

1 **The Life Without Faith**

1 Kings 16-17

2 **Some questions**

- How much faith do you have?
- What does it really mean to live in faith?
- How much does your life reflect your belief in God?

3 **Review**

- The Kingdom of Israel was split after the death of Solomon (because of Solomon's sin) into the southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel
- Over the last 11 lessons we have reviewed the history of these two kingdoms and specifically that of Jeroboam in the north, and Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa in the south.

4 **Goals**

- The goals of this study are twofold:
 - 1) To teach a correctly historical and contextual perspective of the divided kingdom period
 - 2) To seek out the lessons that God has left for us within these narrative passages.

5 **Review**

- In the last lesson we began our focus on Ahab. His reign will be the focus of the next several lessons.
- Ahab's reign represents a microcosm of the political and religious struggle in Israel and Judah during the Divided Kingdom era.
- Ahab was the wickedest king that Israel had ever had, and he was primarily guilty of three sins.

6 **Ahab's sins**

- Ahab had three sins that distinguished him as particularly immoral, even from a long line of immoral forbearers:
 - 1) He was unsatisfied with his forbearers' sins
 - 2) He married foolishly
 - 3) He broke the first commandment (whereas up till now his predecessors had been at least nominally keeping this one) and introduces the worship of a pagan Canaanite trinity

7 **3. Breaking the first commandment**

- Up till now, the kings of Israel had promoted the false calf worship at Bethel and Dan by proclaiming that the calves were Jehovah, thus keeping the first commandment in word if not in spirit.
- Now, Ahab was throwing out this hypocrisy & compromise with the surrounding religions and embracing paganism as a whole.

8 **"Baal"**

- Throughout Scripture, when it refers to Baal-worship, it is actually speaking of the worship of a trinity of pagan Canaanite deities:
 - El
 - Ba'al Hadad
 - Astarte

9 **El**

- El – El is the creator god. The word "El" can simply mean "god" in the same way that the English word "god" does. As such, it is a component of many of the names of God (El-Shaddai, Elohim, etc.).
- Literally translated, "El" means "the strong one."
- This similarity of words has confused many non-Christian scholars.
- This El, however, was supposed to be the original god according to Canaanite mythology and the father of gods and men.

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- 10  **Ba'al Hadad**
 - Ba'al Hadad is a storm and rain god, the lord of the sky.
 - Sometimes referred to simply as Ba'al (Lord), this title is also used for a variety of lesser gods.
- 11  **Ba'al Hadad**
 - Like many pagan deities, Ba'al Hadad is essentially a fertility deity. He was said to govern rain, and thus the growth of plant life. Absence of Ba'al caused dry spells, starvation, death, and chaos.
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- 12  **Astarte/Ashtoreth**
 - Ashtoreth was a pagan goddess, consort of El and co-ruler with Ba'al Hadad and was said to preside over fertility, war, and several other areas.
 - Jezebel's father Ithbaal I was a priest of Astarte before becoming king of Sidon.
 - Ashtoreth is mentioned in the worship of the "groves" throughout Scripture. She is also elsewhere called the "Queen of Heaven."
- 13  **Small compromises**
 - Israel's descent into idolatry did not happen overnight. There were at least three stages that we can glean from Scripture and archeology:
 - 1) The false calf worship, identifying Jehovah with pagan fertility rites
 - 2) The integrating of Jehovah (as El) into pagan myths
 - 3) The wholesale adoption of Baal worship
- 14  **The conflict: idolatry vs. faith**
 - The conflict that Israel faces is this: do the people of Israel worship and follow El, Baal, and Ashtoreth, or will they follow after Jehovah?
 - Today we ask ourselves a similar question: Who gets to be the god that sits on the throne of our lives? Are we going to live as though God is actually real?
- 15  **Faith defined**
 - The definition given to faith in Hebrews 11 also happens to be the same principle applied elsewhere throughout Scripture to the "Fear of the Lord":
 - *And without faith it is impossible to please him [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* (Heb 11:6)
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- 16  **Two answers**
 - In the midst of this conflict, God gives the Israelites two answers to the question: Is Jehovah real and if so, is He or is Baal God? Why should the two be mutually exclusive?
 - These answers are intended to strengthen our faith, one by a negative example, the other by a positive.
 - The oddly-specific story
 - The thundering prophet
- 17  **1. The oddly-specific story**
 - Seeded throughout the narrative books of Scripture there are moments where God takes a diversion from the main line of the narrative.
 - These small stories teach powerful lessons when understood within the context over the over-arching theme of the text.
- 18  **1 Kings 16:34**
 - *In his [Ahab's] days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.*
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- 19  **Details**
 - We are forced to stop and ask the question: why did God consider this detail to be important

enough for us to include it in the narrative?

- Of all the cities that were built and rebuilt throughout the region, why include the details about this one?

20 **Jericho**

- Jericho was destroyed and given to God as the first fruits of the promised land, and thus it was sacred to God:
- *And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction...* (Jos 6:17a).

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21 **The curse**

- More than 500 years previously Joshua had pronounced the following curse on those would try to rebuild the city of Jericho:
- *Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. "At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." - (Jos 6:26)*

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22 **The curse**

- This however is only one of the two curses that was pronounced upon Jericho:
- *And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction... But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. (Jos 6:17-18)*

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23 **Achan's sin**

- This first curse is violated by Achan's sin. Achan defies the commandment of God by taking spoil from the ruins of Jericho.
- While Achan's sin represents the hidden sin that brings death, Hiel's sin represents the open defiance that brings judgment.
- Open defiance is always preceded by hidden sin.

24 **Hiel's sin**

- Hiel is a Bethelite: another important detail that gives us insight into his character. Bethel was the center of the false calf worship instituted by Jeroboam.
- Hiel's sin is as openly defiant of God's Word as Achan's sin was privately defiant.
- God's judgment on Hiel was equally open and was also a censure of the compromise that had started at Bethel.

25 **Hiel's sin**

- The curse was well-known, as evinced by the fact that Jericho (despite being located as an ideal center of trade) had not been rebuilt in over 500 years.
- Hiel's actions defied the reality and power of God to keep his promises and execute judgment. In short, Hiel was acting out of defiance, not out of faith or the fear of the Lord.

26 **The curse**

- Hiel pays for his sin and his insolence with the lives of his firstborn and his eldest son – the idea being that this is symbolic that ruin has come to his entire household.

27 **How it grows our faith**

- God used this story to remind a nation that has turned their hearts away from Him that He is real and He is still judging sin and rewarding righteousness.
- In a world in which wickedness has become so normalized, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God will ignore our secret sins or hidden compromises.

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- 28  **2. The thundering prophet**
- God's second answer to this question comes in the form of a veritable bombshell of a man: Elijah the Tishbite.
 - Elijah is a prophet from Gilead
 - There was a school of the prophets of Jehovah at Gilead, so it's possible that Elijah originally came from this school.
 - Elijah is considered by the Jews to be one of the most important prophets of the Old Testament.
- 29  **1 Kings 17:1**
- *Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."*
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- 30  **Answering the question**
- Keep in mind that the conflict that exists is on two levels:
 - Does God exist?
 - If so, who should they worship, Jehovah or Baal? And why not both?
 - The judgment of Hiel at Bethel answers the first of these questions.
 - God answers the second through Elijah the Tishbite.
- 31  **What's in a name?**
- Elijah's name means: "Jehovah is the Strong One."
 - Thus, by his very name, Elijah repudiates the deity of the pagan gods and declares the primacy of Jehovah.
- 32  **The drought**
- Ba'al-Hadad and Ashtoreth (the two most important Phoenician gods) are supposed to be gods of fertility, rain, and the sky.
 - God afflicts the land with a drought, thus hitting at the very heart of the pagan religion.
 - This demonstrates God's complete control over the very realms of his supposed rivals, demonstrating His power in an incredibly relatable way.
- 33  **How it grows our faith**
- By his name, Elijah confirms that Jehovah is in fact God and the false deities that this world worship are counterfeits and usurpers.
 - By the drought, God demonstrates his absolute power over the world says its gods should control.
 - The world's gods today are primarily sex and money – two areas in which they are demonstrating an increasing lack of control.
- 34  **The life without faith**
- The life without faith:
 - Seeks sin as satisfaction (Ahab was not satisfied with the sins of his predecessors and wanted to up the ante)
 - Chooses my preferences over God's commands (Ahab marries Jezebel, when the Law prohibited marriage to foreign women)
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- 35  **The life without faith**
- The life without faith:
 - Embraces the world's lies as "reality" (the institution of Baal worship in Israel)
 - Cherishes secret sin while defying God openly (Achan, Hiel).
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- 36  **Taking it home**
- Is there an area in your life that God has identified as sacred to Him that you are trying to take back?

- What secret sins do you have that are leading you towards defiance?
- Are you living in faith, as though God is real and He rewards those who diligently seek him?
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