

Lessons from Old Testament Kings - Ahab

Reading: Romans 15:4 “... whatever things were written before were written for our learning”

Introduction:

This lesson is a continuation of the series where we are looking at some of the Old Testament Kings, both good and bad, and drawing some practical lessons from both their lives and events that occurred during their reigns, in order to help us in our walk with God (**Ephesians 5:8**).

In this lesson, we will be looking at King Ahab, probably better known as the husband of Jezebel. He was the seventh king of Israel after the nation had split during the reign of Rehoboam – refer to Annex A of this lesson. The scriptures summarise his life by saying; “*Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him*”¹ (**1 Kings 16:30**).

One of the interesting things about Ahab is that, on some rare occasions, he comes across as someone who wants to do what is right, but that he allows selfishness and worldliness to take the upper hand.

Also of note, it was during the reign of Ahab that the prophet Elijah lived.

LESSON

1) The background leading up to Ahab’s reign

Very early during Jeroboam’s reign, Israel had turned away from serving the Lord and followed idolatry (**1 Kings 12:25-33**). After Jeroboam’s death, his son and successor, Nadab, reigned for just 2 years. He also did evil in making Israel sin, just like his father (**1 Kings 15:25-26**). Baasha then murdered him, took the throne, and then killed the rest of Jeroboam’s descendants (**1 Kings 15:27-30**).

Baasha reigned for 24 years, but was no different to Jeroboam and Nadab – he caused Israel to sin as well (**1 Kings 15:33-34**). Following his death, his son, Elah, reigned in his place for just two years before he was killed and succeeded by the commander of his chariots, a man named Zimri (**1 Kings 16:8-10**). As soon as he was on the throne, Zimri killed all the household of Baasha (**1 Kings 16:11-12**). However, after being on the throne for just seven days, Israel revolted against him, and in the face of losing a battle, he committed suicide (**1 Kings 16:15-19**).

Zimri was succeeded by Omri, another army commander (**1 Kings 16:16**). It was Omri who purchased the hill of Samaria and built a city there of the same name² (**1 Kings 16:23-24**). But like his predecessors, Omri also “... *did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who were before him.*” (**1 Kings 16:25-26**). After a twelve year reign, Omri died, and his son Ahab came to the throne (**1 Kings 16:23, 28**).

Therefore, by the time Ahab came to the throne in around 874 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel had continually abandoned the Lord their God and had followed idolatry for over 50 years³.

¹ Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

² Samaria became the nominal capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, e.g. **1 Kings 16:29**.

³ Jeroboam came to the throne around 930 BC.

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2) The impact of Ahab's marriage to Jezebel

Ahab had married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians⁴ (**1 Kings 16:31b**). She was a bad influence in Ahab's life, as the following two examples show.

a) The worship of Baal

Baal, the pagan god of rain and fertility⁵, was the prominent god of the Canaanite and Phoenician people. Jezebel, having come from that area, was very much a Baal follower, and brought her idolatry with her to Israel. Now most of the people who worshipped false gods at that time were tolerant of other gods. But not so Jezebel - she was very anti-Jehovah. She had prophets of the Lord massacred (**1 Kings 18:4a**), and after the "contest" between Baal and Jehovah on Mt Carmel, she also sought to have Elijah killed as well (**1 Kings 19:1-2**).

Now Ahab will have to answer to God for his own sins, but it was Jezebel who encouraged him to do evil, which included the worship and serving of Baal (**1 Kings 21:25-26; 22:53**⁶).

In **1 Kings 16:31a**, we read that Ahab saw it as "no big deal" to follow the ways of Jeroboam in setting up and supporting false religions and gods⁷. He built a temple and altar for Baal in Samaria (**1 Kings 16:32**). He also made a wooden image, and "... *did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*" (**1 Kings 16:33**).

b) The murder of Naboth so as to seize his vineyard

Ahab had a palace in Jezreel, a city located about 30km north of the city of Samaria. Next to the palace was a vineyard owned by a man named Naboth (**1 Kings 21:1**). Ahab wanted to buy the property from Naboth, but Naboth refused to sell it because it was his family's inheritance⁸ (**1 Kings 21:2-3**). Ahab returned to his home, told his wife, and sulked (**1 Kings 21:4-6**).

When Jezebel heard about this, she took matters into her own hand. She used Ahab's seal⁹ to write a letter to the elders and nobles of Jezreel, the city in which Naboth lived. The letter stated that they should proclaim a fast, have Naboth seated in a high honour position amongst the people, and arrange for two false witnesses to accuse Naboth of blaspheming against God and the king. Then they were to have him taken out and killed¹⁰ (**1 Kings 21:7-10**).

⁴ The Sidonians lived in Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast, north of Israel.

⁵ As the god of fertility, Baal was supposed to enable the earth to produce crops, and people to produce children. Ref: <http://www.gotquestions.org/who-Baal.html>

⁶ Ahaziah served and worshipped the Baal, just like his father Ahab.

⁷ Refer to **1 Kings 12:25-33** for the idolatry and false religion that Jeroboam set up in Israel.

⁸ Inheritance of family property was an important issue to the Jews (**Leviticus 25:23-28; Numbers 27:1-11**).

⁹ An instrument, usually a signet ring or a cylinder with engravings, that was used to mark a document or other object to show that it bore the king's authority.

¹⁰ The penalty for blasphemy under the Old Law was death by stoning – **Leviticus 24:16**. Jezebel was no follower of the Law herself, but was simply using it for her own advantage. She was ignoring what the Law said about bearing false witness and coveting your neighbour's possessions (**Exodus 20:16-17**).

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This was duly done, and Naboth was killed (**1 Kings 21:11-14**). Jezebel then told Ahab to go and take possession of the vineyard, which he did (**1 Kings 21:15-16**).

Note: Although Ahab didn't arrange for the murder of Naboth, he was guilty of standing back and doing nothing to prevent or condemn it.

3) Ahab's repentance and death

This lesson doesn't cover all the events that occurred during Ahab's reign, but I want to mention just two (more) of them from which we can draw application for ourselves.

a) God responded to Ahab's repentance

Ahab had tried to do the right thing by Naboth in offering him a fair price or compensation for his vineyard (**1 Kings 21:2**). But after Naboth refused to sell, Ahab did nothing to stop Jezebel from taking matters into her own hand, which resulted in Naboth's murder. He also had no qualms about taking possession of the vineyard.

God then sent Elijah to him to announce God's judgement on his actions (or lack of action in stopping Jezebel). God would bring calamity on Ahab - his posterity would end, dogs would lick up his blood, his male descendants would be cut off, and dogs would eat Jezebel in Jezreel (**1 Kings 21:17-23**)¹¹.

When Ahab heard these things, he was repentant and humbled himself before God. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, fasted, and went about mourning. God noted Ahab's repentance, and therefore deferred the calamity that He pronounced on Ahab's house - He would delay it and bring it about in the days of his son (**1 Kings 21:27-29**).

b) Ahab's death in battle

In his wars with Syria, Ahab had previously defeated them twice (**1 Kings 20:1-30**). He again wanted to go out against them in order to recover some lost territory, Ramoth in Gilead¹² (**1 Kings 22:1-3**). The Syrians had taken this from Israel in the past, and had failed to return it as part of their treaty (**1 Kings 20:34**). He discussed the matter with Jehoshaphat¹³, king of Judah, who was visiting the king of Israel at the time. Jehoshaphat wanted to hear what the Lord had to say first, so Ahab called his prophets together - 400 of them. They all said that Ahab would have a great victory (**1 Kings 22:6**).

But Jehoshaphat could "see through" these false prophets and asked if there was a prophet of the Lord there who could ask God about it (**1 Kings 22:7**). There was - a prophet called Micaiah. He initially went along with all the other prophets and told Ahab that he would be victorious (**1 Kings 22:13-15**). But Ahab didn't "buy" that, and so he asked Micaiah to tell the truth (**1 Kings 22:16**). Micaiah then told Ahab that Israel would lose the battle, and that it would all end in disaster for Ahab (**1 Kings 22:17-23**).

¹¹ These judgements were fulfilled in **1 Kings 22:37-38**; **2 Kings 9:30 - 10:11**.

¹² Ramoth Gilead is located east of the Jordan River, in the top area of land given to the tribe of Gad.

¹³ Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, married Athalia, the daughter of Ahab (**2 Kings 8:16-18**).

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In spite of Micaiah's prophecy, Ahab, with Jehoshaphat, went ahead anyway to battle against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead. However, he disguised himself so that he wouldn't be seen as the king on the battlefield (**1 Kings 22:29-30**) – from verse **31**, we see that the king of Syria was primarily after the king of Israel. But an arrow fired during the battle struck Ahab, and he died that evening (**1 Kings 22:34-35**).

4) Lessons for us

From Ahab's life, I want to draw the following three lessons;

- a) Be careful who you choose as friends¹⁴ due to their influence.

Ultimately, Ahab was accountable to God for his own individual actions (**Ezekiel 18:20; John 5:28-29**). But in choosing Jezebel as his wife, he allowed himself to be influenced to do evil (**1 Kings 21:25**).

We generally associate or come into contact with a broad range of people during our life. Many of them will not be Christians, but they will still have good morals. But when we chose people who will be our closest confidants and friends, those who will have the most influence in our decisions in life, we need to choose wisely.

In **1 Corinthians 15:33**) we read; "... *Evil company corrupts good habits...*". In other words, if our closest friends are people whose lives do not follow the teachings and principles that are found in God's Word, then our own "good habits" can be compromised. We may have the best intentions in the world to do what is right, but we can be influenced through peer pressure, *etc*, to do things that we would otherwise not do.

Therefore, choose your friends (and spouses) wisely.

- b) God hears the penitent

In general terms, Ahab is described in the Bible as one who did evil (**1 Kings 16:30; 21:25-26**). But as evil as he was, there was a small amount of "goodness" in him. When told of his fate regarding the murder of Naboth, he humbled himself before the Lord and showed remorse (**1 Kings 21:27-29**). God then acknowledged Ahab's repentance and delayed His judgement.

When it comes to God's forgiveness, there is no sin that cannot be covered by God's grace and mercy (**1 Timothy 1:12-16**). King David was guilty of adultery and arranging the murder of Bathsheba's husband (**2 Samuel 11:1-25**). But once he had a contrite heart and acknowledged his sin, God forgave him (**Psalms 51:1-4; 2 Samuel 12:13**).

In **1 Peter 5:5b** we read; "... *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*". The proud may acknowledge their sins, perhaps even boast about them. But they show no remorse, no repentance, no godly sorrow. Therefore, God resists them - they have no forgiveness.

But to those who are humble, those who have a contrite¹⁵ heart, those who not only acknowledge their sins but also have a godly sorrow that leads them

¹⁴ This section relates to who we have as friends. Obviously we cannot avoid coming into contact with immoral people in the world (**1 Corinthians 5:9-10**) - in fact, if we have the opportunity, we should use our contact with such people to teach them the gospel.

¹⁵ "contrite" = full of guilt or regret; remorseful; arising from a sense of shame or guilt

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to change their ways, God is merciful and forgiving (**Psalm 32:1-5; 51:17; 2 Corinthians 7:10**), no matter what the sin may have been.

c) We cannot hide from God

When Ahab went out to battle the Syrians for the last time, he decided to disguise him so as not to make himself a target – the words of Micaiah about impending disaster probably still fresh in his mind (**1 Kings 22:23, 30**). However, Ahab could not hide himself from God. God's prophecy about his demise came true.

Our God is an all-knowing God – nothing is hidden from His sight. No matter where we are, or what we are doing, He knows about it. He even knows our thoughts; He knows what we are going to say even before the words leave our lips (**Psalm 139:1-10**).

In **1 Corinthians 4:5** we read; *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts.”*. Now while this verse is in the context of Paul being judged by others, we can see from this verse the following important facts;

- God knows about the evil things that people do, the sins people commit, even if nobody else knows about them, and,
- He knows what is going on in our hearts, regardless as to what our outward expressions or actions may be.

These facts can either be a source of comfort or a source of terror. We may be able to hide our sins from others, but God knows about them. We may be able to “put up a front” to fool people about our real motives or intentions, but God knows what is really going on inside us. *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked”* (**Galatians 6:7a**).

But on the positive side, if our heart is right, if we are sincerely doing our best to follow God, then He knows that too, *“... and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”* (**1 John 1:7**).

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Annex A - Kings of Judah and Israel

Combined nation	Year BC (approx.)	
Saul	1050	
David		
Solomon		
Judah	Kingdom splits	Israel
Rehoboam	930	Jeroboam
Abijam		Nadab
Asa		Baasha, Elah, Zimri
		Omri
Jehoshaphat		Ahab* , Ahaziah
Jehoram		Jehoram
Ahaziah	840	Jehu
Athaliah		
Jehoash		Jehoahaz
Amaziah		Jehoash
Uzziah		Jeroboam (ii)
		Zechariah, Shallum,
Jotham	740	Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah
Ahaz		Hoshea
Hezekiah		Fall of Israel - 722
Manasseh		
Amon		
Josiah	640	
Jehoahaz		
Jehoiakim		
Jehoiachin		
Zedekiah	586	
Fall of Jerusalem - 586		

*the subject of this lesson