



Lesson 2: Kings of the Kingdom of Israel

Ungodly rulers influence people to sin.

Golden Text:

“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him.” (1 Kings 16:30, KJV)

Study at a Glance: The 5 W's

KEY AREA	DETAILS AND SUMMARY
WHO (Author & Audience)	King Jeroboam son of Nebat (who turned the northern kingdom to golden-calf idolatry), King Ahab (who “did more to provoke the LORD than all the kings before him”), Queen Jezebel (Ahab’s Phoenician wife who imported Baal worship to Israel), the prophet Elijah (God’s fearless spokesman), King Jehu (the commander God chose to judge Ahab’s dynasty), the prophet Elisha (who sent the young prophet to anoint Jehu) — and over all of it, the LORD God of Israel, who is both righteous Judge and patient Sovereign.
WHAT (Core Message)	The downward spiral of the northern kingdom of Israel through three kings: Jeroboam, who planted the seed of idolatry; Ahab, who let it grow into full-grown wickedness; and Jehu, the man God raised up to cut it down — showing how one ungodly leader’s sin can chain-react through generations until God says “enough.”
WHEN (Timing)	Spanning roughly 931 B.C. (Jeroboam’s first acts as king) through about 841 B.C. (Jehu’s purge of Ahab’s house and the Baal worshippers) — nearly a century of northern kingdom history compressed into three portraits.

WHERE (Location)	The northern kingdom of Israel — Bethel and Dan (where Jeroboam set up golden calves), Samaria (Ahab's capital, built by his father Omri), Jezreel (Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel's death, and Jehu's ambush), and Ramoth-Gilead (where Jehu was anointed king).
WHY (Rationale)	Because each king chose his own way over God's way, and each dragged the nation deeper into sin. Jeroboam feared losing political control more than he feared God, so he replaced true worship with convenient idolatry. Ahab wanted what he could not have — Naboth's vineyard — and let Jezebel murder for it. Jehu was God's instrument of judgment, executing justice — but even his zeal could not cure the heart.

Introduction

Imagine a river that starts out clean and clear. High in the mountains, the water is pure, cold, fresh, life-giving. But somewhere upstream, someone dumps poison into the source. At first, downstream, you cannot see it. The water still looks fine; it still sparkles in the sun. But the poison is in it. And the further it flows, the more it spreads, until the whole river is contaminated and no one remembers what the clean water tasted like.

The northern kingdom of Israel was that river. Its source was poisoned from the very beginning, when King Jeroboam set up two golden calves and said, "Behold thy gods, O Israel." The water looked like pure worship — there was a feast, an altar, a priesthood, a holy day — but the source was wrong. By the time Ahab became king, the poison had spread so deep that he could marry a Baal-worshipper, let her murder an innocent man for his vineyard, and sulk in his palace as if nothing had happened. The river was fully contaminated. God's answer was Jehu — a man sent to clean the river by force. This lesson follows the poison from its source to its consequences and asks the question none of us can escape: what am I pouring into the river that others downstream will drink?

Key Terms Defined & The Word Search Technique

Before we open the text, let's learn a simple tool for studying any passage: a "word search" (word study). Here is the method in its simplest form, using the word "calves" in 1 Kings 12:28 as our example.

1. **Select the word.** Pick a word in the verse that seems important. Here: Jeroboam made "two calves of gold" (1 Kings 12:28). Why calves?
2. **Find the original word.** Use a concordance or Bible app to find the Hebrew (or Greek) word and its reference number. "calves" = the Hebrew *'egel* (Strong's H5695), meaning a young bull or calf.
3. **Read the immediate context.** What is happening here? Jeroboam told the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (v. 28). He set one calf in Bethel and one in Dan — the southern and northern edges of his kingdom — giving the people convenience instead of the true God.
4. **Trace the word through Scripture.** See how God uses the same word elsewhere. *'Egel* is the exact word used for the golden calf at Sinai (Exod 32:4, 8, 24) — when Aaron said, "These be thy gods, O Israel," and the people worshipped a golden calf while Moses was still on the mountain. Jeroboam did not invent a new idol; he reached back into Israel's worst moment of rebellion and made it official state religion. Same word, same words, same sin — a generation later.
5. **Compare and apply.** The golden calf was always the people's quick substitute for the real God — something they could see, control, and keep close. Jeroboam turned that impulse into a system. What golden calves am I setting up — what substitutes for God have I made convenient?

That is the whole method: Select → Find the original → Read the context → Trace it through Scripture → Apply. We will use this tool in each section.

Transition into Section 1: Every contaminated river has a source, and Israel's did not begin with Ahab. It began with a king so afraid of losing his kingdom that he rebuilt the golden calf. In Section 1 we see how Jeroboam's fear of man became the foundation of national idolatry — and how one man's private anxiety became a public sin that outlived him by generations.

SECTION 1: King Jeroboam Institutes Idolatry (1 Kings 12:25–33)

- **Word Search for This Section:** “sinned” (*ḥāṭā*, H2398)

Discussion Questions

- **(Text/Exegesis)** In verse 28, Jeroboam says, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem.” But his real motive (v. 27) was fear that the people’s hearts would return to Rehoboam and kill him. How does the fear of losing position or power drive spiritual compromise? Where do you see this pattern today — in churches, in workplaces, in your own life?
- **(Application)** Jeroboam did not invent a new god — he recycled the golden calf from Exodus 32 and even used the same words Aaron used. What “old sins” do we dress up in new religious language and call acceptable? What golden calf has convenience built into your own worship?

Transition to Section 2: Jeroboam poisoned the source, and the poison flowed for generations. By the time Ahab sat on the throne of Israel, the river was so contaminated that the nation’s worst king could sell himself to do evil and still be called its leader. In Section 2 the spotlight moves to a king whose name became the Bible’s definition of wickedness — and to the innocent man who stood in his way.

SECTION 2: Ahab, Israel’s Worst King (1 Kings 16:29–33; 21:17–26)

- **Word Search for This Section:** “sold” (*mākar*, H4376)

Discussion Questions

1. **(Text/Exegesis)** 1 Kings 16:31 says Ahab “did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel that were before him.” What specifically did he do that was worse than the others (vv. 31–33)?
2. **(Reflection)** Naboth refused to sell his family’s inheritance because the land belonged to God and the family, not just to him (1 Kings 21:3; Lev 25:23). Ahab wanted what was not his, and Jezebel got it for him through false witness and murder. When has the desire for something that was not yours — a position, a possession, a person — led you or someone you know down a path of compromise? Where is the line between godly ambition and covetousness?

Transition to Section 3: Ahab sold himself, and God's patience finally ran out. The same river that Jeroboam poisoned and Ahab deepened was about to be judged. In Section 3 God raises up a man with a mandate: clean the river, by force. His name means "Yahweh Is He" — and he would need every ounce of that calling to do what God commanded.

SECTION 3: King Jehu, God's Avenger (2 Kings 9:1–10; 10:11, 20–28)

- **Word Search for This Section:** "avenge" (*nāqam*, H5358)

Discussion Questions

1. **(Text/Exegesis)** Jehu was anointed by a young prophet sent by Elisha (2 Kings 9:1–3) and given a clear mandate from God (v. 7). How does his calling compare to Saul's anointing (1 Sam 9–10) or David's (1 Sam 16)?
2. **(Application)** Jehu executed God's judgment fully on Ahab's house (10:11) and on the Baal worshippers (10:20–28), yet 2 Kings 10:29 and 10:31 say he "departed not from the sins of Jeroboam" and his heart "was not right." How can someone be used mightily by God and still have an unconverted heart? Where have you seen zeal for God's cause coexist with personal compromise — in leaders, in others, in yourself?

Closing: Bringing It All Together

The northern kingdom of Israel did not fall in a day. It fell the way every fall happens — one ungodly leader at a time, each one pouring poison into the river that the next generation would drink. Jeroboam feared losing his kingdom, so he made golden calves (*ʿegel*) and "made Israel to sin" (*ḥāṭā*). Ahab wanted what was not his, so he "sold himself" (*mākar*) to do evil, stirred up by Jezebel. And God's patience finally broke — He raised up Jehu to "avenge" (*nāqam*) the blood of His servants. The whole tragedy is captured in four words: a king who feared man, a king who sold his soul, a king who executed judgment — and a God who, through it all, refused to let evil go unanswered.

One Word to take home: **avenge**. Not ours to take — God's to give. The same God who said, "vengeance is mine," sent Jehu in His time, and He has not forgotten the wrongs done to you or to His people. Do not poison the river. Do not sell your soul. And do not try to be the avenger. Leave justice to the One who sees, who waits, and who — in His time — sets all things right.