

1st Kings Chapter 20

- Elijah has been re-commissioned and set in motion; in the meantime back on the Northern front:

V: 1-3 Beh-hadad lays siege against Samaria, against the Northern Kingdom.

Isaiah 48:22 “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked.”

- As Ben-hadad invades Samaria he brazenly sends messengers to Ahab informing him, threatening him that his wives, his children, his gold and his silver now all belong to Ben-hadad.
- Ben-hadad is obviously emboldened by the size of his army and his allies, and further assuming that Israel doesn't have a protector.

V: 4 Ahab musters all the courage and machismo he has and informs Ben-hadad that he is correct... Ahab rolls over and agrees with Ben-hadad, everything that he has is his.

2 Peter 2:19b “... for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

- We are bound to serve something, if we are not committed to serving the true and living God, then we will serve the gods of this world.

V: 5-6 Ben-hadad seeing that Ahab is compliant is seemingly further emboldened to see what he can take without a fight. When you try to appease a tyrant they always want more - there is no appeasing a tyrant.

- Besides the previous demands to which Ahab has submitted to, now Ben-hadad says that he's going to take servants to conduct a search throughout the Northern Kingdom and take anything else that looks cool, he's going to plunder the Northern Kingdom without a fight.

Jabesh-Gilead:

1 Samuel 11:2 “And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, on this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.”

V: 7-9 With his back against the wall, Ahab begins to show a glimmer of back bone and wisdom.

- He calls the elders together and seeks counsel understanding that Ben-hadad is up to “mischief”.

- Thus far Ahab has caved in to Beh-hadad's demands without a fight, but now he draws a line.
- You can have my wives (Rodney Dangerfield - take my wife (Jezebel), please!), and you can take my kids, and my gold and my silver - but oh no, not my stuff!

V: 10-12 Ben-hadad responds with a threat: May the gods do to me what I'm planning on doing to you - because I'm bringing an army that is more numerous than the dust of Samaria - bear in mind that Samaria can be a pretty dusty place... Obviously Ben-hadad is engaging in psychological warfare, trying to intimidate Ahab into compliance.

- **Ahab tells Ben-hadad not to count his chickens before they hatch** - Benhadad is acting like he's already won the victory, taking his armor off - as opposed to strapping it on before the battle, and not knowing the outcome.
- Ben-hadad hears Ahab's response as he's drinking and celebrating, and he orders his men to set themselves in array, to prepare for battle.

V: 13 "A prophet", if it was Elijah he would probably have been named. This is one of the men that God had preserved when Elijah thought he was the last one left.

Proof:

2 Peter 2:9 "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:"

- **This is an astonishing verse!** Ahab has been described as a despicable character, with an extraordinarily evil wife to boot!

2 Kings 21:25 "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

- **This is a vivid picture, and example, or a demonstration of the grace of God.**
- This may be why Elijah was depressed in the last chapter, like Jonah and the Ninivites.

1. **God initiates**, God approaches Ahab to speak to him.
2. **God wants Ahab to know that He can and will deliver him out of this impossible situation.**
3. **He will do it so that Ahab will know that He is the Lord**, He wants Ahab to know him.

- God is wooing Ahab, God is giving Ahab another chance to repent!

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

V: 14-15 Ahab asks how, or by whom - and God says by you and your army.

- Ahab has already thought this through, and considering his great army and military prowess - he tossed in the towel, but God is saying that He can do it through them.

1 Corinthians 1:25-28 “²⁵Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, nor many mighty, not many noble, are called: ²⁷But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:”

V: 16 Ahab gathers his 232 officers, and his 7,000 soldiers and he goes out to battle seemingly in obedience to what God has said.

- In the mean time Ben-hadad is drinking himself drunk, along with all the kings that were allied to help him.
- *I was in a lot of fights as a cop, when I saw that my opponent was clear eyed and sober, I knew that I had a fight on my hands.*
- *But when I saw that my opponent had been drinking, or was drunk I knew I had him, it was just a matter of how did I want to do it.*
- Alcohol makes fools out of wise men, it makes prisoners out of men that would otherwise be free.

Proverbs 31:4-5 “⁴It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: ⁵Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.”

- Because it clouds their judgment, it impairs their ability to make decisions, and most importantly it impairs their ability to hear from God.

Proverbs 23:29-32 “²⁹Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? ³⁰They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. ³¹Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. ³²At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

V: 17-21 Ahab's forces move out to battle, the young men first, Ben-hadad's forces go out to meet them, being told to take them alive.

- Ben-hadad, besides being drunk, is over confident. He thinks that whether they come for peace, to surrender or to fight that they can easily take them.
- Ahab's forces "slew every one his man" routing the Syrians, chasing them out of Samaria. It was a great slaughter!

Romans 8:31 "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

V: 22 The man of God, the prophet comes again to Ahab and warns him to prepare himself because the Syrians will be back in one years time.

- This is a common tactic of our enemy: we experience victory in some area of our lives, we think it's done it's over, we got the victory; then the enemy comes back again, attacking - we thought the fight was over, but the enemy wasn't done - be prepared, be vigilant, be on guard!
- Why is God warning Ahab?

vv: 13 "... and thou shalt know that I am the Lord."

Speaking of Jesus:

1 Timothy 2:4 "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

V: 23-25 The Syrians try to explain their defeat in that the God of Israel is the god of the hills - they are making a classic mistake in limiting God, who is limitless.

- Sometimes we do the same thing thinking that perhaps God is just at church or in this place or that place; God can do this, but not that - limiting God.
- He's in the car with us on the way to church, He's in our living room as we watch movies or have conversations; He's not limited.

Psalms 139:7 "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

- So they do two dumb things, and one smart thing.
1. They figure victory is theirs if they stay in the plain, because He is the God of the hills, again limiting God.
 2. They went from challenging Ahab / God's people, to challenging God Himself - bad move. Essentially they're back on top of Mt. Carmel...

3. Even though it won't do them any good; The smart thing is that they take the drunken kings out of the battle plan and in their stead put the captains, the professional and presumably sober officers.

V: 26-28 (Map) Aphek - not a border excursion, this is an invasion deep into Samaria - and far from home.

- The Israelites look like a little flock of goats compared to the Syrian army that fills the countryside.
- These are exactly the odds that God likes! (Gideon)

1 Corinthians 1:29 "That no flesh should glory in His presence."

- Again the man of God, the prophet is sent by God to speak to Ahab.
- Because the Syrians have tried to limit God, and so that Ahab would know that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the Lord - He will deliver the Syrians into his hands.
- Sometimes the hills can be that mountain top experience, that spiritual high, that inspirational time - but then we come down to the valley, seemingly the valley of despair - God where are you now?
- The sun shines forth on the mountain tops, often times that is where we get the vision, where we can see the farthest, but the fruit grows in the valleys.

Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

V: 29-30 As they engage in battle, the children of Israel kill 100K Syrians, putting the remainder to flight.

- Running to Aphek for protection, a wall falls upon the Syrians and kills another 27,000 men. "God who's side are you one?!"

Romans 8:31 "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

- The opposite is true as well; if God is against you, who can be for you?
- Why is God doing all of this? That they would know that He is the Lord.

Psalm 106:8 "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known."

- Ben-hadad is also part of the group trapped in Aphek.

V: 31-34 The Syrians have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful, they are hoping that the Israelites will be merciful, Ben-hadad sends messengers out to plead for his life.

- Even though Ahab is wicked, there is a witness and testimony that the Israelites are different than the nations around them.
- This is a stark contrast to the Assyrians, they were known for their cruelty. When they conquered a nation they brutalized them savagely; tearing out their tongues, gouging out their eyes, cutting off their noses, putting hooks through their jaws, and other horrible things.
- When some cities heard that the Assyrians were attacking, entire cities committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of the Assyrians. Yet the kings of Israel had a different reputation, because they had a different God who had been merciful to them, and to whom they were themselves accountable.
- Surprisingly Ahab refers to Ben-hadad as his “brother” - a very conciliatory gesture towards someone who was going to take his wives, and his kids, and all that he had.
- Ahab ends up making a covenant with Ben-hadad and lets him go home in peace.
- In doing this Ahab was disobedient to the Word of God:

There are times or situations where God in His sovereignty will be merciful:

Exodus 22:19 “... I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.”

And there are other times when God has determined not to extend mercy:

Deuteronomy 7:2 “And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:”

- As we read later in this chapter; God intended to destroy Ben-hadad, and apparently Ahab had known this and was disobedient to what he'd been told to do.

V: 35-37 (Parenthetical break) A practical demonstration or example of the contrast in either being obedient or disobedient to the Word of God.

- Disobedience = death

Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death...”

- The 2nd man learned from the 1st man's example, he hit the prophet hard.

V: 38-43 This prophet (identified by Josephus as Micaiah), waits and addresses the king - the king then says that the man has pronounced his own judgment, but it is the king who has pronounced judgment upon himself.

- The king had somehow been told to destroy Ben-hadad, and he had instead let him go in peace.
- King Saul had been given a similar mission and was disobedient, he too lost his life and kingdom.
- Ben-hadad will be killed by his own people, but now Ahab has sealed his own fate as well.

Deuteronomy 32:39 “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand.”

- Ahab goes home heavy hearted and displeased, but un-repentant, and with a death sentence hanging over him.
- What the visible enemy could not accomplish through superior numbers and force of arms the enemy achieved through subtlety, deception and compromise.

2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

- So often God gives us victory in some area of our lives, yet we go home forlorn and defeated because of our own disobedience.
- What should be a time of gladness and rejoicing often turns into a time of sadness and sorrow because we would not take heed to the Word of God, such is the case with Ahab.

Psalms 16:8-11 “⁸I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. ¹⁰For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. ¹¹Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”