



Ahab, Jezebel and ELIJAH

Good Challenges Evil

The Father is calling His children into a glorious new time of the Kingdom of the 7th Day. The nature of the battle is changing; we are not to defend our position, but to challenge the enemy.

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BACKGROUND

More than a century has passed since the leadership of King David, and Israel had prospered under the leadership of Solomon. There was peace in the land and Israel's influence in the world was without parallel. Kings from every land came and paid homage to Solomon, whose wisdom was legendary. Solomon reigned in peace and prosperity for 40 years. Following the death of Solomon, the Northern Kingdom, consisting of the land given to 10 of the 12 tribes, descended rapidly into idol worship while the smaller Southern Kingdom, Judah, remained faithful to God.

INIQUITY

Now the northern kingdom of Israel suffered under a succession of wicked leaders. "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him" (1 Kgs. 16:30). He had the dubious distinction of being the most wicked king of Israel. "And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him" (1 Kings. 16:31).

The Northern Kingdom had vacillated for 80 years between allegiance to God and allegiance to various Canaanite deities, sometimes worshipping all of them at the same time. When Elijah came on the scene, there had been a drought in Israel for 3 years, a sign of God's displeasure. King Ahab married a daughter of the King of neighboring Phoenicia (Lebanon), a powerful and influential woman named Jezebel. She personally kept at her table (provision) 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. These same prophets Ahab summoned to Mt. Carmel in response to Elijah's challenge. In the presence of all the people Elijah (his name means God is Lord) challenged the prophets of Baal to a confrontation to demonstrate the one true God.

COMPROMISE

"Sidonians," also called Phoenicians, lived on the Mediterranean coast and occupied the great cities of Tyre and Sidon. With the growing threat of Assyria and Syria, Ahab decided that he needed an alliance with this neighboring nation, so he made a treaty with the king of Phoenicia and married his daughter, Jezebel.

The Lord had forbid marrying foreign women (the same mistake of Solomon), knowing that they would bring pagan gods into Israel and lead their husbands into false religion (1 Kings 11:2).

DESIRE FOR POWER, PROSPERITY & PLEASURE

The king of Phoenicia was both the political leader and high priest, as his name Ethbaal implies. Jezebel had grown up in the worship of Baal and the female counterpart, Astarte (or Ashtoreth). Baal was considered to be the god of the land. He was believed to have control over weather and the increase of its crops and cattle. Ashtoreth was the mother-goddess of fertility. Idols of both stood side by side in the temples; the idols were worshiped by priests and temple prostitutes with lewd dances and sacred orgies. In times of crisis such as famine, they slashed themselves and sacrificed their children to appease the gods.

Jezebel was fanatical in her religion. The worship of Jehovah probably seemed dull to her by comparison. She was a self-willed, domineering woman and with a moral weakling for a husband, she had little trouble getting her way.

A house for Baal was built beside the palace in Samaria, as well as an “Ashtoreth,” the fertility goddess. There Jezebel housed 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Ashtoreth from Phoenicia, Their duties were to promote the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth throughout Israel.

ROLE OF ELIJAH: A man who knew God and spoke for Him

Elijah was single-minded in his comment to God, which either threatens or challenges us. He was not a pastor that was sent to comfort; Elijah was a prophet sent to confront the enemy.

About 870 BC, he stormed into the presence King Ahab and announced that God was bringing a drought upon the land because of Ahab’s treason. Then God hid Elijah from Ahab for 3 years and trained him for the showdown with Baal at Mount Carmel.

Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the Lord’s prophets left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Get 2 bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire – He is God.” Then all the people said, “What you say is good.” (1 Kings 18:22-24)

All that morning the prophets of Baal called upon their god. They danced around their altar, and cut themselves with knives, part of their religious practice. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder,” he said, “Surely he is a god. Perhaps he is relieving himself or busy or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27). This went on all through the day with no response from Baal.

At the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah took 12 stones and built an altar for the Lord. He dug a trench around it and placed wood and the sacrifice upon it. He had the people bring 4 large jars filled with water that he poured on the offering and the wood. “Do it again,” he said and they did. Elijah ordered more water a 3rd time, covering the wood filling the trench. Elijah prayed. “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel, and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that You O Lord are God and that You are turning their hearts back again” (1 Kings 18:36-37).



Then fire fell from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and even licked up the water in the trench. When the people saw this they fell prostrate and said, “The Lord – He is God. The Lord – He is God” (1 Kings 18:39).

Elijah had them seize the pagan prophets and execute them according to Mosaic law (Deut 13:1-5) and shortly thereafter rain fell on the land of Israel for the first time in 3 years, a sign of God’s pleasure. Jezebel swore out a death curse on Elijah but God took him alive into heaven.

The people later abandoned God again, judgment came in the form of the Assyrian armies, and the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist.

Each side made sacrifices to their God without building a fire. The lighting of the fire was to be performed by the strongest god, and would thus reveal Jehovah as the true God.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The world is offended by this Biblical story. Thirty years ago, in a *modernist* culture that rejected the supernatural, most people stumbled over the main event—the fire consuming the sacrifice, wood, stones, dust and water. In today's *postmodern* culture, they would say of Elijah's execution of the Baal prophets (with the evident approval of God), "How intolerant can you get! Elijah must be some kind of Old Testament ayatollah, slaughtering people."

BAALISM

Besides the use of priestess-prostitutes, Baalism involved the worship of Molech (the Ammonite counterpart to Baal), who demanded child-sacrifice. "The central act of this worship was the sacrifice of the first-born of every woman's body. According to one tradition, there was an opening at the back of the brazen idol, and after a fire was made within it, each parent had to come and with his own hands place his first-born child on the white-hot, outstretched arms of the idol. The parent was not allowed to show emotion, and drums were beaten so that the babies' cries could not be heard.

RELATIVISM

America seems to believe "You must progress beyond your primitive religious absolutism to the realization that all religious paths lead to the same destination. Instead of choosing between Baal & God, you should create a religious smorgasbord.

Religious Relativism: no one right way to God; all are equally valid.

This was the case with God and Baal. God claimed to be the only God who existed; Baal was merely the most powerful of a whole pantheon of gods. God created life on earth by speaking it into existence; Baal created life on earth by having sex with Anath. God was morally perfect and required people to approach him via the blameless sacrifice he provided; Baal was amoral at best and could be stimulated into action by ritual prostitution or placated by child-sacrifice. These are not superficial differences; they are foundational and irreconcilable.

Elijah confronts them and calls on them to **choose**: "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him..." In the same way, Jesus calls on us to choose. In many areas of life, there are legitimate "both-and" scenarios. It is "either-or"—you either choose for Jesus or you choose against him. God's unique Son who lived a uniquely perfect life so that he could die a unique death which pays for our sins (Jn. 14:6); God's claims are either true or false. If they are false, Jesus is a lie. If they are true, he must have our exclusive allegiance.

If we waver between two opinions (to claim to believe in Jesus and other ways of salvation), we are doomed. James says let not a double minded man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord

There is an unmistakable contrast between the way Baal prophets relate to Baal and the way Elijah relates to God—and this is the contrast between religion and biblical spirituality. The Baal prophets related to Baal through CHANT (18:26a), RITUALISM (18:26b “dance wildly”), and SELF-ABASEMENT (18:28). They did these things to get Baal’s attention, to merit his favor, and to manipulate him into doing what they wanted.

How differently Elijah relates to God (18:36,37). He doesn’t try to merit or manipulate—he trusts God’s faithfulness to his promises (explain). And he doesn’t drone on for 9 hours of chant and ritual; he talks to God personally in 63 sincere words (fewer in Hebrew).

In the same way, once you receive Christ you can talk to God personally, as a child talks to his loving parents. This is because God promises to permanently accept you and welcome you into his presence—not because of your works for God, but because of Christ’s finished work for you. How wonderful this is!

SILENCE THE PROPHET

Leadership in the Northern Kingdom (Ahab & Jezebel) rejected the message of God.

Not satisfied to establish her religion in Israel, Jezebel sought to stamp out every remnant of Jehovah worship and to kill every true prophet of God. She had to have things completely her way, and she almost succeeded. Some prophets survived by compromising their convictions and turning into “yes” men for Ahab. Another group of 100 were hidden in a cave and fed secretly by a godly servant of Ahab named Obadiah. But Elijah was the only one courageous enough to stand up openly against Jezebel’s wickedness. God gave him a great victory when he called down fire from heaven upon Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal were slain and it looked as though the nation would turn back to God. But Jezebel was not finished with her sinister work.

SELF WILLED

She swore in her rage that she would kill Elijah, and he ran for his life, collapsed in the wilderness under a juniper tree, and pleaded with God to let him die. It was the lowest point in the godly prophet’s great career. And Baal worship lived on, dragging the nation to new depths of degradation. This stubborn, headstrong, self-willed wife of Ahab brought disruption and distress to Israel for years to come.

Of course, Ahab was just as self-willed as Jezebel, but with a different temperament. For one thing, he had willfully entered a marriage that was politically convenient, but contrary to every word from God.

“Now it came about after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria” (1 Kgs. 21:1). Ahab decided he wanted Naboth’s property, so he went to him and said, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money” (1 Kgs. 21:2). Naboth declined the offer, just as he should have done, for God had forbidden the Jews to sell their paternal inheritance (Lev. 25:23-34). Naboth was simply obeying the law of the Lord.

“So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate

no food” (1 Kgs. 21:4). Sulking behavior is trying to punish others because we did not get our way. They just want to feel sorry for themselves and let everybody know how bad things are for them. All they really succeed in doing is letting people know how self-centered and immature they are.

Jezebel found Ahab sulking in his bed and said to him, “How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?” (1 Kgs. 21:5). So he explained to her how Naboth refused to let him have his vineyard. She replied, “Do you now reign over Israel?” (1 Kgs. 21:7). In modern terms: “What are you, a man or a mouse? Squeak up! Don’t you know that you are the king. You can take anything you want.” Obviously Jezebel did not understand that even the king in Israel was subject to the laws of God.

This weak and wicked man was dominated by his overbearing wife when she said, “Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (1 Kgs. 21:7). She planned a hideous crime; she was going to pay two false witnesses to testify that they heard Naboth blaspheme God and the king, so that both he and his sons would be stoned to death and the king would be free to lay claim to his land (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:26). She was going to teach Ahab her philosophy of life: “Take what you want and destroy anyone who stands in your way.” And Ahab did not have the courage to stop her.

Elijah met Ahab in Naboth’s vineyard and pronounced God’s judgment on both him and his wife for their wicked deed. Ahab was killed in battle.

Fourteen years later, Jehu, the captain of Israel’s army, was to be the instrument of Jezebel’s destruction. After slaying King Jehoram, the son of Ahab, he rode to Jezreel. Scripture says, “When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it, and she painted her eyes and adorned her head, and looked out the window” (2 Kgs. 9:30). She knew what was about to happen, but she was going to die like a queen, arrogant, self-willed and unrepentant to the end. She shouted abuses at Jehu from her upstairs window, but at Jehu’s command, several of her servants threw her down, “and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and he trampled her under foot” (2 Kgs. 9:33). It was a violent death, but it illustrated again the seriousness of sinful self-will in opposition to God.

HUSBAND, WIFE AND CHURCH MEMBERS

Marriages to stubborn, willful people can bring unhappiness to all concerned. Their indomitable self-will, having never surrendered to God, will seldom give in to those around them. With unyielding obstinacy they keep demanding their own way and looking for every possible means of having what they want. They will not listen; they will not consider the feelings of others; they will not consider the potential consequences of their actions.

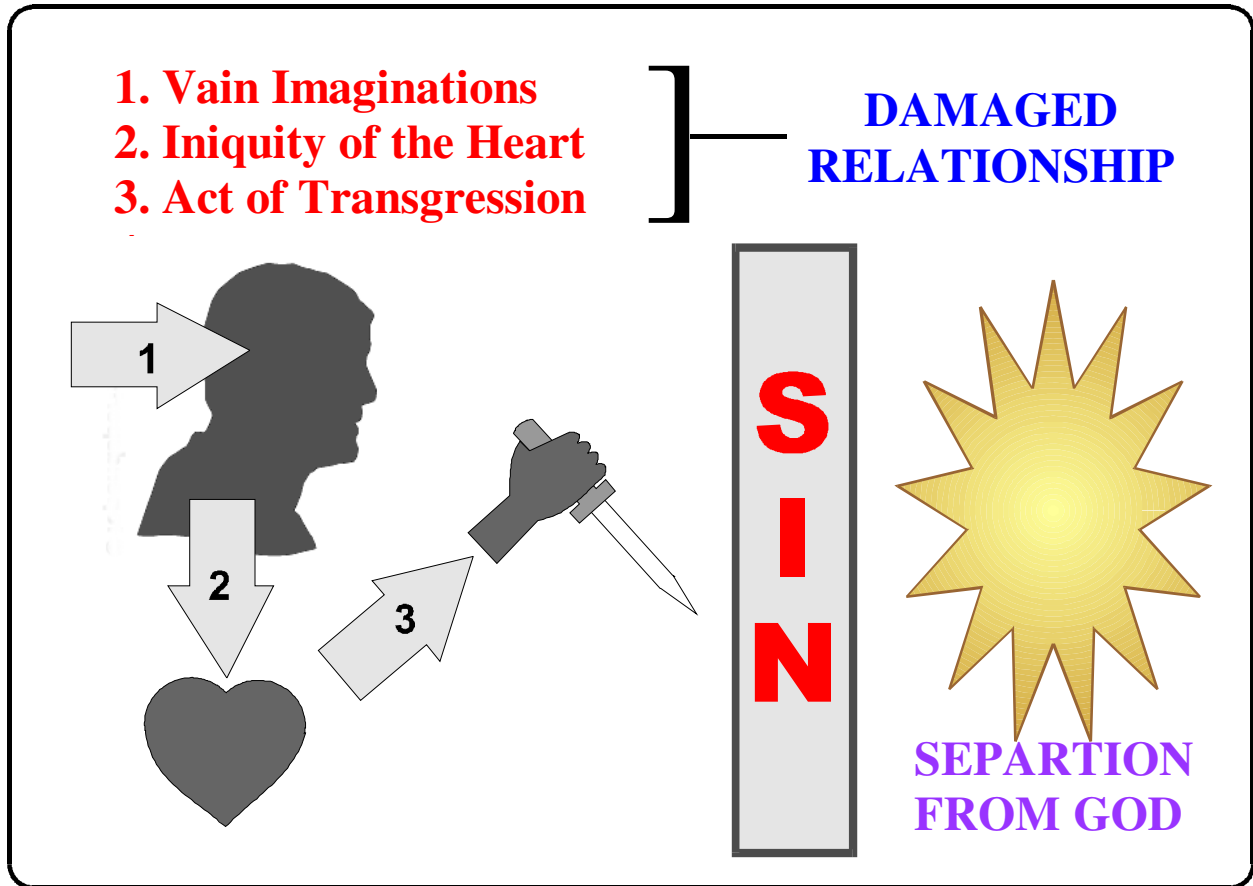
They believe that they are right and others are wrong, and they are determined to have everything their way. They obviously know very little of God’s love which “does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:5), but have only self-love which insists on its own rights and demands its own way. Those who live with people like this eventually find themselves emotionally destroyed.

MOTIVATION FOR EVIL

Historically we can easily see the sin in Ahab and Jezebel’s life. It is may be much harder to see how the spirits that controlled Ahab and Jezebel may be active in us today. It is not a question of do such spirit effect us: Yes or No? It is a matter of the degree of influence. Facing the darkness that lives in us, is the first step in the truth that sets us free.

The will to control others in order to achieve our desires is the root motivation. Often this starts from being a victim – mistreatment by the dominance of others. Re-living the abuse, embitters victims and they make an oath not to be a victim again. Now the stage is set for vengeance and self-indulgence. The energy invested in the replay of earlier mistreatment becomes the fuel to power revenge.

ELEMENTS OF SIN: Separation from God



Satan challenges our flesh with vain imaginations. "...fiery darts of the wicked one..." Eph 6:16

Absence of love & forgiveness rules our heart. "...followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts and went backward and not forward..." Jeremiah 7:24

Sin is what separates us from the Father "But your iniquities have separated you from your God And your sins have hidden His face from you..." Isaiah 59:2

Sermon Notes: World Harvester Church
Caryville, Tennessee August 23, 2009
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