

Lessons from the Life of Ahab, Part 1

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We would not be here if we did not have absolute faith that the Bible is the word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, it is called God breathed, God spoken, God's word. What we are going to do today is to look into the life of one of the kings of Israel.

As I began to study this, I found out there was more detail about this one king than any other king of Israel, with the exception of King David. I started scratching my head. Why would God devote this much space in His word to this one king? Why would He do that? In studying this, the conclusion we would have come to, is that there are things that He wants us to learn from this example.

By way of introduction, and to get to this one king, the background needs to be set. The background is so important to understanding the story of this king.

King Solomon, David's son, died in 938 B.C. and that same year, the nation of Israel became divided. Judah and Benjamin in the south, and the Northern Ten Tribes in the north. Rehoboam, who was Solomon's son was in line to be king over all of Israel. We all know this split occurred, but to review how it happened, we will go to 1 Kings 11 and see how that played out and how that happened. It has everything to do with the king that we are going to look at later. Solomon is dead and Rehoboam is scheduled to be king, he is line to be king but notice what God does. A new man comes on the scene.

1 Kings 11:28 *And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.*

29) *And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field:* Continuing in verse 31
31) *And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces [that's an odd thing to say]: for thus saith the LORD [that's God's name, Jehovah], the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (KJV)*

So, even before Solomon had died, God has said that this is going to take place. 1 Kings 12:1, next chapter.

1 Kings 12:1 *And Rehoboam [it is easy to get Rehoboam and Jeroboam confused. Rehoboam is Solomon's son] went to Shechem [that's about twenty-five miles north of Jerusalem]: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king.*

2) *And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it, (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon [that's another story and we won't go into that now], and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt;)*

3) *That they sent and called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying,*

4) *Thy father [referring to Solomon] made our yoke grievous [many taxes, many demands on military service and the list goes on and on]: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. (KJV)*

Back off a little bit, they are saying to him.

5) *And he said unto them [Rehoboam said this], Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed. (KJV)*

He had three days, seventy-two hours, to consider this.

6) *And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, how do ye advise that I may answer this people? (KJV)*

He sought wise counsel and that is always a good thing to do.

7) *And they spake unto him, saying, if thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, (KJV)*

What a concept that is. A king should be a servant to the people that he rules and he should actually do things for the benefit of the people rather than for his own benefit. These wise men, experienced men said, if you will be a servant unto them and if you will serve them ...

7 continued) *... and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for *good*, speaking good words to them, can mean “cheerful” or “joyful”. We would say today, “positive, uplifting”. He said if you will do this, they will serve you forever. Now let's see what the response was.

8) *But he forsook the counsel of the old men [Rehoboam], which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: (KJV)*

We would say today that he consulted with his cronies, his entourage and they were young like he was. They did not have the experience of the older men and, as we would say today, they were probably full of beans and vim and vinegar, because of this new opportunity for them and for Rehoboam.

9) *And he said unto them, what counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter?*

10) *And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, [this is their response, their advice] My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. (KJV)*

You think it was bad under my father, you just wait.

11) *And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. (KJV)*

We have not yet come to the king we are talking about. However, there is a lesson here for all of us; be careful who you listen to. Be careful about that. Rehoboam is going to find out that lesson.

12) *So, Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.*

13) *And the king answered the people roughly, [the Hebrew can mean "cruel, grievous or hard", it was not a soft answer] and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;*

14) *And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, my father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.*

15) *Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD [as we read earlier], that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.*

16) *So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. (KJV)*

He said Rehoboam, we're out of here, you take care of your own house, we're going to chart our own way.

16 continued) ... *So Israel departed unto their tents. (KJV)*

Verse 17, notice how serious this is, this is not just a squabble.

17) *But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.*

18) *Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; (KJV)*

He was the chief tax collector, because Rehoboam said, you are separating but I still want my taxes. I am not just going to accept taxes from Judah, I want taxes from all ten tribes. This is why he sent Adoram, who was over the taxes or the tribute ...

17 continued) ... *and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died* [this is serious stuff, emotions are heated]. *Therefore, king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.* (KJV)

He probably felt, and rightly so, that his life was also in danger.

19) *So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.*
20) *And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel* [the Northern Ten Tribes]: *there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.* (KJV)

Here we have a king of the south, over Judah and Benjamin, and then you have another king, Jeroboam, over the Northern Ten Tribes. Jeroboam has a choice. He is a brand-new king, so what does he do? At this juncture, he can go one of two ways. God ordained that he was going to be king. God had the prophet come and anoint him so he could say that he was going to do this God's way because it was from God. Or he could say, that he was going to do this his own way, what felt best to him. He would satisfy himself.

Let's see what he chose to do. Notice the human reasoning.

26) *And Jeroboam said in his heart, now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:*
27) *If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.* (KJV)

He had forgotten the fact that God had made him king and anointed him through His own prophet. He had forgotten, or did not take into account that God could take care of them because this was from Jehovah. The fact is, that Jeroboam did not trust God. He made a human choice—the human choice—we still see it today. People want to protect themselves. They want to protect their turf and so he made his choice. Now notice verse 28.

28) *Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.* (KJV)

Somehow that rings familiar, doesn't it? Remember what Aaron did when Moses was up on the mountain for forty days and the people started grumbling? He made two calves of gold and told the people that these were the gods that had brought them out of Egypt. Exactly the same thing is happening here—nothing new under the sun.

29) *And he set the one in Bethel [that's about ten miles north of Jerusalem just over the border into the Northern Ten Tribes], and the other put he in Dan. [Which is way in the far north of Israel]. (KJV)*

In this way, he made travel to the holy days much more convenient. They didn't have to go as far as they would to Jerusalem and therefore, they now had a choice. It would be like having a choice between two Feast sites. They could choose to go to Dan, or they could choose to go to Bethel, whichever they preferred.

30) [This is God's view of it] *And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.*

31) *And he made an house of high places, (KJV)*

The Hebrew *house of high places* can be translated, "temple of temples". That means it was a surrogate or a substitute for the Temple in Jerusalem. He was making a temple in place of God's Temple, not only that, it was a temple to pagan gods, as we will see.

31 continued) *... and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.*

32) *And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month [not the seventh month], on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah [in Jerusalem], and he offered upon the altar [that he built]. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. (KJV)*

Jeroboam had made his choice. He could have ruled the Northern Ten Tribes God's way, but he made a purposeful choice to lead Israel into idolatry. In doing so, he broke the first four commandments just right out of the shoot, with no delay. The fact is that Jehovah warned Moses and He warned Israel, not to let that happen.

We know that, towards the end of Moses' life, Deuteronomy was his account of Israel coming out of Egypt. Notice the warning to Israel. The Israelites had undoubtedly heard this read, many, many times.

Deuteronomy 7:1 *When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;*

- 2) *And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; [after all that, they are warned] thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:*
- 3) *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.*
- 4) *For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: [that was the warning and that was what was happening right here in Israel under Jeroboam] so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*
- 5) *But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.*
(KJV)

Those were the instructions, and obviously Israel did not comply with those instructions. We know that Israel's history down through the centuries was marked with one constant. What was that one constant? That one constant was that they would worship anything but the true God. We see that here and in the instance of Jeroboam and the two calves. Jeroboam is now leading the way for Israel to worship anything but the true God.

Now we are coming to the subject of the message today. We come to the seventh king of the Northern Ten Tribes. Jeroboam was the first king and now, we come to the seventh king. His name was Ahab. I know we have all heard that name. What we want to do first is to look at the life of Ahab to see why God devoted so much space in His Word to this man. Then we are going to draw some lessons from his life. God would not have devoted so much space had there not been important lessons for us to learn through the record of Ahab. The title of the sermon is:

Lessons from the Life of Ahab

To begin with, we will go to the account of Ahab's father in 1 Kings 16:28. His father's name was Omri.

1 Kings 16:28 *So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: (KJV)*

Omri established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Ten Tribes.

28 continued) *... and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.*

29) *And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. (KJV)*

That's roughly 875-853 B.C. These numbers vary a few years either way, depending on which historian you are consulting, or which book you read. This is a ballpark figure.

30) *And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. (KJV)*

That includes Jeroboam.

31) *And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, (KJV)*

Ahab had become king forty-one years after Jeroboam died. The memory of Jeroboam and the memory of that split would be fairly current. It would have been a lot closer than World War II is to us today. Therefore, the people would have remembered the history of all that had happened and what Jeroboam had done.

As we have seen, the sins of Jeroboam that we are talking about—to walk in the sins of Jeroboam—were to completely break the first four commandments and lead Israel into idolatry. We have been told that Ahab was worse than Jeroboam, and worse than all the kings before him. So, the question is, what extra did Ahab do in addition to what Jeroboam had done? He had walked in the sins of Jeroboam, but what additional sins or additional directions did he do and take to make God say that he was the worst king since Jeroboam.

31 continued) *... that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. (KJV)*

The Zidonians—in the King James it's spelled with a 'Z' and in some versions it's spelled with an 'S'. Sidonians were basically the Phoenicians and they lived north of Israel on the coast. They were a famous seafaring people and, as with Solomon's wives, Ahab had entered into political marriages with various women.

There is some evidence to indicate that Omri, his father, had arranged the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel before he became king. This was to cement a relationship between the Northern Ten Tribes and the Phoenicians. Jezebel was the idolatrous daughter of an idolatrous king. Her father, whose name was *lthobaal*, which means "with Baal". That tells you the orientation of Jezebel's father and gives you an indication of the environment under which she was reared. It also gives you an indication of the direction that Jezebel had taken in her life. We will see that Omri arranged this marriage and we will see that it led to absolute disaster.

Jezebel means "where is the prince or the prince exists". It can be taken either way—where is the prince or the prince exists. The last syllable of Jezebel—'bel'—is a form of Baal. Again, as her father was named after Baal, she was named after Baal. Both of these meanings, the prince exists or where is the prince, refer to Baal who went down into the underworld and later came back resurrected. This was Satan's way of counterfeiting the Messiah. Her name was, the prince exists—he is not here, he is down in the underworld, but he is coming back. Where is the prince? It indicates that he is down in the underworld, but he is coming back. That was her name. Some scholars

feel there is evidence to indicate that she was actually a priestess of the Phoenician god, Baal. If we look at the account, as we are going to go through it today, we could easily see that that is probably the case.

Today, if you mention the word Jezebel, people think of harlot. The fact is, she was not promoted as a harlot until the Middle Ages. That push did not come until the Middle Ages through the Catholic church. Prior to that time, the historical indication was that she was indeed a priestess of the Phoenician god, Baal.

Going on in verse 32.

32) And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. (KJV)

Not only did he turn away from God, but he promoted idolatry. He built a temple which was the house of Baal and he went to worship in the house of Baal.

33) And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. (KJV)

Now we're going to move to Chapter 21 and for the sake of time, I am going to summarize the first fifteen verses.

There was a man in Jezreal, which is about twenty-five miles north of Samaria, who had a vineyard. His name was Naboth. Naboth's vineyard was adjacent to some palatial grounds where Ahab had a palace. Ahab looked on Naboth's vineyard and said that he wanted that land—he wanted to raise herbs and grow them in that ground. So he went to Naboth and said that he would like his land and would give him another piece of land of equivalent value or he would pay him for his land. Naboth said, no, he was not going to do that. God had given him this land as inheritance, and it had been in his family for generations. God had given them this land and it had been passed on to him and he wanted to keep it and pass it on as an inheritance to his children. No, he was not going to give the land to Ahab.

The record said that Ahab got in a big snit about it, went to his house, got into bed and turned his head to the wall. He was moping and whining and crying like a little kid who had not gotten his way. His wife, Jezebel came in and she asked what was the matter with him? Why was he downtrodden? He told her the story and she basically said, you are the king of Israel, and therefore he could do anything he wanted. She told him to brighten up, and that she would take care of it.

What she did was wrote letters to the leaders of the city of Jezreal and said I want you to honor Naboth—have a feast for him—but I want two sons of Belial to accuse him of blasphemy against God and blasphemy against the king. They complied and they had this feast and these two men accused Naboth in front of everybody. They whipped the crowd into a frenzy, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. The word then

came back to Jezebel that Naboth was dead, so she went to her husband and said that, now he could have his herb garden. Continuing in verse 16:

I Kings 21:16 *And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. (KJV)*

God had had enough!

17) *And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,*
18) *Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. [To steal it really]*
19) *And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? [Have you really done this?] And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. (KJV)*

Talk about spoiling his party, raining on his parade, Elijah did that.

20) *And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.*
21) *Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, [notice this, an additional punishment] and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel,*
22) *And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. (KJV)*

Ahab had provoked God greatly by his example, by the high places and by continuing to worship Baal on the eighth month. The list of his provocations goes on and on.

23) *And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. (KJV)*

They are not going to just lick her blood, they are going to eat her!

24) *Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.*
25) *But there was none like unto Ahab, [notice this] which did sell himself [the Hebrew means “to surrender”] to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for *stirred up* can mean “to entice, seduce or provoke”. We are being told that Jezebel was right there provoking him, pushing him, prodding him to go on and

do this evil. The important thing is, as Christ said in John 8:34, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. We see here that Ahab surrendered himself to do evil and became a slave of sin and by becoming a slave of sin, he became a slave of Satan. It's important to note that Ahab promoted and protected idolatrous religion at the same time his wife, Jezebel, persecuted and killed the prophets of God. If you check 1 Kings 18:4, it said Jezebel *cut off*—the Hebrew means “to destroy or consume”—the prophets and 100 were hidden in a cave to hide them from Jezebel. It was her attempt and her husband's attempt to destroy the true religion. Going on in verse 26.

26) And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. (KJV)

We see that Ahab not only followed in the sins and the footsteps of Jeroboam, he amplified them. He chose to put other gods before the true God and he chose to persecute the true religion while he promoted idolatry. So that is the life of Ahab and the life of course, of his wife Jezebel. The question now is, what can we learn from his life and from the life of his wife to learn some lessons that God wants us to learn. God devoted so much space in the Bible to this man and to this man's reign—this king's reign.

In conclusion: All that is in God's word is there for a reason, and the more we study it, the more we realize this. Today, we have examined the life of one king of Israel who lived some 2900 years ago and we asked the question, why did God devote so much space to this man's life and to that of his wife? Obviously, God wanted us to learn lessons—powerful lessons—that are applicable to our lives today.