

Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 16:28–18:46.*

Memory Text: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (*2 Corinthians 6:14*).

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.

In many ways this week's study is about power and authority; more specifically, it's about the abuse of power and authority.

Power and authority are gifts from God. Those who have them have the divine responsibility to wield that power and authority in a godly way. When they don't, they are sinning, not just against people but against God Himself. As we'll see this week, Ahab and Jezebel used their power and their authority in a way contrary to the will of God. They reaped the consequences, too. There's a good lesson here for all of us regarding how we use whatever power we have been granted.

The Week at a Glance: Ahab and Jezebel were a husband-and-wife team that brought out the worst in each other. That's bad enough for any marriage, but when they happened to be the leaders of a nation, the results were disastrous.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 15.*

Ahab

Last week we looked at David’s sin against Bathsheba, the sin that led to so much pain and suffering, not just for himself but for his nation. Indeed, his weakened stature helped fuel the seeds of rebellion in his own house, and that certainly helped pave the way for the rending of the nation into two separate kingdoms a generation or so later.

Read 1 Kings 16:28–30. What does this tell us about the character of Ahab?

What were some of the things that previous kings had done? 1 Kings 12:25–33; 13:33, 34; 14:22–27; 15:26, 34; 16:15–20, 25. How does this help us understand the degree of wickedness found in Ahab’s reign?

“Two years before the death of Asa, Ahab began to rule in the kingdom of Israel. From the beginning his reign was marked by a strange and terrible apostasy. His father, Omri, the founder of Samaria, had ‘wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him’ (1 Kings 16:25); but the sins of Ahab were even greater. He ‘did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him,’ acting ‘as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.’ Verses 33, 31. Not content with encouraging the forms of religious service followed at Bethel and Dan, he boldly led the people into the grossest heathenism, by setting aside the worship of Jehovah for Baal worship.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 114.

From our perspective it’s hard to understand how these kings could have fallen into such sin and apostasy. But that’s the problem: We’re looking at these things from our perspective, not theirs. Who knows what any of us might have done were we in the same position. These stories should serve as a warning to all of us about how easily we can fall away from the living God.

What daily steps can you take in your own life to protect yourself against slowly, steadily moving away from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

▶ **Key Text:** *2 Corinthians 6:14*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

Know: Power and authority are gifts of God.

Feel: The injustice of Jezebel's accusations against Naboth.

Do: Strive to be honest and compassionate to others.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Bad to the Bone (*1 Kings 16:30–33, 2 Kings 9:30–37*)

A Jezebel's family tree is rotten to the roots—Ahab, weak and selfish; her genocidal daughter, Athaliah; and her father, King Ethbaal, priest of the lewd fertility goddess Astarte. Jezebel imports this worship into Israel. Obviously, Ahab doesn't change Jezebel; she changes him. Why?

B Jezebel's bio reads like a rap sheet for extortion, genocide, murder, idolatry, blackmail. Her forceful personality dominated her husband. What happens in marriage when one spouse dominates the other?

II. The True Exercise of Authority (*1 Kings 21:25*)

A “But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, who Jezebel his wife stirred up.” What does this reveal about the nature and lure of sin?

B Psalm 45:13 speaks of a gold dress worn by a princess of Tyre. Some scholars believe that this refers to Jezebel. Even if this were true, imagine the cost and opulence of such a garment. Yet, this is nothing compared to a pure character. Why are all our riches rags without Jesus' grace?

III. Death by Dogs (*1 Kings 21:1-4, 2 Kings 9:30-37*)

A Ahab craves the vineyard of Naboth and won't eat until he gets it. Naboth's fate shows us where Ahab's disastrous hunger leads. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness” (*Matt. 5:6, NIV*). What is the difference between the two hungers?

B Two of Jezebel's eunuchs push her out a window. Her body was trampled by horses and eaten by dogs that left only the palms of her hands. How ironic this is because she used her hands to commit her evil deeds. How do we keep our hands and hearts pure before God? Why is this essential?

▶ **Summary:** Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Power Couple

As if everything Ahab had already done weren't bad enough, he added to his sin by marrying Jezebel (*1 Kings 16:31*), the pagan princess whose name has become synonymous with evil.

This more than likely was a marriage born out of political expediency than out of love. War, mostly with Aram under Ben-hadad, dominated the 22-year reign of Ahab. This conflict prompted alliances with other threatened neighbors and resulted in Ahab's marrying Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, who also served as a priest of Astarte. Sometime later Ahab's daughter Athaliah helped cement ties with Judah through marriage with Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat and crown prince of Judah.

Right after the Bible says that he married Jezebel, what did Ahab start doing? *1 Kings 16:31–33*.

Already so filled with sin and compromise, Ahab probably didn't need a lot of encouragement from his pagan wife not only to serve Baal but also to help spread the worship of Baal in the nation of Israel. Was she doing it because she was a true believer in her god, or was she doing it to consolidate power? After all, if the followers of Yahweh had control, she would probably be dead, not queen. More than likely she was interested in keeping power. How convenient to use a supposed devotion to her "god" as a way of getting that power.

What evidence do we have of her attempts to eradicate the worship of the true God and replace it with Baal worship? *1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:1, 2; 21:25*.

One sin led to another and another. Before long the king had reached levels of degradation he himself probably couldn't have ever imagined. What lessons can we learn from this sad account that can help us not make the same kind of errors?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

A book describes the lives of the people detained in a camp during a war in Asia. One chapter talks about the development of a black market within the camp. Because of the black market, precious commodities like eggs, sugar, and milk—not known to be available in the camp—soon became regular items on the menu. When the soldiers running the camp found out about the black market operation, they shot the people involved, not to put an end to the black market but rather to take over the illegal business themselves and make and keep the money for themselves. Ask the class to name characters in the Bible who abused power. Examples: Saul, Absalom, Herod the Great, Judas, Pilate, David.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

Imagine having total, complete control of everybody and everything. How far would you go in using your power? What would be your limit, the line you would not cross? Would a good motive justify a dictatorial use of power?

Thanks to sin, life is filled with strife and tests of faith. Every time we are tested with difficulties, we brace ourselves by saying it is a time of testing and look forward to the future when life will take a more favorable turn. In reality, the greatest tests of spiritual fortitude occur not during difficult times but during the good times.

Take Joseph, for instance. He probably thought being gagged and sold by his own brothers and sent to a foreign land was his greatest test. But it was not. His greatest test came when he had control, had power, had authority to get back at his brothers. It is one thing to be tested when you are powerless and have no options; it is another to be tested when given the opportunity to get revenge and have self-satisfying options at your disposal.

While poverty, suffering, or injustice may be tests that come our way

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Jezebel and Elijah

Review the famous story in 1 Kings 18. What issues were at stake here?

A powerful struggle between Elijah and Jezebel ensued. As queen, Jezebel held political clout. With religious fervor she carried on in Israel the work of her father, king and priest of Baal and Astarte in Tyre and Sidon. Ahab built a temple to Baal for Jezebel, which doubtless included a “seminary” for the training of priests. Jezebel personally presided over the Baal cult in Israel and made it the state religion.

How did Jezebel show her support for the prophets of her cult? See *1 Kings 18:19*.

Four hundred of these prophets ate at her table. This means that they had access to the royal household, all with the support of her husband. She obviously had a powerful sway over him.

In the face of this rampant apostasy, Elijah led the struggle to keep Yahweh worship alive. Appropriately, his name meant “my God is Yahweh.” The religious conflict came to a head when Elijah burst into the presence of King Ahab and announced that there would be no dew or rain except at God’s word (*1 Kings 17:1*). This was a direct attack on Baal, god of rain and, therefore, god of fertility. Ahab labeled Elijah the “troubler of Israel” (*1 Kings 18:17, NIV*), but Elijah turned the label back at him. It is not Elijah who is the cause for the drought, but Ahab’s departure from the worship of Yahweh (*vs. 16–18*). Later, on the summit of Mount Carmel (in the absence of Jezebel but in the presence of Ahab), Elijah exposed the impotence of Baal and demonstrated the power of Yahweh over rain. Ahab was as impotent as Baal. Helplessly he watched the defeat of Baalism and the slaughter of the hundreds of priests. Back home he had to explain to Jezebel why she did not have to have food ready the next day for all the priests of Baal.

What kind of negative influences are you surrounded with? What can you do, as much as possible, to negate those influences?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

from time to time, like Joseph, we are tested most by the power that is ours and the way that we use it. Our lesson this week shows how power is abused (specifically by Ahab and Jezebel). Compare this with the way Joseph used the power he had.

The use of power is an act of stewardship. True, legitimate power is a gift from God. Like money, power in itself is not evil; the love of it is evil.

Consider This: The following texts speak of power as stewardship:

Genesis 1:26

John 19:11

Genesis 9:5–7

Romans 13:1

Genesis 41:15, 16

1 Corinthians 4:6, 7

Just for Teachers: Have the class independently explore the different types of powers and how they may be abused in our society. Listed below are some kinds of power to start the discussion.

Power of position. This is the power that comes with office. A sergeant in the army has authority over a private; a manager or supervisor has authority over those who are under him or her. A parent has certain authority over his child, and so forth. (Example: Ahab and Jezebel ruled as tyrants for 22 years simply because they had the title and clout to do what they wanted.)

Power of situation. While positional power is the formal mechanism for allocating power, circumstances also have a way of putting power into our hands. (Example: Jacob and Esau. Jacob used Esau's hunger to give Jacob situational power to get the birthright he wanted.)

The Old Testament law made it extremely difficult for a person to take advantage of someone else. Study the following texts:

Exodus 22:25–27

Deuteronomy 15:1, 2

Leviticus 25:8–17

Deuteronomy 15:12–15

Deuteronomy 15:7–11

Power of competence. In a situation that demands expertise, we tend to defer to someone with education and experience in that particular field. And the expert can either aid or exploit the situation with his power. (Example: For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he

Naboth's Vineyard

How did Ahab allow things to get so bad under his rule? The story of Naboth's vineyard gives us insights. Read 1 Kings 21:1–4. What do we see here about the character of Ahab that explains so much?

In 1 Kings 21:5–7 we see how Jezebel responded. What a contrast! No wonder she was able to dominate the kingdom. While her husband went home sulking, ready to give up, she conspired to get him what he wanted. Her reaction is “Are you king of Israel or what?” Again we see evidence that for Jezebel the issue was one of power and domination and that she was married to someone who would not stop her quest to get it.

Read the rest of the story (*1 Kings 21:8–16*). How did Jezebel go about achieving her aims? What very clever ploy did she use? What does this tell us about her?

Jezebel seemed to be quite aware of Israelite law; hence, she was able to use it to her advantage. Besides the calling of a fast, which meant that some horrible sin that needed to be dealt with had been committed, she had Naboth accused of a crime that, she knew, would lead to death (*Lev. 24:16*). Then, finally, she had it arranged that at least two witnesses would be summoned (*Num. 35:30, Deut. 17:6*), which was required according to their law. This woman knew exactly what she was doing; though someone who obviously didn't follow the religion of Yahweh, she knew how to exploit it to her advantage.

The rest of the chapter (*1 Kings 21:17–29*) shows that though Jezebel was the instigator of this crime, the Lord held Ahab responsible, as well. Ahab knew what was going on and did nothing to stop it. He was as guilty as his wife of this crime.

Think about how easy it is to use religion to exploit people. How might you have been tempted to use faith to push people to do what you want? Why must we be very careful not to allow ourselves to fall into that trap?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

said that the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth. Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time, and surely he would not be wrong. It was not until centuries later that his theory was finally tested—and proved wrong!)

Power of personality and character. There are many ways that one can have the upper hand in a situation by playing on the psyche of another. It could be using physical attractiveness as a lure, tears for sympathy, body language for assertiveness, empty threats to get results, pretending to be helpless to get someone else to do the job, etc. (Example: Delilah used her hold on Samson as power to bring down a nation.)

Conclusion: While Ahab and Jezebel are examples of how we should not use power, Joseph is an example of how we can use power. Although Joseph's feigned harshness produced fear, it was his graciousness that resulted in spiritual awareness and the beginnings of repentance. The gruff accusations of Joseph did produce the facts he sought about his father and brother (*see Gen. 42:8–13*), but it was grace that caused his brothers to consider their circumstances as coming from the hand of God.

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Questions:

What are some of the selfish gains that result from abuse of power (money, influence, prestige, control) in everyday situations? How can we exercise whatever power we have at our disposal? Do we use it to serve others or to seek our own selfish ends?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them to answer this question, **With God's help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

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The End Comes . . .

Ahab's and Jezebel's deliberate actions in causing Israel to change their allegiance to Baal worship and to participate in all the immorality associated with it could not fail to arouse God's wrath. On top of that, they added the sin of flaunting all norms of decent government and perpetrated the cold-blooded murder of the innocent Naboth. Their marriage was the worst possible combination: a weak-willed king married to an unscrupulous and manipulative power-hungry woman. No wonder it was a disaster for Israel.

How ultimately did both Ahab and Jezebel meet their end? *1 Kings 22:29–40, 2 Kings 9:30–37.*

The baneful influence of this wretched alliance didn't end only with them. They were able to pass on their influence to the next generation.

Read *1 Kings 22:51–53*. What does that tell us about the continued influence of these two wicked people?

“During his father's reign, Ahaziah had witnessed the wondrous works of the Most High. He had seen the terrible evidences that God had given apostate Israel of the way in which He regards those who set aside the binding claims of His law. Ahaziah had acted as if these awful realities were but idle tales. Instead of humbling his heart before the Lord, he had followed after Baal, and at last he had ventured upon this, his most daring act of impiety. Rebellious, and unwilling to repent, Ahaziah died, ‘according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.’”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 209, 210.

In what immediate ways have you been impacted by the sins of others? What biblical principles, and promises, can you claim to help alleviate the damage done?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Power of any kind can be a temptation, a test of a Christian's stewardship. Is how you combat the temptation of power done in the same way you fight any other kind of temptation? Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, gives four ways to defeat temptation:

- Refocus your attention on something else.
- Reveal your struggle to a godly friend or support group.
- Resist the devil.
- Realize your vulnerability.

(See Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan], pp. 209–216.)

Consider the following activities to keep you from abusing power: When you find yourself in the middle of a disagreement or conflict, deliberately take time to pray and then look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Deliberately fight your natural instinct to justify your point of view. Practice humility with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Exercise Authority With Humility,” p. 215, in *The Adventist Home*.

“Ahab was weak in moral power. His union by marriage with an idolatrous woman of decided character and positive temperament resulted disastrously both to himself and to the nation. Unprincipled, and with no high standard of rightdoing, his character was easily molded by the determined spirit of Jezebel. His selfish nature was incapable of appreciating the mercies of God to Israel and his own obligations as the guardian and leader of the chosen people.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 115.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In many ways this week’s lesson was a lesson about the use of power. What are the privileges that come with power? What are the dangers? As a class, talk about the kind of power that comes specifically with religion. What particular dangers must be avoided in the wielding of the power associated with religion? Why can this kind of power be the most dangerous, if abused? How can we as a church help protect ourselves and others from this kind of abuse?
- 2 Another lesson we can gather from this week’s study deals with influence. In class, talk about the kind of influences we have as individuals and as a church. What can we do to make sure that our influence is as positive as possible, both in the world and in the church?
- 3 Think about the first impression of your local church. Put yourself in the position of a first-time visitor. What kind of impression do you think your church makes? What are the strong points? What are the weak points? What can you do as a class to help make that first impression as good as it can be?

Summary: Bad to begin with, Ahab became much worse under the influence of Jezebel. No other couple abused their authority as much as they did. God had to intervene to save both Israel and Judah from ruin.