

I Kings Lesson 20

I Kings Chapter 20

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Memory verses for this week: *Zec 14:6 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: Zec 14:7 But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.*

Introduction:

In last week's lesson, Jezebel threatens Elijah's life after she hears of what has transpired when Elijah slew the false prophets of Baal. He flees into the wilderness where he fears for his life and prays that God might take his life. God comes to him and tells him that he is not alone in his service to the Lord but God still had 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal.

In this week's lesson, enough time has passed that there are now prophets of the Lord serving in Israel. In this chapter, the king of Syria attacks Ahab's capital city of Samaria, but God enables Israel to defeat the massive army. The king of Syria returns to fight again, but is promptly defeated and captured this time. Ahab then angers God by allowing the king of Syria to depart in peace.

I. Ahab's First Victory

1Ki 20:1 And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.

1Ki 20:2 And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad,

1Ki 20:3 Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.

Benhadad, the king of Syria comes with 32 other kings and makes demands of Ahab. The king of Syria besieges the capital city of Samaria. These thirty-two vassal kings that came with him would have been rulers over cities and small districts.

Benhadad's message of demands comes in verses 2-3. He claims Ahab's silver and gold, and all of his wives and children. These demands are the result of arrogance and pride (and perhaps drunkenness).

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

1 Samuel 2:3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly ; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

James 4:6 Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

1Ki 20:4 And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.

1Ki 20:5 And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children;

1Ki 20:6 Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.

Ahab's reply comes quickly to the king of Syria. King Ahab gives complete surrender to all of Benhadad's demands. It is interesting to note that Ahab doesn't call for a man of God. See the difference in Ahab and Jehoshaphat over in chapter 22.

1Ki 22:5 And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day.

1Ki 22:6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.

1Ki 22:7 And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?

Neither does Ahab call on the Lord for assistance because he does not know the Lord like Elijah did.

Psalms 18:3 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We find in verses 5 and 5 Benhadad's second message of demands. Ahab capitulates too quickly, prompting Benhadad to demand even more. He now wants freedom to ransack the city. This is also the way of sin and temptation; when you give in to temptation, it always demands more.

1Ki 20:7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not.

1Ki 20:8 And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent.

Verse 7 calls the elders of the land to see what his response to Benhadad should be. Ahab is in great distress and calls for the elders of Israel to obtain advice. We as Christians have the opportunity to seek the face of the Lord in times of trial and troubles.

1 Samuel 30:6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

Psalm 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Psalm 107:6 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

The elders appear to have more backbone than Ahab and say that Ahab should not hearken to Benhadad. This is likely the result of God's victory over the prophets of Baal, and the ministry of His prophets now serving in the land.

1Ki 20:9 Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

1Ki 20:10 And Benhadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.

After obtaining counsel, Ahab gives his second reply to the king of Syria. We see a blending of the strength of the elders and the weakness of Ahab. God is not inclined to bless those who only take half a stand; this leads to trouble.

Verse 10 records Benhadad's third message to Ahab. This threatening message reminds us of Jezebel's message to Elijah as he shows no fear of God just as Jezebel in last week's lesson. Benhadad boasts of his great army: enough soldiers to carry away all the dust of Samaria in their hands.

1Ki 20:11 And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.

1Ki 20:12 And it came to pass, when Benhadad heard this message, as he was

drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city.

Ahab finally shows a little backbone in reply to Benhadad. The harness was a harness of armor. Example of this in chapter 22.

1Ki 22:34 And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded.

Benhadad, perhaps in a drunken fury, prepares for war. This might explain his arrogant demands to Ahab.

Proverbs 31:4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.

Proverbs 23:29-30 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

1Ki 20:13 And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD.

1Ki 20:14 And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou.

1Ki 20:15 Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.

A prophet comes and brings a message to Ahab. Because there are now prophets in the land, they have the blessing of hearing the Word of God. God gives a message of victory. The victory that is promised is not because Israel or Ahab deserved it, but that “thou shalt know that I am the Lord.” The blessing of knowing God’s will is for those who seek it.

Ahab has victory over the Syrians. In the following verses, we see the blessing of obedience to God. Ahab’s army was small: 232 young men, and an army of 7000, in contrast with Benhadad’s army of over 100,000.

1Ki 20:16 And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him.

1Ki 20:17 And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria.

1Ki 20:18 And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.

1Ki 20:19 So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them.

1Ki 20:20 And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued

*them: and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen.
1Ki 20:21 And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.*

Verse 16 says that Benhadad and his thirty-two kings were drunk. This is not a good state to be in anytime, but particularly bad when you are about to go into battle. God is faithful to His promise, and the Syrians are soundly defeated.

II. Ahab's Second Victory

1Ki 20:22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

1Ki 20:23 And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

1Ki 20:24 And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:

1Ki 20:25 And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so.

The prophet brings a second message to Ahab. He warns Ahab that the Syrians will return. This is the way of Satan, he may leave but he always returns.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The servants give King Benhadad some bad advice. The Syrian's foolish reasoning was that their gods are gods of the hills and they were no match for the Syrians. They make their battle plans there in verses 24 and 25. They intend to fight on the plains. They will replace the kings with captains of war and return with another massive army.

1Ki 20:26 And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel.

1Ki 20:27 And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.

The prophet's warning is fulfilled. This very same thing happened to King Asa, but what did he do?

2 Chronicles 14:11 And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.

1Ki 20:28 And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

1Ki 20:29 And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

1Ki 20:30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

The man of God comes back with a message to King Ahab. The promise of victory was given because of the Syrians opposition to God, and that “ye shall know that I am the Lord.” This was to be a test of Ahab. In verse 29, the promise of victory is fulfilled. Time and again we are reminded that God is always faithful to His word. It says the children of Israel slew a hundred thousand footmen in one day, and the rest fled to Aphek. Aphek means strength or fortress. Here God fights for Israel, and Benhadad has to hide.

III. Ahab's Grievous Failure

1Ki 20:31 And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.

1Ki 20:32 So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.

1Ki 20:33 Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.

Benhadad has clever servants that have a plan for survival. It says the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings, and perhaps they could put on sackcloth and save themselves. The sackcloth and ropes around their necks were a sign of being humble and showing a desire for mercy. It was not God’s purpose for Ahab to show mercy. Benhadad had already been marked for death. Another king was to take over Syria.

1Ki 19:15 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:

In F. C. Cook's Bible Commentary, he said this:

By the Oriental law of dakheel any one is at any time entitled to put himself under the protection of another, be that other his friend or his greatest enemy; and if the man applied to does not at once reject him, if the slightest forms of friendly speech pass between the two, the bond is complete, and must not be broken. Ben-hadad's friends were on the watch to obtain for him dakheel; and the single phrase "He is my brother," having been accepted by them on his part, was sufficient to complete the bond, and secure the life of the captive. Ahab having called Ben-hadad his brother, treated him as he would a brother; he took him up into his chariot, than which there could not be a greater honour.

Ahab errs in calling Benhadad his brother, and honoring the enemy of God.

2 Chronicles 19:2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.

1Ki 20:34 And Benhadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

1Ki 20:35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him.

Ahab makes a very foolish covenant with Benhadad in verse 34. These designated streets were most likely places of duty free trading. Ahab makes the covenant and sends Benhadad back to Syria. By allowing him to live, this Syrian King would shortly return to finally kill Ahab. The prophet gave a rebuke to Ahab. The prophet prepares to meet Ahab,

The sons of the prophets were men in training for the ministry as prophets. We know that at least some of them dwelled together, so this neighbor may also have been a prophet in training. Note that this was a command of the Lord to smite him.

1Ki 20:36 Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.

1Ki 20:37 Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him.

1Ki 20:38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.

When we are given specific directions, it is always foolish to be willingly disobedient.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

The prophet is wounded and waits for Ahab by the way.

1Ki 20:39 And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.

1Ki 20:40 And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it.

1Ki 20:41 And he hasted, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets.

1Ki 20:42 And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.

1Ki 20:43 And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria.

The prophet gave an object lesson for Ahab in verses 39-41. **An object lesson is defined as: “A lesson in which the object to be known, or a representation of it, is shown to the eye; hence, figuratively, the exemplification of a principle or moral in a concrete form or striking instance.” — From Funk & Wagnalls College Standard dictionary, 1943 edition.**

Verse 42 record the prophet’s message to Ahab. Ahab learns his life is to be cut short. The children of Israel are also a part of this judgement. It could mean that Ahab’s dynasty will end and it might mean that many were to lose their lives.

2 Kings 10:32 In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel.

In verse 43, we see King Ahab’s response to this message. He went home unhappy and unrepentant.

** Additional Comments added by E.L. Bynum in Jan. 2014*

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.