

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?

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?

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 (*vss. 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?

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?

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?

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.

Caught Off Guard

by DAVID PRICE

Iris Chan loved to surf the Internet. She often slipped into Internet chat rooms just to see what was happening. The last thing she expected to find on the Internet was God.

Iris grew up in a Chinese family that did not believe in God or any religion. “For more than twenty-five years, I had shut God out of my life,” she said.

Then in 2001 Iris hit an emotional brick wall during a traumatic breakup. While surfing one day on the Internet, she entered a chat room and there met a guy who lived not far from her in Sydney, Australia. This guy surprised her by announcing that he was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a vegetarian. Iris was surprised but not turned off. She responded to him, and thus began an online friendship that eventually led to Iris visiting a Seventh-day Adventist church.

Iris went, and the experience plunged her into a period of intense questioning about God and the Bible. The pastor patiently addressed her questions and helped her find the answers she needed. Iris admits that she was still skeptical of Christianity when she accepted an invitation to attend a Daniel and Revelation seminar. But there she saw the Bible as authentic and reliable. After months of additional questions and answers, Iris surrendered her life to Christ and was baptized.

Iris now uses her computer skills for God. She is her own church’s webmaster and has developed online Bible prophecy study courses as part of the Greater Sydney Conference’s initiative in Internet outreach. She currently interacts with more than one hundred students online.

Iris’s story shows how God can use any medium to reach even non-searchers and draw them to the feet of Jesus. “There is no medium that God cannot use to reach people who are searching for something, even something they cannot name,” Iris says.

The Adventist Discovery Center in Sydney, Australia, is constantly seeking new ways to reach people with the gospel. Iris knows it will work, for God used the Internet, the one thing she was passionate about, to reach her soul.

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