

September 13, 2026 (Lesson 2)

KINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

1. **King Jeroboam Institutes Idolatry** (1 Kings 12:25-33)
2. **Ahab: Israel's Worst King** (1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:17-26)
3. **King Jehu: God's Avenger** (2 Kings 9:1-10; 10:11, 20-28)

Central Truth: Ungodly rulers influence people to sin.

Focus: Recognize that God rules over rulers and trust His sovereignty.

Evangelism Emphasis: Jesus Christ saves individuals and nations from ungodliness.

Golden Text: “Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him” (1 Kings 16:30).

After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam became king. Rehoboam stubbornly refused to cooperate with the northern tribes of Israel in their pleas for leniency. These tribes rebelled, and the Israelites were divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In the centuries that followed, the southern kingdom maintained the dynastic rule of the house of David. However, not all those kings served God as David did. Some were good, others were bad, and some went back and forth. We will study Judah's kings next week. The northern kingdom of Israel started with Jeroboam and his rejection of the Law of God. This set a pattern for all of Israel's kings—none were good.

Bible commentator J. Vernon McGee told about studying the kings of Israel and Judah in Bible college. For one of their tests, students were to list the kings of both kingdoms and tell whether they were good or bad rulers. One student discovered if he memorized all the kings and then wrote beside each one “a bad king,” he would get a 95 percent grade. This was an ingenious way to achieve a good exam score, but a sad commentary on these two kingdoms. This story illustrates the rebellious history of God's people. Yet, God was faithful to those who served Him. He never completely forsook the Israelites and preserved a remnant of righteous followers.

1. KING JEROBOAM INSTITUTES IDOLATRY

A. Political Calculation (1 Kings 12:25-29)

²⁵ Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Peniel.
²⁶ And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: ²⁷ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. ²⁸ Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. ²⁹ And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan.

The prophet Ahijah foretold that Solomon's kingdom would be divided and the northern tribes would follow Jeroboam as king (1 Kings 11:29-37). Ahijah also told Jeroboam if he would follow the Lord wholeheartedly he would have an enduring kingdom (v. 38). However, this was not to be.

When Rehoboam decided to reject the pleas of the northern tribes (12:16), they rebelled and chose Jeroboam as king. He immediately established the city of Shechem as his capital. Shechem was a prominent city, already well known in the days of Abraham (Gen. 12:6) and Joshua (Josh. 24:1). Jeroboam may have selected this as his capital not only for its history but also because Rehoboam had planned to be coronated there before the northern tribes rejected him (1 Kings 12:1). Jeroboam was affirming that he was now king in place of Rehoboam. He also fortified Peniel, a city in Gilead, east of the Jordan River. Militarily, it served as a defense against anyone coming from the east or north. Another factor may have been that the land east of the Jordan had historically been friendly to David (see 2 Sam. 17:22, 27-29). Jeroboam may have wanted to ensure that the Transjordanian tribes did not follow David's grandson, Rehoboam.

After establishing his political and military base, Jeroboam took measures to ensure that the northern tribes were religiously tied to his kingdom. For generations, Israelite worship was focused on Jerusalem. Jeroboam was afraid if the people continued to worship the Lord at the Jerusalem temple, they might return to their allegiance to the house of David (1 Kings 12:26-27). To prevent

this, Jeroboam instituted a new religious system. This involved a new priesthood and a new way to worship God—through calf idols. Calves and bulls were common idols used by the surrounding pagan nations, especially the Aramaeans and Canaanites. Often their gods would be depicted standing on the back of a bull or a calf. This indicated both the strength of the god and its abundant fertility. Jeroboam now proposed to the people to worship Jehovah under this guise.

Jeroboam not only needed a new “god” to worship, he also needed sacred locations for this worship to occur. He established two shrines, one for each of the golden calves. The first was in Bethel, a town about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. This would provide a place of worship for the southern part of his kingdom. It was also a historically significant place for worship. There, Abraham had built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12:8) and Jacob had his vision of a ladder ascending into Heaven (28:10-22). The second location was in Dan, to the far north near Mount Hermon. Note that the shrine at Dan was discovered by archaeologists in 1966, a historical support of the Biblical account.

The Gift You Adore

Your pain could be God prying open your life and heart to remove a gift of His that you’ve been holding on to more dearly than Him.—Tullian Tchividjian

B. Spiritual Adultery (1 Kings 12:30-33)

³¹ And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. ³² And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.

Jeroboam not only made idols and established new holy sites, he also instituted a new priesthood (1 Kings 12:31). The Levites and the sons of Aaron were closely tied to the temple worship in Jerusalem. Jeroboam wanted other priests to lead worship and offer sacrifices. He created a new

class of priests who had no connections to the Levitical priesthood. This was another violation of God's Law (see Ex. 28:1; Num. 3:5-10).

He also instituted a new annual festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month (1 Kings 12:32), a day "which he had devised in his own heart" (v. 33 NKJV). This was done to replace the Feast of Tabernacles, which was on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. He picked a date close to a festival the Israelites were accustomed to celebrating, but still new and different. On that day, he himself offered a sacrifice at Bethel, presenting an animal to the golden calves. In observing this festival and making the sacrifice himself, he again purposefully violated the commands of the Lord: the dates of Israel's festivals were ordained by God (Lev. 23), and only Aaron's descendants could offer sacrificial animals (17:1-9).

Jeroboam's actions closely parallel the account of Aaron's fashioning a golden calf for Israel to worship (Ex. 32:1-4). Jeroboam declared, "Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (1 Kings 12:28 NKJV), which is almost a direct quote from Exodus 32:4. Jeroboam's strategy was similar to Aaron's. He was not calling on Israel to reject Jehovah but to worship Him in a visible form. Notice, he said these were the "gods" who brought them out of Egypt. He was not encouraging the people to worship Baal, Molech, or another deity. He wanted them to feel comfortable in continuing to worship the Lord, but not at the temple in Jerusalem. He probably chose golden calves not only because they were a culturally familiar image, but in keeping with Aaron's example. He essentially said, "Let's worship God like our ancestors did in the wilderness," violating God's command against making carved images (Ex. 20:4).

All of this was "a great sin" (1 Kings 12:30 NLT). Such idolatry was a form of spiritual adultery, for the Lord often pictured His relationship with Israel as being like a husband with his bride. To reject the true worship of God is spiritual infidelity. This great sin led to ever-increasing wickedness.

What began under Jeroboam as an attempt to mix the worship of Jehovah with pagan rituals eventually turned into full-blown idolatrous devotion to Baal and a host of other false gods.

§ *Why do you suppose the Israelites readily embraced Jeroboam's idolatry?*

2. AHAB: ISRAEL'S WORST KING

A. Loving Jezebel and Baal (1 Kings 16:29-33)

³⁰ And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.

³² And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. ³³ And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

After Jeroboam, there followed a succession of kings. One of the more famous kings was Omri—so well known that other nations referred to Israel as the land of Omri. Omri bought a parcel of land and built the city of Samaria as his capital (1 Kings 16:24). This was set on a hill and heavily fortified. It remained Israel's capital until its destruction by the Assyrians in 721 BC.

Omri's son, Ahab, became king after him. Like Omri, Ahab was wicked; indeed, the most evil of all Israel's rulers (v. 30). The kings prior to Ahab had sinned against the Lord by following the practices of Jeroboam. Ahab would take Israel to even greater depths of depravity. It began with his marriage to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon (v. 31). The Sidonians were Phoenicians, related to the Canaanites. They worshiped many gods, notably Baal. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ethbaal was also a priest of the goddess Astarte. He apparently raised his daughter Jezebel in complete devotion to these deities. She fervently promoted pagan worship among the Israelites, even as she stood in adamant opposition to the worship of Jehovah (18:13). She was also an active opponent to the ministry of Elijah (19:1-2). In the Scriptures, Jezebel is presented as the epitome of wickedness, license, and iniquity.

Ahab probably married Jezebel as a political alliance. Since her name means "chaste" or "unmarried," some think their marriage was one of political convenience only. Whether there was

romance between the king and queen is debatable, but we cannot debate the influence Jezebel had over Ahab. Upon his marriage to her, Ahab then considered it a “trivial thing” to follow the religious practices of Jeroboam (16:31 NKJV) and wholeheartedly devoted himself to the worship of Baal. In Ahab’s capital city of Samaria, he built a temple for Baal and set up an altar for his worship (v. 32).

Who was this deity Israel chose to replace the true God? The name *Baal* means “master” or “lord.” He was worshiped under different names in different localities (Baal-Berith, Baal-zebub, Baal-gad, etc.). Baal was believed to be the god of storms, rain, and fertility. He was responsible for bringing life and fruitfulness to the land. Originally the god El had been chief among the Phoenician gods, but Baal became more popular. The worshipers of Baal would sometimes sacrifice their children to him, to placate him and appeal to his power to bring life-giving rains.

Ahab also worshiped the goddess Ashtoreth (or Asherah). She was a mother-goddess figure worshiped with sexual license. She was originally the consort of the god El, but later became associated with Baal. She was honored with wooden poles or images called *asherim*, often found in sacred groves. This is what is referred to in 1 Kings 16:32. In her efforts to promote the worship of her gods, Jezebel supported 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (18:19). The rejection of the worship of God and the devotion to Baal and Asherah were a great offense to God, provoking Him to “anger” (16:33).

One Man’s Influence

Concerning evil leaders, probably the first person we think of is Hitler. This one man, through the force of his will and the power of his oratory, convinced a nation to join him in some of the darkest deeds known in history. Ordinary men performed horrific acts of cruelty based on the Führer’s rantings. One man of influence can influence a nation for good or evil.

B. Facing Certain Doom (1 Kings 21:17-26)

²⁴ Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. ²⁵ But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. ²⁶ And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.

First Kings 21 tells the story of Ahab's covetousness and murderous intent. Near Ahab's palace lived a man named Naboth. He had a vineyard that Ahab wanted. Ahab offered to buy the vineyard, but Naboth refused, citing the land as being the inheritance of his ancestors. Ahab became angry and sullen at Naboth's refusal. Jezebel, however, took action. She had false witnesses accuse Naboth of cursing both God and the king, which was a capital offense under Mosaic Law (Lev. 24:15-16). As a result, Naboth was stoned to death. Ahab then took possession of the vineyard.

God had put up with many years of rebellious wickedness from Ahab, but this was the final straw. God sent Elijah to confront Ahab, who was in Naboth's vineyard enjoying his new possession (1 Kings 21:18). Elijah reproached him for both murder and theft (v. 19). Although Jezebel was the force behind the death of Naboth, Ahab knew and approved of the deed, so he was equally guilty of the crime. The Lord told Elijah to pronounce judgment on Ahab. The prophet painted a brutal image of Ahab's doom—in the place where Naboth's blood was shed and dogs licked it up, so the blood of Ahab would be licked up by dogs also (see 22:34-38).

Since Elijah confronted Ahab, the king saw the prophet as his personal enemy (21:20). Elijah exposed the sinfulness of the king, and declared that not only would he die as a consequence of his sin, but God would judge his entire household (vv. 21-22). The short-lived dynasty that began with Ahab's father, Omri, would end with his son, Joram, or Jehoram (see 2 Kings 3:1; 9:24). Jezebel would also face the judgment of God. Indeed, her flesh would become food for the dogs (1 Kings 21:23). The same fate would come on all of Ahab's household, wherever they might die (v. 24).

Verse 25 sums up Ahab's entire reign and the depths of wickedness into which Israel had sunk: Ahab had "sold himself to do wickedness" (NKJV) and worship false gods at the instigation of Jezebel. There was no wickedness committed by the pagans that Ahab did not imitate (v. 26).

\$ *What did Ahab call Elijah in 1 Kings 21:20, and why?*

3. KING JEHU: GOD'S AVENGER

A. Jehu Anointed King (2 Kings 9:1-10)

¹ And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramothgilead.

⁴ So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramothgilead. ⁵ And when he came, behold, the captains of the host were sitting; and he said, I have an errand to thee, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of all us? And he said, To thee, O captain. ⁶ And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel. ⁷ And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.

Fulfilling divine prophecy, Ahab was killed in battle (1 Kings 22:34-37). His son Joram became king. He was as wicked as Ahab and would also face judgment. By then, Elijah had gone to Heaven (2 Kings 2:11), leaving Elisha as the principal prophet. It was common for prophets to gather a community around them, called the "sons of the prophets," to be mentored by men of God such as Elijah and Elisha (see 2 Kings 2:3; 4:38). Elisha called one of these young men for a mission (9:1). He was to take a flask of oil, probably an open-mouth jar or vial made of glass or stone. He was to find Jehu, deliver a word from the Lord, and then anoint him as king (vv. 2-3).

Jehu was a member of Joram's bodyguard. He is known to secular history because of an Assyrian monument called the *Black Obelisk*, where he is seen bowing before Shalmaneser III, the king of Assyria. Elisha's messenger went to Ramoth-Gilead, a town east of the Jordan River. There

Jehu was serving Joram by fighting against the Arameans, or Syrians (8:28). Joram had been wounded in battle and left to recover in Jezreel. Jehu had remained to continue the battle.

The young man hurried to find Jehu. Once alone, he anointed Jehu and announced that he was the king of Israel (9:6). Anointing with oil was the usual method of authorizing someone to serve as a king, prophet, or priest. The messenger then pronounced judgment on Ahab's household. God had already done this through Elijah. However, Ahab had shown remorse, and so God deferred full punishment until after Ahab's death (1 Kings 21:27-29). This shows God will have mercy on even the most wicked if they will show genuine sorrow for their sin.

Jehu was told that Ahab's entire household would perish, as had the previous dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha (2 Kings 9:7-9). Specific judgment was pronounced against Jezebel (v. 10)—appropriately, since she was the major force causing Israel to turn to Baal worship. After uttering these words, the young man hurried away in accordance with Elisha's instructions.

Mischaracterizing God

Some Christians have taken all the justice, judgment, and hatred of sin out of the nature of God, and have nothing left but a soft God.—A. W. Tozer

B. Divine Decrees Carried Out (2 Kings 10:11, 20-28)

¹¹ So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining.

²⁵ And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and slay them; let none come forth. And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went to the city of the house of Baal. ²⁶ And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them.

Jehu was ruthless in his execution of God's instructions. Yet, he was an instrument of God's judgment on the house of Ahab. After being anointed, Jehu immediately left for Jezreel, where

Joram was recovering from his wounds. Joram expected good news from Jehu, so he rode to meet him outside the city walls. There, Jehu shot him with an arrow (2 Kings 9:24). He then commanded that his body be dumped on the plot of ground Ahab had stolen from Naboth (vv. 25-26).

Next, Jehu sought out Jezebel, who was also in Jezreel. When she heard Jehu was coming, she put on makeup and adorned her hair (v. 30). She either thought she could seduce Jehu or intimidate him with her regal appearance. Use of cosmetics was common in the ancient Middle East, and archaeologists have found many artifacts attesting to this. But Jehu did not even enter the city to see her. Instead, he appealed to men on the wall to throw her down, which they did. The Scriptures record that her blood splattered the city wall (v. 33). In utter contempt for her, Jehu rode his horse over her dead body. He then went inside the city for a meal. Later he gave instructions to bury Jezebel's body. However, dogs had already eaten her corpse, leaving only her skull, hands, and feet. Though a gruesome image, this fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah about Jezebel's end (vv. 35-37; 1 Kings 21:23).

Next, Jehu turned to the rest of Joram's family. The king had seventy "sons" living in Samaria, probably meaning both sons and grandsons (2 Kings 10:1). Jehu sent a letter to the elders of Samaria challenging them to oppose him. However, they feared Jehu, so they responded by beheading all of Joram's sons and sending their heads to Jezreel (v. 7). Thus, Jehu annihilated the household of Ahab. Not only that, but he also killed all Joram's officials, friends, and priests (v. 11). Probably, he considered this politically expedient in order to secure his position as king.

Then he called all of the priests of Baal to gather in Samaria, pretending he wanted to worship with them. But once they were in Baal's temple, he had his soldiers kill all of them (vv. 24-25). They also emptied the temple of its sacred objects, which he burned (vv. 26-27). These were probably

images of Baal, as well as wooden images of Asherah. Jehu effectively ended Baal worship in Israel (v. 28). Tragically, however, Israel largely replaced Baal with Molech.

God commended Jehu for effectively carrying out His judgment on Ahab's family (v. 30) and promised that Jehu's descendants would rule for generations. Yet, Jehu's heart was divided. He still followed Jeroboam's path and worshiped the calf idols (vv. 29, 31). He must have known this was as offensive to God as Baal worship. So why do it? Perhaps he feared for his throne. If Israel got rid of the golden calves, they might return to Jerusalem for worship, thus kindling feelings of loyalty to the house of David. Like Jeroboam, Jehu could have left a godly legacy. Instead, his final epitaph is that he "took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart" (v. 31).

§ *Where is false worship taking place in our nation, and how should genuine worshipers respond?*

LEADERS NOT TO BE FOLLOWED

In teaching principles of leadership, motivational Christian speaker John Maxwell talks about "The Law of the Lid." This principle says nothing will rise higher than the standard(s) of the leader. As is often stated, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." This is true in so many ways. It is amply illustrated by the three rulers we have considered: Jeroboam, Ahab, and Jehu. All three were men who began with great potential—to be a godly leader who influenced God's people in a positive way. Instead, their hearts were given over to pride, stubbornness, rebellion, and earthly wisdom. They did not listen to God's word as given to them through God's servants. As a result, all three saw the Israelites follow the ways of the nations and worship false gods. They established patterns of wickedness that plagued Israel for generations to come.

We must learn from these kings' examples and avoid the pitfalls they fell into. Let us pray to be godly influencers in other people's lives, not falling prey to worldly wisdom.