

Ahab

I am Ahab, son of Omri, King of Israel in Samaria, the city built by my father. I avoided the internal struggles that my father had to deal with and laid the foundation for international peace by a strategic marriage and by building temples to Baal and Asherah. I made nearly everybody happy except for the occasional cantankerous prophet, like Elijah.

He had the nerve to announce that he had the power to stop the rains – for years, no less. Well, I guess he actually said that it was by the LORD God of Israel whom he served. Then he promptly fled somewhere into the wilderness.

It did cross my mind to appease this God, after all, Elijah claimed that He was our national God – ours and our off-and-on enemy, the sister state of Judah. But this particular God insisted on exclusivity. How reasonable is that? After all, we are a very pluralistic society. And besides, my wife, Jezebel, is particularly hostile towards that God – and for domestic tranquility alone, I could not compromise.

Well, the prediction did come true and although I sent search parties everywhere in the land, Elijah was not to be found until Obadiah, my palace administrator, located him and arranged a meeting. When I saw him and called him a “troubler of Israel” he claimed that I and my father were to blame for abandoning the LORD’s commands.

He had a lot of chutzpah, calling for a contest with himself alone against the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. I liked those odds. Two altars were set up for burnt offerings and each side was to call on their god to send down fire from heaven. The assembled people liked the prospect of a spectacle and my prophets began their incantations. They were not in particularly effective form that day. They started early in the morning and by early evening there were still no results, despite energetic attempts to get Baal or Asherah’s attention by blood-letting and frenetic dancing.

Elijah had taunted them for the whole afternoon then called the people together, built an altar in the name of his Lord. After he had placed the wood and the bull on it, he drenched everything with water. I suspected some sort of trick but found nothing suspicious. Then he called on the Lord to turn the people’s hearts back to Him. Suddenly it happened! Fire actually fell from heaven and burned not only the sacrifice but the very stones of the altar! The people fell down in awe and declared that the Lord was God. Elijah commanded that the prophets of Baal and Asherah be killed. I could agree with that. They had failed miserably.

Then Elijah told me to prepare for the end to the drought – the rains were coming. I was ready to declare this LORD to be the most powerful God, but Jezebel would not have it and threatened to kill Elijah. If I had to choose between an angry God and an angry wife, well, the God seemed a bit more distant and more likely to be merciful.

Things actually settled down. We got our usual rains. The prophet ran from my wife – that tells you something. He had faced 850 hostile prophets, but couldn’t stand up to her. Anyway, after a while we heard that Elijah was gone, maybe dead, but that he had anointed Jehu king over Israel and had passed his mantle to another prophet.

In time, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram besieged Samaria. I was ready to appease him by giving up the people and treasures he demanded but he also claimed the right to search the entire city and take

whatever else he wanted. The elders thought that was too much. I exchanged insults with Ben-Hadad and then he prepared to attack.

A prophet of the Lord came to me and, surprisingly, promised a victory through the leadership of the young officers of the provincial commanders. They made good on the confidence by attacking the Arameans when they were drunk. Surprise! I guess the Lord must have been on our side after all. The prophet even warned us about another attack to come the following spring but that the Lord would give us the victory to show us that He is God.

Gathering for battle, we looked like two flocks of goats against the huge force of Arameans covering the countryside. But we inflicted 100,000 casualties in one day and the escapees were killed by a falling wall in the city where they fled. I showed mercy to the king and made a favorable treaty for commerce and the return of captured cities, but, amazingly, the prophet didn't like that.

Some time later, I offered to buy a vineyard near the palace for a vegetable garden. The owner, Naboth, was completely unreasonable and would not part with it. Jezebel saw me sulking and questioned my manhood, much less my royalty. She arranged for false accusations to be brought against Naboth and for him to be stoned publicly. When I took possession of the vineyard, Elijah showed up again – he wasn't dead! He condemned me for murdering Naboth for his property and said that the dogs would lick my blood in the same place as they licked Naboth's. He went on to predict the death of my entire family including my wife.

I did repent of this act and humbled myself – after all it was really Jezebel's idea. Anyway, God must have been impressed because Elijah came with the message that the judgement would come in the time of my son. Then the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, a worshipper of Elijah's God, came to form an alliance to fight Aram, and even inquired of the prophets about the battle. I brought out my complete panel of prophets, mostly Baal and Asherah worshippers, and they all prophesied success. Jehoshaphat insisted on a prophet of the LORD and I had one. He predicted my death.

So I disguised myself as an ordinary chariot driver while Jehoshaphat agreed to wear his royal robes. Of course that would make him the target and protect me but he agreed to it because, so he said, he was trusting in his God. I would never have shown such a blind faith in a deity but he wanted to do it and it should protect me. The Aramean soldiers did not fall for the ruse, however, and left Jehoshaphat alone as they were on orders to kill me! Then a random arrow wounded me through the chinks in my armor as I stood in the chariot. I kept commanding as my strength faded. The horse must have decided to go home when I lost control of the reins. The last thing I remember as my eyes went dark, was seeing the former Naboth's vineyard just before I collapsed into the pool of blood in the bottom of the chariot.

(1 Kings 16 – 22)