

Choose Wisely | Ahab: The Evil King | 1 Kings 16:29-22:39

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[Title Slide] We are working our way through first and second Kings this summer in a series called “**Choose Wisely.**” We’re turning to Kings because in this ancient record of the history of the Israelite kings, each king’s life is summed up with a simple phrase: they did what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight, or, they did evil in the Lord’s sight. The pattern repeats throughout 1-2 Kings because, ultimately, that is what truly matters.

Today, we’re going to be looking at the Thanos of the Biblical Universe. The Darth Vader. The Khan Noonien Singh.

[Star Trek Slide] Khan. “At the end of the universe lies the beginning of vengeance.” There have been 13 Star Trek movies over the years. Thirteen. And there are more on the way. But here’s the thing, the greatest villain, the greatest threat, the greatest evil to face the crew of the Enterprise happened forty years ago in Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan. Did you know that movie had the lowest budget of all the Star Trek movies? Only twelve million dollars – and directors, producers, and writers have been chasing the success of that one ever since. He was such an incredible villain it’s literally become a part of our cultural zeitgeist.

Kirk’s “Khaaaaaan” scream has been heard around the world and parodied on so many shows, including Family Man, Big Bang Theory, and – of course – **Seinfeld**.

We’re looking at the reign of King Ahab in Israel this week. Married to Jezebel – I think you already know with those two names we’re in for a trip – he has gone down in history for all the wrong reasons. Those names have become villainous names in culture because of their biblical legacy.

1 Kings 16:30 (NLT) ³⁰ Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him.

More evil than any king before him. The introduction continues:

1 Kings 16:31-33 (NLT) ³¹ And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam,

When the nation split in two David’s grandson Rehoboam became king of the southern kingdom of Judah, and Jeroboam became king over the northern kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam worried that if his people traveled to Judah to worship at the temple, Israel would eventually fall to Judah. He believed they needed to follow another god so the temple would lose its draw, so 1 Kings 12 records that he created two golden calves and told the people, “these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!” (1 Kings 12:28, NLT).

1 Kings 16:31-33 (NLT) ³¹ And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal.

The Israelites were commanded not to marry foreigners, not out of a concern over race or ethnicity, but conflicting belief systems. It's the same reason we're told in the New Testament not to "yoke" ourselves to an unbeliever.

If you're not familiar with what a yoke is, here's a picture. It's a device used with animals to share the load of work. You can see why it would be important to pair similarly built animals, otherwise they could hurt each other pulling in different directions. But it was also a metaphor back in the day; the ancients would use it to describe putting on a set of beliefs, particularly from a Rabbi. In other words, the disciples would have very much understood themselves as putting on Jesus' yoke, or His teachings. Which makes this passage in 2 Corinthians make that much more sense, doesn't it?

2 Corinthians 6:14-16a (NIV) 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? Or 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.

We are temples of the living God; God dwells inside His followers. It makes sense that conflicting viewpoints cannot be yoked together – they would be pulling in different directions. Which is why it was such a problem that Ahab married Jezebel, a foreigner who would bring Baal worship into Israel.

³² First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. ³³ Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.

It doesn't end there. The prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab over his sin resulting in a massive confrontation on Mt. Carmel where Elijah faced off against Jezebel's 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah in front of the nation. And won when God sent fire from heaven – it was incredible. Elijah was able to execute those pagan prophets that same day. It should have been the moment where Ahab left his evil ways behind.

Instead, he continued. He went to war. He ignored God's instructions. He stole from his own people; he was mad at a man named Naboth who had a vineyard he wanted but wouldn't sell to him, so Jezebel had the man framed for a crime and stoned to death so they could seize the vineyard.

Elijah confronted him and told him God had judged him and said that dogs would eat him and Jezebel for their crimes. There's a fascinating parentheses in chapter 21 written after that promised judgement:

1 Kings 21:25-26 (NLT) ²⁵ (No one else so completely sold himself to what was evil in the Lord's sight as Ahab did under the influence of his wife Jezebel. ²⁶ His worst outrage was worshiping idols just as the Amorites had done—the people whom the Lord had driven out from the land ahead of the Israelites.)

Over and over he had chances to follow God but chose evil instead. It finally comes to a head in 1 Kings 22. The prophet Micaiah warned him he would die if he chose war again, but it didn't stop him.

1 Kings 22:29-38 (NLT) ²⁹ So King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah led their armies against Ramoth-gilead. ³⁰ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "As we go into battle, I will disguise myself so no one will recognize me, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle.

The King of Aram told his chariot commanders to focus on finding King Ahab and to not bother with anyone else, so they initially went after the decoy until they realized the deception.

³⁴ An Aramean soldier, however, randomly shot an arrow at the Israelite troops and hit the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. "Turn the horses and get me out of here!" Ahab groaned to the driver of his chariot. "I'm badly wounded!"

³⁵ The battle raged all that day, and the king remained propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran down to the floor of his chariot, and as evening arrived he died. ³⁶ Just as the sun was setting, the cry ran through his troops: "We're done for! Run for your lives!"

³⁷ So the king died, and his body was taken to Samaria and buried there. ³⁸ Then his chariot was washed beside the pool of Samaria, and dogs came and licked his blood at the place where the prostitutes bathed, just as the Lord had promised.

Eleven years later, Jezebel met her end as well as a new conqueror Jehu sought to wipe out Ahab's family and descendants and secure his own reign. When Jehu arrived she yelled out the window at him, sarcastically making fun of him and insulting him.

2 Kings 9:32-33 (NLT) ³² Jehu looked up and saw her at the window and shouted, "Who is on my side?" And two or three eunuchs looked out at him. ³³ "Throw her down!" Jehu yelled. So they threw her out the window, and her blood splattered against the wall and on the horses. And Jehu trampled her body under his horses' hooves.

It then goes on to describe that dogs ate her remains, fulfilling prophecy, and when Jehu finally sent someone out to clean up, there wasn't much left of her. Gross.

In the end, Ahab reigned 22 years. And as we saw, multiple times he was described as being the most evil king in God's sight.

Here's what I find fascinating; look at this description of King Omri, Ahab's father:

1 Kings 16:25 (NLT) Omri did what was evil in the Lord's sight, even more than any of the kings before him.

One of the sad realities of 1-2 Kings is that they paint a downward spiral of the Kings of Judah and Israel and the people. But the language is particularly strong when it comes to first Omri and then Ahab.

Ahab was his father's son, but more so. And then of course, there's the aside we read in *1 Kings 21:25 (NLT) (No one else so completely sold himself to what was evil in the Lord's sight as Ahab did under the influence of his wife Jezebel.)*

Ahab was the product of the influences in his life, wasn't he? None of us want to admit that our parents were right – we become like the people we associate with, don't we?

When I went to high school, I went to a really conservative, strict boarding school for missionary kids – my family lived in South America for several years. The school had incredibly strict rules; we weren't allowed to go to the movies, had almost no free time, and any music remotely cool wasn't allowed. Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant were prohibited for being too loud and wild. Seriously. A few of us had a secret stash of cassettes and some hidden Walkman's – those were prohibited as well since they couldn't hear what we were listening to – that we would use out in the Bolivian wild to listen to. If you're not sure what a Walkman is, it's what Starlord used to listen to music in the first two Guardians of the Galaxy movies. One of the albums we listened to?

One Bad Pig. A Christian punk band. They sang greats like "Thrash Against Sin", "Judas' Kiss", and of course, their hit song, "Swine Flew", where they scream about how we're all just pigs in our sin until Jesus saves us, and then these swine flew / fly up to heaven. I thought it was the dumbest thing I had ever heard. And we listened to it over and over and over ... and 30 years later, I still like it. You can find it on Spotify.

Of course, that's a funny example of how I was influenced by those I spent time with. But we can all point to examples in our own lives or the lives of those we are close to that aren't so funny, can't we? Moments where dangerous influences were allowed to guide us or those we care about in directions that caused pain and destruction. Teams disrupted, marriages destroyed, friendships wrecked, addictions spiraled out of control, the list goes on and on.

Scripture has a lot to say about the influences we allow in our lives:

Proverbs 22:24-25 (NLT) ²⁴ Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, ²⁵ or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.

Proverbs 12:26 (NLT) The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray.

Proverbs 13:20 (NLT) Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.

“You will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.” “The wicked lead them astray.” “Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.” God is deeply concerned with the influences we allow in our lives – and the influence we have with those around us. But here’s the thing, just like our parents worrying about what friends we associate with, it’s not out of a desire to micromanage or control – God’s concern is the healthiest version of this desire in that He wants the best for each of us. We are His children He deeply loves and desires to see flourish for His glory.

Ahab is the ultimate example of influences gone wrong. He followed the example of his father and the influence of Jezebel. To be clear, he is 100% responsible for his sin, but what would his reign have been like had he changed his associations? I think there are two things we can learn from his choices:

Choose Friends Wisely

How much thought do we give to the influence our friends have in our lives? Are we using wisdom in who we allow to guide us? I’m not saying we should not be friends with unsaved people – God calls us to reach the world around us. But do you have core friends that reflect God’s calling for our lives? We read 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 earlier; often times we talk about this passage when talking about dating and marriage relationships, but that’s not the context of Paul’s writing. This was a general instruction for our significant relationships *and friendships*.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16a (NIV) Do not be yoked together with unbelievers ... For we are the temple of the living God.

Remember how “yoke” was a metaphor for putting on a set of beliefs or following a set of teachings? Wisdom calls us to share our yoke, our set of beliefs, with friends who are pointed in the same direction. I love that Paul puts this in the context of us being the temple of the living God. There is a sacredness, a beauty, a holiness to having God dwell in us – do our lives reflect that? And do we have people in our lives that point us to that understanding?

I would challenge you to take some time today, this week, to consider your key friendships. Ask yourself some questions:

- **Do they love God?**

- Do they share my desire for the future?
- Do they challenge me to be more like Christ?
- Does their advice line up with Scripture more often than not?

If the answers are no, maybe it's time to reconsider who you are letting influence you. Again, we are not to cut ourselves off from the world – but if you can't say yes to these questions about any of your core friendships, that is a red flag. Our small groups are an incredible place to build these kinds of friendships. If you're not in one, put it on your connection card, we have so many groups launching in the coming weeks as the fall kicks off!

The second thing we can learn from Ahab?

Choose to be a Godly friend

It's not just about finding Godly influences for our own lives, is it? It's also about being that Godly influence towards others.

Romans 12:2 (NLT) Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Choose to let God transform you into the new person He has called you to be! I don't know about you, but I want to be the type of friend that people look back on and are glad to have known. When Ahab faced God I have to believe he felt regrets at the influences he allowed – and the influence he wielded.

Every single one of us wields influence; with our family, our spouse, our friends, our coworkers, our classmates, the kids that are younger than us, our teammates. It's easy to forget or ignore, but we all have influence somewhere. Are we letting God transform us for his glory? Or simply influencing others with the behaviors and customs of our broken culture?

Here are some questions I want you to reflect on:

- Do I love God? Can others tell?
- Do I challenge others to be more like Christ?
- Does my advice line up with Scripture more often than not?

If the answers are no, maybe it's time to consider how you need to grow as a Godly friend. Again, one of the best places for that is in our small groups. Maybe these are questions you should ask someone close to you about yourself; it's so easy to see these answers in others but not our own lives.