

SULLEN AND VEXED

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The Israelite king Ahab is one of the most complex characters in the Bible. He isn't a straightforward villain like Sisera or Caiaphas. There is good in him. When Elijah confronts him over the judicial murder of Naboth in 1 Kings 21, he repents and humbles himself.

However, Ahab is doomed by two fatal flaws. First, he is a weak man married to a strong, evil woman, the Sidonian princess Jezebel, and she drags him into all sorts of trouble. Killing Naboth was her idea, not his.

Second, he usually responds negatively to godly correction. When Elijah and other prophets come to him with unpleasant spiritual truths, he takes the criticism personally instead of taking it to heart. He doesn't view the prophets as friends who are trying to help him. Instead, he considers them enemies.

His encounter with a prophet at the end of 1 Kings 20 epitomizes the problem. Here, the prophet tells him that he is going to lose his own life because he spared the life of the Syrian king Ben-Hadad. When similarly confronted with sin in 2 Samuel 12, the great king David repents immediately, leading God to spare his life instead. It is not so with Ahab. He doesn't brush off the warning like the foolish monarch Jehoiakim, but neither does he try to make amends with God. Rather, in the words of 1 Kings 20:43, he goes to his house sullen and vexed.

God is very patient with Ahab, giving him chance after chance rather than destroying him. However, this patience is wasted on the childish king. Ahab's lack of moral courage ultimately leads to his death and the destruction of his entire house. The devil would love nothing more than for us to walk in the footsteps of Ahab. Indeed, the temptation to be like him is present for all of us. None of us enjoy correction. None of us like having our sin pointed out. All of us are inclined to take it personally. It's easy for us to regard those who tell us things we don't want to hear, whether a preacher, a loved one, or a friend, as our enemies.

However, rising above these ungodly impulses can make a heaven-and-hell difference in our lives. The problem is that all of us are very good at lying to ourselves about our sins and our spiritual condition. We prefer to believe that we are fine just the way we are, and most people will go on believing that all the way to destruction.

Thus, it often is easier for others to see and diagnose our problems than for us to do so. When someone comes to us, we must learn to check our egos and honestly consider their painful words. Then, we must be strong enough to make needed changes in our lives, especially when those changes are painful and difficult.

It's easy to be an Ahab. It's easy to respond to rebuke by becoming sullen and vexed. However, the easy path leads only to disaster. Instead, we must take the wise words of David in Psalm 141:5 to be our own. There, he says, "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it. . ." Let our heads not refuse it either.
