

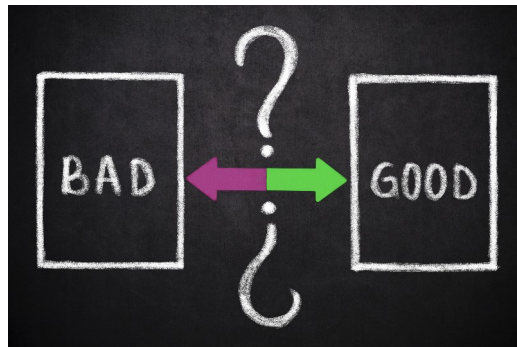
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## Stories with a Twist

[250]

### For What Virtue Was Ahab Privileged to Ascend to the Monarchy and Rule for Twenty-Two Years?

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 102b



#### Background to Our Story

##### Ahab



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahab>

Ahab (Hebrew: **אַחָאָב**) was the seventh king of Israel since Jeroboam I, the son and successor of Omri, and the husband of Jezebel of Sidon, according to the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew Bible presents Ahab as a wicked king. He is criticized for following the ways of his wife Jezebel, killing his subject Naboth, and leading the nation of Israel into idolatry.

#### Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1

"...Three kings and four commoners have no share in the World-to-Come. The three kings are: Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and Ahab, both of whom were kings of Israel, and Manasseh, king of Judea...."

#### I Kings 20: 1-12 (Ben-Hadad Attacks Samaria)

<sup>1</sup> Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram mustered his entire army. Accompanied by thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it. <sup>2</sup> He sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, saying, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: <sup>3</sup>"Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine."

<sup>4</sup> The king of Israel answered, "Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours."

<sup>5</sup> The messengers came again and said, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: 'I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children. <sup>6</sup> But about this time tomorrow I am

going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away.”

<sup>7</sup> The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, "See how this man is looking for trouble! When he sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him."

<sup>8</sup> The elders and the people all answered, "Don't listen to him or agree to his demands."

<sup>9</sup> So he replied to Ben-Hadad's messengers, "Tell my lord the king, 'Your servant will do all you demanded the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.'" They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad.

<sup>10</sup> Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful."

<sup>11</sup> The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: 'One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.'"

<sup>12</sup> Ben-Hadad heard this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents,<sup>[a]</sup> and he ordered his men: "Prepare to attack." So they prepared to attack the city.

**?** What does Ahab refer to when he says: "but this demand I cannot meet"?

## Omri



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omri>

Omri ([Hebrew](#): עֹמְרִי, 9th century BC) was, according to the [Hebrew Bible](#), the sixth [king of Israel](#). He was a successful military campaigner who extended the northern kingdom of Israel. Other monarchs from the House of Omri are [Ahab](#), [Ahaziah](#), [Joram](#), and [Athaliah](#). Like his predecessor, king [Zimri](#), who ruled for only seven days, Omri is the second king mentioned in the Bible without a statement of his [tribal origin](#). Nothing is said in Scripture about the lineage of Omri. Omri is credited with the construction of [Samaria](#) and establishing it as his capital. Although the Bible is silent about other actions taken during his reign, he is described as doing more evil than all the kings who preceded him.

## The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 102b

אָחָאב – אָח לְשָׁמִים, אָב לְעִבּוּדָה זָרָה. אָח לְשָׁמִים, דְּכָתִיב: "אָח לְצָרָה יוֹלֵד". אָב לְעִבּוּדָה זָרָה, דְּכָתִיב: "כָּרַחֵם אָב עַל בְּנָיִם". וּמָנָא לֹן דְּלֵא אָתִי לְעֵלְמָא דְּאָתִי? דְּכָתִיב: "וְהִכְרַתִּי לְאָחָאב מִשְׁתֵּינ בְּקִיר וְעִצּוֹר וְעִצּוֹב בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל". "עִצּוֹר" – בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, "וְעִצּוֹב" – לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מִפְּנֵי מָה זָכָה עֹמְרִי לְמַלְכוּת? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוֹסִיף כָּרַךְ אֶחָד בְּאַרְצֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁנֵאמַר: "וַיִּקֶּן אֶת הַהָר שְׁמֵרוֹן מֵאֵת שְׁמֵר בְּכַפְרִים כֶּסֶף וַיְבִן אֶת הַהָר וַיִּקְרָא [אֵת] שֵׁם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה עַל שֵׁם שְׁמֵר אֲדִנֵי הַהָר שְׁמֵרוֹן". אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מִפְּנֵי מָה זָכָה אָחָאב לְמַלְכוּת עֲשָׂרִים וּשְׁתַּיִם שָׁנָה? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁכִּיבַד אֶת הַתּוֹרָה שְׁנֵי תַנְגָּה בְּעֲשָׂרִים וּשְׁתַּיִם אוֹתִיּוֹת, שְׁנֵאמַר: "וַיִּשְׁלַח מִלְּאָכִים אֶל אָחָאב מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל הָעִירָה, וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, כֹּה אָמַר בֶּן הַדָּד, כִּסְפָךָ וַיִּהְיֶה לִּי הוּא וְנִשְׁיָךְ וּבְנֵיךָ הַטּוֹבִים לִּי הֵם... כִּי אִם כָּעֵת מִחָר אֲשַׁלַּח אֶת עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְחִפְּשׂוּ

את ביתך ואת בתי עבדיך והיה כל מחמד עיניך ישימו בידם ולקחו...ויאמר למלאכי בן הדד, אמרו לאדני המלך, כל אשר שלחת לעבדך [אל עבדך] בראשונה אעשה, והדבר הזה לא אוכל לעשות". מאי "מחמד עיניך"? לאו ספר תורה?

אמר רב נחמן: אחאב שקול היה, שנאמר: "ויאמר ה', מי יפתה את אחאב ויעל ויפל ברמת גלעד? ויאמר זה בכה וזה אמר בכה". מתקיף לה רבי יוסף מאן דכתב ביה: "רק לא היה כאחאב אשר התמכר לעשות הרע בעיני ה' אשר הסתה אתו איזבל אשתו". ותנינא: "בכל יום היתה שוקלת שקלי זהב לעבודה זרה". ואת אמרת שקול היה? אלא, אחאב ותרן בממונו היה, ומתוך שההנהגה תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו, פיפרו לו מחצה.

Ahab [Aḥav], although he was a brother [aḥ] to Heaven, he was a father [av] for idol worship.

He was a brother to Heaven, as it is written: "*And a brother is born for adversity*" (Proverbs 17:17), and in desperate times, he turned to Heaven. He was a father for idolatry, as it is written: "*As a father has compassion for his children*" (Psalms 103:13).

...

And from where do we derive that Ahab does not enter into the World-to-Come? It is derived as it is written: "And I will excise from Ahab every man, and him that is shut up and him that is abandoned in Israel" (I Kings 21:21). "Him that is shut up" indicates he will be excised in this world, while "and him that is abandoned" indicates he will be excised in the World-to-Come.

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: For what virtue was Omri, king of Israel, who was Ahab's father, privileged to ascend to the monarchy? It is due to the fact that he added one city in Eretz Yisrael, as it is stated: "And he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city that he built after Shemer, the owner of the hill, Samaria" (I Kings 16:24).

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: For what virtue was Ahab privileged to ascend to the monarchy and rule for twenty-two years?

It is due to the fact that he respected the Torah, which was given with twenty-two letters, as it is stated: "And he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, into the city, and said to him: So says Ben-Hadad: Your silver and your gold are mine; your wives and also your good children, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said: It is according to your saying, my lord, O king: I am yours, and all that I have. And the messengers came again, and said: So speaks Ben-Hadad, saying: I sent to you, saying: You shall deliver me your silver, and your gold, and your wives, and your children. Yet I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house, and the houses of your servants, and it shall be, that they shall put in their hand all the delight of your eyes and take it... And he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, tell my lord the king: All that you did send for to your servant a the first I will do; but this thing I cannot do" (I Kings 20:2-6, 9).

The Gemara asks: What is "the delight of your eyes" that Ahab refused to give Ben-Hadad after agreeing to give him his wives and his gold? Is it not a Torah scroll? Ahab treated the Torah with deference.

...

Rav Naḥman says: Ahab was balanced in terms of the mitzvot and transgressions that he performed, as it is stated: "*And the Lord said, who shall entice Ahab that he may ascend and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And this one said in this manner, and that one said in that manner*" (I Kings 22:20), indicating that it is unclear whether or not he was a full-fledged transgressor. Rav Yosef objects to this statement: This is the person about whom the prophet wrote: "*But there was none like Ahab who devoted himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife had incited*" (I Kings 21:25). And we learn in a baraita: Every day she [Jezebel] would weigh gold shekels equal to Ahab's weight for idol worship. And you say he was balanced?

Rather, Ahab was generous with his money and since he also benefited Torah scholars with his property, the heavenly court expiated half his sins for him.



**Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)**

**Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**Bonus ?** How does the verse "As a father has compassion for his children" (Psalms 103:13) explain that Ahab was a father to idolatry?

**?** How are the father and brother relationship different?

**?** What was Omri's virtue?

**?** What were Ahab's virtues according to the Sages?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why does Rav Yosef object to Rav Nahman statement?

**Bonus ?** Why are the Sages (at least some of them) interested in finding some modicum of redeeming virtue in these two evil kings (Omri and Ahab)?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

**!** Finding goodness and virtue! It is not about Ahab and Omri. It is about you, your life, your family, your co-workers, and your whole experience.

**EPILOGUE**



**Appendix**

*Know and Understand!*

*A person must judge everyone favorably. Even if someone is completely bad, it is necessary to search and find in him some modicum of good; the little bit of him that is not wicked. And by finding in him a drop of good and judging him favorably, one brings him to return to his true good self. —Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Likutey Moharan, 282*