

Lesson 6 8 September 2013

Ahab's Iniquity

Lesson Scope: 1 Kings 20 and 21

Lesson Focus

The last time Ahab was mentioned was after the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He was riding toward Jezreel in a great rainstorm, which resulted from Elijah's intercession. We have no record of Ahab's response to Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel except that "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." Likely Ahab was not involved in the threat Jezebel issued against Elijah (chapter 19), nor did he challenge it.

Then a prophet of God came to Ahab (chapter 20), not in rebuke, but in encouragement, not once, but twice. The prophet promised Ahab victory over Ben-hadad and the Syrians, who were challenging Israel. This was an unusual opportunity for Ahab, a test God put before him to see if he would fully follow His direction. Ahab miserably failed the test.

Ahab's life stands as a warning to all against choosing wrong. We may think that our lives do not portray any self-centeredness, but we can always improve.

Before you teach others search your own life to be sure you have crucified self and are choosing right values. Only then can you be effective in teaching others and leading them to the Lord.

Use this lesson to make practical applications to areas in which we may be failing to have proper values. Living in a society where many are choosing for self can easily affect our thinking. There is an emphasis here on the importance of living a life of simplicity that reflects a pilgrim-and-stranger mentality. This will issue into a concern for others and an interest in serving them. Most importantly is also the emphasis on the need for godliness and careful obedience to God's commands.

One's responses to the circumstances of life reveal the content of one's heart. A pattern of choosing for self indicates an ungodly character and a refusal of godly direction.

Lesson Aim: To receive warning from the life of one who had wrong values.

Theme Verse: [3 John 11](#). Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

Lesson Text

Befriending the Enemy

[1 Kings 20:22](#) ²² And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

[1 Kings 20:29-32](#) ²⁹ and they pitched one over against the other seven days. And *so* it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

³⁰ But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and *there* a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. ³¹ And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel *are* merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.

³² So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is* he yet alive? he *is* my brother.

[1 Kings 20:38](#) ³⁸ So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.

[1 Kings 20:42-43](#) ⁴² And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of *thy* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. ⁴³ And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

Destroying the Righteous

[1 Kings 21:2-4](#) ² And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it *is* near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; *or*, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. ³ And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. ⁴ And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he

had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

1 Kings 21:7-10 ⁷ And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, *and* eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. ⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth. ⁹ And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: ¹⁰ And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

1 Kings 21:16 ¹⁶ And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Reaping Destruction

1 Kings 21:20 ²⁰ And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee*: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.

1 Kings 21:24 ²⁴ Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.

Questions for Study

Befriending the Enemy

1. What is indicated by Ahab's letting Ben-hadad go free?
2. What are some ways we might befriend the enemy?

Destroying the Righteous

3. What is indicated by Ahab's becoming "heavy and displeased"? What circumstances might tempt us to respond in a similar way?
4. How might one reveal disdain for a godly heritage?
5. How might we undermine respect for others?

Reaping Destruction

6. What were the sins of Ahab?
7. Describe the course of one who has poor attitudes toward those who endeavor to help him.

Analyzing the Passage

God mercifully lengthened Israel's tranquility by delivering Ben-hadad and the Syrian army into Ahab's hand. The people had responded favorably in

acknowledging Elijah's God, at least outwardly. This victory over the Syrians came in spite of Ahab's wickedness.

The great victory of 1 Kings 20:29 undoubtedly came as a result of God's supernatural involvement. Israel was greatly outnumbered by the Syrian confederacy.

The strategy of Ben-hadad's servants (1 Kings 20:31-32) was an effort to obtain mercy from Israel after Syria had been soundly defeated. Israel's policies toward conquered kings may have been decidedly more humane than those of the heathen, but merciful hardly seems to apply to Ahab in his dealings with his fellow Israelites.

God's view of Ahab's sending away Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:34) is found in verse 42. The prophet told Ahab that he had "let go" a man that God had appointed to utter destruction.

Naboth (21:2) means "fruits." Naboth was a fruitful man of God. In a day when men commonly swore by false gods and neglected the laws of Jehovah, Naboth valued his heritage and openly confessed his loyalty to God (see Leviticus 25:23 and Numbers 36:7).

In defiance of God's law, Jezebel declared that she would give Ahab the vineyard he desired (1 Kings 21:7). This contrasted starkly with Naboth's refusal to break God's law (1 Kings 21:3).

Jezebel declared a fast (1 Kings 21:9) as if some calamity or adversity had been upon Israel. Naboth was set in a place of honor as a cover-up for what she was really plotting. With a bare minimum of witnesses and a speedy sentence, Naboth and his sons were executed (2 Kings 9:26).

Principles and Applications

Befriending the Enemy

1. God faithfully reveals Himself to men and provides the opportunity to choose right (1 Kings 20:22, 29-30). "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Romans 10:18). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech" (Psalm 19:1-2). God also desires to use each of us to point sinners to Himself.

2. Responding to the appeals of the enemy leads one to destruction (1 Kings 20:31-32, 38-42). It is extremely dangerous to consider someone a brother if his life is displeasing to the Lord. When we become close friends with those who are worldly-minded, we are always in danger of contracting their worldly lifestyle. (See Haggai 2:12-13.) Unequal business or so-

cial yokes place us in the same danger. We must constantly guard against Satan's temptations, the world's allurements, and our own lustful, native tendencies.

3. Befriending the enemy and spurning the rebukes of the godly will bring God's judgment (1 Kings 20:32, 38, 42-43). Not surprisingly, these two often go hand in hand. One who is set on befriending the world often views the godly, careful brother, who challenges his unwholesome associations, as narrow-minded, unloving, or meddling. If we despise or resist a concerned brother's effort to help us in these areas, we will turn further away from godly living. If we become "heavy and displeased" with the church's direction in practical areas, we will move away from God's direction and will place ourselves in line for His judgment.

Destroying the Righteous

4. Wrong values cause one to disdain a godly heritage (1 Kings 21:2-4). Do we appreciate our Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage and readily identify with it? Historically our forebears, in keeping with Scriptural principles, have been satisfied with a simple lifestyle that portrayed a pilgrim-and-stranger outlook on life. Are we continuing to portray that in our clothing, food, houses, house furnishings, automobiles, and other material things we use? Or do we readily conform to the worldly society about us?

5. Those who have wrong values become slaves to selfish passions (1 Kings 21:3-4). If we live for the material with little regard for spiritual, eternal values, we will become very self-centered. Covetousness and self-conceit will rule our lives. When we cannot obtain what we want, self-pity will rule us. "Foolish and hurtful lusts" will drown us "in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6:9).

6. A conceited view of one's power and authority marks a wrong set of values (1 Kings 21:7). It is never right to exercise power or authority at the expense of others. We should always value the input of our brethren above our own judgment. When each one in the brotherhood does this, harmonious working together will be evident.

7. A wrong set of values destroys respect for human life (1 Kings 21:9-10, 16). Although we would not consider taking someone's physical life to satisfy our own desires, we should consider that our words or actions may jeopardize another's integrity or success. To speak disparagingly of others also indicates a lack of respect.

Reaping Destruction

8. Those who disregard God and godly values must finally face divine retribution (1 Kings 21:24-26). God gives man the freedom to choose which

course he will take in life; however, he is never free to choose the consequences of his choices. God sovereignly decides the consequences. In Isaiah 66:3-4 God says of those who have chosen their own ways that He will choose their delusions and bring their fears upon them. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Important Teachings

1. God faithfully reveals Himself to men and provides the opportunity to choose right (20:22, 29-30).
2. Responding to the appeals of the enemy leads one to destruction (20:31, 32, 38, 42).
3. Befriending the enemy and spurning the rebukes of the godly will bring God's judgment (20:32, 38, 42-43).
4. Wrong values cause one to disdain a godly heritage (21:2-4).
5. Those who have wrong values become slaves to selfish passions (21:3-4).
6. A conceited view of one's power and authority marks a wrong set of values (21:7).
7. A wrong set of values destroys respect for human life (21:9-10, 16).
8. Those who disregard God and godly values must finally face divine retribution (21:24-26).
9. Those who deliberately embrace a wrong set of values sell themselves, body and soul to do evil (21:20, 25-26).

Answers to Questions

1. What is indicated by Ahab's letting Ben-hadad go free?

Ahab did not really see the enemy for who he was. He did not appreciate the gracious victory God had provided over the Syrians. He did not see the importance of keeping Israel separate from the heathen nations. He was careless about obedience.

2. What are some ways we might befriend the enemy?

We could do this by joining evangelistic or relief activities with other "Christian" groups that do not keep the "all things" of Scripture. Close social interchange with relatives or others who do not appreciate the stand the church takes in separation from the world has a similar effect. Parents might be lax and therefore might allow their children to be influenced by inconsistent books, tapes, or CDs.

3. What is indicated by Ahab's becoming "heavy and displeased"?

What circumstances might tempt us to respond in a similar way?

Ahab was resentful and depressed because he had been told that his life was not pleasing to the Lord. He also was displeased that he was denied Naboth's vineyard. These reactions indicate that he was set on having his way. Repenting and amending his ways was not an option that he seriously considered.

We might respond similarly to a brother's concern about our life.

We might be sullen or resentful about the church's direction in practical areas. We could react adversely to circumstances of life we may feel are not fair instead of taking our burdens to the Lord and relying upon His grace.

4. How might one reveal disdain for a godly heritage?

One might be ashamed to identify with those who, in the past, suffered ridicule and physical persecution. One might be ashamed or hesitant to identify with the distinctive practices that set us apart from other groups who claim to be serving the Lord. One might resent the effort of godly church leaders who are endeavoring to make applications to current issues.

5. How might we undermine respect for others?

We undermine respect when we speak disparagingly of others or when we promote our self-image and the importance of what we are doing, at the expense of others.

6. What were the sins of Ahab?

Ahab sold out to evil, followed idols as did the Amorites, and allowed Jezebel to influence him wrongly. He did not see the need for careful obedience.

7. Describe the course of one who has poor attitudes toward those who endeavor to help him.

He who resists the help of other brethren and the church sets himself on a course away from God. He will become less sensitive to God's Word. He will more and more easily go against the commands of Scripture. He will finally experience God's judgment.

Summarizing the Lesson

"But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (1 Kings 21:25). "So the king died, and was brought to Samaria.... And one washed the chariot ... and the dogs licked up his blood; ... according unto the word of the LORD" (1 Kings 22:37-38).

Research Guide

1. Study the encounter of Balaam with Israel in Numbers 22-24, 31:8 to see many similarities to Ahab's life.
2. Read Scriptures on the subject of "Choice" in a topical Bible.