



Ahab: What It Takes To Be Wicked

Lesson 9

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” 1 Kings 21:25

Teacher’s Note: *Once again, a flyover summary of the life of such an important king as Ahab will require a quick pace to cover all the material. Reading everything will not be possible, so it might be good in your prep time to decide what your group will read and what you will skip. You may want to summarize well-known stories, only reading a few select verses.*

A slight chill runs through the spine of the student of God’s Word when the name “Ahab” is mentioned. When was the last time you met someone named “Ahab”? Ahab is not the first northern king to be described as doing “evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him” (Omri, his father, is given the same evaluation in 1 Kings 16:25), but he is the last (1 Kings 16:30). What in the world did this king do to earn the title of the most wicked king in the North? And how can we learn from this awful example?

In this lesson we will focus on Ahab himself. Obviously, much of Ahab’s life overlaps with the lives of Elijah and Elisha. While both of these prophets are fascinating men who are covered in large portions of Scripture, we will have to skip over them except when they interact with the kings (if you would like to know

more about Elijah, I know a great series available on sermonaudio!). In this lesson we will see five characteristics of a wicked person.

- I. **Ahab, Jezebel, and Baal (1 Kings 16:29-34)**
- II. **Ahab and Elijah at Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 17-19)**
- III. **Ahab vs. Ben-Hadad King of Syria, Round 1 (1 Kings 20)**
- IV. **Ahab and Jezebel murder Naboth (1 Kings 21)**
- V. **Ahab vs. Ben-Hadad King of Syria, Round 2 (1 Kings 22)**

Ahab, Jezebel, and Baal: Wicked People Have Bad Influences (1 Kings 16:29-34)

I. Ahab's wicked lineage (1 Kings 16:25-28)

Ahab was the son of the most wicked king of Israel up until that time. In a nation where the leaders consistently rejected God, Ahab stood at the bottom of a long downward trend. No doubt the example set by his father was part of the reason Ahab ended up as he did.

How might Ahab have overcome the negative influence of his father? Do we have any examples of others who had wicked parents but turned out well?

II. Ahab's wicked wife (1 Kings 16:31-33)

The story of Ahab is also the story of Jezebel, who together are the most infamous couple in the Bible. Who exactly was this woman and how did she impact her husband?

A. Jezebel's influence (1 Kings 21:25)

The author of Kings identifies Ahab as being wicked, in part because he was “stirred up” or “incited” to be so by his wife (1 Kings 21:25). It is clear throughout the story that Jezebel is the primary one pushing the worship of Baal, and she is the one who manipulates and murders a man to get her husband the vineyard that he wants. Many of Ahab's sinful choices were made at the urging of his wife.

Why do you think Jezebel had so much sway with her husband?

How are people today influenced to do wrong as Ahab was? How do we prevent that from happening?

B. Jezebel's religion (1 Kings 16:32-33)

Jezebel was an avid proponent of Baal worship. In fact, during her time she fed 850 prophets of this pagan religion at her table (1 Kings 18:19), while also murdering the prophets of the Lord (1 Kings 18:13). Let's examine what it is that Jezebel believed and taught.

Who was Baal? Baal was the storm god of the Canaanite pantheon. He was the son of El, who was the chief god, but eventually Baal became more powerful and the defacto leader of the gods. His title was often associated with local areas (such as Baal-Peor) or other attributes, but these were likely all manifestations of the same god.

Since Baal was the god of the storm, Baal sent the rain. In a dry, arid place like Israel, the god of the rain would obviously have been very important. Baal was also considered the god of fertility, this meant both that he sent the rain which made crops fertile and that the way to worship him was through ritual fornication. Baal was the perfect invention of an evil heart. He supposedly gave people what they needed, and pleasing him meant doing that their flesh wanted anyway.

How do people today still invent “religions” that give them what they need while only requiring what people want to do anyway?

What was a “grove”? In the KJV, the word “groves” appears 41 times, 40 of these times it translates the Hebrew *‘asherah* (plural *‘asherim*). The ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Bible translated this word as “groves” and many translations have followed their example. Modern translations, however, translate this word as “Asherah” or “Asherim.” Why is this?

In 1929 a treasure trove of ancient texts from Canaanite city of Ugarit were discovered. These texts gave us much insight into the beliefs and teachings of the Canaanites concerning the false gods they worshipped. In particular, it highlighted three of the main deities in their religion: El, Asherah, and Baal. El was the chief god of the pagan pantheon and with his wife Asherah he fathered many other gods, including Baal.

The Hebrew word *'asherah* could be used in the Old Testament to refer either to the goddess herself (1 Kings 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:4). However, because in Scripture *'asherah* can be made (1 Kings 16:33), set up (2 Kings 17:10), cut down (2 Kings 18:4), or burnt (2 Kings 23:6),¹ the word can also refer to some object that was used in the worship of this goddess (likely a wooden pole). This is a standard view, held by notable theologians such as John Whitcomb and Charles Ryrie.

While Baal and Asherah were worshipped at other times in the north and the south, never before had Baalism been the official religion. Under Ahab and Jezebel, Israel came closer than ever before to totally and completely abandoning God for Baal.

Ahab wasn't a trailblazer when it came to wickedness. He simply followed the example of his father and listened to his evil wife. The power of wrong influence is vividly portrayed for us by this man who simply followed those around him, and wound up the most evil king of Israel.

Why do people tend to underemphasize the power of the influence others have on them?

How can someone overcome negative influences in their life?

¹ Some argue that "groves" is the best translation because in Deuteronomy 16:21 Israel is commanded "you must not plant for yourselves *'asherah* [of] all trees" (literal translation). The problem with this is that other verbs used with *'asherah* (make, build, set up) make little sense with the meaning "grove," and some of these *'asherah* were under or beside green trees (1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 17:10, Jeremiah 17:2). The Hebrew word for "plant" (*nata'*) can sometimes be used metaphorically, like our English verb plant, and this is the best meaning for this verse (cf Ecclesiastes 12:1, Daniel 11:45).

Ahab and Elijah at Mt. Carmel: Wicked People Ignore God's Working (1 Kings 18-19)

Since Baal was the god who was supposed to bring rain, for the Elijah to announce there would be no rain was not just a random threat. It was a direct attack on the power of Baal. For three and a half years (cf James 5:17-18), the prophets of Baal would have been begging their god to do the thing he was supposed to do best: send rain. For three years and six months, water got scarcer and scarcer.

I. The face-off (1 Kings 18:17-37)

Elijah's famous battle with the prophets of Baal is well known. Ahab gathers the nation to see which god will answer by fire – Baal or the Lord. After trying to get Baal's attention all day, and getting mocked mercilessly by Elijah for it, the prophets of Baal finally quit.

Notice Ahab's first words to Elijah, and Elijah's response (17-18). Why would Ahab say this, and what does it say about him?

Who does not show up at this battle? Why might that be?

II. The victory (1 Kings 18:38-46)

There is a twofold victory here. Not only does God send fire, but he also sends rain. This dramatic demonstration on the part of God is enough to convince all of Israel that the Lord is God. Elijah seizes on this opportunity to wipe out the wicked prophets of Baal. He then runs ahead of Ahab to location of the secondary palace in Jezreel (cf 1 Kings 21:1). Elijah wasn't in hiding anymore! He no doubt expected to be

brought into the palace and lead the nation in their return to the Lord!

III. The coward (1 Kings 19:1-3)

Elijah's expectations were crushed once the queen got news of what happened. Jezebel still had power and authority, and she threatened the life of Elijah. Rather than deposing his idolatrous queen, Ahab steps back and let Jezebel do what Jezebel does.

Why would Ahab allow Jezebel to threaten Elijah after all he had seen?

Why did the events of the day not have a greater impact on the king?

Ahab vs. Ben-Hadad King of Syria, Round 1: Wicked People Proudly Take Credit for God's Work (1 Kings 20)

The nation of Syria (Hebrew "Aram") was located to the north of Israel. Israel would have constant tension with Syria, at times fighting and at times cooperating, much like the tension they would have with Judah in the south. God grants Ahab a powerful victory here, yet in his victory Ahab ignores God.

I. God brings the victory (1 Kings 20:1-34).

Syria musters up a mighty army, creating a coalition of 32 kings. This is a vast army, and Ahab at first bows to their demands (20:2-4). But when Ben-Hadad gets to be too greedy, Ahab and Israel decide to fight back (20:5-12). Surprisingly, God actually decides, for his own purposes, to

give Israel the victory. A prophet tells Ahab what to do, and when Ahab follows those instructions, they win the war (20:13-21). The Syrians take the wrong lesson, and decide that God must be more powerful in the hills, and that a battle on the plains would allow them to win (20:22-26). God is upset that they would come to this conclusion, so he once again gives them into the hand of Israel (20:27-30).

II. Ahab takes the credit (1 Kings 20:35-43).

Here is where Ahab goes wrong. Ben-Hadad comes to Ahab begging for his life, and Ahab makes him sign a pretty hefty peace deal. God was upset, however, that he wasn't consulted and that the enemy of his people was not killed.

Today, we would be tempted to see Ahab's decision to show mercy as noble. Why do you think this upsets God so? How do Ahab's actions show a wicked heart?

Ahab and Jezebel murder Naboth: Wicked People Selfishly Abuse Others (1 Kings 21)

This story should stand out to us. It stood out to God. Ahab had a wife whom he allowed to replace the worship of the Lord with the worship of idols, who had killed his prophets, and yet it is this story which serves as the breaking point for God. It is after the corrupt murder and theft of Naboth's vineyard that God dooms Ahab and his dynasty.

I. Naboth's refusal (21:1-4)

Ahab wanted a vineyard adjacent to his secondary palace. He offered to pay handsomely for it, or swap it out for a

better one. But Naboth knew it was wrong to give up his vineyard.

Why did Naboth feel it was wrong to give up his vineyard?

Ahab became upset that he didn't get what he wanted so he went back to his palace and pouted.

II. Jezebel's scheme (21:5-16)

Ahab, who was willing to let it end at that and simply pout until he got over it, allowed his evil wife to take things further. She falsely accused Naboth of blasphemy against God (ironically enough) and the king. Naboth was executed and Ahab was able to buy the land.

III. God's rebuke (21:17-24)

God is very upset with this, and so he condemns this action more strongly than any other action. It is at this point that God tells Ahab that his dynasty will be cut off.

Why is it after this event that God condemns Ahab? What does this tell us about God's view of injustice?

IV. Ahab's repentance (21:25-29)

Surprisingly, Ahab shows remorse for his sin, and even more surprisingly, God shows mercy! Although God still brought judgment, he put off that judgment because Ahab had shown sorrow over his sin and had humbled himself before God.

How can this give believer's today hope?

Ahab vs. Ben-Hadad King of Syria, Round 2: Wicked People Only Hear What They Want (1 Kings 22)

2 Timothy 4:3 warns us that the time will come when people will find teachers who tell them what they want to hear because they have “itching ears.” There may be no better example of this in our Bibles than Ahab, Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah.

I. A Bad Partnership (22:1-4)

The godly king of the south, Jehoshaphat took a wife for his son from the family of Ahab. While he was feasting in celebration, Ahab asked if he would be willing to go up to war with him against Syria.

II. A Mixed Message (22:5-28)

Jehoshaphat wants to make sure God is on board before they take off. Ahab is able to find 400 hundred prophets of the Lord, which is surprising since Jezebel tried to wipe out the prophets of the Lord and Obadiah only saved a hundred (hey, whatever did happen to those 400 prophets of Asherah that Elijah challenged in 18:19 who never showed up?).

Then Jehoshaphat asks if there is anyone else, and a true prophet of the Lord named Micaiah appears and warns that God is not behind the venture and they will fail. Sadly, Jehoshaphat and Ahab take the advice of the 400 false prophets rather than the message of the true prophet.

Why do you think Ahab ignored Micaiah? Why did Jehoshaphat?

Why do people today ignore God’s warnings, or pick the interpretation of Scripture they like the most?

III. A Tragic End (22:29-40).

Ahab tries to fight in the war in such a way that no one targets him, but if you're God's target nowhere on earth is safe. Wearing a regular uniform, and possibly staying back from the heat of the battle, a "random" arrow just happens to hit Ahab where he has an opening in his armor, and by the end of the day he perishes. Thus ends the life of the most wicked king of Israel.

Like Adam, Ahab would no doubt have claimed he wasn't as bad as he is made out to be. Ahab would have pointed and said, "The woman my dad got for me, she made me do it." While Scripture does acknowledge the impact Jezebel made, it makes no excuses for Ahab. In the end, his choices were his choices, and he was the most wicked king of Israel. Many people today use others selfishly, ignore God's working and his warnings, and take credit for what God has done. Such people would probably not see themselves as evil, but God would. Ahab is a sobering warning to all of us that we are responsible for the choices we make, and that sin can take us much further than we ever thought we'd go.