iv. As owner, God issues specific and concrete rules that regulate the economic affairs of the community, and the human managers of God's property are expected to observe these rules conscientiously.
- v. These rules serve the cause of economic justice by prohibiting the accumulation of wealth or property by individuals or families, thereby ensuring a reasonably just distribution of goods (Folk, 1991:74).

Hence Israel was mindful that everything, including their land, rightfully belonged to God. But there are points in Israel's history where the laws were ignored. Folk

suggests that one of the underlying factors for this is idolatry (1991:75). Wealth has always been one of the most common idols. The prophets of Israel sought to create safeguards against the idolatrous worship and service of wealth by forbidding efforts to accumulate wealth, and warning of the spiritual dangers connected with its accumulation. We see this in the experience of Ahab. In his endeavor to enlarge his territory, he lost favour with God (1 Kings 21).

According to Israel's understanding nobody has the right to deprive the person who has use of land, for this would violate a right, even the king cannot do that. The account of Naboth's vineyard as recorded in 1 Kings 21 illustrates this for us. But at the same time, any form of absolute and arbitrary possession exclusively for one's own advantage is forbidden. Hence, we cannot just do what we want to with the goods that God has given to all, and in essence, actually belongs to him.

For Naboth, he understood that he had a God given right to this land, this was his *nahalah*, his inheritance. No one, not even the king, had a right to remove him from this land. Wallace points out that to Naboth the religious and legal tradition in Israel did not allow for anyone, even the king to acquire great estates. He probably remembered Samuel's warnings against the greed of royal power (1 Sam 8:14) and the traditional teaching of his faith on the limitations of kingship (Deut. 17:14-20) (1995:153). The king, knowing and understanding this law, realized that he could not legally remove Naboth from his vineyard. However, based upon the concoctions of Jezebel, Naboth was sadly dispossessed of his vineyard.

With this brief discussion of land, I will now go on to look at the aspects of power and justice.

### **3.4. The use of power by the Kings**

According to De Vaux, none of the historical books allude any legislative power to the king (1978:150). The king had, of course, an extensive administrative authority; he organized his kingdom, appointed his officials, and made decrees, but he did not enact the law. De Vaux points out: "It is remarkable that the two 'laws of the king' (1 Sam. 8:11-18; Dt. 17:14-20) make no allusion to any power of the king to lay down laws. On the contrary, the first warns the people against his arbitrary acts, and the second orders him to have a copy of the divine law and to obey it to the last detail" (1978:150). An example of this is during the siege of Jerusalem, Sedecias ordered that all slaves be freed; but this was after he had consulted with the people – he did not act on his own authority (Jr. 34:8). The king was, however, a judge, and he had judicial power.

Folk suggests that as the monarchy developed, however, the power that rightfully belonged to God, was usurped by the state and the king. They allowed the accumulation of power and wealth until Israel's social structure began to resemble that of Egypt. Some kings attempted to suppress the worship of Yahweh – in part, perhaps, to escape the condemnation of Yahweh's prophets. These kings preferred other gods who cared little for justice and peace so long as their cult was served and their name was honored with the correct religious ceremonies (Folk, 1991:83).

The history of Israel, as recorded in 1 and 2 Kings and Chronicles and corroborated by the prophets, bears witness to the apostasy of Israel's kings, their usurpations of Yahweh's prerogatives and oppression of their subjects.

Hence, the original intention of Yahweh, that the power given to the king was to be used in administrative terms, was lost with the advent of the monarchy. Their abuse of power was mainly for their own personal gain and prosperity (like in the case of Jezebel and King Ahab who used their power to dispossess Naboth of his vineyard). The selfish use of power was the very thing that led to a breakdown of Israel's social order causing it to become a nation that in many ways lost touch with Yahweh.

### 3.5. How was justice administered by the Kings?

De Vaux states: "On a wider scale, the preambles of Mesopotamian codes, the poems of Ras Shamra, the Aramaean and Phoenician inscriptions all demand as the first quality of a king the virtue of justice" (1978:151). In Israel, too, men prayed that the king might be given justice (Ps. 72:1-2), the foundation of his throne (Pr.16:12; 25:5; 29:14)

The list of David's senior officials (2 Sam. 8:15) is introduced with these words: 'David reigned over all Israel, doing right and justice to all his people'. In the same way, the list of Solomon's senior officials (1 Kings 4:1-6) is immediately preceded by the story of the famous judgment which proved to all that there was in the king 'a divine wisdom for doing justice' (1 Kings 3:28), i.e. both to settle quarrels and to assist every person to obtain their rights. This was the wisdom for which Solomon had prayed, to 'judge the people' (1 Kings 3:9). Thus 'to judge' was almost a synonym for 'to govern' (2 Kings 15:5), and 'governors' could be called 'judges' (Ps 2:10; 148:11).

Some of the cases in which the king was called on to administer justice were: the theft of a sheep (2 Sam. 2:16); a family blood feud (2 Sam. 14:4-11); the substitution of a child (1 Kings 3:16-18); the recovery of a house and land (2 Kings 8:3).

Justice was administered in public, at the gate of the town (Dt. 21:19; Am. 5:10), or in a holy place or a sanctuary (Ex. 21:6; 22:7; Jg. 4:5; Jer. 26:10). The king gave his judgments in the porch of judgment (1 Kings 7:7), which was open to all. In certain religious cases, such as idolatry (Dt.17:2-5) or blasphemy against God and the king (1 Kings 21:10f), the tribunal took cognizance of the case after a denunciation.

According to De Vaux, a man who disobeyed an order of extermination and one who was guilty of *lese-majesty* were also stoned, according to 1 Kings 21:10 (1978:159). The condemned person was taken out of town (1 Kings 21:10, 13; Lev.24:14). The witnesses for the prosecution cast the first stones and the people continued till death ensued. The collective character of communal justice was thus expressed to the end. The role of the judge was not so much to impose a sentence as to settle a dispute while respecting justice. He was more a defender of right than a punisher of crime. His role was to be a just arbitrator (Jb. 9:33).

However, in the story of Naboth's vineyard, it is clear that King Ahab did not rule with justice. He did not defend that which was right in the case of Naboth. According to 2 Kings 8:3, he should have been the one to assist with recovery of house and land, however, he was the one responsible for the loss of Naboth's vineyard, and ultimately, the loss of his life.

### **3.6. The Prophetic view of God's justice**

In this section, I would briefly like to consider the discussion on trajectories of the Old Testament as presented by Brueggemann. As pointed out, there are two circles of tradition in Israel's literature concerning covenant, one derived from Moses and the other Davidic in its formulation. He further suggests that the Mosaic tradition tends to be a movement of protest which is situated among the disinherited and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings. On the other hand, the Davidic tradition tends to be a movement of consolidation which is situated among the established and secure and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who faithfully abides and sustains on behalf of the present orderings (Brueggemann in Gottwald, 1993:202). He goes on to urge that Israel was formed by an intentional bond between persons in an intolerable situation. Oppressed people with an alternative vision of social order were able to reject the religious, economic, and political obligations to the existing network of political organizations (Brueggemann in Gottwald, 1993:203). Hence, bound to a nonhuman overlord by covenant and the solidarity of the newly formed community, the oppressed people set about fashioning a deliberate alternative social ordering which became Israel. Their marginality is not geographical in character, but rather, social, economic, and political. As pointed out by De Vaux, the conception of theocracy was fundamental to Israelite thought. Israel is Yahweh's people and has no other master but him. That is why from the beginning to the end of its history Israel remained a religious community (1978:99).

Brueggemann goes on to suggest that these two trajectories can be discerned in development throughout the period of the divided monarchies, 922-587 B.C. Brueggemann states:

The political institutions of the northern and southern kingdoms are likely vehicles for these two traditions of religion and social vision. Thus the split of

1 Kings 12 represents a departure of community of historical liberation from the ordering regime of David. It is important that the split did not happen over a theological dispute, nor was it simply a gradual growing apart, but it was triggered by a concrete issue of political oppression and social liberation (Brueggemann in Gottwald, 1993:209).

This in no way suggests that the northern kingdom did not practice similar oppression as under Ahab, but the northern kingdom appears to have been peculiarly open to and vulnerable to the transforming impact of the Moses tradition.

Brueggemann makes mention of four occasions of tradition in conflict, in which these trajectories are at work. However, I wish to discuss one of those confrontations, which is that of Elijah/Ahab (Jezebel) in 1 Kings 21.

Elijah stands in the old tradition of 'inheritance' (*nahalah*) whereas the royal figures are committed to the right of royal confiscation, which overrides the older inheritance rights (*yaras*). The prophet appeals to the unfettered work of Yahweh, which calls kings to accountability and dismantles kingdoms (vv. 17-19), whereas the king utilizes mechanizations of the torah for the sake of royal interest. Elijah believes that covenant curses follow violation of torah, even against the royal person, whereas Ahab believes that the torah is only a tool of royal policy (Brueggemann in Gottwald, 1993:209).

Makula describes the Naboth vineyard story as a clash of values where Naboth's refusal to sell his land was in keeping with his tradition. According to Israelite law, the inherited land was inalienable. This differed from Canaanite law as reflected in Genesis 23; 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Kings 16:24 (2001:104).

Farisani sees the Elijah/Ahab confrontation as a clash between a Canaanite (Ahab) and Israelite view of the land issue (1993:82), suggesting a concurrence with Brueggemann's notion of the two circles of tradition.

— Hence, I concur with Brueggemann's suggestion of two circles of tradition in Israel's literature concerning covenant, one derived from Moses and the other Davidic in its formulation. We find that this tension that existed is better understood in the frame of peasants (Naboth)/ city-kings (Ahab). ✓

### 3.7. Conclusion

From the discussion above, we realize that Israel understood Yahweh to be the true master of the earth. All that is in it belongs to him. Humanity was seen as an administrator of this gift from God. He alone is the true master. They also understood him to be one who reigned with power and justice. However, with the advent of the monarchy, this once God fearing nation had lost their focus and allowed greed and accumulation of wealth to manipulate and dictate to them, which resulted in the abuse of power and a justice system that became corrupt. My reason for discussing the kings is that they were the ones who were in possession of power and were responsible for administering justice. Sadly, in the case of Naboth, the power of King Ahab and Jezebel was abused and they certainly did not rule with justice.

Brueggemann points out that justice is aimed at transformation of social power (1986: 15). He further states that "Israel has a social vision in which every family, clan and tribe has its rightful place of power. Where these entitlements are fully honored, there is justice, assuring each the power for life, access to public decisions, fair treatment in court" (1986:16). However, the advent of the monarchy enabled those in authority to abuse their power (as in the case of Naboth) and this in turn gave way to grave injustices.

Now that I have given an overview of the sociological setting of Israel, where the story of Naboth's vineyard is located, I will go on to discuss in more general terms, the aspects of land, power and justice.

## **Chapter Four**

### **A closer look at land, power and justice**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

Thus far I have been referring to the aspects of land, power and justice in relation to one another. However, I have not provided a deep analysis of each of these aspects. This is the aim of this chapter, giving individual attention to each, and finally finding the connection or relationship between land, power and justice.

#### **4.1. Land**

African people have always understood that God is the life giver. He is pre-eminently revealed through the gift of human life, and his greatest desire for people is the enhancement of life in the community. Life is the greatest gift of God. Life is the greatest sign of his benevolent presence and power. God not only gives life, but He also sustains it. In addition to his life giving power, he is also the giver of gifts. One of the gifts that God has abundantly given to His people is that of land. According to Shenk, among the Gikuyu people (this is one of the tribes in Kenya), God is often referred to as the 'Divider of land'(1997: 5). The land of a people is the people's inheritance from God for the sustenance of life. To seize the land of another is to steal the source of life, which God has given. Land stealing is a crime against God, against life and against humanity.

Shenk further suggests that it becomes theologically perplexing that the divider of the land had not given consideration to White people when he divided out the lands of the earth. It was inconceivable that a people who had received land from God would try to seize the land of another people. To seize land was to strange life, it was an act against divine order and harmony (1997:5). This was the experience of Naboth who had his very inheritance stolen from him.

Wrights points out that in earlier societies, including the ancient world at the time of the Old Testament, wealth was more directly linked to land and to land ownership. For a nation of arable and pastoral farming like Israel, land was the only permanent possession. Crops and herds and habitation might be destroyed by drought or war, but

the land would recover. "But to be dispossessed of one's family land or, worst of all, to be driven out of the country into exile was unmitigated calamity" (Wright, 1990:3). It is clear that ancient Israel placed much value (cultural, social, political, and religious) on land. Wright states:

The Deuteronomistic historians, by contrast, believing Israel to be constituted by the gift of the land and by the law as regulative of life in the land, regarded Israel as essentially bound to the land. The loss of land was thus the end of the people's existence as Israel in the theological sense (1990:8).

He further discusses the historical and cultic conceptions of land (1990:5). The historical conception is described as comprising of both the promise to the patriarchs and its fulfillment in the Conquest, whereas the cultic conception is basically the belief that the land was owned by Yahweh – Yahweh's land, as distinct from the Promised Land. The clearest expression of this is in Lev.25: 23: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity (NIV 'permanently'), for the land is mine".

The book of Leviticus states: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (25:23). The Old Testament insists that the earth is God's and that God has given it as a heritage to all the children of Israel. It is therefore to be shared among all the tribes, clans and families. Humanity is not the true master of this land, but rather, an administrator. God is the true master. So Israel understood that the earth is God's, and God gives it to all his children. In Egypt, however, land belonged to the Pharaoh, with the peasants as his servants and property, and in Babylon, there existed a feudal structure, with the king granting land in exchange for fidelity and services.

The Jubilee, as recorded in Leviticus 25, is one of the most striking social institutions that translates God's lordship directly onto the social and economic planes. The Jubilee sought to affirm or defend three types of freedom, with the third freedom concerning the land, which must be allowed to rest for a year during Jubilee and sabbatical years. This is the instruction of God to Moses on Mount Sinai:

Give these instructions to the Israelites: 'When you have entered the land I am giving you as an inheritance, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord every seventh year. For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land

will enjoy a Sabbath year of rest to the Lord. Do not plant your crops or prune your vineyards during that entire year. And don't store away the crops that grow naturally or process the grapes that grow on your unpruned vines. The land is to have a total year of rest. But you, your male and female slaves, your hired servants, and any foreigners who live with you may eat the produce that grows naturally during the Sabbath year. And your livestock and the wild animals will also be allowed to eat of the land's bounty' (Lev. 25:1-7).

Hence, the underlying reason for this freedom is to display God's lordship, in exercising his lordship, he sets the pattern on how the earth should be cared for – he sets the pattern of allowing the land to have a rest period. Although God freely gives land to us, it still belongs to him.

Having this general overview of land, how then do we view power?

## 4.2. Power

In examining power, Prior states:

Power is a fact of life. We all exercise a measure of power, husbands over wives and wives over husbands; parents over children and children over parents; management over employees and employees over management; government over people and (sometimes and in some places) people over government; church leaders over church members and church members over church leaders. The debate and the problems are not concerned with the existence or even the achievement of power so much as with its exercise.

How is the power we possess to be used? (1987:32).

One of the greatest difficulties is that humankind is never sure of how to use their power. Some might have more than others, but the fact remains that we all possess power to some level. Power does occupy a central and all-embracing place in our lives.

Power is spoken of by Mann as the "ability to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of one's environment" (1986:6). This could be described as *social* power, which in its first sense restricts its meaning to mastery exercised over other people. This is the type of power that I described Jezebel as possessing. This could also be the kind of power that White South Africans exercised over Black South Africans in their dispossession of land. According to Mann, the four sources of social power are the ideological, economic, military and political (IEMP) relationships (1986:11ff).

I have come to understand human characteristics as the source of original power. In attempting to fulfill our basic human drives, needs and goals, this leads us into external relations with nature and other forces. Each of these possesses organizational means to attain human goals. Thus, we speak of organized power.

Organizational power could be sub-divided into collective and distributive power, of which I find collective power to be a very relevant form of power in the life of the church. For the church to be vocal enough and to be heard, it is critical that it cooperates with one another in order to enhance their joint power over third parties, or over the forces of darkness. However, I am yet to see distributive power being exercised by people of faith or by people in general. It is a sad reality that not many,

if any at all, are willing to lose some power in order for a fixed amount of power to be distributed among participants!

In taking a closer look at the four sources of power as described by Mann, (1986), I wish to note the following:

- a). **Ideological power:** this type of power suggests that in order to understand the world, we require categories of meaning and we need to have shared understandings of people's moral actions.
- b). **Economic Power:** This kind of power carries the concept of class, which in this setting is viewed as purely an economic concept. A dominant class has power of the extraction, transformation, distribution and consumption of the objects of nature. It is this *dominant* class of people that can obtain general collective and distributive powers in society.
- c). **Military Power:** This kind of power is intensive rather than extensive. It is highly concentrated, coercive and highly mobilized, and is of organized physical force. Due to its concentrated coercion, this type of power reorganized existing social life. It acts out of organized physical defense, and concerns questions of life and death.
- d). **Political Power:** This kind of power differs from the above three in that it concentrates on one particular area called the center - it is located in that center and is exercised outward, whereas the other three can be involved in any social relationships wherever located – it is centralized and territorial.

Of these types of power as suggested by Mann, I see Jezebel as possessing ideological power, (operating from the Canaanite ideology that land could be sold), economic power (she was undoubtedly a very wealthy woman, being the wife of the King), and political power (she operated from that center of being the wife of the king). She, being the dominant class in the story of Naboth's vineyard, by virtue of her being the wife of King Ahab, was in a strategic position to exercise these kinds of power. Drawing from our sociological study of the text of 1 Kings 21:1-29, we find that much power was in the hands of the king, which, in turn, made her a very powerful figure.

Going a little further, and considering how others view power, Germond states that “Power not only produces subjects, it lies at the bottom of all our social practices: politics, medicine, religion and work” (2001:26). Power is everywhere; there is no way of escaping it. It is not confined to one particular location, nor is it in the hands of one particular individual, and it is something that impacts on every facet of our lives. Power rules society. It shapes and dominates us. It is found in a multiplicity of organisms, and more and more it is becoming diffused in global networks.

Jacobsen points out “in Spanish the word for power is *poder*, which literally means ‘the ability to act’ or ‘to be able’” (2001:38). In the light of organizers, they see power as what is essential to get things done. This ability to act is necessary to build power organizations.

Niebuhr suggests that both “equality and liberty” (1943:263) are recognized as transcendent principles of justice in Stoic, mediaeval and modern theories of natural law. The two main instruments of justice are seen as the organization of power and balance of power. The development of democratic justice in human society depends to a large extent on the principle of the equilibrium of power.

It is Tillich who emphasized, “justice is immanent in power” (1960:67). In his exploration of the threefold relationship of love, power and justice, he also points out that as in power, justice is immanent in love. Hence, we find that power and justice cannot be seen as isolated strands. Instead, they are interwoven with each other, and the one must be seen in relation to the other.

Percy, who looks at power and the church, examines various models of power (1998). He points out that definitions or explications of power are, practically speaking, a dime in a dozen. Power is what we call something; it is primarily a noun, not a verb. However, the verb does exist in the sense that we may speak of empowering.

Percy goes on to examine Rollo May’s *Power and Innocence: A search for the sources of violence*, where May considers power to be exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient or integrative. Each of these types of power represents a different level of threat, force or coercion, ranging from mutually empowering (integrative) to the potentially violent (exploitative), (Percy, 1998:6).

I concur with Percy in his suggestion that power is a multi-faceted reality. It is a force that applies itself through and reifies itself via agents (tools), (1998:73). It can be dispositional, in the form of ideas, manners, bonding and unity. It can also be

episodic, in the form of specific instances, interventions and moments. "It is a phenomenon present within all epistemological and social frameworks, usually encountered via its agents rather than the source itself" (Percy, 1998:73). Apart from the power of God, power is a function of systems of social interaction; and is seen as one of the important means of social organization. Agents are things capable of motivity, that is to say moving or impelling power. Agents can be people, instances, doctrines, situations, and so on.

I would like to take a few moments to consider Jesus' use of power. We find that throughout the ministry of Jesus, He was challenged to display his power. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3). Satan wanted to manipulate Jesus into using his authority in very inconsistent ways, to use his power in a way to satisfy his own needs. Similarly, Jesus was taunted by Jewish onlookers when he hung on the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:39). Had Jesus used his power and given in to the requests and taunting of those around him, then he would have betrayed his Father, his mission and his vocation.

We come to understand Jesus as being selective in his use of power. My observation is that whenever it concerned the needs and well being of others, Jesus was willing to use his power. The feeding of the five thousand, the raising of dead Lazarus, the healing of the leper, the blind, and so many other miracles, suggesting that Jesus was unlimited in his power. Surely he could have turned stone into bread or jumped off a high building and be uninjured (as suggested by Satan), but he chose to restrain his power in those areas, reflecting the very nature of God.

Prior states:

The traditional way into the subject is to begin with a distinction between two New Testament Greek words that are generally translated 'power' and 'authority' – *dunamis* and *exousia* respectively. The first word refers to the actual energy or strength released; the second word refers to an inherent or authorized capacity to be in charge. Among ordinary men and women in the world, it is usually explained, there is a lot of *dunamis*, but without *exousia*. The point about Jesus was that his *dunamis* was a consistent expression of his *exousia*, which he received from God" (1987:15).

Jesus chose to use his power for good rather than for evil. He did not need to do strange, way-out things to prove that he was the Son of God, his very character reflected the Father.

What then can we say about religious power? Looking at the history of power, religion is seen as one of the extremely important historical phenomenon. World salvation religions are said to have spread over much of the globe more extensively than any other power organization

Religiously centered cultures offered a particular way of organizing social relations – there was also power organization of temples, priests, scribes, and so forth.

Religious movements are said to provide the most obvious example of ideological power. We could also speak of religious power being hegemonic, since there does exist a dominant group that intentionally persuades a subordinate group to act or to conceive of themselves in a particular manner. Religion has the potential to exercise relational and intentional power and is also able to engage intentionally with other forms of power, be they economic, political or ideological. Religion draws on its many resources as a power to do good. Since religion is a major part of our systems of beliefs, the way we see things, the way we act, the manner in which we formulate our opinions, our superstitions – all of this shapes and contributes to the knowledge that we possess – and knowledge is said to be power.

When we consider the story of Naboth's vineyard, we see Ahab and Jezebel as the agents of power. They had used their social, religious and political power to dispossess Naboth of his inheritance. They were, according to Mann's understanding of power, able to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of their environment (1986:6). To expand on this point, we find that because of who Ahab and Jezebel were, because they were king and queen and possessed much power, they were able to use that 'environment' to dispossess Naboth of his vineyard through unjust and corrupt means. In addition to that, there was a weakness in the justice system of the day, which allowed Jezebel and Ahab to get away with their devious plot. However, this was not for long, since God's justice system (with the aid of the Prophet Elijah), pointed out the evil and injustice that lay behind Naboth being dispossessed of his vineyard. The unjust and false testimony led to the death of an innocent man.

Considering power, I am able to state that power in itself is not a bad thing. Power has, over the centuries, in the religious and political arenas, been used in a positive way. We are also challenged by the life and model of Jesus in his positive use of power. However, the reality is that power is not always exercised in a positive way. It is often used to control, manipulate, disempower and dehumanize people. When power is used in an incorrect way, when power is abused, that leads to injustice.

Having looked at power, I will now move on to look at justice.

### 4.3. Justice

As pointed out earlier, there is a relationship between justice and power. As stated by Haugen, justice fundamentally has to do with the exercise of power (1999:71). To say that God is a God of justice, is to say that he is a God that cares about the right exercise of power or authority. God is the ultimate power and authority in the universe, so justice occurs when power and authority is exercised in conformity with his standards. Haugen further suggests that in the Old Testament, the Hebrew words for justice and righteousness are almost interchangeable, both including a conformity to God's standards of holiness and moral excellence. He states:

Ultimately, the sovereign God of the universe will establish justice over all peoples and spirits because at that time all power and authority in the cosmos will be exercised in accordance with his standards of moral purity (1999:71).

In affirming that humanity was made in the image of God, we acknowledge that every person, regardless of nationality, religion, race, sex or class, has an intrinsic dignity, and should therefore be respected and served. Any form of exploitation, oppression, or discrimination is a denial of that dignity and is an offense to God.

The God of the Bible is a God of justice. He requires that His people not only exhibit, but also spread justice and righteousness in the midst of an unjust world. A healthy community is one in which the human rights of each individual are protected. In this context, the Christian ethic is not a defense of "my rights" but a concern for the rights of my neighbour. God's concern is expressed specifically for the outsiders, the poor and those without power.

In a detour from biblical faith, many Christians in the twentieth century neglected this heritage of service to a hurting world. As Bosch observed,

It was a stupendous victory of the evil one to have made us believe that structures and conditions in this world will not or need not really change, to have considered political and societal powers and other vested interests inviolable, to have acquiesced in conditions of injustice and oppression, to have tempered our expectation to the point of compromise, to have given up the hope of wholesome transformation of the status quo, to have been blinded to our own responsibility for and involvement in a world en route to its fulfillment (1991:509).

I concur with Bosch's suggestion that our responsibility as children of God has been compromised. We have become so accustomed to the way things are, that we see no need to change and challenge the things that keep us in bondage and in oppression. It is the very structures that we so faithfully adhere to that have indirectly contributed in injustice and oppression. With this, we are challenged to recover our ministry of justice.

I have been challenged by Brueggemann's understanding of justice. He points out that Micah 6:8 is commonly recognized as a very peculiar and precious summary as the demands of God mediated through eighth century prophets (1986:5). An important element in this well-known triad is to do justice. Doing justice is the primary expectation of God. According to Brueggemann, "Everything else by way of ethical norm and covenantal requirement derives from this, for God is indeed a 'lover of justice' (Ps.99: 4). Israel is here commanded to attend to the very thing which God most values, namely justice" (1986:5).

Brueggemann further suggests the following as a way in which the Bible conveys the message about justice: 'Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them' (1986:5). This understanding does imply that there ought to be a right distribution of goods and access to the resources of life. However, through uneven workings of the historical process, some have come to access or control what belongs to others. The truth is that if we control something that belongs to others long enough, we begin to think of it as rightly ours, and tend to forget that it belonged to someone else. When things are alienated from those to whom they belong, this can

only lead to trouble and disorder. But God's justice system has a transformative quality and can only lead to abundant life.

When we learn to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly as commissioned in Micah 6:8, we enjoin to do justice as God does justice. When God does justice it is not polite or modest or understated. It is an act of powerful intervention. It is like Moses in the court of Pharaoh insisting on freedom. It is like Nathan sent to David (2 Sam. 12) who will not tolerate such rapacious action. It is like Elijah thundering against Ahab and Jezebel when Naboth has been done in, for the sake of land (1 Kings 21). God is a lover of justice, which means that He intervenes for the poor and weak against the powerful who have too much (Ps 99:4).

Brueggemann goes on to state that justice is aimed at transformation of social power (1986: 15). He further states that "Israel has a social vision in which every family, clan and tribe has its rightful place of power. Where these entitlements are fully honored, there is justice, assuring each the power for life, access to public decisions, fair treatment in court" (1986:16).

God's severe judgment flows out of his love for the victims of injustice for the simple fact that injustice is sin. In addition to this, according to the Old Testament tradition, God takes the abuse of power personally – and he calls it sin. As the prophet Amos declared to the elite of Israel who were abusing their power, "I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos 5:12).

Amid a world of injustice, oppression and abuse, we can know some simple truths about God if we trace biblical texts. Here are four solid truths about his character:

- God loves justice and, conversely, hates injustice. "For I, the Lord, love justice" (Isaiah 61:8).
- God has compassion for those who suffer injustice – everywhere around the world, without distinction or favour, (Psalm 43:15).
- God judges and condemns those who perpetrate injustice (In the story of Naboth's vineyard- 1 Kings 21:1-29, God sent the Prophet Elijah to remind King Ahab of his acts of injustice against Naboth)
- God seeks active rescue for the victims of injustice, (Psalm 43:1).

Justice is not a romantic social ideal for another world. It is the hard work of redeploing social power and the transformation of the social system. Micah 2:1-5 envisages the redistribution of land as the supreme measure of justice. In addition to this, the redistribution of social power must be seen as the crucial element of the gospel. Hence, according to the above understanding, when we talk about justice, we are talking about the use of power. The correct use of power can be equated with justice, while the incorrect use of power can be equated with an injustice.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have looked at land, power and justice. As stated earlier, it is not possible to consider land in the South African context without giving thought to the aspects of power and justice. The three are interwoven and each forms a significant part of the other.

To say that God is a God of justice is one way of saying that he is concerned about whether those who have power or authority over others are exercising it in accordance with his standards. When power is exercised in a way that violates those standards, then it is said that an injustice has occurred. Injustices occur when power is misused or abused. With this in mind, I have come to understand the strong relationship that exists between power and justice. The wrong use of power has negative results - it becomes an injustice. This was the experience of Naboth. His vineyard was taken away from him by the abuse of power and the lack of justice, hence he suffered an injustice. Many in the South African context have suffered a similar injustice. People have been stripped of their land due to an abuse of power, which resulted in the occurrence of an injustice.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Relevance and Application**

#### **5.0. Introduction**

In this final chapter, I will aim to find the relevance of the biblical account of Naboth's vineyard to our South African context. Are there similarities in the story to that of the South African story? What lessons can we learn from the experience of Naboth as well as from that of Black South Africans?

Are there measures that we need to take in order to prevent another Zimbabwe experience? How does the church respond and intervene in this very sensitive matter? These are some of the issues that I will address in this final chapter.

#### **5.1 Relevance of 1 Kings 21 to the South African Context**

When we consider the story of Naboth's vineyard, we learn that it was through the abuse of Jezebel's power that Naboth lost his land. She used her position as the King's wife to influence those that were under her authority.

Similarly, in our South African context, it was through the abuse of power, through unequal power relations that people were dispossessed of their land.

Our history tells us that the colonization of South Africa in 1652 by the European settlers, has led to its integration into the European capitalistic process. South Africa stands out as the most industrialized and wealthiest country on the African continent today. This is partly so because the wealth of this country has been founded on a racist, political and capitalist system.

Seemingly powerful white settlers have invoked racism as an exclusion principle to facilitate the exploitation of the indigenous people. This led to the denial of their participation in decision-making processes. This, in turn, led to the denial of 'land tenure rights' and also to land being forcibly expropriated from them.

Apartheid has been tied up with white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, and oppression. It is no secret that South Africa carries a history of Whites abusing their power in order to oppress, disempower and keep under subjection people of colour.

The logic behind White domination and power was to prepare the Black person for the subservient role in this country. This showed itself out in every facet of life –

even in the education system itself. The Bantu Education system was part of the process of dehumanization and disempowerment. Knowledge is said to be power. The more uninformed a people are kept, the less powerful they remain.

Sadly enough, the 'white man's religion' being Christianity, was in itself presented in such a manner that it was a powerful tool for oppression. The religion of the indigenous people was viewed as 'evil' and superstitious. Ironically, the God of the Bible was presented as one who allowed his people to suffer continually. Selective content was shared with a gullible and intimidated people.

This is one of the reasons that we now find ourselves redefining the message of the bible to make it relevant to the struggling masses. Biko suggests that it is because of this misinformation and misrepresentation of the gospel message that young black people have been dropping out of churches by the hundreds! (1987:31) Very rarely was God presented as the hater of injustice and oppression.

Hence, when we carefully consider our South African history, it is evident that power at every level was used and abused by White South Africans over a powerless Black people. In like manner, Jezebel used her power to dispossess Naboth of his vineyard!

Unequal power relations is one of the major factors that has left some individuals superior over others and that has left such economic and social imbalances. It is the very thing that calls for development, that process of improving the quality of life.

It is political powerlessness that has directly contributed to the cycle of poverty, deprivation, alienation, and dispossession.

Strydom, who does a comparison of redistribution of land during the eighth century in Israel and that of the twentieth century in South Africa, suggests that both of these are a problem of social injustice calling for affirmative action (1995:399).

He further suggests that the cause for the problems in each of these cases is related to the political and social structures, which in turn led to an unjust economic system. In the case of Israel, a new era started with the introduction of the monarchy (as discussed in chapter three). As stated by Strydom:

Whereas up to then a principle of equality (especially in terms of land ownership) was practiced, a new phenomenon suddenly came to the fore, namely different social classes. Two groups were involved: the king and his officials on the one hand and the farm families on the other hand (1995:407).

The economic inequalities existing in South Africa are also ascribed to the socio-political structures of the previous apartheid government: the economy was built on a systematically enforced racial division in every sphere of life.

The fact that only whites could vote, led to a political system which resulted in the Whites being the upper social class (the have's) while Blacks were seen as the lower social class (the have-not's). This led furthermore to Whites having a monopoly on land ownership, while Blacks had scarcely and access to land (Strydom, 1995:408).

The South African situation seems to be much more complicated than that of Ancient Israel. In Ancient Israel during the Monarchic period, it was more a matter of social class per se (rich vs poor), while in South Africa this social classification is linked to a racial distinction (the rich are the white, the poor are the black).

Strydom goes on to suggest that it seems as if in the Israelite situation the main emphasis was on the aspect of religious negligence, while in the South African situation it is on the socio-political level. For the Israelite prophets, the main reason for the injustice had to be sought in the fact that the people did not comply with the religious requirements and conditions of the land promise. From this situation then developed the corrupt socio-political structures, which finally caused all the injustice. But basically the 'crime' was religious negligence. "Within the South African situation the emphasis is more on the socio-political corruption as the main reason for the inequality amongst people. In essence the social injustice is ascribed to an undemocratic political system, while religious negligence plays a more subsidiary role" (1995: 410).

Hence, the story of Naboth's vineyard carries many similarities to our South African context. Just as Naboth was dispossessed of his land by a very powerful Jezebel for the sole purpose of King Ahab enlarging his territory, so too were people of colour in South Africa dispossessed of their land by a powerful White minority for the purpose of 'enlarging their territories'.

Let me, at this point, mention that in the setting of this research, dispossession is confined to the issue of land, but it, in fact, goes way beyond that. People of colour were dispossessed of so much more than their land – their dignity, their identity, their culture and their well-being.

## **5.2. Space for Church Intervention**

This brings me to the final aspect of this dissertation and that is the role of the church in land issues. In the South African context, the aspect of land is a development issue, and I believe that the church must be at the forefront of all development action.

I concur with Samuel who suggests that: "Development is a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future, in order to realize their full potential of life that God has made possible" (Samuel in Sider, 1981:19). God's concern runs throughout the whole of his creation, to sustain and preserve human life. Development is the activity of the church to put this concern into practice. How then, do we respond?

### **5.2.1. Our role in redistribution**

Although the text of 1 Kings 21 does not directly address the aspect of redistribution, it is a step that the church must take in order for justice to be carried out. The scenario could have been different if Naboth was not stoned to death. Then perhaps, King Ahab could have considered giving back his land to him after being convicted by the prophetic utterance of Elijah. It is essential that the church play an active role in the redistribution process.

Gillian states:

Churches can take the lead in utilizing and distributing land in such a way as to contribute towards the eradication of poverty. The moral leadership of the Church has the capacity to benefit the entire nation. The poor in the church look forward to the church for help to alleviate their situation (1998:186).

However, there are those who argue that Church ownership of land has placed the church in an ambiguous position. To date, debates on this issue have left the church feeling condemned but still lacking clarity on how to respond to this issue. The challenge to the church needs to be framed in a way that enables her to respond positively.

Korten emphasizes that the ultimate aim of any form of development action is to right a perceived wrong, but in each case, it works from different assumptions, taking into account the nature of the development problem (1990:113). As the church we need to

aim at correcting these injustices – we are called on to serve as catalysts, as agents of change.

I have been encouraged by Makula's record of how the church in Brazil responded to this challenge of the struggle for land. The Catholic Church in Brazil made a concerted effort to counter the injustices on land in practical ways. Using its own lands, the church has a vision of making a contribution towards a resolution of the problem of land injustices. There is a clear awareness that there has to be a base from which to operate in providing an example of what the entire society can implement. According to Makula "That base is the church's own land. This is where all the theories that the church has on its understanding of the use of land is to be tried and tested" (2001:99).

Makula goes on to describe how this particular church decided in 1982 to turn over a church-owned and church-operated estate for the use of peasant workers. These peasant families themselves decided to pay a rent for the use of the land. The only difference was that the money was now paid into a community fund instead of the church, and the peasants themselves controlled this fund. The fund provided for community needs such as portable water, access to roads, a school teacher's salary and assistance to families with special needs. The administration of the estate is conducted by an elected board and community assemblies (Makula 2001:100).

It is clear that the objective of this was to benefit everyone equally. At the same time, the peasants were allowed to make decisions for themselves. I find this to be very significant since Brazil was a country that experienced much oppression; it was in this setting that Paulo Freire wrote his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970. During the time of the depression he had first hand experience of poverty and the social structure was clear, there were the rich oppressors and the poor peasants who were oppressed. He started adult education classes for peasants to learn and become aware of their situation. It was a class for awareness, conscientization and development of critical thinking. Says Nurnberger: "Freire developed an ingenious educational programme to demystify the oppressor and empower the oppressed" (1999:250). Freire detested dehumanization. He states: "Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human... This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete

historical fact, is *not* given a destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (Freire 1970:26).

In our responsibility of redistribution, it is imperative that the church at large in South Africa serves as a catalyst in challenging and reshaping policies and frameworks that are dehumanizing and disempowering. I see the church in Brazil fulfilling a two-fold purpose. The first being that of finding a practical way of dealing with the land issue, by giving their own land. The second being that of empowering the peasant community by allowing them to make their own decisions of how the land was to be used. This was done according to their own needs and not by the decisions taken for them by an ‘outsider’.

This is not to say that people who are given land should be encouraged to do whatever they please with that particular piece of land, but rather, they should be guided on how that land could be utilized to improve the quality of their lives.

Du Toit addressed this very issue of productive land being used in a very unproductive manner. He sees South Africa as being the last nation in Africa, which is self-sufficient in food. He states: “We don’t want another Zimbabwe. If 35 000 commercial farmers produce enough food for the people of Southern Africa, why take their farms?” (2004:iii). He records that more than 1 500 farmers have been brutally murdered since 1994, in many instances without anything being stolen. “South Africa can do without its advertising agencies and retail boutiques and horse racing, but it cannot do without its farmers. If matters continue as they are, and productive farms are handed over to people who cannot farm and who do not want to farm, then we are on the Zimbabwe slippery slope” (2004:iv).

Inasmuch as I believe that justice needs to be done, that those who have been dispossessed of their land need to be recompensed for their loss, I couldn’t agree more with Du Toit in that we need to be guarded against the same errors of Zimbabwe. Are we redistributing land just for the sake of fulfilling a programme or is this done in a meaningful way which will seek to improve the quality of life for all? What would be the point of good, fertile agricultural land that brings forth no fruit? I do not see this as being a concern that only the government should bear, but it should of every citizen of this country. The government needs for the church to partner with it in order for this to become a better place for all to co-exist.

I am certain that there are a number of white farmers in various churches who are most willing to impart their skills of farming and agriculture. Du Toit emphasizes that land reform and the resettlement policy was put in place by the post-apartheid South African government to alleviate poverty but has in actual fact created more poverty, with South Africa's unemployment rate having increased by 54% between 1996 and 2003 (2004:258). The church would be irresponsible if we were aware of these facts and did nothing about it!

Philpott relates the experience of church leaders who were at a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs in July 2000. The suggestion made by the Minister was that churches 'partner' with government and there was a keen interest that churches hand over their land to communities using existing land reform instruments. However, the difficulties that the church leaders experienced with this was that there was no guarantee that handing over church land in terms of the government's present package of land reform would result in sustainable livelihoods for the poor (2004:1).

I fully identify and agree with those concerned leaders. Our main concern is for the poor and disadvantaged of this country. In us seeking to do the right thing with church land we must take the responsibility to investigate, clarify and articulate those concerns. It does not stop at handing over church land – in fact that is the beginning. Does our handing over necessarily mean that the poor would benefit from this – would this necessarily improve the quality of their lives?

I believe that this is the very concern that Du Toit expressed in his work. He strongly emphasizes: "South Africans must resist the senseless transfer of land for ideological reasons" (2004:vi). What is the benefit of a fishing rod to one who has not been taught how to effectively use it? In like manner, what is the advantage of land to the poor when they have not been helped into allowing this land to improve the quality of their lives? What is the advantage of land that does not bring people into a sustainable lifestyle? I agree that it is necessary for us to partner with the government but it is of utmost importance that we do this with wisdom. It would be an unpleasant situation for the church to hand over its land to the government only to find that that land has not effectively improved the standard of living of the poor and the marginalized.

### 5.2.2. Our role of stewardship

Although the text of 1 Kings 21 does not bring out the aspect of stewardship, I wish to discuss this, since it is a biblical mandate to us to care for the earth.

The task that God entrusted Adam and Eve with was: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the face of the earth” (Gen. 1:28). This first task is clearly a fundamental one, and it concerns the attitude that they should have toward the earth and all creatures. According to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the concepts “subdue” and “have dominion” are easily misunderstood, and seem to justify the type of despotic and unbridled domination that takes no care of the earth and its fruit, but despoils it for personal advantage. However, in biblical language these concepts are used to describe the rule of a wise king who cares for the well-being of all of his subjects (1998: 21).

Earth keeping and good stewardship is the responsibility of every individual and we are called on to care for creation, so that it will serve each of us and remain at the disposition of all, not just a few. Nature was given to humanity as a gift from God, and it is His intention that we preserve the earth and nature, and not to transform it into an instrument of power or motive for division. Certainly, it is humanity in its entirety that must shoulder the responsibility for creation. The right and duty of the human being to have dominion over the earth is derived from being the image of God: all, and not just a few, are responsible for earth keeping.

According to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in Egypt and Babylon, this prerogative of caring for the earth was attributed to a few, whereas in the biblical text, dominion belongs to the human person as such, and hence to all (1998:22).

Our responsibility regarding land is to serve as good stewards of the earth.

### 5.2.3. Toward an Agrarian Reform Strategy

On examining the role of the church in land issues, Philpott suggests an alternative to the current policies of land and agricultural reform, which is an agrarian reform (this system was successfully used in Brazil). The key features of this agrarian reform are listed as follows:

- one which prioritizes the interests of the poor rather than those of the powerful. This is done in a way that allows the poor and oppressed to clarify their own needs rather than this being done for them.
- one where the state fulfills its public responsibilities and defends the weak, rather relying on 'free market' forces to allocate power and resources.
- one where access to, and use of, the land primarily and immediately feeds our people, nurtures the natural environment, and provides dignified livelihoods to all.
- one which fosters relations between people that reflect the innate value of each and encourages mutual support and cooperation, rather than exploitation, immiseration and competition over resources. (Philpott, 2004: 35).

An agrarian reform policy is certainly one that puts the poor and the marginalised at the top of its agenda, and ensures continuity, sustainable lifestyles and an improvement in the quality of life. It has proven to be a system that has brought tremendous success in other such cases concerning issues of land, for example, the experience of Brazil (Makula 2001:96ff.).

In our South African context, Makula gives examples of how a number of churches used their land in ways that benefit the poor and bring about and improved quality of life. Among these examples are the following churches:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa – the provision of important facilities that enhanced the living standard of rural people. These included cultural centres, community centres, libraries and so on. There is also a record of 75 schools with over 12 000 children – these schools are either directly or indirectly associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.
- The Moravian Church – sheep and wheat farming, various projects which aim at providing work for people – these include a shoe and industrial glove factory in Wupperthal, a development agency running a bakery, sewing project and clay project at Elim, the provision of housing for 50 families at the Clarkson Mission station (Makula, 2001:109ff.).

This is just to mention two. There are a number of other records of the church's use of land. It is encouraging to note that those of the Christian faith have not turned a deaf ear to this very complex situation in South Africa. Certainly, the Bible does not

provide a blueprint for solving these questions around land in South Africa. However, our understanding of the God of the Bible causes us to engage in this issue simply because it is our responsibility.

Inasmuch as we should become vocal and active in the redistribution process, we should also be deeply concerned about whether the land that is being redistributed is used to enhance the lives of people in a way that would cause every person to be transformed into living an improved quality of life. In this way, that would be the very thing that would make us good stewards of the earth – ensuring that lives are being sustained because of the manner in which the land is being utilized.

We have seen in chapter one that the government is making headway in terms of its land reform programme. Inasmuch as we are concerned that there is redistribution of land, we should be equally concerned about the utilization of land. I believe that in our present context, where unemployment is at its peak, where thousands are affected and infected by the AIDS pandemic, where there is such a high rate of absolute poverty, it would be a greater injustice for us to know that people have that precious resource of land, but we have remained silent on looking at effective ways in which this God-given resource could be a solution to many of the problems we face as a nation.

It is possible for us to be sustained by the land that God has blessed us with. That was his original plan and intention. Unfortunately, power and greed have led to injustices that have caused us to miss his plan and intention. The story of Naboth's vineyards points this out to us. The desire for the rich and powerful to enlarge their territories leave devastating effects – it leaves people dehumanized and causes them to live a lesser life. This desire even leads to death.

Tsele is in agreement that an Agrarian Reform strategy would be a good way ahead. He states:

We must redouble our dedication to combat poverty, and the productive use of land is one of the instruments we may employ to realise this goal. In this, we must call on those who receive more to give more. But above all, this is the time for us as the church to be practical, to pool our resources, and to effect our agrarian reform plan on our own land, held in trustee for the poor... What

is needed is an openness to seek new ways together, including the readiness to lose our interests in the process should this be necessary for the genuine benefit of the poor (Tsele in Gillan, 1998:144).

Again, this is in no way suggesting that the church give up its land ownership, but rather that this be redirected to benefit the poor and marginalized. I am in full support of an agrarian reform strategy, which is people focused rather than programme focused. We have seen that this strategy has the interests of the poor as its priority. Its agenda is to improve the quality of lives through the utilization of church-owned land. I challenge and encourage church leaders to draw from the example of the church in Brazil, and also for those in the South African context, who have caught the vision of engaging in an agrarian strategy. Every little bit counts, and put together, we are able to make an incredible difference to this nation!

#### 5.2.4. The Church as Advocate and Helper

In addition to the above, in order for the church to respond compassionately, we need to be made aware of how communities and families were affected by land expropriation under the past government. Many of the victims who have lost land are hurt, bitter, and afraid or have a low self-esteem. The church needs to help such people to deal with their bitterness and fears through the tool of counseling – the church could be instrumental in raising their self-esteem.

May, looking at the subject of 'land and ministry', strongly argues that the church is called to overcome decades of neglect to bring to the struggle a number of its gifts:

...a renewed and renewing understanding of the covenantal community of God on the God-given land, a prophetic voice raising the challenge of distributive justice on the land, an activist stance with those who organize and empower the rural poor... and land policies...(1991:108).

In the story of Naboth's vineyard, Elijah spoke prophetically into the situation bringing into focus God's justice system. This brought about repentance and a change of heart from the part of King Ahab. In like manner, we, the body of Christ, are to intervene prophetically, to ensure a just society. We are to continue to speak out boldly against any injustices that occur.

I am in agreement with Tsele that the church needs to be actively engaging in the land debate. He states:

... theologically-grounded models must articulate with contemporary models and practices that characterize the broader South African land debates. Being mindful of the necessity of this articulation that will assist in identifying the particular contribution of churches to the search for a just, developmental and sustainable resolution of land and poverty issues in South Africa – and beyond (Tsele in Gillian, 1998:40).

It is quite evident that people all over are waiting to hear the voice of the church on the issue of land redistribution. Apart from wanting to see that justice is done on the part of those who lost land, the church has a ministry to those many lives that have been affected by this issue. There are those victims who are angry, hurt, bitter, feel remorse, and may be looking for ways to 'pay back'. This was perhaps the way Naboth's family had felt. There may be those who react aggressively and violently as a way of dealing with the bitterness. Then there are those who feel guilty (like King Ahab and Jezebel) because of their part in the injustices committed. There would also be those who would want to shift blame on to others who they think are responsible for the hurt and pain caused over the land issue in the past.

There is such a diversity of emotions and feelings. If these are not properly dealt with, this could become harmful to our nation. In the light of this, I believe that the church has a ministry of reconciliation and of healing. The church is in a position of striking a balance and of being able to reason with the parties concerned. But at the same time, the church needs to be firm in its stand of wanting justice to be done.

Democratic nation-building has become a major challenge to a post-apartheid South Africa. It is a process that calls for reconciliation, and this process is not just dependent on the government, but also calls for the intervention of the church as well as other concerned organizations.

Gledenhuis points out that nation building refers to the development of a common identity and loyalty among the populace as a whole. Reconciliation between antagonistic groups is a prerequisite for successful nation building (Gledenhuis in Rhodie, 1994:413). Because of its contact with the masses, the church is in the most strategic position to encourage reconciliation.

Hallowes, reporting on the 'Church land programme discussion session' notes the following comment made by Tsele:

The dispossession of land was more fundamental than disenfranchisement. In losing the land, people lost everything – their livelihoods and their sense of self. So reclaiming the land means more than the vote. The land question remains a clear barometer of the continuing struggle for justice and for development in post-apartheid South Africa (Hallowes, 1998:46).

Certainly, it is not possible to restore or to bring back everything that was lost by these individuals. But the Church is called upon to act out of a spirit of compassion – to empathize with these affected individuals – to speak words of restoration in their lives – to intervene prophetically.

For the church to look at the question of land redistribution, it is necessary for us to seek answers within a theologically rooted model. Yes, we should include history and economics, but we need to go further beyond that. We need to elevate the question of liberation and the meaning and spirituality of people's relationship to land as a gift of God. There needs to be a deeper restoration. The church needs to find a redemptive way of dealing with land. Individual churches need to ask: "What have we done in relation to land issues?"

So their starting point begins with the fact that the church is a landowner; that it never experienced the cruelty of being dispossessed of its land, and that it is in fact a beneficiary of this injustice. Philpott and Zondi, who have worked on the Church Land Project, use their starting point as the Church being Landowner. With this in mind, they iterate the words of Dawood and Mayson who state that " 'the church in South Africa owns substantial pieces of land and it is thus directly affected by this sensitive and relevant issue' " (1998:17). On following through with this, Philpott and Zondi point out that the church acquired these pieces of land through its missionary activities, and now finds itself in a strange position of being a significant private landowner whilst the overwhelming majority of its members have been systematically dispossessed of their land. So their starting point begins with the embarrassing fact that the church is a landowner; that it never experienced the cruelty of being dispossessed of its land, and that it is in fact a beneficiary of this injustice.

In other words, the church itself was a part of these injustices – the church in the midst of all of this, was silent. Therefore, for the church not to become vocal, for the church not to take an active role on the issue of land redistribution, would be arrogant

and cold. If true reconciliation and justice were to take place, then the church herself needs to be at the frontline in this struggle!

#### 5.2.5. The Church's Ministry to women regarding land

Although this aspect does not emerge from the text of 1 Kings 21:1-29, and could, in fact, pass as a separate thesis altogether, I see it as my responsibility as a concerned woman to give some attention to this aspect. I believe that the church does have a responsibility to women, and can play a major role in their development and improvement in the quality of their lives. Many women have been directly affected by the process of dispossession of land in our South African context.

Women ownership of land has not been an easy process. In a gender sensitive context, we need to consider whether women are now in a position to own land and we also need to take time to consider how we as the church could address this issue. When considering the context surrounding Naboth's vineyard, we realize that the Israelite women did not have the freedom of owning land, as did those in other nearby countries. In our context as well, women did not always have the freedom of owning land. Considering that we are in a developing context, are women still stifled with this type of 'unfreedom'?

Amartya Sen, who looks at the aspect of development as freedom states: "Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency." (1999:xii)

This act of removing unfreedoms is described as being constitutive of development. But central to all of this is individual freedom – if one cannot enjoy individual freedom, they see no need for social freedom. Individual freedom should be seen as a social commitment.

Looking at freedom of women, Sen states:

Perhaps the most immediate argument for focusing on women's *agency* may be precisely the role that such an agency can play in removing the iniquities that depress the *well-being* of women. Empirical work in recent years has brought out very clearly how the relative respect and regard for women's well-being is strongly influenced by such variables as women's ability to earn an independent income, find employment outside the home, to have ownership

rights and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions within and outside the family (1999: 191).

Sen argues that once women are given the freedom to seek work that is done outside of her home, it makes her contribution to the family more visible, which in turn causes her to have more voice and be less dependant on others. This, as a result, could contribute to the reduction of women's relative and absolute deprivation. Sen suggests that freedom in one area fosters freedom in other areas, thus enhancing other aspects of life, it seems to have a ripple effect with one dimension playing off into the other (1999:192).

For example, if women were given absolute freedom to be educated and to work, this in turn would give their children better chances of an education, of basic health care, of better nutrition, and would also help her as an individual to see herself as a being of value instead of feeling like a dehumanized child manufacturer. Giving her this freedom also heightens her decisional power so much so that she is able to decide for herself if she wants to have more children or get onto family planning. This factor has serious implications in developing countries.

If one is to experience wholistic development, this cannot be done in an atmosphere of unfreedom. Sen concludes his work by stating: "Development is indeed a momentous engagement with freedom's possibilities" (1999:298).

My choice for looking at this piece of work is for the simple reason that Black South African women have suffered this kind of unfreedom, as discussed by Sen, especially when it concerns issues such as access to land, employment, labour and training. In relation to these issues, women are generally disadvantaged in comparison to men. Women also have less authority and less involvement in decision-making in the home, the community as well as the nation. Meer states: "Women and men also have different priorities in the development process, for example in relation to land use; because men's priorities are advantaged, all too often women's needs are not met" (1997:1).

Bearing this in mind, how are we as the Christian church promoting the freedom of women in a way that they would be confident enough to be landowners, and use this resource as a means of development? Are women being empowered by the church?

An overarching ideology and practice of male authority still largely structure most rural communities. Even though women are deeply rooted and actively involved in community affairs, which go beyond their particular household, it is rare that they are allowed to participate in the committee or traditional governance structures of community life.

So it is a reality that in certain cultures, for women to own land is rare or almost impossible. For one to question or challenge traditional authorities is indeed a complex situation. Attitudes towards women's rights to land and property are located within the complicated relationship between law, practice and custom, which is in turn intertwined in the complexity of economic and emotional ties between men and women and this stretches across the generations.

Land is now seen as an important resource to women. It especially represents an opportunity for them to meet a variety of needs, including those, which are socially identified as primarily their responsibility. As suggested by Marcus, "Most women see access to land as central to their role in social reproduction – seeing to all their family's needs – and the domestic economy" (1996:89).

Social reproduction is seen as the common denominator underlying women's land demand.

In present day South Africa, the ownership of land should not just be viewed only from a traditional perspective, or as a reflection of wealth or status, but rather, it should be seen as a survival strategy for the poor and the oppressed.

Whenever opportunities arise for women to make stronger claims, they are generally hesitant and doubtful of the legitimacy of their presence as women. They are generally held back by customary practices, prejudices and their own ambivalence. Now that there is much more scope and opportunity for women to own land, it is critical that they seize the moment in order for the quality of their lives to be improved. I strongly believe that the church has a major role of assisting the process of women's ownership of land. *But how?*

### **5.3. Conclusion**

The church does have a vital role to play concerning the issue of land in South Africa. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we have that great responsibility of being stewards of the earth. With that in mind we are to speak out boldly and prophetically against the injustices of the past. In addition to that, we need to join forces with the respective authorities in ensuring that land is fairly redistributed – for the purpose of building lives, building our economy, being productive, and bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. It is also essential for us to reevaluate how it is that church owned land is being utilized. Drawing from the Agrarian Reform strategy, is there a strategy that we could come up with that would ensure a better quality of life for all? Is the church using its power in a positive and wholesome way to ensure that justice is carried out in the earth? The church can make a difference.

## **Conclusion**

The book of 1 Kings 21:1-29 highlights the experience Naboth being dispossessed of his vineyard by an abusive power system and by the lack of justice. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had their own interest at heart, and that was the expansion of their own empire at the expense of a less powerful being.

It was the prophetic voice of Elijah that caused King Ahab to see the wrongness of his doing. However, repentance came only after an innocent life was taken. Naboth was ruthlessly stripped of his ancestral inheritance, and to ensure that his vineyard was not passed on to the next generation, his sons were killed. Jezebel ensured that all tracks were covered, and even went to the extent of using the law of the Lord, the very thing that she despised, to dispossess Naboth of his vineyard.

Throughout Jezreel, there was no voice of justice that spoke out on behalf of Naboth, if this were so; his life would have been spared. It is usually the king who is to ensure that justice is carried out, but in this incident it was the king himself who resorted to unjust means. This picture causes us to understand that the more power one possesses, the greater their ability to control and turn about a situation in one's favour, at the expense of another.

This research highlights the issue of land, which is a development issue. The need for development has arisen out of unequal power relations. Unequal power relations, tied in with the injustices and prejudices of the past, have contributed immensely to the poverty experienced in this country. It has also contributed to the vast economic imbalances. The encounter of Naboth's vineyard shows how power and injustice can have such devastating effects. The South African context shares a very similar story as that of Naboth. The very same error that was made by the Jezebel generation has been repeated in our context. The power of a minority exercised over a majority has left thousands traumatized, displaced and living in abject poverty. Unfortunately, in our context, it was not just 'Naboth and his sons' that were affected but so many more. Like Naboth, many died without ever seeing justice carried out.

May this be a resounding lesson for the generations to come. Hunger for power and the accumulation of wealth by unjust means only leads to a few being content and

satisfied, but on the whole, it leaves masses that are in desperate need for an improved quality of life.

In summary, this dissertation has aimed to show how in our South African context, in its very diverse history, the abuse of power that led to the dispossession of land from people of colour.

People were dispossessed of their land through the abuse of power by a minority and a system of injustice against the majority. Although this situation cannot be reversed, every effort is being made for justice to come to the forefront. We as the church are now faced with the challenge of ensuring that in the context of land, we use our power in a positive way to see that land is utilized in a productive manner that will improve the quality of lives in South Africa. It will be used in a way that will alleviate poverty and empower men and women to live sustainable lives. If we are concerned about justice in our present context then it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate good stewardship over the earth – in a manner that will ensure that the needs of the generations to come are not compromised.

At one time in our history, we were faced with the challenge of speaking out against injustices regarding land dispossession. We are now faced with an added challenge – seeing to it that redistributed land is utilized in a manner that will stimulate and contribute to improved living. If we do not take on this challenge, we will find vast amounts of arable land becoming unproductive and this would contribute further to the poverty of this country.

The church has the power to maintain justice.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, N. 2002. *An Ordinary Country*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Anderson, B.W. 1988. *The Living World of the Old Testament*. Essex: Longman House.
- Biko, S. 1987. *I write what I like*. Randburg: Raven Press.
- Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming Mission*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Bruce, F.F. 1997. *Israel and the Nations*. Cumbria: Paternoster Press.
- Brueggemann, W. (et.al). 1986. *To act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Carpenter, E. (ed). 1992. *Asbury Bible Commentary*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Davidson, J. & Myers, D. (eds). *No time to waste: Poverty and the Global Environment*. Oxford: Oxfam
- Dentan, R.C. 1964. *Kings, Chronicles*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- De Vaux, R. 1978. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.
- Du Toit, P. 2004. *The great South African land scandal*. Centurion: Legacy Pub.
- Epp, T.H. 1965. *Elijah: A man of like nature*. Nebraska: Back to the Bible Pub.
- Farisani, E.B. 1993. *Land in the Old Testament: The conflict between Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 21:1-29), and its significance for our South African context today*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, Masters dissertation.

- Folk, J. 1991. *Doing Theology Doing Justice*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Freedman, D.N. (ed) 2000. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Michigan: William B Eerdmans Pub. Co.
- Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by M.B. Ramos. London: Penguin Books.
- Gardner, J.L. (ed.) 1981. *Atlas of the Bible*. New York: The Reader's Digest Association.
- Germond, P. 2001. "Theology, Development and Power: Religious Power and Religious Practice" in *The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 110/2001.
- Gillian, D.S. 1998. *Church, Land and Poverty*. Johannesburg: Progress Press.
- Ginsberg, A. 1998. *South Africa's future*. London: Macmillan Pres Ltd.
- Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R.A. (eds.) 1993. *The Bible and liberation*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Gray, J. 1980. *1 & 2 Kings*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- Hallowes, D. 1998. "Church Land Programme Discussion Session". *Bulletin for contextual Theology in Africa, Vol.5, No.3. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.*
- Harley, A.& Fortheringham, R. 1999. *AFRA 20 years in the land rights struggle*. Pietermaritzburg: Association for Rural Advancement.
- Haugen, G. A. 1999. *Good news about injustice*. Illinois: InterVaristy Press.
- Hoerth, A.J. 1994. *Peoples of the Old Testament World*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press.
- Jacobsen, D.A. 2001. *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- Korten, D.C. 1990. *Getting into the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press.
- Letsoalo, E.M. 1987. *Land Reform in South Africa*. Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers.
- Lewis, S.R. 1990. *The Economics of Apartheid*. London: Council of Foreign Relations Press.
- Lundahl, M. 1999. *Growth or Stagnation? South Africa heading for the year 2000*. Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Maharaj, G. (ed) 1999. *Between Unity and Diversity*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers.
- Makula, N.A. 2001. *A quest for ubulungisa-justice in the distribution of land in South Africa*. Queenstown: Rev N A Makula.
- Mann, M. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power. Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marcus, T. (et.al.) 1996. *Down to Earth – Land Demand in the New South Africa*. Durban: Indicator Press.
- Marshall, I.H. (ed.) 1996. *New Bible Dictionary*. Leicester: England.
- May, R.H. 1991. *The Poor of the Land*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Meer, S. (ed). 1997. *Women, Land and Authority: Perspectives from South Africa*. Cape Town: David Phillip Publishers.
- Molefe T. & Butler, M. 1998. *Towards a Theology of Church Land in South Africa*. Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa, Vol.5, No.3. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal.
- Montgomery, J.A. 1967. *The book of Kings: The International Critical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Nash, M. 1980. *Black Uprooting from White South Africa*. Braamfontein: SACC.
- Niebuhr, R. 1943. *The Nature and Destiny of Man Vol. 2*. London: Nisbet & Co.

- Nurnberger, K. 1999. *Prosperity, Poverty & Pollution* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications
- Percy, M. 1998. *Power and the church*. London: Cassell.
- Philpott, G. 2004. *Land in South Africa: Gift for all or commodity for a few*. Pietermaritzburg: CLP.
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 1998. *Towards a better distribution of land: the challenge of Agrarian reform*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Prior, D. 1987. *Jesus and Power*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Rhoodie, N. (ed.) 1994. *Democratic Nation Building in South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.
- Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books
- Segal, R. 1967. *The race war: The world-wide conflict of races*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Shenk, D.W. 1997. *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa*. Nairobi: Uzima Press.
- Sider, R (ed). 1981. *Evangelicals and Development*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Soggin, J.A. 1985. *A History of Israel*. London: SCM Press Ltd.
- South African Council of Churches and The South African Catholic Bishops Conference. 1984. *Relocations: The Churches' report on forced removals in South Africa*. Randburg: The South African Council of Churches and The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference.
- Strydom, J.G. 1995. "Redistribution of land: The eighth century in Israel, the twentieth century in South Africa". *Journal of the Old Testament Society of South Africa*. Vol.8, No. 3. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

- Tillich, P. 1960. *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Villa-Vicencio, C. 1988. *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English Speaking Churches*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Wallace, R.S. 1995. *Readings in 1 Kings*. Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Weber, L. 1987. *Theology of the Land*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.
- Wood, L.J. 1979. *Israel's United Monarchy*. Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Wittenberg, G.H. 1990. *The significance of land in the Old Testament*. Cape Town: JTSA, 77, 58-60.
- Wright, C.J.H. 1990. *God's people in God's land*. Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

**Documents on Internet Websites:**

RDP 98: The RDP's Policy Framework

<http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/rdp/rdpall.html>

NLC 2001: National Land Committee  
<http://www.nlc.co.za.pamphlets>

September Commission

<http://www.cosatu.org.za/congress/sept-ch4.htm>