

King Ahab of Israel, Part 1

Bible Characters

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Bible Text: 1 Kings 16:29-34; Joshua 6:26
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Our scripture lesson today is taken from 1 Kings chapter 16 beginning at verse 29, that's page 554.

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. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. 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. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. 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. In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:29–34)

The word of the Lord. ["Praise be to God."]

May we pray.

Please help me, Lord, not to get bogged down in technicalities. Use the little handout, Lord, that I've distributed so that we can remember what we need to remember and forget what we need to forget, and that this sermon will come with pressing, pointed, practical application through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Now the first thing I want us to notice about Ahab is that he is a very, very bad man. That we have here on page 555, verse 31, “He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat ...” (1 Kings 16:31)

Now, what are the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat?

Remember that God only had one authorized place of worship, and that was the temple of God in Jerusalem. And the temple fulfilled God’s commandments that had been laid out in the Torah for worship.

When God’s people were in tents, we had the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35). And when finally, God’s people are settled in a settled place, God allows King David to lay up the treasures necessary to build a permanent house for him, which was built by King Solomon, using materials of his father, and that is the only authorized place to worship (1 Chronicles 28:2-3, 11-20).

It’s not like it is today, where this is the authorized place to worship. But so is First Baptist Texarkana, and so is where they’re having all the bells with even a member of the Order of the British Empire, ringing a bell today, First Presbyterian Church over in Arkansas.

So what I’m saying is we’re not like that today, but back then there was only one authorized place to worship, but Jeroboam became afraid and even though he had been authorized by God to lead a secession from the house of David, he was not authorized to create his own system of worship, setting up his own dates, setting up his own priests, and having idols for the people to worship.

Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings. (1 Kings 12:31-33)

That's the sin of Jeroboam. And he did it; his son did it; Baasha did it, and his son did it.

And then comes Omri. And as we pointed out last week, the evidence is that Omri had a connection with the people of Tyre and Sidon. And that is borne out in what we see today. Namely, that his son Ahab marries the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidonians.

And we're used to saying Ethbaal (ʿetbaʿal, אֶתְבַּעַל), but Baal is really in Hebrew, Baal (baʿal, בַּעַל). And so, I'll just say it that way. It's okay, whatever way you want to pronounce it. Like Mexia, Texas, they have the sign that says, a great place to live regardless of how you pronounce it, and they pronounce it mə-HAY-ə.

And so anyhow, there is Baal. And Ahab marries Jezebel (ʿiyzebel, אֵיזֶבֶל, meaning "Where is the Prince," referring to Baal), the daughter of Ethbaal.

And so, you see what he does here is that he openly does what his father did not openly do. His father was allied with those twin cities of Tyre and Sidon, but he didn't openly promote idol worship. He buys and builds on a hill, Samaria, this magnificent place which was an excellent choice to build a capital.

But Ahab joins in with Jezebel, and then he begins openly to worship Baal.

Who is Baal? Baal is a thunder god. Baal is a god of fertility. Baal has a hammer, and he creates the rain and the thunder. That's what the people who worship Baal believed. And we know so many things as a result of a discovery in the 20th century where we discovered the whole of Canaanite mythology as we discovered the ruins of the city of Ugarit. And so Ugaritic, we have all of this profound information about the whole of the Canaanite pantheon of gods.

In addition to its appearance in compound names of people and places (e.g. Jerubbaal, Jud 9:16; Baalzephon, Ex 14:2), בַּעַל is the name of a great active god in the Canaanite pantheon and has other religious connotations.

The god Baal met in the OT is the West Semitic storm god, bʿl (sing.) and bʿlm (pl.), encountered in Egyptian texts (from

fourteenth century B.C. on), Tell Amarna Letters (fourteenth century B.C.), Alalakh Tablets (fifteenth century B.C.), Ugaritic texts (fourteenth century B.C.), Amorite proper names from Mari, Tell al-Rimah, and Chagar Bazar, and later in Phoenician and Punic texts. Both within the Bible and outside it the name appears either absolutely or in construct with place names; e.g. Baal-peor (Num 25:3, 5), Baal-berith (Jud 9:40), Baal-zebub (2 Kgs 1:2). (Baal-zebub, “lord of flies,” is a parody on his name found elsewhere, b’l zbl, “Prince Baal.”) These names do not denote various gods with the epithet “lord,” but local veneration of the same West Semitic storm and fertility deity called simply Baal, “Lord.”

Scholars used to think that the plural form with the article, “the Baalim” denoted different local numina, but the plural form of the name occurs outside the Bible and the mention of “lovers” and “strangers” (Jer 2:25) suggest another use of the plural than that of a numerical plural. The article occurs frequently in Hebrew with proper names whose meaning is transparent.

Since the biblical writers did not intend to teach the Canaanite religion, we know more about Baal’s roles, consorts, and cult from the extra-biblical literature than from the OT; but the picture of Baal presented in the OT comports well with the extra-biblical sources.

He was also called Haddu (=Hadad). He is above all the storm god who gives the sweet rain that revives vegetation. Dry years were attributed to his temporary captivity or even death. But at his revivification fields, flocks, and families became productive. In addition, he is a war god and fertility deity who consorts with Anat (is later equated with Astarte). Both by reciting the myth of his role in reviving life at the autumn new year festival and by magical ritual of sacred marriage represented in the cult by the king, the queen and a priestess, the West Semites hoped to ensure the earth’s fertility. [This ritual is witnessed to in Babylon but not clearly in Canaan (cf. H. Frankfort *Kingship and the Gods*, also Kitchen, K. A., *Ancient Orient and the O.T.*, Inter-Varsity, 1966, p. 104). It should be noted that the identification of Baal as an annually dying and rising god with

the Babylonian Tammuz has lately suffered. New Sumerian tablets published by S. Kramer show that Tammuz died once for all and C. H. Gordon has argued that Baal too had no annual death and resurrection. See the whole discussion with refs. in E. M. Yamauchi, "Tammuz and the Bible" *JBL* 84: 283–90. R.L.H.] Archaeological cultic objects with exaggerated sexual features, as well as the myths themselves, support the OT notices about the degraded moral features associated with the cult.

Throughout the period of the judges, Israel succumbed to this infectious cult (Jud 2:11ff.; 6:25) and had to be rescued from its tragic consequences by Yahweh's judges. During the period of the Omrides, Baal worship became the official state religion of the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 16:31). Leah Bronner has presented convincing argument that Israel's miracles by Elijah and Elisha served as a polemic for God against the very powers attributed to this pagan nature deity, namely, fire (18:17ff.; 2 Kgs 1:9–16), rain (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:41–46), food (17:1–6, 8–16; 2 Kgs 4:1ff.); children (4:14–17); revivification (1 Kgs 17:17–23; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20–22, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics Against Baal Worship*, Leiden, 1968.) But their miracles did not rid the land of this degraded cult and it brought about the captivity of the northern kingdom (Hosea). It also infiltrated the southern kingdom (2 Kgs 11:18; 21:2ff.), and in spite of Josiah's reform (23:4ff.), brought the nation into exile (Ezek 16; 23 etc.).

The Hosea discourse describes how Israel, who received gifts of grain and oil from YHWH, used these for the worship of Baal (Hos 2:8 [H 10]). The chapter fairly turns on the term *בַּעַל*, not only in the mention of the Canaanite god(s) (e.g. 2:8 [H 10]; 2:13 [H 15]; and 2:17 [H 19]), but in the imagery throughout of God as Israel's husband. Israel will call the Lord her husband (*יְיָ*, 2:16 [H 18]; cf. 2:2 [H 4]; 2:7 [H 9]) and no longer call him, apparently along with the list of other gods, my Baal (*בַּעַלִי*). God's supremacy over Baal is constantly affirmed. However man's preoccupation from then and until this day is rather with sex and technology, than with devotion to the almighty God of history, who is also the covenant God.

Bruce K. Waltke (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute), vol. 1, pp. 119-120

And so we see here that Ahab is a very wicked man, and:

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. (1 Kings 16:33)

And you see, that's connected with the female goddess. And you have to understand this about pagan worship, three things.

Number one, it was never simply spiritual.

It involved sexuality. I'm talking about illicit, immoral, ungodly sexuality. Raw sexuality.

It also included human sacrifice to appease the gods. You killed people, and their blood appeased these gods who fed, in their mythology, who fed on the blood of these things.

So one, it's not simply a spiritual phenomenon. It is very earthy, very physical, and very perverted, and it involves human sacrifice.

So when he builds an Asherah pole, this is part of the female counterpart of Baal, and this is all part of the Canaanite worship. So he's a very, very bad man.

אֲשֶׁרָה. **Asherah.** Both a Canaanite goddess and a wooden cult object in the OT. The word is translated “groves” in the KJV presumably on the basis of the LXX ἄλσος and *nemus* in the Vulgate. Before examining the OT itself we turn to the famous Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra. It is they which tell us who Asherah was. Her name is a feminine participle of the Ugaritic verb *ʿtr* (Heb אָשַׁר “to go”). One of her titles is *rabbatu atiratu yammi*, “Lady Atirat of the Sea,” or “the lady who treads on the sea.” She is the consort or wife of the divine El, and as such enjoys the title *qaniyatu elima*, “progenitress/creatress of the gods.” Her most famous son was Baal. A characteristic of all

mythological literatures is “in the beginning there were two.” In the Bible, however, we meet “in the beginning there was one.” The issue is not simply arithmetic. The fact that one does not read about Mrs. God in Gen 1 and 2 may be one of the Bible’s ways of stating that only God finds fulfillment in himself. In one of the famous mythological texts from Ugarit, the Kret epic, it is predicted to Kret of his bride that “she will bear you seven sons/and an eighth (daughter) ‘Octavia’/she will bear you the lad Yasib/who will suck the milk of Asherah.” Hence, (divine) life is guaranteed and bequeathed.

To turn to the OT, there is no actual description of an Asherah there. Was it a tree, a pole, some kind of tree symbol, an image? It apparently was not a natural object but one that was constructed by man, an artifact. It was “made”: 1 Kgs 16:33; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; it was “set up”: 17:10; 2 Chr 33:19; Isa 27:9; it was “built”: 1 Kgs 14:23. Only once is the verb “to plant” used, Deut 16:21, and here the meaning is “implant.” The conclusion then is that in the OT Asherah stands for the Canaanite goddess represented by a carved wooden image implanted into the ground, usually adjacent to an altar dedicated to the god Baal and located on a hilltop under a leafy tree (Patai).

It is in the period of the divided monarchy that the Asherah cult flourished both in Israel and Judah, though its existence before is documented by the command in Ex 34:13, the prohibition of Deut 16:21, and the incident at the threshold of Gideon’s life of service to God, Jud 6:25ff. Rehoboam’s career marks the beginning of this in Judah (1 Kgs 14:23). In the north the cult received its greatest momentum from the incentive of Jezebel who was responsible for the presence of “four hundred prophets of Asherah” (18:19). Even a reform-minded king such as Asa (15:13) or later Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:4) was unable to liquidate the movement. It was knocked down, but not knocked out. There was an almost inevitable resurrection even in the wake of reform. Compare son Manasseh’s policy (2 Kgs 21:7, even to the point of placing the image in the temple) on the heels of father Hezekiah’s reform (18:4). Apostasy and idolatry just behind revival! What one generation attempts to get rid of a

subsequent generation may trot back in, however reprehensible it may be. All too frequently this has been the pattern in the human race.

Victor P. Hamilton (1980), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute), vol. 1, pp. 81-82)

Now, Ahab is also the single most important man in the entire Old Testament, to date the Old Testament. And that's why I've given you a handout because you probably won't remember any of this without the handout. And if you look at the handout, it's front and back, and you see here several things.

The first thing is the *Assyrian Eponym Lists* from 893 to 648 BC. Each year is named for a limmu, and that is the Assyrian prime minister elected for that year.

So while they had kings, emperors, they also had prime ministers. And so each year they had a new prime minister. Wouldn't that be nice to get a new president every year? Anyhow, and so what they did was record significant astronomical events that occurred during the reign of that particular Prime Minister.

And so as we look at it, it says a limmu named Bur-Sagale . . . a complete solar eclipse . . . Astronomically this had to occur on June 15, 763 B.C.—90 Limmu-years back, 853 B.C., Shalmanesar III was involved at the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River against Ahab and Ben Hadad. Biblical data would make this be after 1 Kings 20:34, during 1 Kings 22:1, when Ahab and Ben Hadad were on good terms.

Now what's significant about that? Does the Bible ever mention the Battle of Qarqar? No. This is an astronomically fixed date, and we know that in 853 Ahab happened to be alive.

Now, if you go to the *Black Obelisk*, which is number three down there, (a stele erected by Shalmaneser III in his eighteenth year; according to the eponym lists, this is 841 B.C.). Here is commemorated the subjugation of many Assyrian enemies including Jehu of Israel.

I received the tribute of Iaua (Jehu) son of (the people of the land of) Omri (Akkadian: 𐎗𐎎𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎 𐎗𐎎): silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears. (Cohen, Ada; Kangas, Steven E. (2010). *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography*. University Press of New England. p. 127.)

And what does that mean? Jehu is submitting to Shalmaneser. Now if you add up the chronologies of these kings, you've got Omri, you've got Ahab, then you've got two successors to Ahab, and you push them to the absolute max. You know, in 2 Kings 3, for example, in verse 1, page 572:

Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. (2 Kings 3:1)

Now, so what you've got, a very short reign after Ahab, and then a 12-year reign, and you've got to understand you've got spring and fall dating that way and some overlaps. It means that absolutely, the absolute limit, the beginning of the reign of Jehu is in 841.

So we have two dates established. conclusively, absolutely based on astronomical phenomena.

Now the Jewish people tended not to observe the stars like that so much. They were familiar, they mentioned Orion, they mentioned the Pleiades and so on, the Jewish scriptures, but they're not focused on recording every single astronomical phenomenon (Job 9:9; 38:31; Amos 5:8-9). They might record an earthquake and that kind of thing and an eclipse (an earthquake, Amos 1:1, but not an eclipse except in apocalyptic passages).

But these people, To the north of them and to the south of them, you see there the *Canon of Ptolemy*, that's number two: "The years of Babylonia's rulers from 747 B.C. down to the second Christian century were accurately listed by this Greek Egyptian."

So you can see these things as an absolute date. That's why Ahab is important. He is the single most important figure in the entire Old Testament

for dating it. I want to see if you all comprehend that, and you've got the handout to go meditate on that maybe later today.

So if he is alive in 853, we know he had to die right after that, and he's killed. And if Jehu has done obeisance to Shalmaneser III, that had to be 841.

And so what's the significance of this? If you turn the page, we'll see in a moment that you see biblical dates working back from the Battle of Qarqar.

This is not insignificant. So if we've got an absolute date, 853, 841. We can go forward and backward in time. Look at Abraham. We know that Abraham lived from 2166-1991 B.C., Isaac, 2066-1886 B.C., Jacob 2006-1859 B.C., Joseph, 1915-1805 B.C., and the Egyptian Sojourn was from 1876-1446 B.C.

And what that's based on . . . if you look at Exodus 12:40-41:

Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt. (Exodus 12:40-41)

So you can go to Moses and so on. And look at First Kings 6:1:

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD. (1 Kings 6:1)

Do you see the significance of this? In other words, not based on the Bible alone here, but based on the biblical data, coupled with the very, very extensive records of the Assyrians and Babylonians, to the north, and of the Egyptians to the south, we can absolutely fix dates.

And that gives us a great sense to think, why is that important? Because we're not dealing with mythology when we're dealing with the Bible; we're not dealing with stories of Krishna, and of the Black Kali, and all these other gods of the Hindus. We're not dealing with those kinds of things; we're dealing with real history in real time in real space.

The Bible is an historical book. The things that are recorded in the Bible really did happen. And they happened the way the Bible tells them.

And so we have these fixed dates. That's important. To know that Ahab is alive in 853, and to know that Jehu had come to power by 841.

Now there's a significance right here in this very chapter that we have read to the significance of those dates. Look at verse 34. 1 Kings 16:34.

In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:34)

So let's hold our hands there, and you see a reference at the bottom of the page, excuse me, right there, at the end of that chapter, Joshua chapter 6 verse 26. So let's turn back there for a moment. Joshua chapter 6 and verse 26. And we'll see there on page 1339. Why is this significant? Why is it significant? He says, "At that time," this is after Joshua has "Fought the Battle of Jericho," and it's destroyed. It's the first city in the promised land that is destroyed. And it was symbolic of that and that no spoil could be taken from the people. Later on, they could take spoil.

You remember, of course, what happened that one man coveted gold and silver and an Egyptian garment, and he hid them, and he brought great destruction, Achan did, on the people of God because he took spoil (Joshua 7). They were not allowed to take spoil from Jericho. Why?

Because Jericho was offered up to God as a holocaust. What's a holocaust? It's a whole burnt offering. So the city of Jericho is a holocaust. It was offered up to God as a whole burnt offering and nothing was to be taken from it.

However, of course, God did rescue a prostitute and her family who lived in the house with her because she had received the spies in peace, the Israelite spies (Joshua 6:22-25). So they destroy the whole thing. And now look at verse 26:

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates.” (Joshua 6:26)

And then it says:

So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land. (Joshua 6:27)

Now, when did this happen? Well, because of the Battle of Qarqar. And because of the Black Obelisk, we know exactly when this happened. This happened in 1406 BC. This is when it happened. The conquest of Canaan occurs in 1406 and continues down for a while.

So Joshua issued a curse on the city of Jericho, if it would ever be rebuilt.

Now I had lunch in Jericho, and it has been rebuilt. It’s been destroyed a number of times over the years, but I had lunch in Jericho in the year 2000, so it’s been rebuilt. But the point is Joshua issued a curse.

Now think about it. We’ve seen this before in scripture in Proverbs 26: it says a curse without a cause does not alight.

Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest. (Proverbs 26:2)

And we also see in Zechariah chapter 5 how a curse from the Lord is like a flying scroll that just goes out in time, and it lodges in people who meet the conditions of the curse.

I looked again—and there before me was a flying scroll! He asked me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a flying scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.” And he said to me, “This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. The LORD Almighty declares, ‘I will send it out, and it will enter the house of the

thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.” (Zechariah 5:1–4)

So here you have something very interesting: 1406 BC, a curse that is issued. It’s like a flying bird. It’s like a flying scroll. And the conditions are not met. Not in 1306, not in 1206, not in 1106, not in 1006, not in 906.

But we move into the next century. And sometime during the reign of King Ahab, Hiel of Bethel, arrogant man that he was, decides to rebuild the city of Jericho.

Now, I am not absolutely sure what happened.

Was it an accident? I used to always think it was an accident that he laid his foundations at the cost of his firstborn son. Is it an accident? His son is standing nearby, and this rope breaks, and this heavy stone slides, and the boy is smashed by it, and dies?

And as he ends up putting the gates up, his his youngest son is there and somehow or another the builders who are holding these giant gates happen to let the rope slip, and it falls on his youngest son? Is that the deal?

I’m inclined to think something else. If you turn back to 1 Kings 16, page 555, in Ahab’s time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid the foundations at the cost of his firstborn son, Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son, Segub.

What did we say about idolatry? What did we say about pagan worship? What did we say about the Canaanite pantheon with Baal and with Asherah? What do we say about that?

It’s not simply a spiritual phenomenon. It is a physical phenomenon where there’s raw, perverted sexuality, and where there is blood sacrifice and killing of human beings.

I’m inclined to believe that under the influence of Baal worship, with Ahab coming to succeed his father Omri, marrying Jezebel, I’m inclined to believe that the man deliberately killed his oldest son in order to, in his mind, break the curse.

Is it possible that it wasn't an accident at all? Is it possible that Hiel of Bethel was keenly aware of a curse that had occurred over five centuries before and said, "Well, I know what I got to do to get out from under this."

And so he brings his oldest boy over there, and he says, "Now son, look what's over there." And he slices his throat. Is that what he did? I don't know.

And then if I'd been the youngest son, Segub, I'd have begun to worry about things. Think, what's going to happen next? And man, the oldest and the youngest, did he deliberately slaughter his oldest and youngest sons in order to, in his mind, placate God and remove a curse?

Whether it was an accident or a deliberate act of human sacrifice, ultimately it makes no difference.

It's a fulfillment, literally, of a literal curse spoken by Joshua the son of Nun in 1406 BC, when Israel conquered Jericho as the first city of the Canaanites. I think that's not insignificant at all. Isn't it? It's profound. Have you ever thought about how that would apply in our time?

Are there curses that come on a people as a people group when they violate certain things? You can't read the Bible and come to any other conclusion but that. What do you do with the people who once profess to know God and then not only turn their back on knowing him, but deliberately do the things that God has declared are wicked and profane.

And you need to understand something. While not every nation of people has a special revelation of Holy Scripture, every single culture in the entire world has the moral law of God written on its heart. People know intuitively and instinctively right and wrong. We see that in Romans chapter 2.

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Romans 2:14–15)

People know intuitively and instinctively there is a God. And not just any old God, not some cosmic Santa Claus who winks at sin and says everything's okay, don't worry about it. But every single human being knows there is a God who is the true God, and that witness is there if a person is a human being. Why? because we're created in the image of God.

To be created in the image of God doesn't mean that God looks like us. It means that his moral attributes, his character, is embossed on the human nature. And so everyone knows of the existence of the true God, at some level and shoves it down, suppresses it, represses it, and everyone knows at some level right and wrong in terms of the moral law. And that's why when a nation goes in defiance of the moral law of God, God judges that nation. God judges that nation.

As I look at the United States of America and all of the troubles we're in, all of the difficulties, all of the bleeding off of our financial resources to give away to other people, while our own infrastructure is crashing around us... As I look at that, as I look at wars and rumors of war and all of that everywhere...

As I look at our divided nation and what's going on in New York City right now, and the huge animosity on both sides: People are acting crazily now. I mean, I've never seen anything like it.

I was born, as most of you were born, in the first half of the 20th century. I have never seen the insanity at a national level that I'm seeing now. It makes no difference whether you're a Democrat or Republican. That's not the issue.

The issue is people used to be civil. People used to be able to have a conversation. No one tried to put a Presidential candidate in jail. I'm not saying he doesn't deserve to be in jail. Probably, he really does. So does the other guy. But I'm just saying, I've never in my life ever seen the strife and division and pure lunacy that I'm seeing in the United States of America now. It's horrible. It's awful. Where does that come from?

It comes from the judgment of Almighty God. When people choose not to retain the knowledge of God... If you hold your hand there in Kings and turn with me to Romans chapter 1, you see a clear evidence of the judgment of God. Romans chapter 1. And he says this in verse 18, page 1747.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18)

This isn't just people who have the Bible. This is also people who don't have a Bible. And this is what he says. Verse 19:

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:19–20)

One day, according to Revelation chapter 20 beginning at verse 15, every single human being who has ever lived will give an account of his life to God. The books will be opened, and those books are not simply what you physically did that was caught on that camera at the traffic stop.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15)

It's everything you've said. They're probably monitoring it right now. And do you know that there are giant computers that do monitor things that go on the internet? They do. And there's certain words like Allahu Akbar (الله أكبر) that will suddenly, think, and the computer will say, where'd that come from? That'll get somebody's attention.

And so I used to text friends when they were in airports with, in Arabic, things like Inshallah (إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ) and Allahu Akbar (الله أكبر), just so they would, you know. That's a terrible prank to play.

My point is that we're so insecure as a nation that we now are monitoring so much, and that is in order to try to win the War on Terror which we will never win because the only way to win the war on terror is through the conversion of Jews and Muslims and Hindus and everybody else, because hatred is the natural state of fallen people when somebody's done them wrong (<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11120611216>). So notice here he says they're without excuse.

Look at verse 21.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:21–23)

Consider the pantheon of Egypt that God judged when he rescued the Jewish people out of Egypt, beginning in 1446, when he released his people there. God not only judged the Pharaoh and killed his oldest son, but he also judged the gods of Egypt.

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. (Exodus 12:12)

And what did those gods look like? They were bizarre-looking creatures with heads of animals. Wow! One of the most violent had the head of a cat (Bastet).

And if you've ever watched a cat play with a mouse, you can understand. So he said they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Now look at verse 24 and ask yourself this question in April of 2024, April the 21st.

Is this an indicator that America has been under God's judgment for quite a while? And if so, why?

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:24–25)

Look at verse 26, page 1748: “Because of this, God gave them over.”

What does it mean? What is the root of perversion? The root of perversion is God's abandoning a culture and civilization. Is that what he says?

God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:26–31)

Turning back to 1 Kings 16 for a moment.

Is America under the judgment of God? Absolutely!

How long has it been under the judgment of God? I would submit to you that it began to be under God's judgment in a very severe way beginning around 1961, 62, and 63. What happened then?

It's when we said you can't have prayer in the public schools. It's when we said you cannot read the Bible in public schools except as literature. No longer is it read authoritatively. Prayer in public schools was outlawed based

on dealing with the regent's prayer in New York (*Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962)). Bible reading was ruled against in *Schempp v. Abington Township* (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)).

When I was a child, we had the Ten Commandments. And we recited the Ten Commandments because we all understood that that was God Almighty's standard for moral behavior. But we removed all of that. And here's the question. When God is told, we don't want you, what does God do?

Okay, have it your way. Like Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way." Look at modern American education. Where is it today?

I support the public schools. I went to a retirement party Friday night for a very good friend of mine, a pastor, who retired after 29 years of working for the public schools in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, as Dr. Franklin was a counselor for troubled youth.

What have we got going on in America today? We've got violence, unprecedented. I sat next to a black minister who's also a sheriff's deputy at this gala on Friday evening, and we talked about what's going on and he said, "What do you make, what can we do with the kids today?" And he's a sheriff's deputy as well as pastor of what was once the First Methodist Church of Alexandria.

What can we do? I'm going to tell you this. Why is there trouble with children? Why are children violent? Well, you can say, "Well, you can't play Grand Theft Auto over and over and over again." And where you designed a game where you shoot and murder people in order to win Grand Theft Auto, you can't train a brain like that over and over again without putting it in that brain through repetitious behavior to think, "I'll shoot and kill this person."

But I want to tell you what's really behind it. What's really behind it is God saying, you want to do it your way? Have it your way!

That's modern America. That's modern American twenty, twenty-four, where juvenile crime is unprecedented just look at the things that happen in Texarkana. I no longer take the *Gazette*, but I do get their daily mail, and I read the email.

And I see the shootings and the killings and in my own uh... the capital of uh... of Rapides Parish. Alexandria is one of the most violent cities in the world for its size. Murder right and left, what's going on?

You say, "Well, the Great Society and fathers left the home."

Well, all of those things are penultimate causes, Grand Theft Auto, Kids left to themselves playing video games constantly, never able to sleep well, social media driving them: "I'm so insecure, I'm so fat!"

You may be as thin as, what was that woman's name, Twiggy. But you've got this self-image that's shattered. People are devoured with inferiority. Those are penultimate causes.

That means they're not the ultimate cause. What's the ultimate cause of America's destruction which is going on right now? And it's very plainly, clearly revealed in Romans chapter 1.

And so we look back here. In the case of Ahab, as we conclude part one.

In Ahab's time (verse 34), Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:34)

To rebuild monuments of paganism? That's an act of defiance to Almighty God. And it's pretending that God's written word and the authoritative words that he's spoken throughout history through his prophets, such as Joshua, and some of which were recorded in the Bible and others were not, that those words, when people incur a judgment from God, and they defy it, and they know they're defying it, what's the result?

"The oldest boy? I'm going to grease the slab with his blood. The youngest son, I'm going to grease the gates with his blood." It's what happens when people who have known something of the true God say, we have no use for this anymore.

And if you're watching on the internet, I appeal to you. Consider where you are. If it's indeed true, and I believe with all of my heart that what I've said is true, and you've heard from Scripture that it's true:

Now's the time to seek the Lord, because this nation will fall unless there is a massive turning to the Lord on the part of people who are brokenhearted because of their own sin, and who grieve for the sins of our nation. We need to pray for revival. And if you don't know the Lord, I urge you to seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near and forsake your wickedness and cast yourself on God's mercy in Jesus (Isaiah 55:6-7).

In whose name we pray now, Lord, you would bless this word that it may touch our hearts, that those who listen worldwide would be touched with the reality that a once great nation, in many ways, never a perfect nation, a nation with terrible faults, that a once great nation is crumbling before the eyes of the watching world. Lord, may we flee to Christ for Jesus' sake. Amen.