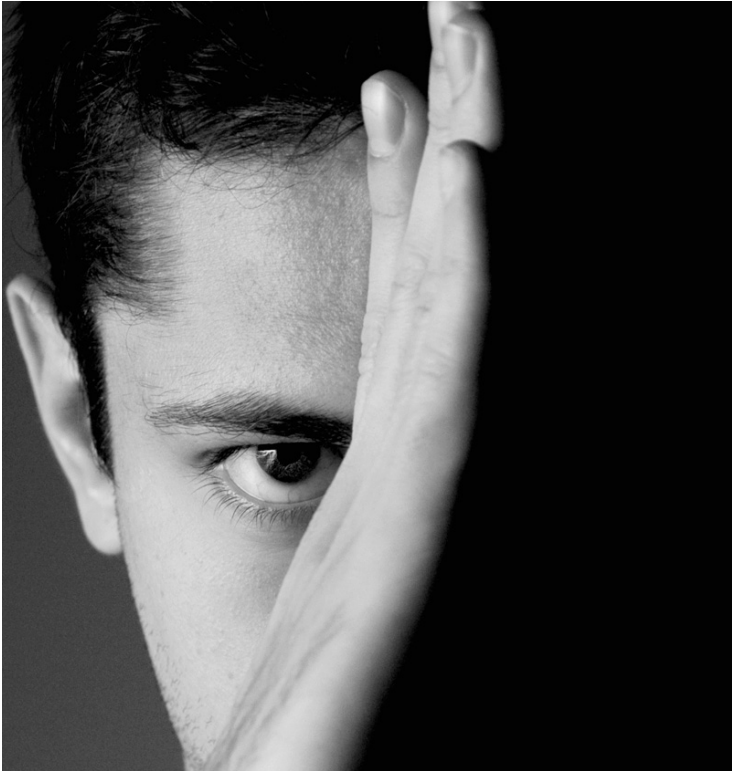


Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority



“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, NIV).

Ahab, Jezebel, and the Power

INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

Sometimes God just has to intervene. Why do you think there was the Flood? Why else would Sodom and Gomorrah have been destroyed? Why do you think people have been raised from the dead, like the son of the widow at Zarephath, but to have God step in and show He exists and has the real power?

Power is something we cannot take lightly. Unfortunately, power is often abused. Every day, the news is full of all types of people who misuse the power they have.

Remember when God made the Israelites His own people? He brought them through the wilderness, leading them His way. Then He brought them through the Jordan River and had them march around Jericho, enter and conquer Canaan, and set up a nation.

When they wanted a king, God let them have their way. But He warned them about the problems that come with people who have power, and by about 874 B.C.,* they had King Ahab, who married Jezebel, princess of Sidonia. And because of her, they also had Baal worship.

Jezebel practically tried to take over. She is mentioned to be the one killing the Lord's prophets and feeding 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. Obadiah, the manager of Ahab's palace, had to do some undercover work to hide the Lord's prophets in the wilderness.

After three years of famine, Ahab and Obadiah went to search the wilderness for green pastureland.

God had to intervene. He used Elijah.

God used Elijah to show He is the One with the power. By proving He had the power, God not only saved the prophets in the wilderness but purged the land of the prophets of imported false gods.

In this case, God's will was to have a nation led by Him, a nation that was to be holy and righteous, following the One and only Lord. The people messed up God's original plans, and Ahab—the worst yet of Israel's kings—and Jezebel—hateful toward the Lord—set out to destroy everything God wanted. But God had the power and stepped in. He still has the power.

This week we will study power and how it can be abused.

Power is something we cannot take lightly.

*Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

Sunday
September 9

God Save the King; Well, He Tried

LOGOS

1 Kings 16:21–22:40; 17–20; 2 Chronicles 18

If He's Not Lord of All, He's Not Lord at All (1 Kings 16:21–34)

God had established Jeroboam as the king of the northern federation of tribes in response to the arrogant leadership of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. While God recognized the division of the kingdom into the resulting nations of Israel (north) and Judah (south), He still claimed the spiritual allegiance of both nations. The temple He had established was located in Judah. Fearful that his supporters would abandon him and compromise the solidarity of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam established a new form of worship and founded a site for it. This new worship would make it unnecessary for people in his northern kingdom to travel to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. Rather than trust the matter to God, who had provided his kingly authority in the first place, Jeroboam took matters into his own hands to ensure the allegiance of the northern tribes to himself.

Although Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was not pleasing to God, God did not give up easily.

God was not pleased with this lack of trust or the resultant false worship. Nevertheless, all the kings of Israel, including Ahab, adopted this new worship. It was a blend of the sacrificial system established by God and human elements introduced by the northern kings. Sadly, this compromised system of worship

made it easy to take another step further away from truth, resulting in his marriage to Jezebel.

Jezebel was the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal. His very name indicates his allegiance to the pagan worship of Baal. Since Ahab had grown up in a compromised religious climate, it seemed but a small step to introduce this crass new form of worship to his subjects.

The Lord Is a God of Second Chances (1 Kings 17–20)

Although Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was not pleasing to God, God did not give up easily. He sent a famine to Israel in hopes that Ahab would repent. Unfortunately, rather than accepting God's discipline and hearing His voice, he listened to his wife's pagan influence and resisted the prophets of Jehovah.

Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal brought things to a head. God's

victory at Carmel may have turned the tide of public opinion, but it apparently made no positive spiritual impact on Ahab and Jezebel. Like the Pharaoh whom Moses had confronted (Exodus 7–12), their hearts seemed only to get harder. So Jezebel sent a threatening message to Elijah, which resulted in his flight.

Amazingly, God did not abandon Israel and its rogue hierarchy. King Ben-hadad of Aram formed an alliance with 32 kings in an effort to conquer Israel. Humanly speaking, this was a “slam dunk” for the alliance. There was no way Ahab could win this battle. Yet a prophet who spoke for the Lord promised Ahab victory in the upcoming battle. Ben-hadad’s forces were completely routed. His advisors were convinced that this defeat was merely the result of a tactical mistake rather than the result of divine providence. Thus, they urged Ben-hadad to form another army. This time, however, they would not meet their Israelite enemy in the hills where Ben-hadad’s chariots were more of a liability than a strategic advantage. They would meet the Israelite army on the plains, where their chariots would almost guarantee Israel’s defeat. Vastly outnumbered, even as Gideon’s band had been many years before, the army of Israel scored a stunning victory.

Some People Never Learn (1 Kings 21; 22)

One is tempted to think that someone who had witnessed God’s unmistakable power at Carmel, someone who had been blessed by a favorable climate since the days of Carmel, and someone who had been given, not one, but two incredible military victories against overwhelming odds would have turned back to God. Instead, it seems that Ahab assumed an attitude of invincibility, which in time, became arrogance.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the story of Naboth. Naboth owned a vineyard adjacent to the king’s property. Ahab wanted it; but Naboth refused to sell it to him. This, however, was no obstacle for Jezebel. She merely hired two false witnesses to accuse Naboth of a crime he did not commit. Using the power of the state and a system of corrupt courts, she had him executed. Ahab was then free to take possession of the coveted vineyard. How different things might have been had Ahab been raised in the atmosphere of pure worship and found a mate to match the high ideals he would have found there.

REACT

1. What role does a pure and selfless worship play in influencing the big decisions, such as marriage, that we face in life?
2. In light of Ahab’s mistakes, what criteria should you establish to guide you in the selection of a life mate?
3. How can a person avoid the temptation to mistake the mercy of God to mean personal invincibility, which invariably leads to arrogance?

“Abuse of Power”

TESTIMONY

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

“Under the perverted rule of Ahab, Israel departed from God and corrupted their ways before Him. . . .

“Ahab was weak in moral power. He did not have a high sense of sacred things; he was selfish and unprincipled. His union by marriage with a woman of decided character and positive temperament, who was devoted to idolatry, made them both special agents of Satan to lead the people of God into idolatry and terrible apostasy. The determined spirit of Jezebel molded the character of Ahab. His selfish nature was incapable of appreciating the mercies of God to His people and his obligation to God as the guardian and leader of Israel. The fear of God was daily growing less in Israel. The blasphemous tokens of their blind idolatry were to be seen among the Israel of God. There were none who dared to expose their lives

“Ahab was weak in moral power.”

by openly standing forth in opposition to the prevailing blasphemous idolatry.”¹

“Ahab related to his wife the wonderful events of the day and the marvelous exhibitions of the power

of God showing that Jehovah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, was God; also that Elijah had slain the prophets of Baal. At this, Jezebel, who was hardened in sin, became infuriated. Bold, defiant, and determined in her idolatry, she declared to Ahab that Elijah should not live.”²

“The prophets of God were hated by apostate Israel because through them their hidden sins were brought to light. Ahab regarded Elijah as his enemy because the prophet was faithful to rebuke the king’s secret iniquities. So today the servant of Christ, the reprover of sin, meets with scorn and rebuffs. Bible truth, the religion of Christ, struggles against a strong current of moral impurity. Prejudice is even stronger in the hearts of men now than in Christ’s day.”³

REACT

1. How did Ahab and Jezebel abuse the power they had?
2. How do we responsibly use the power God has given to us?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 262.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 289.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 587.

The Unlucky Viticulturist

EVIDENCE

Num. 36:7–9; 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9:25, 26

Naboth owned a vineyard that was probably on the eastern side of the city of Jezreel. Because the land sloped away from the city on this side, the view from the vineyard could have been breathtaking.¹ Moreover, the name *Naboth* means “sprout” or “fruit.”² So most likely, his vineyard was quite successful. However, Naboth was an unlucky man, for his vineyard was next door to the king of Israel, and Ahab wanted Naboth’s land. Ahab tried to persuade Naboth to trade for the land, and, when that failed, he tried to buy it. Naboth, however, was not interested, since he felt he would be disobeying the Levitical code by transferring the land outside his family. Under the provisions of the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:13–28), it would have been possible to eventually redeem his land. However, he was still unwilling to sell it to Ahab.

It was certainly within Naboth’s right to refuse, but Ahab went home sulking. As expected, Jezebel wanted to know why Ahab was having a pity party. Unfortunately for Naboth, she did not tell Ahab to get over it. Instead, she plotted to get the vineyard by writing letters in Ahab’s name, falsely accusing Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king. To make matters worse, a fast is proclaimed, and Naboth is seated in a position of “high honor among the people” (1 Kings 21:9, NKJV). Essentially, Jezebel used religion as a cover for evil, a frequent occurrence throughout history.

Ahab went home sulking.

In accordance with Israelite judicial law (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6), two witnesses were brought in to testify and stir up the people who willingly went along with the despicable charade. The result: Naboth and his sons were stoned, and Ahab took possession of the vineyard.

REACT

1. How do you respond when people won’t let you have your way?
2. The people in Jezreel willingly went along with Jezebel’s evil plans. How can we avoid being victims or perpetrators of any kind of groupthink?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 834.

2. *The Word in Life Study Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), p. 635.

How to Make Good Decisions

HOW-TO

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

Here are some ways you can make good decisions:

Surrender your will to God. By giving us the gift of free will, God chose to allow us to determine our futures. The best decision we can make for our life is to give our lives to God and let Him lead us. Thus, we can begin to live happy, more fulfilling lives (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Choose your alliances carefully. (See Proverbs 18:24.) Ahab and Jezebel brought out the worst in each other. Both wanted complete and utter control over the other's life. They wanted to choose their way in everything. When faced with a crucial decision, be sure to seek the advice of wise people. However, don't let them make your decisions for you.

Know your limitations. Ahab and Jezebel abused their power and authority over the people of Israel. They forced them to worship a god other than *the* God, our God. As Christians, we should follow God's commandments, especially the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, NIV).

**We are all human onions—
we have many layers.**

Ask God for understanding. (See Proverbs 3:5, 6.) Many of us dedicate our lives to the search for understanding. We want to know

where we came from, how we got here, why the sky is blue. I think it's very important to have understanding, because we are all human onions—we have many layers. We should know why it's important to give all to God, why we should choose our alliances carefully, and why we should know our limitations. It's important to know God and to know ourselves.

REACT

1. How do you think Ahab should have handled the situation when it became obvious to him that Jezebel wanted to eliminate Jehovah worship from Israel?

2. Why is it so hard for us to ask for help? And why is the word *surrender* so frightening even to Christians?

It's All About Those Genes

OPINION

1 Kings 16:30, 31; 2 Kings 9:34; 10:11, 30; Amos 3:3

Genetics is an important ingredient to a successful marriage. When we look for a future mate, we acknowledge the fact that the genetics of our children will be greatly determined by our spouse, and that our spouse has certain basic characteristics as a result of their genes.

In the ancient world, however, it seems that social and economic status played a greater role in spouse selection than genetic composition. Ahab should have taken the time to look at what God had said about genetics—"unto the third and fourth generation." After the fiasco of Elah's assassination, Ahab's father, Omri, started a new rule, because he was not a direct descendant of Elah. First Kings 16:25 says that Omri "did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him" (NIV). First Kings 16:30 says the same thing of Ahab, but also mentions him as the son of Omri even though it is previously stated. I would suggest that this is not simply excessive, but that mentioning Ahab as the son of Omri recognizes the role Omri's genes played in who Ahab was.

First Kings 16:31 says that it had been a trivial thing for Ahab to walk in the ways of "Jeroboam son of Nebat" (NIV). This text also introduces Baal after introducing "Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians" (NIV). Ahab goes beyond merely having golden calves so people can worship God; he attempts to replace Him completely.

At Jezebel's death, Jehu ordered that she be buried because she was the daughter of a king. However, when they went to bury her, her body had been torn to pieces. Jehu wanted to bury her as recognition of her social heritage. But God allowed her to be destroyed, proving that what is important is the genetic heritage with which you live.

Jehu destroyed the entire house of Ahab, because the wickedness had run through the genetics of their family. Because Jehu did this, he received a promise from God that his sons "will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation" (2 Kings 10:30, NIV).

Genetics by itself is a far cry away from determining your salvation, but it plays an important role in the life you lead, the life that you allow others around you to lead, and the life your children will lead.

Ahab should have taken the time to look at what God had said about genetics.

Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority

EXPLORATION

Rom. 13:11–13; Phil. 2:12–16; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Pet. 4:1–4; Luke 6:46; 11:39, 42–44, 46; 2 Cor. 13:5

CONCLUDE

In my own marriage, if I'm out only for myself (even if I claim or appear to be a Christian), what does it matter if I develop intimacy with someone other than my spouse? Our relationship doesn't work out, so why not just split and find new partners? Am I being God's man or woman, or my own? How much does a relationship with God matter to me? What claims does He have on me?

CONSIDER

- Gathering ten objects that float in water. Fill a large tub with several inches of water and place your items in it. Count how many items you can hold below the water for 60 seconds. How successful do you feel about your efforts? How does this apply to our spiritual life?
- Cutting a lump of moist clay in half. Reseal one portion to keep it moldable. Work the other half into an interesting shape and leave it out to dry. Once your creation is hard, push it together with the moist half and observe what happens. What spiritual conclusions can you draw from this?
- Playing a strategy board game (Risk, Parcheesi, etc.). Secretly play to lose. Observe the interactions of the players as you do this. How easy is it to let others win?
- Talking with the genealogist in your family. What is happening in your life that happened in the life of your mom or dad? Your grandparents? Anything from your life that looks familiar in theirs?
- Journaling the present circumstances of your life. What are the good things? The painful things? How much of what you face now seems impossible to get through? Read what you wrote several weeks later. How has God led you?
- Finding a private place that lets you connect with nature on a grand scale. (City-dwellers might consider a book of nature photography.) Listen for a whisper from God. What is He telling you?

CONNECT

J. Keith Miller, *Compelled to Control: Recovering Intimacy in Broken Relationships*.