



Ahab - wrong choices (1 Kings 16-22)

Sometimes in life, people make bad choices. For most people, choice can often be altered. Our first video machine was a Sony. It was very good. It recorded nice pictures. The only problem was it was a Betamax. In the end we couldn't even sell it even though it worked. We ended up with a VHS machine like anyone else. My first computer was an Amstrad PCW. It was a good computer but the only problem was that everyone else was buying a PC which is what we ended up buying in the end.

All reversible choices and we learned by our mistakes. There are some people that choose for the course of their lives something that eventually destroys them and people around them. This was certainly true of our character this evening. Let's see how the Bible describes him:

1 Kings 16:29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. 30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. 31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. 32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

Some epitaph! He *did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.* And you can see why.

He committed the sin of Jeroboam - not to worship in Jerusalem but at Bethel and Dan.
He married a very evil woman - Jezebel
He worshipped Baal and Asherah - the local gods of that age
He provoked God - mostly in the way he stamped out prophets in the land.

Judgement came in the form of a long drought and we all know the story of Elijah and the showdown on Mount Carmel. It was an opportunity for Ahab to repent. Did he? Did he just - Jezebel threatened Elijah's life and off he went and that was that. Things continued the same.

Ahab got his second chance when Samaria was besieged by Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. Let's read on:

1 Kings 13:20 Meanwhile a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel and announced, "This is what the LORD says: 'Do you see this vast army? I will give it into your hand today, and then you will know that I am the LORD.'" 14 "But who will do this?" asked Ahab. The prophet replied, "This is what the LORD says: 'The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it.'" "And who will start the battle?" he asked. The prophet answered, "You will." 15 So Ahab summoned the young officers of the provincial commanders, 232 men. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all. 16

They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk. 17 The young officers of the provincial commanders went out first. Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts, who reported, "Men are advancing from Samaria." 18 He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive." 19 The young officers of the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them 20 and each one struck down his opponent. At that, the Arameans fled, with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. 21 The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.

Sounds better. Ahab has started listening to God. But not for long. Ben-Hadad attacked Israel again the next year and Ahab followed the advice of the prophet again and captured Ben-Hadad but instead of killing him he made a treaty with Ben-Hadad which would line his pocket's personally. Let's read on:

1 Kings 20:35 By the word of the LORD one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, "Strike me with your weapon," but the man refused. 36 So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him. 37 The prophet found another man and said, "Strike me, please." So the man struck him and wounded him. 38 Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes. 39 As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.' 40 While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared." "That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself." 41 Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognised him as one of the prophets. 42 He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.' " 43 Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.

Oh dear. And in chapter 21 things get worse as Ahab covets the vineyard of Naboth so he can have a garden. Jezebel fits Naboth up and gets him stoned. There she is again - Jezebel. Elijah gets the task of bringing the bad news:

1 Kings 21: 17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood--yes, yours!' " 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!" "I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. 21 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel--slave or free. 22 I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin.' 23 "And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' 24 "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country." 25 (There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. 26 He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.) 27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. 28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

Ahab eventually repented but because of his sin it was too late to save his dynasty and he brought down both the nation and his family. Ahaziah his heir was murdered and his other son Joram was deposed by Jehu who usurped the throne. Ahab was killed in battle when an arrow went through a chink in his armour when he was cowardly trying to disguise himself so that his ally, King Jehoshaphat of Judah would get killed instead of him. And Jezebel got thrown off a balcony in Jezreel and was eaten by dogs.

All sad stuff. Why had Ahab brought this calamity on himself?

🔴 He was an idolater

He worshipped idols which were especially forbidden by God. He went further than other kings who had worshipped God and idols (if that could be done - not!). He wanted the best of both worlds to be trendy and modern. But God is a jealous God and he does not allow such an abomination.

The same is still true. How often we try to get the both worlds. We like the idea of our faith but the world is a huge lure to us. Things become important in this age of wealth and plenty. We live in the most materialistic society ever known and it is the Baal of the 21st century. It's there all big and shiny. We are God's people but so often even though we want to seek His kingdom and His righteousness we don't seek them first because it doesn't suit. It's often not just a case of liking the world but worse.....

🔴 He yoked himself with an unbeliever

Not just any old unbeliever either. He married Jezebel who was quite happy to abuse his power for him. Ahab always got the last word in his marriage it would seem - "Yes dear". Let's read in *2 Corinthians 6:11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also. 14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

This idea of yoking is an interesting one. Cattle were yoked so that one walked with the other to a point where neither could do what they desired. Inevitably, the good ox works at the rate of the lazy one, not the other way round.

Jesus said *Matt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Paul says in *Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

We are supposed to be yoked with Christ but it is easy to take on some other yoke. In verse 14 of 2 Cor 6 people often think it's the yoke of marriage but in fact it can mean any partnership or commitment to unbelievers where they can influence your walk with God. I think it goes without saying that in marriage it should be inconceivable that a Christian should marry an unbeliever. But it happens. It is a quite different scenario to people who become believers and have an unbelieving partner.

But this is about any relationship that becomes more important than our relationship with Christ. The Corinthian socialite Christians made friends of non-Christians and they went with them to parties at idol temples. They thought it was OK but it wasn't. They were pulled to the lowest common denominator and this revealed itself in the divisions and strife in the church. they acted like the people they circulated with.

The same is true of us. Whether it be our jobs, families, business partnerships or our possessions; if we become yoked to the world we are dragged down because we are not walking with Christ. So much for *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*

Ahab not only yoked himself with Jezebel, but with everything she stood for. God and Baal didn't mix and he brought disaster on himself. Paul says *15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?*

We are encouraged to make friends and reach the lost, but there is a point that when we yoke to the world and not Jesus

Many Christians believe that Paul is advocating separation here. The Exclusive Brethren rarely circulate and are employed outside EB circles. Even good evangelical Christians often have no friends outside the church (particularly true of Ministers!). We are called to be in this world but not of it - not a separate community. If we want to reach people we need to befriend them. But there is a difference when we yoke because we have to take account of the behaviour and values and the crunch comes when we start to commit to them and the project we have with them rather than to Christ.

This is the issue we need to examine ourselves with. We all have some links with the world and we need them and we can't avoid them either. But have we become yoked to them instead of to Christ? We need to examine ourselves because with it comes trouble if we have.

🔴 He failed to truly repent

Ahab had plenty of chances. And he blew them. One of the things I most have been impressed with as I have got older is the number of chances God gives people! Particularly Christians. If the judgement of God falls then there is no excuse because people had plenty of chance to repent.

I believe we have seen the fire of judgement fall on the church of God in this country in the last couple of decades. We had plenty of chances. The hypocrisy and double standards of evangelical Christianity was prophesied a generation ago by people like A W Tozer. He saw that sound churches were sound asleep. We were so tied up with our doctrinal arguments and our own ways that we never saw the enemy steal away our families and steal away our societies until it was too late. And I look around and I still don't see many Christians awake to it. The evangelical church of 2004 in Britain reminds me of the church in Sardis in Revelation 3: *I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.*

There is time to repent and do new things. That's the core of my message here in Swaffham and the message of people like me in Britain to Christians who are still alive and well in the dying Church - "Wake up! Strengthen the things that remain."

For us it means going back to simple values. It's to *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness* rather than whatever else we have been seeking and become yoked to.

BECOMING WORLD CHANGERS!

Over the next few times I speak here I'm going to explore what that means practically for us. I believe God is giving us the opportunity to repent and put right in our piece of his world what has been taken away. Like Ahab we are getting another chance. Unlike him, we're not going to blow it.

I believe that God calls His people to be world changers! Yes, us!

Why? Because we are the people of God and we are not powerless to change it. We are the world changers because we are the children of God. Ahab had the power to change his world and he didn't. By the power of the Holy Spirit we can be world changers in Swaffham because we have the power and we can.

It's a question of choice. Ahab chose Baal. What about us?