

Who was King Ahab in the Bible?

Ahab was one in a line of increasingly evil kings in Israel's history, starting with the reign of Jeroboam. King Ahab "did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him" (1 Kings 16:30). Among the events chronicled in Ahab's life that led to his downfall was his marriage to an evil woman named Jezebel who had a particular hatred for God's people (1 Kings 18:4). Because of his marriage to a pagan woman, Ahab devoted himself to the worship of the false gods Baal and Asherah in Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33).

The evil of King Ahab was countered by the prophet Elijah who warned Ahab of coming judgment if he did not obey the Lord. Ahab blamed Elijah for bringing trouble on Israel (1 Kings 18:17), but it was Ahab's promotion of idolatry that was the true cause of the three-and-a-half-year famine (verse 18). In a dramatic confrontation between Elijah and Ahab's false prophets, God proved to Israel that He, not Baal, was the true God (1 Kings 18:16-39). All of Ahab's men of Baal were killed that day (verse 40).

King Ahab also disobeyed the Lord's direct command to destroy Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram. God set it up so that Ahab would lead Israel to victory, but Ahab made a treaty with the king he was supposed to kill (1 Kings 20). "Therefore," God told Ahab through an unnamed prophet, "it is your life for his life, your people for his people" (verse 42).

The event that sealed Ahab's doom was his murder of an innocent man (1 Kings 21). Ahab coveted a vineyard belonging to a man named Naboth. The king offered to buy the vineyard, but Naboth refused, because the Law forbade him to sell it (1 Kings 21:2-3; cf. Leviticus 25:23). While Ahab sulked about it in his palace, his wife arranged Naboth's murder. Once the vineyard's owner was out of the way, King Ahab took the

vineyard for himself. Elijah came to Ahab and told him the Lord would deal with him by cutting off all his descendants. Also, Ahab himself would suffer an ignoble fate: “In the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!” (1 Kings 21:19). Upon hearing this, Ahab “tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly” (verse 27). In response to Ahab’s repentance, God mercifully postponed the destruction of Ahab’s dynasty until after Ahab was dead (verse 29).

The prophesied judgment against Ahab came true exactly as Elijah predicted. God used Ahab’s own false prophets to entice him into going to the battle at Ramoth-Gilead, where he was hit by a “random” arrow and slowly bled to death in his chariot. Later, “they washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared” (1 Kings 22:38). After Ahab’s death, Jehu killed Jezebel (2 Kings 9) and all of Ahab’s descendants (2 Kings 10).

King Ahab was justly judged by God because he disobeyed the Lord’s direct commands, he abused his responsibility as Israel’s king, and he led God’s people right into idolatry. In the end, “there was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols” (1 Kings 21:25-26).