

Old Testament History

The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 2

Background:

Introduction:

The Assyrian Empire posed a constant threat to the northern kingdom of Israel and surrounding kingdoms. At its height, the Assyrian Empire extended as far south as Egypt and Ethiopia (See map on page 13). The Syrian (Aramaeans) king Benhadad I of Damascus (900-850 BC) had taken certain northern regions of Israel earlier, although these areas were retaken in the time of Omri (885-874 BC) and Ahab (874-853 BC). However as he prepared to launch another campaign into the northern kingdom, Benhadad sent an ultimatum to Ahab stipulating that Ahab must provide a huge payment of gold or suffer the consequences. Ahab agreed, but Benhadad came a second time and threatened to take the city of Samaria even if the ransom was paid. A prophet assured Ahab of a victory over this Aramaean foe. To strengthen and protect Israel against military threats from the Benhadad, Ahab formed an alliance with the Sidonian (Phoenician) king Ethbaal. This alliance was mutually beneficial to the Phoenicians since Benhadad posed a threat to them as well. At this time in their history, the Phoenicians were at the height of their expansion (the city of Carthage was founded by the Phoenicians later in the century). The principal cities of the Phoenicians, Tyre and Sidon, were partly dependent on imports of grains and other foods from the rich farmlands of the northern kingdom of Israel. Therefore, the treaty between Israel and the Phoenicians provided Israel with an outlet for agricultural products as well as other commercial opportunities. Unfortunately, Ahab sealed this alliance by marrying the Sidonian king's infamous daughter Jezebel, a zealous and devoted follower of the pagan god Baal.

Jezebel's determination to make the worship of Baal and Astarte the religion of Israel nearly exterminated the worship of Jehovah in the land. The prophets whom God had raised up quickly became the principal targets of her deadly wrath, and unfortunately, some eventually yielded under the pressure, saying only what the king wanted to hear. Therefore, God raised up the prophet Elijah who, along with his successor Elisha, waged a form of holy war against Jezebel and her prophets and priests. During the famous confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah ordered the execution of a total of 850 prophets of Baal and Astarte.

Because of their wickedness, the days were numbered for Ahab and Jezebel. He would die in battle against Benhadad I of Syria, and his wife Jezebel would later be thrown from a rooftop and devoured by dogs except for her skull, feet and the palms of her hands. The prophecy of Elijah came true: "On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel" (2 Kings 9:36).

Historical Notes:

There are many reasons why the worship of Baal and Astarte (also called Ashtoreth) posed such a serious problem to the people of God in Old Testament times. In addition to believing that sacrifices to Baal and Astarte would guarantee good harvests, the worship of Baal was a form of worship that could best be summed up as "anything goes" – even to the extent of infanticide.

M. H. Pope writes: "The Israelites absorbed the Canaanite ways and learned to identify their god with Baal, whose rains brought fertility to the land. A characteristic feature of the fertility cult was sacral sexual intercourse by priests and priestesses and other specially consecrated persons, sacred prostitutes of both sexes, intended to emulate and stimulate deities who bestowed fertility. The agricultural cult stressed the sacrifice or common meal in which the gods, priests and people partook. Wine was consumed in great quantity in thanksgiving to Baal for the fertility of the vineyards. The wine also helped to induce ecstatic frenzy, and was climaxed by self-laceration, and sometimes by self-emasculatation. Child-sacrifice was also a feature of the rites."

Thus the powerful attraction to the worship of Baal was sexual promiscuity or licentiousness. Promiscuity is defined as being "characterized by or involving indiscriminate mingling or association, especially having sexual relations with a number of partners on a casual basis." Licentiousness, on the other hand, is defined as the "dissolute indulgence in sensual pleasure" or "lacking legal or moral restraints, especially: disregarding sexual restraints."

Halley (1922) describes Baal worship, the religion of the Canaanites as follows: "Temples of Baal and Ashtoreth were usually together. Priestesses were temple prostitutes. Sodomites were male temple prostitutes. The worship of Baal, Ashtoreth and other Canaanite gods consisted in the most extravagant orgies; their temples were centers of vice."

Solomon wrote, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Solomon should know. It was his extravagant, opulent lifestyle, his 300 wives and 700 concubines that brought him, and ultimately the nation, down. The northern kingdom of Israel eventually fell into the hands of its enemies because "righteousness" had become a forgotten word. What was true of Israel will also be true of any nation that forgets God – including the United States of America.

Outline:

- I. **The Reign of Ahab in Israel (1 Kings 16:29–22:40; 2 Kings 9:30-37; 2 Chronicles 18:1-34)**
 - A. Sin of Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-34)
 - B. The Ministry of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-19:21)
 1. Elijah's warning to Ahab (1 Kings 17:1-7)
 2. Elijah and the Widow (1 Kings 17:8-24)
 3. The prophet's message to Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-19)
 4. Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-46)

B. The Ministry of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-19:21)

1. Elijah's warning to Ahab (1 Kings 17:1-7)
 - a. What was the message Elijah delivered to Ahab? (1 Kings 17:1)

 - b. How did God provide food and water for Elijah? (1 Kings 17:2-7)

 - c. What does this tell us about God's provisions?

3. Elijah and the Widow (1 Kings 17:8-24)
 - a. Why did Elijah go to Zarephath, and where did he stay? (1 Kings 17:8-12)

 - b. How was the widow of Zarephath blessed by God? (1 Kings 17:13-16)

 - c. What happened to the widow's son, and what did Elijah do? (1 Kings 17:17-24)

3. The prophet's message to Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-19)
 - a. What command did God give Elijah? (1 Kings 18:1)

 - b. What did Jezebel do to the prophets of the Lord? (1 Kings 18:2-4)

- c. What did Ahab tell Obadiah to do? (1 Kings 18:5-6)

 - d. Describe the next meeting between Obadiah and Elijah. (1 Kings 18:7-16)

 - e. What accusation did Ahab bring against Elijah? (1 Kings 18:17)

 - f. What was Elijah's response, and what did he tell Ahab to do? (1 Kings 18:18-19)
4. Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-46)
- a. What was the challenge Elijah made to the people? (1 Kings 18:20-24)

 - b. What was the challenge Elijah made to the prophets of Baal? (1 Kings 18:25-29)

 - c. Describe the altar Elijah prepared. What was unique about this altar? (1 Kings 18:30-35)

 - d. How did God show his approval of Elijah? (1 Kings 18:36-39)

- e. What happened to the prophets of Baal? (1 Kings 18:40)

 - f. What did Elijah's servant see when he looked the first time? What did he see when he looked the seventh time? (1 Kings 18:41-46)
5. The prophet escapes Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-18)
- a. What message did Jezebel send to Elijah, and why? (1 Kings 19:1-2)

 - b. How did Elijah escape? (1 Kings 19:3)

 - c. What did Elijah pray for? (1 Kings 19:4)

 - d. Why do you think he was so despondent?

 - e. How did God answer his prayer? (1 Kings 19:5-8)

 - f. How did Elijah explain his feelings? (1 Kings 19:9-10)

- g. When Elijah felt he was the only one still faithful to God, what did God reveal to him? (1 Kings 19:11-14)

 - h. What did the Lord tell Elijah to do next? (1 Kings 19:15-17)

 - i. In addition to Elijah, how many others were still faithful to the Lord in Israel? (1 Kings 19:18)
6. Elisha joins Elijah (1 Kings 19:19-21)
- a. Describe the meeting between Elisha and Elijah. (1 Kings 19:19-20)

 - b. What did Elisha do to show his complete commitment to Elijah? (1 Kings 19:21)

C. Wars with Syria (1 Kings 20:1-43)

- 1. Ahab defeats the Syrians twice (1 Kings 20:1-30)
 - a. When Benhadad and his forces besieged Samaria, what message did he give Ahab? (1 Kings 20:1-3)

 - b. How did Ahab reply to Benhadad? (1 Kings 20:4)

 - c. What was Benhadad's reaction? (1 Kings 20:5-12)

- d. What was the message the prophet gave Ahab? (1 Kings 20:13-14)

- e. What was the outcome of the first battle with the Syrians? (1 Kings 20:15-22)

- f. What misconception did the Syrians have about the God of Israel? (1 Kings 20:21-27)

- g. What did the prophet tell Ahab this second time? (1 Kings 20:28)

- h. What was the outcome of the second battle with the Syrians? (1 Kings 20:29-30)

- i. What advice was Benhadad given? (1 Kings 20:31-33)

- j. What was the treaty between Benhadad and Ahab? (1 Kings 20:34)

D. Ahab condemned (1 Kings 20:35-43)

1. Describe the unusual way God show his displeasure toward Ahab regarding the treaty with Benhadad? (1 Kings 20:35-36)

2. What was the message to Ahab? (1 Kings 20:37-43)

D. Murder of Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29)

1. The plot (1 Kings 21:1-16)

a. What did Ahab want from Naboth, and what offer did Ahab make?
(1 Kings 21:1-2)

b. What was Naboth's reply, and Ahab's response? (1 Kings 21:3)

c. What did Jezebel propose, and how did she carry out her plan? (1 Kings 21:4-16)

2. The prophet's final warnings (1 Kings 22:17-29)

a. What accusation did Elijah bring against Ahab? (1 Kings 22:17-19)

b. How did Ahab react to the words of Elijah? (1 Kings 22:20)

c. What message did Elijah give concerning Ahab's future? (1 Kings 22:20-24)

d. How does the Bible describe Ahab in the verses these verses? (1 Kings 22:25-26)

- e. What was Ahab's reaction? (1 Kings 22:27)

 - f. What was God's reaction? (1 Kings 22:28-29)
- E. Ahab's final days (1 Kings 21:17-22:40; 2 Kings 9:30-37; 2 Chronicles 18:1-34)**
- 1. Alliance with Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:1-29; 2 Chronicles 18:1)
 - a. How long was there peace between Israel and Syria? What two kings made an alliance? (1 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chronicles 18:1-2)

 - b. What request did Ahab make of Jehoshaphat? (1 Kings 22:3-4; 2 Chronicles 18:3)

 - c. What did Jehoshaphat require before agreeing to Ahab's request? (1 Kings 22:5; 2 Chronicles 18:4)

 - d. How many prophets did Ahab gather together, and what advice did they give to Ahab? (1 Kings 22:6; 2 Chronicles 18:5)

 - e. What question did Jehoshaphat ask following the counsel of Ahab's prophets? Why do you think he asked this? (1 Kings 22:7; 2 Chronicles 18:6)

- f. What prophet remained, and how did Ahab regard this prophet? (1 Kings 22:8-9; 2 Chronicles 18:7-8)

- d. What did the four hundred prophets tell Ahab and Jehoshaphat? (1 Kings 22:10-14; 2 Chronicles 18:9-11)

- e. What did the messenger tell Micaiah? What was his reply? (1 Kings 22:13-14; 2 Chronicles 18:12-13)

- f. What was the first message the prophet Micaiah delivered to the king? (1 Kings 22:15; 2 Chronicles 18:14)

- g. What was Ahab's response? What did he do, and what did he say? (1 Kings 22:16-17; 2 Chronicles 18:15)

- h. What was most upsetting about Micaiah's response regarding the prophecies of the four hundred false prophets? (2 Chronicles 18:16)

- i. What did Ahab tell Jehoshaphat? (1 Kings 22:18; 2 Chronicles 18:17)

- j. What heavenly scene did the prophet Micaiah see when he delivered his prophecy? (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18)

- k. Who enticed Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead, who responded? (1 Kings 22:20; 2 Chronicles 18:19-20)

- l. What did the spirit say he would be in the mouth of Ahab's prophets? (1 Kings 22:22-23; 2 Chronicles 18:21-22)

- m. After striking the prophet on the cheek and mocking him, what did Ahab's prophet Zedekiah ask? (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chronicles 18:23)

- n. What was Micaiah's answer, and what happened after that? (1 Kings 22:25-28; 2 Chronicles 18:24-27)

- 2. Ahab dies in battle (1 Kings 22:29-40; 2 Kings 9: 30-37; 2 Chronicles 18:28-34)
 - a. How did Ahab and Jehoshaphat prepare for battle? What advice did Ahab give to Jehoshaphat? (1 Kings 22:29-30; 2 Chronicles 18:28-29)

 - b. What had the king of Syria commanded? (1 Kings 22:31; 2 Chronicles 18:30)

 - c. How was Ahab slain? (1 Kings 22:32-34; 2 Chronicles 18:31-33)

- d. What prophecy was fulfilled in the death and burial of Ahab? (See: 1 Kings 22:35-38; 2 Chronicles 18:34; 1 Kings 21:17-20)

Application:

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?

The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires

