AHAB DID MORE EVIL IN THE EYES OF THE LORD

1 Kings 16:1-34

Key Verse: 16:30

*“Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.”*

Happy Independence Day! It is good to celebrate our independence as a nation. However, it is even better to celebrate our freedom in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we can experience freedom from our sins and all the evil influence of this world. Last week we learned that Asa, King of Judah overcame evil and did what is right in the eyes of the Lord. But in today’s passage, “Ahab, [King of Israel] … did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him” (1Ki ‭16:30). Why did Ahab do so much evil? **(Slide 2)** We’ll consider this issue in two parts: Part 1. The Ways of Jeroboam (1-20), and Part 2. An Altar of Baal in The Temple of Baal.

**(Slide 3)** Part 1. The Ways of Jeroboam (1-20)

The phrase “The way(s) of Jeroboam” or “sin(s) of Jeroboam” appears 23 times in 1st & 2nd Kings, including four times in today’s passage (1Ki 16:2, 16:19, 16:26, 16:31). **(Slide 4)** The five kings of Israel mentioned here Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri and Ahab all followed the ways of Jeroboam. **(Slide 5)** But what were the ways of Jeroboam? When Jeroboam became King of Israel, he made two golden calf idols and set them up in Bethal and Dan. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods ... who brought you up out of Egypt” (1Ki 12:26-28; 2Ki 10:29; 2Ch 13:8). The way of Jeroboam was nationally sanctioned idol worship. It became like a gateway drug for idolatry to have free reign in the land. Because of this Jeroboam became the standard for all the evil kings that followed him. When Israel’s kings followed the way of Jeroboam each became worse than the one before them.

**(Slide 6)** The first king mentioned here is Baasha. Baasha, killed Jeroboam’s son and whole family according to the word of the Lord given through the prophet Ahijah (1Ki 15:29). Because of this, there was hope that Baasha might not follow the evil ways of Jeroboam. **(Slide 7)** However, Baasha’s first act as king was to secure the border between Israel and Judah, preventing anyone from leaving or entering (1Ki 15:17). In this way he attempted to alienate Israel from the word of the Lord by blocking worship in Jerusalem and keeping prophet missionaries from entering the land. It was because he was afraid to lose what he had. **(Slide 8)** But ultimately, Baasha could not escape the word of the Lord.

1Ki 16:1-4 *“Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu son of Hanani concerning Baasha: 2 “I lifted you up from the dust and appointed you ruler over my people Israel, but you followed the ways of Jeroboam and caused my people Israel to sin and to arouse my anger by their sins. 3 So I am about to wipe out Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat. 4 Dogs will eat those belonging to Baasha who die in the city, and birds will feed on those who die in the country.”*

Here, the word of the Lord through the prophet Jehu was given as God’s judgment on Baasha. When Baasha followed the ways of Jeroboam and caused Israel to sin, the Lord judged him according to what he had done. He received the same judgement as Jeroboam, even down to the last disturbing details. In a sense, it could be hard to blame Baasha. He just followed the example of the king before him and the current culture. But, this is not a legitimate excuse. God gave him a choice. Baasha could have followed the example of King David. Moreover, Baasha could have followed the word of God for himself. Look at verse 1 again and notice the phrase “The word of the Lord.” Fundamentally, Baasha did evil because he did not follow the word of the Lord. The phrase “The word of the Lord” appears 45 times in the books of 1st & 2nd Kings. The Lord wanted the kings of Judah and Israel to follow the word of the Lord, not idols.

**(Slide 9)** Despite his position as king, Baasha could not escape the judgment of God’s word. He 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* The word of the Lord is God’s sword to fight against evil. When we expose our hearts before the word of the Lord, God judges our thoughts and attitudes and circumcises our hearts for repentance. If we do not repent based on the word of God, we will be judged for our sins as Baasha was.

**(Slide 10)** Next up, Elah. **(Slide 11)** After the death of Baash, his son Elah succeeded him as king and reigned for two years. When he was getting drunk, one of his officials, Zimri, struck him down and killed him, and succeeded him as king. The only notable thing about Elah’s two year reign is that he was getting drunk. He was getting drunk and Zimri killed him.

**(Slide 12)** Next Zimri. As soon as he began to reign, Zimri killed off Baasha’s family line. **(Slide 13)** Verses 12-13 read. *“So Zimri destroyed the whole family of Baasha, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken against Baasha through the prophet Jehu— 13 because of all the sins Baasha and his son Elah had committed and had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols.”* God’s word of judgement against Baasha was fulfilled. Baasha and his son Elah committed the same sins of Jeroboam. Their sins aroused the anger of the Lord, not only because of their worthless idols, but also because their sins caused Israel to sin.

Our sin not only hurts us, but also those around us. It especially hurts our family members and close friends. God values these relationships so much, because they are intended to reveal the love of God. He is so angry when we bring our sins into our family or church fellowship, or when it affects those closest to us that we are called to serve. God hates to see our sins destroy our close relationships that should be used to reveal the love of God. This is another reason it is so important to repent and love our family members and close friends and those we are called to serve with the love of God. We need to follow the word of God, not our sinful nature.

**(Slide 14)** Zimri reigned in Tirzah for only seven days. When the army heard that Zimri had killed Elah, they proclaimed Omri king and laid siege to the city. Then Zimri set the palace on fire around him and died. His reign began with murder and ended with suicide in the span of 7 days. In this way, the idolatry of the kings exploded into violence. Verse 19 says that Zimri died “ ... because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and following the ways of Jeroboam and committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit.” There could be many reasons for the skyrocketing murder or suicide rates of nations, or increasing violance within societies of families, but idolatry is the true underlying cause. **(Slide 15)** Even after the murder of Elah and suicide of Zimri, disorder and division continued. According to verses 21-22, “ … the people were split into two factions; half supported Tibni son of Ginath for king, and the other supported Omri. But Omri’s followers proved stronger … so Tibni died and Omri became king.” It doesn’t say, but maybe another murder or suicide.

In times of division and violence, people need the words of the Lord the most. As the colleges reopen, let’s pray to invite the next generation to God’s word through our invitation to Bible study.

**(Slide 16)** Part 2. An Altar of Baal in The Temple of Baal (23-34)

Thus far each of the kings of Israel followed the ways of Jeroboam and did not follow the word of the Lord. **(Slide 17)** The next king was Omri, who became king after the death of Zimri and also his rival Tibni. Omri moved the capital of Israel from Tirzah to Samaria, which soon became “sin city'' in Israel. **(Slide 18)** Verses ”25-26 say that “... Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He completely followed the ways of Jeroboam … , committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols.”

Omri sinned more than all those before him. Things were continuing to go from bad to worse. Omri not only followed the ways of Jeroboam, he followed them completely. The Lord’s anger was aroused, but he was silent. The word of the Lord had not come to any of the kings of Israel since Baasha and no word of God’s judgement was given to Omri. In this way, the land experienced a famine of God’s word. Israel began to look more and more like the Canaanite nations it replaced.

**(Slide 19)** Finally, Ahab. After Omri died, his son Ahab succeeded him as king. He reigned in Israel for twenty-two years. **(Slide 20)** Verse 30 says that, “Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.” Ahab did more evil than any of those before him because he did not live before the eyes of the Lord. **(Slide 21)** He 4:13 says that, “Nothing is all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.” To live before the eyes of the Lord means to fear the Lord. When we live before the eyes of the Lord we can do what is right and repent of doing what is evil. If we really love the Lord, then we need to live before the eyes of the Lord. We need to live before the Lord not only in public, but also in private.

**(Slide 22)** Verses 31-33 summarize the evil committed by Ahab, King of Israel, “[Ahab] not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. 32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.”

When Ahab did not live before the eyes of God he ended up taking a very light attitude toward his sins. The idol worship of Jeroboam became almost nothing to him. But what really led Ahab over the top in doing evil was his wife. Ahab married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of Sidonians. Her Father was king of the Sidonians in the region of Tyre and Sidon, which was a Canaanite nation adjacent to Israel in modern day Lebanon. Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel was political. However, it also said something about his sin problem. Like Soloman, Abab loved foriegn women (1Ki 11:1). And like the wives of Soloman, Ahab’s wife Jezebel turned his heart after other gods (1Ki 11:4). However, Ahab was a lot weaker than Soloman and his wife Jezebel was a lot more wicked. Jezebel was a worshiper of Baal and influenced her husband Ahab to become a worshiper of Baal. Ahab built a temple of Baal in Samaria and set up an altar of Baal there, and also an Asherah pole.

Baal was the god of fertility and Asherah the goddess of fertility. The Baal worship services included pornagraphic displays of sexual immorality, public prostitution and even child sacrifice. It made the worship of golden cows look pretty innocent.

Ahab did more to arouse the anger of the Lord than did all the kings before him. **(Slide 23)** 1Ki 21:24 says that, “There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.”

What does the Bible say about worldly women? I recommend that all unmarried young men read the book of Proverbs. **(Slide 24)** One of my favorites is Pr 11:22 “A beautiful woman who lacks discretion is like a gold ring in a pig’s snout.” **(Slide 25)** Imagine a pig trying to look beautiful! True beauty comes from the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. A woman that loves Jesus is beautiful from the inside out. **(Slide 26)** Pr 31:30 says, “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”

**(Slide 27)** Look at verse 34, “In Ahab’s time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun.”

After the fall of Jericho, Joshua pronounced a solemn oath, cursing the one who undertakes to rebuild Jericho, saying “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.” and it came true. Jericho was a symbol of the strength and idol worshiping culture of Canaan. For it to be rebuilt meant that Canaan had been restored, which was really a cursed thing. The Israelites removed the idol worship of Canaan, only to have spirit Canaan rise back up from within. They became no different than the people they drove out.

**(Slide 28)** Personally, whenever I face the stress or burden of my responsibilities, I always want to escape. I might take a walk or eat something or watch a movie or sports game. But there can be a darker side to this too. Once, shortly after Miriam and I were married, I dropped her off at the campus for fishing. Instead of going to park the car, I went somewhere and looked a pornography. Somehow, at that time my mind was able to compartmentalize what I was doing and not think about her. And, I did things like this many times, holding my own private idol worship service and then afterwards being overcome by my guilt and shame. Although I wanted to hide these things, I know that I cannot hide anything from the eyes of God. I thank God that only by the grace of God I was able to marry a beautiful woman of God. Whenever I feel like I want to escape, I want to escape into the words of God and the love relationship with Jesus Christ.

**(Slide 29)** Look at verse 30 again. “Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him.” Why did Ahab do so much evil? He followed the ways of Jeroboam and not the word of the Lord. He followed his worldly desire for a hot wife, and followed her. But, most of all, he didn’t live before the eyes of the Lord. May God bless us to live before the eyes of the Lord; to fear the Lord and do what is right.

One word: Live before the eyes of the Lord.