
AHAB AND ELIJAH: MICROCOSM OF AMERICA TODAY

Contributed by Jim Jordal
Wednesday, 15 January 2014

AHAB AND ELIJAH: MICROCOSM OF AMERICA TODAY

By Jim Jordal

And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 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.

I Kings 16:29-33 KJV

"And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." This phrase encompasses the many egregious evils of Israel's king Ahab, including his marriage to the wicked Jezebel whose name slips down through history as a symbol of everything evil. In short, Ahab angered God exceedingly, bringing upon him disaster and the opprobrium of the great prophet Elijah.

There are reasons why this account of evil exists in Scripture. One of them is that through the learning of biblical principles and their enactment in events we might gain comfort and hope (Romans 15:4). The other is that we upon whom the ends of the ages have come might be admonished toward increased faith through these examples (I Cor. 10:11). So it's not accidental that this section of Scripture reveals the great principle of Divine retribution for human sin, and how we might turn from our sin into an era of deliverance and peace.

It is my purpose to compare the tensions between sin and justice in America today with the struggle between Ahab and Elijah as Ahab continually hatches new plots of evil and is called into account by Elijah. The ever-present evil of Ahab in America today is not difficult to see, but prophetic cries for justice by modern Elijahs seem mostly absent from the mainstream of American religion.

Ahab was the grandson of Jereboam, the first king of Ten-Tribed Israel following the split between Israel and Judah precipitated by the oppressive taxes of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. He continued the many sins of his grandfather, and further angered God by marrying the wicked Jezebel and creating idols and worship sites for the heathen god, Baal.

Now comes Elijah with a message to Ahab from God that the land would be stricken by drought until Elijah should pronounce an end to the curse. Elijah then fled into the inhospitable wilderness, only to be saved from starvation by God who provided a brook from which he drank and ravens to bring him food. Finally, as the brook dried up, Elijah's hope appeared gone. But again came deliverance as God directed him to a nearby town where a Divinely-appointed widow willingly shared her last meal of flour cakes and oil with him. That was when he pronounced a miracle with these words: "The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day that the Lord send rain on the earth" (I Kings 17:14).

Scripture in this case declares the drought to be God's retribution for the continued sins of the nation's political leader, Ahab and his house. Today the idea that there might be some Divine cause behind ecological disaster receives short shrift even though it is repeated scores of times in the Bible. Yes, disasters are often of our own making—like global warming—but still they result from our sins of not caring for creation as God intended. Is it God, or us, or both? You decide!