

11. Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority

Biblical material: 1 Kings 16:28-34; 1 Kings 17, 18.

Quotes

- Where love rules, there is no will to power; and where power predominates, there love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other. *Carl Jung*
- Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men. *Lord Acton*
- [Jesus'] ministry was clearly defined, and the alternatives to the illusion and temptations of the desert were spelled out. A choice was made—life abundant, full, and free for all. Make no mistake about it, the day that choice was made, Jesus became suspect. That day in the temple he sealed the fate already prepared for him. How was the world to understand one who rejected an offer of power and control? *Joan B. Campbell*
- There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty. *John Adams*
- Never work just for money or for power. They won't save your soul or help you sleep at night. *Marian Wright Edelman*

Questions

What are the central issues in this story? Why did God permit Ahab to become king of Israel, knowing what damage Ahab and Jezebel would cause to the nation? Can we excuse behavior because of temperament and upbringing? What does this story say to our personal relationships? How does God try to work with people—and how does he look here?

Discussion/Comment

“If there were ever a couple in the Bible not to emulate, it would be Ahab and Jezebel. Talk about a marriage made in hell! When you take one weak-willed king and add to him a power-hungry and conniving woman, the result will not be good.” (Sab. pm. lesson).

Once again we have the example of what not to do. The blatant hostility to God, the demonic corruption of power, and the total depravity of moral and ethical behavior shows how far humanity can fall. And in all of this, were Ahab and Jezebel happy? What satisfaction did they gain from their pagan lifestyle? One may even wonder what benefit there is to be gained from studying such a deplorable couple. Yet God includes this story in his word, as part of the great controversy demonstration that is so essential to understand...

Much centers on the use of power. This is a primary aspect of the Devil's charges against God—that he misuses his power. Satan does not debate the almighty nature of God, rather he criticizes the way in which God utilizes and directs this power. In the story of Ahab and Jezebel we see in microcosm what really happens when power is abused. Instead of representing God, Ahab as king reveals what would happen if Satan took over. The innocent would suffer and die, the wicked would reign in idolatrous splendor, and the whole of society would be debased. Ultimately even the wicked would not find joy in this kind of world, and the eventual result would be ruin and death for all.

Not because God steps in to punish, but because the final results are the natural consequences of sin, of choosing to be the opposite of God, who is all good, truth, and right. The story of Ahab and Jezebel demonstrates once again the disastrous results of exploiting power for

selfish ends, and the destructive personal and societal consequences of failing to live by God's principles.

For this apostasy was not just personal, but national. The example of the royal couple as leaders led Israel to accept a false picture of God. 1 Kings 16:30 records that Ahab did more evil than any of the kings before him—he began to serve Baal and worship him. At the heart of this corruption is the embracing of the Devil's lies regarding God's nature and character.

The response through Elijah is to demonstrate the foolishness of belief in Baal, the fertility god who brought rain and blessed agriculture. By the imposition of the drought, Baal is proved to be false and powerless to help. And in the confrontation on Mt. Carmel, all the intercessory prayers of the priests of Baal are also proved pointless and worthless. Elijah's taunts are to the point, for why pray to a "god" who is not real?

At the demonstration of divine power—the fire falling from heaven—the people fall prostrate and acknowledge "the Lord he is God." The tragedy is that they are only persuaded by power, and not by truth. God is placed in the situation of having to win them not by force of argument but simply by the display of raw power. Like their forefathers at the foot of Mt. Sinai, they tremble with fear and promise that they will do whatever the Lord says. But their agreement lasts only as long as their fear. Once that is gone, they wander after the desires of their true hearts, and like Israel under Ahab and Jezebel, return to their evil natures once more...

Ellen White Comments

Under the blighting influence of Ahab's rule, Israel wandered far from the living God and corrupted their ways before Him. . . . The dark shadow of apostasy covered the whole land. Images of Baalim and Ashtoreth were everywhere to be seen. Idolatrous temples and consecrated groves, wherein were worshiped the works of men's hands, were multiplied. The air was polluted with the smoke of the sacrifices offered to false gods. Hill and vale resounded with the drunken cries of a heathen priesthood who sacrificed to the sun, moon, and stars.

Through the influence of Jezebel and her impious priests, the people were taught that the idol gods that had been set up were deities, ruling by their mystic power the elements of earth, fire, and water. All the bounties of heaven—the running brooks, the streams of living water, the gentle dew, the showers of rain which refreshed the earth and caused the fields to bring forth abundantly—were ascribed to the favor of Baal and Ashtoreth, instead of to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The people forgot that the hills and valleys, the streams and fountains, were in the hand of the living God, that He controlled the sun, the clouds of heaven, and all the powers of nature. . . .

In their blind folly they chose to reject God and His worship.

How few realize the power of an unconsecrated woman. . . . God would have been with Ahab if he had walked in the counsel of heaven. But Ahab did not do this. He married a woman given to idolatry. Jezebel had more power over the king than God had. She led him into idolatry, and with him the people. {CC 204}

God chooses men of a humble and contrite spirit through whom he can work, and imparts to them his wisdom. They are little in their own eyes, and will not interpret success as the result of their own smartness, but will glorify God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." If men are entrusted with great responsibilities, this is no assurance of their fitness for their position. The assurance comes after test and trial. If they evidence that they sense their own weakness, if they make God their trust, the Lord will supply them with his wisdom.

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