

Sunday 11th September

It's not going to rain for a while!

1 Kings 16:29-17:1

Ahab Becomes King of Israel

²⁹ In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. ³⁰ Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. ³¹ He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³² He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

³⁴ In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun.

Elijah Announces a Great Drought

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

Revelation 2:12-17

To the Church in Pergamum

¹² "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³ I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

Sermon: It's not going to rain for a while

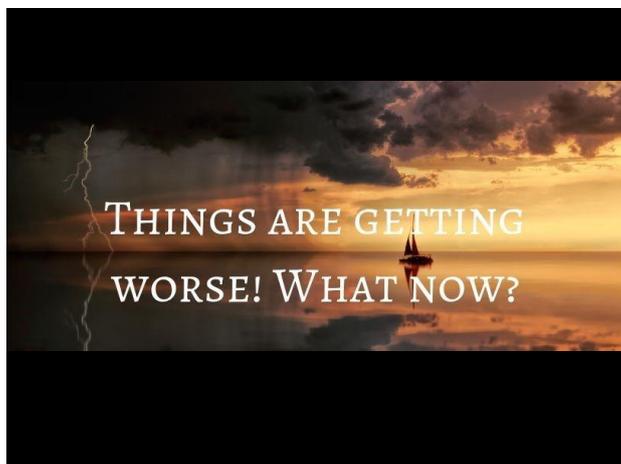
[Turn your Bibles to 1 Kings 16 starting at verse 29– let me pray before we begin]

Intro – Things seem to be getting worse

In my **ministry** I get to **talk** to a **lot of people**

And it's fair to say that the **comment I hear most** is: *how the world seems to be getting worse*

[Slide 1-It's getting worse]



People my age and older **compare the world/country they grew up in** - with the **world/country they live in now** – and **their assessment** is – *things seem to be getting worse*

In the last 10 years – we've seen:

- An increase in **terrorism**
- An increase in **crime**
- More **natural disasters**
- More **Bush fires**
- More **Floods**
- Extreme **weather** patterns
- **COVID** pandemic

- The rise of the **Taliban** in **Afghanistan** again
- **China flexing** its **muscles** on more than one occasion
- **Russia's** attack on the **Ukraine**
- An increase in **protests**
- A decline in **Christianity**
- An increase in **atheism**
- More people thumbing their nose at God
- The **introduction** of a **cancel culture** – cancelling all the values and traditions we grew up with
- An increase in **selfishness**
- **Governments** around the world endorsing **euthanasia, abortion and same-sex marriage**
- And even in our own neck of the woods here at **St. David's** – church **attendance has dropped** from 80 in 2019 down to 56 in 2022!

All of this, understandably, is why people are saying – ***things are getting worse!***

Why is this **happening?**

Of course – we can say – in general terms - we are **living in a fallen and broken world** – and that fallen and broken world has existed since Adam and Eve broke God's rules – and **we've inherited that problem**

But why does it seem to be getting worse?

Well – perhaps it's got something to do with **thumbing our noses at God** – and **ignoring Him** - and **ignoring His Son** – and **ignoring God's Word?**

I wonder what the **people of Israel thought** in the time of our Old Testament passage in 1 Kings?

Well - if they knew their Bible at all

They could **cast their mind back to** when Moses gave the people of Israel God's rules to follow – and they could cast their mind back to **chapter 28** of the book of Deuteronomy

[Slide 2-Deut 28:1-2]

In **vv1-2 of Deut 28** – God says this:

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

And then vv3-14 gives a whole load of blessings for obeying God.

[Slide 3-Deut 29:15]

But then in **v15 of Deut 28** – God says this:

However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees, I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you:

And then **vv16-68 gives a whole load of curses or punishments for disobeying God.**

And notice there's a pile more curses and punishments for disobedience – including God withholding rain from the land for their crops to grow!

What we have though is a **general principle** here – if Israel obeys God – **they will be blessed** – if Israel disobeys God – **they will be cursed/punished!**

And from our look at 1 Kings thus far – **we can see where Israel is heading.**

If we just **pause for a minute** though?

It's **food for thought** for us isn't it – on how our world is going and how our nation is going? Is it getting worse because – we're **ignoring God and his commands** more than ever?

(pause)

The **Kings of Israel** run from about **930BC to 722BC** when they finally get exiled to Assyria.

200 years or so of bad ungodly Kings

So far in the Northern Kingdom – aka Israel

[Slide 4-Kings...]

We've **heard about these kings:**

King Jeroboam (22 years)

Nadab (2 years)

Baasha (24 years)

Elah (2 years)

Zimri (7 days)

And Omri (12 years)

Each King – didn't follow **God's commands** and **allowed the worship of idols and false gods.**

And each time the **Bible describes** – the **current king as more evil than the previous king!**

The people of Israel – especially those who still remain faithful to the one true God, YHWH – **might be thinking surely** – it can't get any worse?

But as we hit our Old Testament **passage from 1 Kings 16 – verses 29 to 33** – **it's about to get a whole lot worse?**

It's just got a whole lot worse (1 Kings 16:29-33)

We **pick up the story** in **v29** of **1 Kings 16**

Ahab son of Omri becomes **King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel**

And he **reigned 22 years**

Don't be **fooled** by the fact that he reigned such a long time

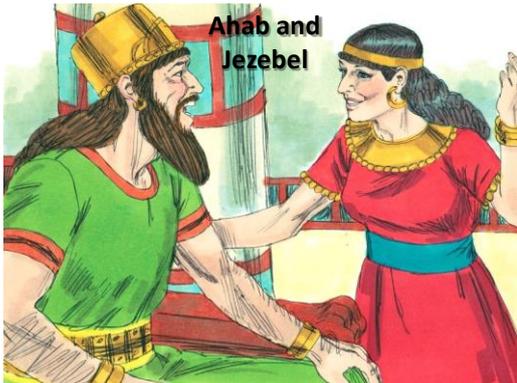
[Slide 4a-Ahab]

Because the next verse – **v30** – says **Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord** than any of those [kings] before him.

V31 – explains why Ahab is **worse**

Because **Ahab considered the sins that King Jeroboam did as trivial** – [and remember King **Jeroboam is the benchmark** – having built two golden calves to worship]

[Slide 5-Ahab and Jezebel]



And worse still – **Ahab married a foreign wife Jezebel** – who is the **daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians** – and we see **Jezebel influenced Ahab** so much - that Ahab began **to serve and worship a false god called Baal**. [and note King **Ethbaal's** name means **“with Baal”** or **“towards Baal”** – and Jezebel's name means **“Baal exalts”** or **“Baal is a husband”**]

Baal is the **name of the God worshipped by the Canaanites** [the *original occupants of the Promised Land*] and worshipped by the Phoenicians [including Tyre and Sidon]

And to compound his wickedness – Ahab in v32 – even built an altar for Baal in a temple he built **for this false god Baal** - in Samaria in the Northern Kingdom

No previous King had gone as far as building a temple for a false God

What we are witnessing is the beginning of a God-war – the false god Baal versus the one true God of Israel, YHWH. And we'll see how that plays out in the **coming weeks.**

Ahab hasn't finished yet though – in v33 – he also **builds an Asherah pole** for the false goddess Asherah.

And understandably – all this **aroused the anger of the Lord God** – more than all the previous Kings of Israel.

Is God going to stand by and watch this blatant disobedience and do nothing?

Of course, He's not.

God is in control

[Slide 6a-God is in control]



God is in control

God's word stands (1 Kings 16:34, 17:1)

Just before we look at the next verse – **v34**

We need to **remind ourselves about a story** from a few hundred years earlier – when **Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land** – and God instructed Joshua to capture the city of **Jericho**.

God gave Joshua and the people **specific instructions** on how to **bring down the walls of the city of Jericho** – they marched around the city for 6 days and then on the 7th day – as they **marched around the city and blew trumpets** – the walls fell down – **brought down supernaturally by God**

When this happened – **Joshua made this oath from God** – *“Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.”*

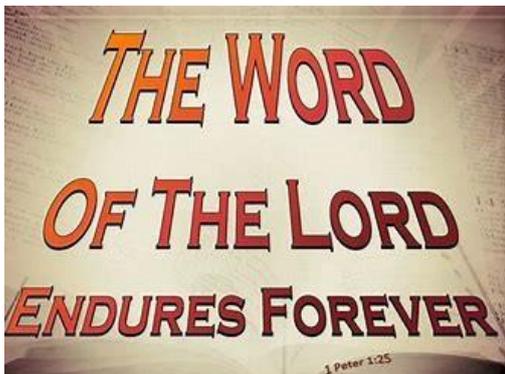
In other words – **no one was to ever rebuild the city of Jericho** – people could live in the city but never fortify the city again. If anyone did try to rebuild Jericho – **it would cost them their children!**

But here we are in **v34 in 1 Kings 16** –we see a **man named Hiel of Bethel** rebuild the foundations of the city of Jericho - and the opening phrase “in Ahab’s time” **implies that Hiel did not undertake this project on his own initiative but under Ahab’s direction.**

What we’re meant to see is that under the regime of King Ahab – not only was the worship of the God of Israel abandoned – but **there was open defiance of God’s Word. Ahab and his regime ignored Joshua’s prophecy** – and it costs this poor man Hiel – the loss of his firstborn son – Abiram – as the foundations were laid – and it cost him the loss of his youngest son – Segub – as the gates were installed.

Ahab thought he could ignore God’s Word – he thought this prophecy of Joshua would never happen.

[Slide 6b-God’s Word endures forever!]



But **God’s Word endures forever** (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25). If God says something will happen – **it will happen** – even if it’s a few hundred years later.

Then as we start the next chapter – chapter **17 verse 1**

We see out of nowhere – in God’s perfect timing – a **prophet name Elijah** [whose name means: “my God is Jehovah”] **turns up with a word from God for Ahab** – and Elijah

says— *As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word*

This word from God **shows that God is not going to tolerate Ahab's evil regime** and God's promise of curses for disobedience from long ago – **still applies** – because God's Word is always true and He always keeps His promises – even if they are negative ones!

For us it means – **we ignore and blatantly disregard God's Word** – at our peril!

If we can learn anything from this blatant disobedience of God - surely, it's this – **if we continue to disobey God and thumb our noses at Him** – He will get angry – and those curses will come upon us – as a world – and as a nation

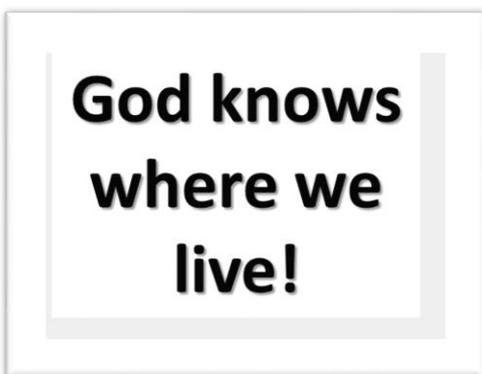
(pause)

Let's not forget that **God is in control**

God knows where we live (1 Kings 17:1; Revelation 2:12-15)

Let's not forget as our New Testament reading – in **Revelation 2:13** says – *God knows where we live*

[Slide 6c-God knows where we live]



God knew where Ahab and Jezebel lived – and God stepped into history – and sent His prophet Elijah to deal with the evil of Ahab and Jezebel.

And it's like God is saying to Ahab and Jezebel - through the prophet Elijah – ***so you think you can pray for rain for your crops to your false gods Baal and Asherah – but they don't control the rain – I YHWH the Lord God of Israel control the weather patterns – and it will rain when I say so!***

In our NT passage from Revelation 2:12-17 [[Please turn there now](#)] - God also ***knew where the church of Pergamum lived***

And John describes the city of Pergamum (v13) as a city ***where Satan has his throne and where Satan lives.***

Why does John describe the city this way?

Because Pergamum had a **temple dedicated to the Greek god, Dionysus**, son of the god Zeus. Worshipers would gather at the **altar of Zeus and gorge on meat, get drunk and commit sexual immorality.**

There was also a **temple shrine for the snake god, Asclepius**, believed to be a god of healing.

And there was a **shrine for the goddess Demeter, the goddess of grain.**

Pergamum was also the **first city to establish an emperor cult.** The **people worshipped the emperor, Caesar Augustus, at the Athena temple.** They declared the emperor as divine and claimed him to be both god and king.

In the city of Pergamum, just as it was in King Ahab's time – and just as it is in our culture today, **Satan wanted people to lose sight of God and his power.** All the false gods who took the credit God deserves for providing life and giving life meaning and significance made Pergamum the city "***where Satan lived***". **Satan wanted people to think that everything they needed for life, even eternal life, could be found through their own efforts or through the world around them.**

Living in a such a city as Pergamum – would make it **very difficult for a Christian Church to survive** – with such satanic influence.

Yet **Jesus through John commends the church for remaining true to the Lord's name and not renouncing their faith.**

However – the church did come under threat because of a similar sort of teaching as occurred in the time of the ancient prophet of Israel, Balaam, who tricked the people of Israel into the worship of idols and into sexually immorality. In the same way the church of Pergamum had been infiltrated by some people who practiced the worship of idols and sexual immorality and others who had fallen for the teaching from a group called the Nicolaitans who practiced gross self-indulgent behaviour. It's not surprising that living in such a city – this might happen.

And it's no different today – **God knows where we live too.**

Our culture today is in danger of becoming like the culture of Ahab's day and like the culture of the city of Pergamum – we might try to pretend it isn't – but there's the worship of self – the worship of sex and materialism – and gross self-indulgence – and God's word and the worship of God are put on the shelf – and Satan is rubbing his hands in glee at how far we are drifting away from God!

But - God knows where we live too – and He knows the danger we're in– which is why – in His own perfect timing - He sent Jesus to deal with the evil of sin and death – and defeat Satan's throne – once and for all.

And so, we need to respond to what we hear about King Ahab's time and what we hear about the city of Pergamum – and respond to the culture we live in today

Thankfully we do have the **response in Revelation 2:13, 16 and 17.**

[Slide 7-Heading]

Response and Reward (Rev 2:13,16-17)

[Slide 7a-1st Response]

1. 1st response - **Remain true and faithful to Jesus' name** (v13) – that is – we must believe Jesus is our Lord and Saviour - and persevere in our love of Jesus - despite the environment we are in. There must have been faithful ones in Israel and in Pergamum – **and there are faithful ones in our nation too!**

[Slide 7b-2nd Response]

2. 2nd response - **Repent** (v16) – be quick to repent and turn back to God and sincerely confess our sinful behaviour – every time we get it all wrong

[Slide 7c-3rd Response]

3. And 3rd response – **Really listen to the Holy Spirit** (v17). As we read God's Word – listen to the Holy Spirit guiding us in God's truth – and apply God's Word to our hearts and our lives – which will keep us away from worshipping false gods and idols and keep us away from sexual immorality.

And if we remain faithful and repent and listen to the Holy Spirit.

There's a reward for us in v17.

[Slide 7d-Reward]

We will be given **hidden manna** – bread from Heaven – the bread of eternal life that Jesus gives (John 6:41)

We will be given a **white stone**. In the culture of the day – a white stone was sometimes used as ticket to a banquet - or as a sign of friendship – or as evidence of having been counted or included – or as a sign of being acquitted in court.

For us – Jesus gives each believer a white stone. This white stone means: We have a ticket to a wedding banquet in Heaven. We are His true friends. We are counted and included in Jesus' family. We are acquitted of any guilt for our sins (and seen as pure and white as snow like the white stone). Basically, we have a free ticket to Heaven and eternal life!

And our reward also includes a new name which only we know. This **shows** we have an **intimate relationship with our Lord**. It's a bit like a couple having a pet name for each other – that only they use!

And it's like we have the **assurance** that **we have a reservation with our name on it** – **waiting for us in Heaven**.

So, if like in Ahab's day – it doesn't rain for a while – remember God is in control – Jesus has defeated Satan – **all we need is to persevere in our faith in Jesus - and we have a better place to live in eternity!**

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you for the warnings from Ahab and Jezebel's time and the warnings from the city of Pergamum's time.

Help us to hang on to the truth that YOU are in control of all things and that YOU know where we live and the times we live in.

Help us to remain strong in our faith in Jesus – and to be quick to repent – and to really listen to the Holy Spirit guiding us in all truth.

Thank you we have the reward of a reservation in Heaven waiting for us because of Jesus; in His name, we pray. AMEN.