

David Meiklejohn

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The End of Ahab

1 Kings 22

Introduction

We come to the end of the book of first Kings, and the final chapter of Ahab today. However, first and second Kings were really only a single book, so we will return and continue with second Kings some time in the future. In this chapter we will see the importance of choosing friends wisely, the importance of choosing your advisors wisely, and the importance of choosing your battles wisely.

Recap of Ahab's Life

We were first introduced to Ahab in chapter 16, as he took over the reigns of Israel from his father, Omri. It starts off badly, as verses 30-31 tell us:

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. [1 Kings 16 v 30-31]

In chapter 17 we find God punishing the nation of Israel. They are sent a drought because of their wickedness, which lasts 3 and a half years. It climaxes in chapter 18 on Mount Carmel, as Elijah, the prophet of God, challenges the prophets of Baal to bring down fire on a sacrifice. Elijah puts the prophets of Baal to the sword and prays for rain to return.

Chapter 19 finds Jezebel in a rage over Elijah, who has to flee for his life. Then in chapter 20 we find Israel under attack from Syria. God is amazingly merciful to the Israelites and protects them from the Syrians in a miraculous way, both in a battle in the hills and later in a battle in the valleys. However, Ahab lets King Ben-hadad live, and a prophet confronts him to tell him of the Lord's displeasure.

Last week we learned of Naboth's vineyard. Ahab wanted it for his own, and when he was denied he sulked in his bed. Jezebel had Naboth killed so that Ahab could take the vineyard, and a prophetic punishment was laid on them both:

'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."' [1 Kings 21 v 19]

And of Jezebel the LORD also said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.' [1 Kings 21 v 23]

Right at the end of chapter 21 we had a surprise. Ahab showed some repentance for his ways, and in return he received some mercy from the Lord. Instead of the kingdom being taken from him, it would be taken from his son.

THE END OF AHAB

Chapter 22 is set 3 years later. We're going to look at three prominent characters in this chapter, and see what we can learn from them.

Choose Your Friends - Jehoshaphat

"If Jimmy told you to jump off a cliff, would you do that?" Many a young boy or girl has heard these words from a parent. Usually it's when a normally well-behaved child gets into trouble, and they blame it on their friend. This tendency to follow a badly-chosen friend into disaster is one shown by the first character in our lesson: Jehoshaphat.

Not long after Ahab took the throne in Israel, Jehoshaphat became king in Judah. Remember that while the kings of Israel (the northern kingdom) were universally evil, Judah (the southern kingdom) had at least a few who followed God. We also see how the kings of Judah were all from the line of David, while in Israel the royal family were often cut off and a new dynasty took over.

Jehoshaphat was one of the better kings. He followed God. He won quite a few victories in his life, and stabilised the military in Judah. You can read more about him in 2 Chronicles. However he didn't clear his land of all the false Gods. And he made a few pretty bad choices in his life.

For instance, look at his decision to befriend Ahab. Perhaps wanting to return to the glory days of a united Israel, Jehoshaphat agreed to Ahab's plan to retake the city of Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians.

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." [1 Kings 22 v 4]

To make a bad decision even worse, he goes along with Ahab's battle plan: Jehoshaphat is to ride into battle in full kingly array, while Ahab is going to disguise himself as a common soldier.

And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." [1 Kings 22 v 30]

This turned out to be a very bad idea (surprise, surprise!) as the Syrians were intent on finding and killing Ahab, and were instructed to look out for the king.

Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him. [1 Kings 22 v 31-32]

Jehoshaphat was in serious trouble here, and he cried out to the Lord. The Lord heard him and responded by saving him.

And Jehoshaphat cried out. And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. [1 Kings 22 v 32-33]

So he seems either naive, or prone to making bad choices. But Jehoshaphat was a man who wanted to follow the Lord. And he did eventually learn from his mistakes. We read right at

the end of chapter 22 that he teamed up with Ahab's son, Ahaziah, in a shipping venture. But all the ships were destroyed, and Jehoshaphat refused further partnership with Ahaziah.

It's only later on that we learn of the lasting damage caused by Jehoshaphat's friendship with Ahab. He chose Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, as bride for his own son. Now the pagan influence that had caused so many problems in Israel was carried over into Judah, and Athaliah brought much evil to the land over the next few decades.

Lessons

What can we learn from Jehoshaphat? How about "choose your friends wisely"? As Christians we live in a world that is decidedly non-Christian. Some respond to this by restricting their circle of acquaintances to only Christians. However this isn't just difficult to do, it also reduces our chances to witness, to spread the gospel. Jesus called us to be salt and light to the nations, and we can't do that by hiding ourselves away. Jehoshaphat had a chance to influence his northern kingdom neighbours for good, perhaps showing Ahab the way back to God. Instead he let himself be influenced by Ahab and followed him. We need to be rooted in the gospel, and the fellowship of other believers, but we should stretch our branches out to reach the unbeliever.

Choose Your Advisors - Micaiah

I have a colleague in my team at work, who can be quite abrasive in his manner. We quite often have opposite opinions on things, and he's not one for glossing over a criticism. The other day he said in a team meeting: "we agreed to do things a certain way, and it seems like David just didn't bother to follow that guidance." It can be tricky to work with him sometimes, but he's a really good engineer. And sometimes (not always) he's right.

Our second character here is a bit like that. His name is Micaiah, He is a prophet of the Lord, and it seems he is one among many. When Jehoshaphat agreed to join with Ahab, he suggested enquiring of the prophets to see if the Lord was on their side:

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of the Lord." Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king" [1 Kings 22 v 5-6]

This sounds pretty good. 400 prophets all agreeing with Ahab's plan. However Jehoshaphat may have been naive, but he wasn't daft, and he could recognise a bunch of yes-men when he sees them. He asked if there were any more prophets. There was one: Micaiah, but Ahab hated him, as he kept prophesying against Ahab. Nevertheless, he was sent for.

While they were waiting, one of the prophets decided to strengthen his message with an object lesson. He made iron horns for himself, symbolising two armies of great strength, and said that with them, Ahab and Jehoshaphat would push the Syrians until they were destroyed. All the other prophets gathered round and reiterated their message, that they would win a great victory.

Eventually Micaiah was brought out. He was warned to only prophecy favourably to the king, but responded in verse 14:

“As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.” [1 Kings 22 v 14]

Interestingly, when Micaiah came before the kings, he does seem to agree with the other prophets:

“Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king” [1 Kings 22 v 15]

Why does he say that, after claiming that he will only say what the Lord tells him? Did he get scared and just tell the king what he wanted to hear? That seems unlikely, as he had prophesied against Ahab before, so much so that the king hated him. I think instead, Micaiah must be speaking sarcastically here, and his tone of voice was obvious to Ahab, as he responded:

“How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” [1 Kings 22 v 16]

Now we hear the real prophecy from Micaiah, and it doesn't sound good for Ahab:

“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 home in peace.’” [1 Kings 22 v 17]

Ahab had a bit of an “I told you so” moment with Jehoshaphat, and Micaiah went on to explain that he had a vision of heaven, and saw a spirit being charged with putting lies into the mouths of the other prophets. What was Ahab's response? He ignored the voice of Micaiah and sent him off to prison. Perhaps more surprising is that Jehoshaphat still followed Ahab into battle.

Lesson

So how do we decide who to listen to? We should be able to spot those who always just agree with us fairly easily. However, it's harder to ignore their advice. We like being told we're right and it can seem the easiest path to just surround ourselves with people who tell us to go ahead with whatever our plans are.

It's also easy to take a majority view as the correct one. Generally that's the right thing to do. If 400 experts in their field tell you one thing and 1 person tells you the opposite, you should stick with the 400.

It's not the same with God's Word though. It's not easy to find a godly person, who will tell you the truth even when they know it's not what you want to hear. If you find a person like that, keep them close, consult them often, and show them appreciation, even when they make life more difficult for you.

Choose Your Battles - Ahab

So Ahab ignored the word of God from the inconvenient advisor. Jehoshaphat let himself be persuaded to join in the battle, and also to wear his royal robes while Ahab went dressed like an ordinary soldier. How did the battle go? Let's read it again:

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. And about sunset a cry went through the army, "Every man to his city, and every man to his country!" [1 Kings 22 v 29-36]

Rather than take Micaiah's prophecy as a warning and cancel the battle, Ahab decided he would try to outwit God. If he dressed as a common soldier the enemy wouldn't target him, and maybe he would get through the battle alive. But God is not mocked. While the highly visible King Jehoshaphat was spared, it was a random arrow that did for Ahab.

In verse 34, Ahab told his servant to take the chariot out of the battle, so his wound could be seen to. But in verse 35 we read that Ahab was propped up in the chariot, facing the Syrians, until he died at evening time. The commentators are split on what happened here. Some suggest that the battle was too fierce to take the time to retreat to have his wound treated. Others say that he was taken out of the battle, his wound bound up, and then he was propped up so he could observe the rest of the battle and perhaps encourage his soldiers.

Whatever the details, Ahab died. The prophecy spoken by Micaiah had come to pass. And the earlier prophecy of Elijah came true as well:

"Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."'" [1 Kings 21 v 19]

As the passage tells us, when they got the king back to Samaria:

And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood [1 Kings 22 v 38]

Lesson

What can we learn from Ahab? One of the most wicked kings in the Bible, the obvious lessons are around following God instead of idols, not being polluted by others' gods, learning to take God's word seriously, and many others.

From this chapter, perhaps we can think about what battles are worth fighting. I've seen Christians get into verbal battles, or make a stand, for things which aren't even biblical. I've seen Christians make a stand for trivial things, that only make God's people seem petty or

hateful. Choosing the wrong battle can be damaging to our witness for the Lord. On the other hand there are those who avoid any battle at all cost, which can result in the gospel message being watered down.

Battles are dangerous. They can result in hurt. So we need to be sure the battles we engage in are worth fighting.

Summary

So what have we learned?

- Choosing our friends - we should be careful who we follow and who we team up with. Jehoshaphat made some mistakes and didn't see the dangers of siding with Ahab. Thankfully God was merciful to him.
- Choosing our advisors - it can be difficult to hear a word from God when it is critical, but we need to treasure those people who will bring God's word to us in love. Ahab didn't listen to the message from Micaiah, and he lost both the battle and his life.
- Choosing our battles - a battle can be costly, so we should be sure it is one that God wants us to fight. However when we know we are standing in God's will, we can trust him to fight for us.

That's the end of Ahab. But we'll see when we start on 2 Kings that the influence of his wicked family will extend for several generations more.