

## What's the Message - Lesson 60

Today we start to dig into the lessons to be learned from following a false god.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that the Lord would guide you through this study, and that it will be clear to you what God expects from His people. Then we ask that our Lord will give you the strength and wisdom to follow His course, with the life you live in His name. Amen.

Last time we saw how Baalism had taken over as the state religion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and how that led to bloody chaos and murders. Today we see how Baalism snakes its way into Judah, and the price Judah will end up paying as a result.

At the same time that Ahab was reigning as king in Israel, Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah, the fourth king after Rehoboam. He began his reign with ability and pious devotion to Yahweh, building up the administrative and judicial systems, and making alliances with neighboring nations. Most importantly, he re-built the familiarity and trust of the people in the Word of God by sending priests and Levites out into the countryside to instruct the people. His reign was considered one of the best of the kings of Judah after David.

But he made a fatal mistake. He decided to make peace with the north, and agreed to unite with Ahab in a battle against Syria, a battle in which Ahab was killed by a stray arrow, fulfilling the first half of the prophecy of Elijah. From a political and economic standpoint this move toward cooperative efforts appeared to be a good decision, for it led both nations into a time of growing prosperity. But it also led good king Jehoshaphat to have his son, Jehoram, marry Athaliah, the scheming and wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

Now the two houses were united, and Athaliah followed the same process her mother Jezebel had used to seduce her husband into the idolatrous worship of Baal. And so, Baal made its way into the life of the kingdom of Judah with the queen using the position of her husband to promote Baalism

as the state-approved religion. For a covenant-conscious Jew, it was a very dark time, indeed.

As we read in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, chapter 21, beginning at verse 5: *Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned 8 years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done; for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.*

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, who sent a message to Jehoram saying: because of how you have disobeyed the Lord, and have led your people into unfaithfulness, you will die in great agony because of a disease the Lord will send. And this is precisely what happened. We are told at the end of chapter 21 that Jehoram departed with no one's regret, and he was not buried with honor in the tombs of the kings.

But the son who followed Jehoram, named Ahaziah, did no better, as his mother, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was his counselor. So now both Israel in the north and Judah in the south had departed from faithfully following the Lord, and had turned to Baal. King Ahaziah agreed to go with his uncle, Joram, who was then king in the north, to battle against the king of Syria. In this battle King Joram was wounded, and was taken to Jezreel to be healed.

Ahaziah went to visit his uncle while he was sick. Also at this time, the successor to Elijah, the prophet Elisha, had one of his disciples anoint a man named Jehu to be the next king of Israel. That was accomplished in a bloody *coup* that took the lives of both kings Ahaziah and Joram, as well as Jezebel and all the prophets of Baal. This fulfilled the final portion of the prophecy of Elijah regarding Ahab and Jezebel. It can be read in detail in 2 Kings chapter 9 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles chapter 22.

That brought an end to the house of Ahab, and opened the door for Queen Athaliah to usurp the throne in Judah. But that is a part of the story we will hold until next time. This account has been summarized greatly, to keep it as simple as possible, but it was still packed with unfamiliar names and lots of action, mostly vile. So once again, Teacher, I have to ask, what does all this mean for us today? What's the message?

Even though the physical environments of the Children of Israel and our own day differ greatly, those who have been following this series from the beginning should readily see that there are parallels we can relate to. One of the consistent themes we have seen in this study is that God has told Israel: You are my people, and I am your God. Walk with Me, in my ways, and you shall have peace and joy. Turn away from Me and you will suffer both temporal and eternal consequences. Ahab and Jezebel certainly illustrate this point.

The danger of Baalism to Israel was immense. We may not be able to relate to idols, but we can quickly relate to the reality that many people of our day have placed other, false gods, first in their lives. In one of the books we have recommended, *The Kingdom of God*, by John Bright, this statement is made: *Paganism was, then as now, no trivial thing. As long as men take on the character of the gods they serve, so long does it greatly matter who those gods may be. Had Israel embraced Baal it would have been the end of her; she would not longer have lived as the peculiar people of God.*

It is true that we see in this lesson a bloody purge by Jehu to wipe Baal out of existence in the northern kingdom, but further reading will quickly reveal that this purge did not really clean, nor did it last. As John Bright comments further: *A foreign paganism had been drowned in blood that the native variety might flourish unhindered. That it is possible to crush an overt paganism physically only to surrender to a subtler form of it in the spirit is tragically true.* The question we must ask ourselves is this: Do we consistently keep God first in our lives and respond to His grace with our love and loyalty, or have we subtly placed the gods of materialism at our forefront?

Next time we will see how the danger of Baalism and false gods plays out in the demise of Israel.