

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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1 KINGS 19-22 ELISHA, JEHOSEPHAT; DEATH OF AHAB & JEZEBEL



In the last Bible Study, we went over the life of Elijah the prophet and his conflict with King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. After the great miracle on Mt. Carmel, Elijah had the prophets of Baal slain. But when he heard Jezebel was after him, he fled for his life to Mt. Sinai. There, God taught him a lesson that He doesn't always do things in dramatic form, but in a quiet and subtle way. The manner He would solve the problem of Ahab's and Jezebel's wickedness was by placing the right people in positions of power. Elisha would succeed him, Jehu would eventually be king of Israel, and Hazael, the king of Syria.

Let's begin: Elijah now goes to find Elisha. We read, "So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth [last in line]. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, 'Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.' And he said to him, 'Go back again, for what have I done to you?' So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant" (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Expositor's further explains, "Coming on him suddenly, Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha, a symbol of Elisha's call to the prophetic office. When Elisha was able to collect his wits, he ran after Elijah, asking only that he be allowed to take leave of his family. Elijah's reply indicates that he himself had not called Elisha; it was God's call. Whether Elisha would follow that call was his own decision. Elisha meant business for God. Taking his leave of Elijah, Elisha returned home to enjoy a farewell meal with his family and friends. The meat was cooked over Elisha's own plowing equipment [he killed his oxen and burned his plow]. Thus he had burned his past behind him. Henceforth he would serve God. However this first meant learning more of him through Elijah [his teacher and mentor]."

Here we see that a servant of God can come from any profession, but it has to be a calling and many times the recognition comes from a superior, as was the case here with Elijah. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace and order (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

Although Ahab had done many wicked things, God still regarded him as the king of Israel and wanted to work with him, changing his life.

When a huge Syrian army came against Ahab and surrounded Samaria, resistance looked hopeless. Initially, Ahab was ready to give up, but the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad, made a serious mistake by disregarding the God of Israel and boasting how he was going to ransack the entire capital and take the choicest things and women. This incited Ahab to convene the elders and complain of those boasts. The elders advised him not to give in, and this message was sent to Ben-Hadad. It seemed suicidal.

But, although the Syrians had overwhelming force, God sent Ahab a prophet to let him know He would intervene on their behalf in the victory.

The Bible says, "Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.' And Ahab said, 'By whom?' 'Thus says the Lord, 'By the young leaders of the provinces.' Then he said, 'Who will set the battle in order? And he answered, 'You.' (20:13-15).

By using young leaders, God was showing the victory would not come by experienced officers, but by Him. They assembled their army and caught Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings (governors) all cocky and drunk at their command post. "Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter. And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, 'Go, strengthen yourself, take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you" (20:21-22).

Ben-Hadad tried again and still did not regard the God of Israel. The Bible says, "Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, 'Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they. So do this thing: dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places, and you shall muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they.' And he listened to their voice and did so" (20:23-25).

So the Syrian army came with overwhelming force to the plain of Megiddo, and again they made the fatal error of insulting God. "Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, 'Thus says the Lord, 'Because the Syrians have said, 'The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys,' therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.' And they encamped opposite each other for seven days....So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left. And Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber" (20:29-30).

The Syrians were defeated and the king and his officers pleaded for mercy. We read, "So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, 'Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please let me live.' And he said, 'Is he still alive? He is my brother.'...So Ben-Hadad said to him, 'The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.' Then Ahab said, 'I will send you away with this treaty.' So he made a treaty with him and sent him away" (20:32-34).

This treaty is important in two counts: 1. There is a historical and archaeological connection. 2. Ahab would be condemned by God for it.

Now Israel and Syrian became allies and Ahab grew in power. *Archaeology and the O.T.* comments, "Ahab was becoming a strong king, which is evidenced in his playing an important role in one of the famous battles of antiquity....In 853 B.C., Shalmaneser III marched west once more. Tribute, but no resistance was offered him until he reached the vicinity of Karkar (or Qarqar) in northern Syria. There Shalmaneser records [in a stele] that a coalition of twelve kings opposed his advance:

'I destroyed, tore down, and burned down Karkar...[Its king] brought along to help him 1,200 chariots, 1,200 calvarymen, 20,000 footsoldiers of [Hadadezer] of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 cavalrymen, 10,000 foot soldiers of **Ahab, the Israelite...**'

"In biblical studies the Battle of Karkar is important for two reasons. First, in the fifty-to-sixty-thousand-man coalition that opposed the Assyrians,

Ahab is given credit for fielding the second largest army and over half the chariots...This battle report suggests that, although Ahab was evil in God's eyes, he had probably become the most powerful king the northern kingdom had yet known. Second, the Battle of Karkar represents the first physical contact between Israel and Assyria" (pp. 311-312).

The Battle at Karkar is thus a key date in Bible chronology, and pegs the reign of Ahab with the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria.

Meanwhile, in Israel, God is very unhappy with this alliance with a pagan king of Syria. He sent a prophet to let Ahab know His displeasure. "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.' So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria" (20:42-43).

Now Ahab commits a great sin, breaking the 10th Commandment about lusting other's goods, a classic case in the Bible of what envy and lust can do. "Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near; next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.' But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!' So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food" (21:1-4).

Again, we can shed more archaeological light on this scene. *Archaeology & the O.T.* adds, "Ahab continued the construction his father, Asa, had begun at Samaria, and the small portion of the palace that has been excavated there reveals a quality of building equal to that of Solomon's day. First Kings 22:39 makes passing reference to Ahab's house of ivory, an allusion to inlaid palace furniture. Ivory inlays were popular with wealthy families in Syria-Palestine, and the Assyrians coveted such decorations when they began to ravage the area in the late divided kingdom" (p. 311). Ivory is still a luxury today.

Yet, despite his huge, luxurious palace, Ahab, like a spoiled child, pouted because he couldn't have

Naboth's small vineyard. Of course, when Jezebel found out, she would not let a bit of legality get in the way, and devised a horrible way to have Naboth falsely accused of blasphemy and then stoned.

When this was carried out, Jezebel told Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead." So when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead he got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth" (21:15-16). God, of course, was infuriated with all of this and sent Ahab none other than Elijah the prophet.

"Then the word of Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who lives in Samaria. There he is, in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?...In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood...And concerning Jezebel, 'the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field.'....So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, 'See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house'" (21:17-29).

So even someone as evil as Ahab can still repent and God can have mercy on him.

Now, Jehoshaphat, a righteous king of Judah, decides to form an alliance with Ahab. *Archaeology & the O.T.* adds, "The thaw between Judah and Israel...became complete when Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, married Jehoram, the crown prince of Judah (2 Kings 8:8). This intermarriage between the two royal families took place about 865 B.C. and was destined to cause great harm to Judah [having Jezebel's daughter there]" (p. 311).

Now, Ahab and Jehoshaphat decide to take back some Israelite territory back from the Syrians. They asked their prophets for advice, and all said the omens were favorable. But Jehoshaphat, being a righteous king, wanted to hear what one of God's prophets had to say.

So they brought the prophet Micaiah before their presence, and at first, he just mimics what the other prophets were saying. But Ahab insists on knowing the truth from God. Then the prophet said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.' And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?'....So the king of Israel said, 'Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and...put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction...until I come in peace.' But Micaiah said, 'If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me'" (22:17-28).

Both kings disregard Micaiah's warning from God, and decided that Jehoshaphat wear the king's battle gear while Ahab wore a commoner's armor. During the battle, the Syrian army pursued the one clothed as the king, but when they realized he was not Ahab, they turned back. Then an archer shot an arrow and it struck Ahab in between the body armor. He still remained in his chariot most of the day, like El Cid, but finally died, still mounted there. Israel was defeated. Then his body was brought to Samaria and the prophecy about his death was fulfilled, "Then someone washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood while the harlots bathed, according to the word of the Lord....[These are] the acts of Ahab...the ivory house which he built and all...the cities that he built...So Ahab rested with his fathers. Then Ahaziah his son reigned in his place." (22:38-40). Jezebel would soon die in a similar way, and her body thrown down from the wall at Jezreel. Incredibly, this is one of the best attested archaeological finds, as we will see.

Meanwhile, Jehoshaphat returns to Judah, and probably because of Micaiah's admonition, truly turns wholeheartedly to God. "And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (1 Kings 22:43). He was a great king of Judah.