

1 Kings Chapter 20 Commentary

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. 2 And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad, 3 Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. 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."

We left the last chapter with Elijah anointing Elisha to take his place. In this chapter we have the entrance of Benhadad the king of Syria. He comes with thirty-two kings and a host of armament to besiege Samaria, where king Ahab lives and reigns over the ten northern tribes of Israel. He sends terms of surrender to king Ahab, which Ahab accepts in this desperate situation.

The lesson for us: we are not to be willing to sacrifice all that we have, and all that we are by the grace of God, to save our own person alive, and thereby submit to be servant to another. Israel was God's chosen people, who had deserted their God, and God is going to remind them that He is their Saviour.

Just consider: are you willing to surrender to another all that you own, including your wife and children, to keep yourself alive? This is totally contrary to the teaching of Christ, which is in ***Joh 15:13; 12 "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."*** If we are children of God, and have turned to idolatry, we have forgotten our first love, and we have surrendered our all to Satan.

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; 6 Yet I will send my servants unto thee tomorrow 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. 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. 8 And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent."

The messengers return, to Benhadad, Ahab's answer, and Benhadad sends them back again, with additional stipulations, which simply put mean, I accept your money, your wives, and your children: but I have changed the surrender agreement. I will send my men, and they will take anything they want from Israel.

Ahab gathers the council of elders and tells them what is going on. They council together and tell Ahab to not give Benhadad anything, but rather stand up and fight.

This is a reminder to the child of God: if you surrender to the devil just a little, he will use that as a wedge to widen the crack and take what he so desires.

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. 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. 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. 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 sends the messengers back and says to Benhadad that I will honor the first surrender terms you sent but not the last. Benhadad sends word back that he is coming to utterly destroy Samaria. Ahab sends Benhadad word back, stating that let him that takes off his armor when the battle is over say what he has done. In our vernacular of today, do not count your chickens before the eggs hatch. Benhadad orders his people into position to begin the attack upon Samaria.

Benhadad's boast of the innumerable host of his army, and the power of what his gods can do. We believe that this is why God sends a prophet to Ahab in the next verse. Benhadad has bragged on his gods, and this is an affront to the God of Israel, and the greatness of his name, of which Benhadad is well aware.

This is a warning to the children of God to not let the devil tempt you, by the multitude of his minions and his words, to forget that we are bought with a price, and the name of our God is not to be defamed, rather it is to be exalted above all other gods.

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. 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. 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. 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."

God sends a prophet to Ahab declaring that God will deliver this great multitude into the hand of Ahab, so that you may know that I am The LORD. A reminder to us to never forget our God. Ahab asked the prophet, how the battle is to be set forth? The prophet instructs Ahab as to what to do. They come out to fight at noon, but Benhadad is in the pavilions drinking himself into a drunken stupor, along with the thirty-two kings. All the leadership of Syria is drunk.

It is interesting to note: the number of warriors in Samaria were the same as the number of those who had not bowed to Baal, seen in **1Ki 19:18 "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."** This is simply to remind Israel, and especially us, that the deliverance is from the Lord, not from their idols. Though we are sure it is not the same seven thousand men, but just a prophetic picture of the strength of God to deliver by few.

We would like to make a point here that when we know we are in a warfare, we do not drink ourselves into a stupor, so we are unable to make good decisions. Also, every child of God is always at war with the satanic evil forces of this world, and we all need clear minds filled with the word of God as a ready sword of defense against the dark arts of this world, as we are told in **2Co 10:1-6; 1 ¶ "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: 2 But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."**

"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." This will be a one-day war. Why just one day? Because Israel went forth under the direction of God, and armed with the word of God, who cannot lie, that the battle was theirs. We have the same promise from God, in our own lives, as we battle each day to remain faithful to God. We overcome our enemies by the power of God, by obeying the word of God. Every day of our lives is another day of battle against the devil, and our inherited sin nature.

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. 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. 19 So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. 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. 21 And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter."

Benhadad sends out spies, and they tell him that the men of Samaria have come out to fight. Benhadad in his drunken state tells his men whether they come to make peace or war, take them alive. The Syrians head out to take the Samaritans prisoner, and the Syrians fall before Israel as though they are nothing. The Syrians flee before Israel and Israel pursues them. Benhadad escapes on a horse with some horsemen, while Israel slays the Syrians with a very great slaughter.

Again, Israel is reminded of the power of God, to no effect, as they continue their idolatry and do not turn to God in repentance. Did you notice that there is no mention of any of Israel being slain in the battle? That is a reminder to us of the surety of our salvation in Jesus Christ and his finished work of redemption.

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

God sends a prophet to Ahab and tells him, to be preparing, for Benhadad will return at the first of the next year. This reminds us that we are to be aware of the threat of the devil all the time, for we shall not be rid of his attacks upon us until we die mortally.

The servants of Benhadad tell him that the gods of Israel are the gods of the hills, and you should lure the Samaritans into the plains where you can overcome them. So, Benhadad puts together an army, like the one he had the first time, and goes up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

Benhadad should have known that there was no way to overcome the God of Israel, because of how they became subjects to Israel in the reign of King David. They knew of the mighty deliverances that came to Israel, and King David, from history.

"And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them:" We point out again, not one Israelite was missing. The Israelites come out to engage them, and the numbers are so vastly different in the size of the armies, that the comparison is made of Israel as two little flocks of kids, against an army that filled the country.

We are reminded of another time when Israel was under siege, seen in **1Sa 14:6 "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few."** A reminder to us that God is in complete control and doeth whatsoever He will in heaven and on the earth, as seen in **Da 4:35; 34 ¶ "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"** We are also reminded of the New Testament scripture in **Ro 9:20 "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"**

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. 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. 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."

We remind you; this time Benhadad is coming against Israel and not against Samaria. God sends a prophet to Ahab saying: since the Syrians have said I am a God of the hills and not of the valleys, therefore, I will deliver this great multitude into thy hands, and you shall know that I am the LORD. Notice, it is because the name of God is being defamed, that God will deliver the Syrians into the hand of Ahab. It is not because Ahab has praised the Lord or prayed to God for deliverance. Neither has Ahab turned to God in repentance. We point out that it is one thing to "**know of the Lord**" and another thing to "**know the Lord**," Ahab is an idolater, but it seems he only has a head knowledge of the Lord, not a heart knowledge.

Seven days later the battle begins, and the Israelites slay the Syrians with a great slaughter. Benhadad flees to an inner chamber in the city of Aphek. The Syrians flee to Aphek and God causes a wall to fall upon twenty-seven thousand Syrians.

This is not the first time that we have read of a wall falling to deliver an enemy to Israel. Remember the fall of Jericho? Remember the scripture in **Heb 11:30** "**By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.**" Not only are the walls falling down, but there is the same number of seven days before each battle began. Just another reminder to Israel, the Syrians, and us, of the power of God. What about the seven days? Seven has the first meaning of **seven (as the sacred full one.)** Seven has the secondary meaning of **completeness**. This simply tells us that the battle is the Lord's, as God has completely routed the Syrians.

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. 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. 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. 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."

Benhadad's servants tell Benhadad: we have heard that the Israelites are a merciful people. Wherefore, let us put on sackcloth and ropes on our necks, signifying that we are willing to be slaves to Israel, and perhaps Ahab will spare our lives. They did so and came to Ahab, telling him that thy servant Benhadad has requested to live and not be slain.

Ahab claims Benhadad as his brother and asks if he is still alive. Finding that Benhadad was still alive, he sent them to bring Benhadad to him. They do, and Benhadad tells Ahab that he will return to him all that they have taken from Israel in the past, and they will allow Israel to have streets in Damascus, the Syrian capital. Ahab makes a covenant with Benhadad and sends him away.

Why would Ahab do such a thing? Remember that Ahab's wife is a Phoenician, and the Phoenician's are a part of Syria. Thus, Ahab considers Benhadad his brother because of his wife Jezebel. This is a reminder to us today. We cannot serve both God and mammon. This demonstrates to us; Ahab has not turned to God and is still being directed by his inherited sin nature, which advises him to use political tact.

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

God immediately acts against Ahab, for his political move of making a league with Benhadad. A certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor, "**in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee.**" Notice this prophet demanded "**in the word of the Lord.**" The man refused and the son of the prophet said, as soon as thou depart from me, a lion shall slay thee, for not obeying the voice of the Lord, and it was so. A warning to us; when

we know God is speaking to us; we are to obey the voice of the Lord; or we should expect to suffer the consequences of disobedience to God.

The prophet found another man who did smite him as commanded, and the prophet went and hid, by the way the king would be going. He disguised himself by putting ashes upon his face.

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. 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. 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. 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. 43 And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria."

As the king passed by the place where prophet was, the prophet cried unto Ahab and gave him a parable as though he had failed to do as was required of him, and because of his failure he is facing death, or must pay a great penalty price. The parable is the actual case of Ahab. Ahab tells the prophet: **"So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it."** The prophet then cleaned his face and Ahab recognized he was one of the prophets of God. The prophet said unto Ahab: God gave you Benhadad to destroy, and to bring all that great army down, and you have sent him away in peace. You, Ahab, have condemned me to death, who am one of your own people, yet you had mercy on Benhadad, a stranger to Israel, whom God has appointed to destruction. Therefore, the sentence you pronounced upon me is now pronounced upon you, and your life shall be taken in the stead of Benhadad.

Ahab goes home very displeased with the sentence he must face, for this political move, which he made to find grace in the eyes of his idolatrous wife Jezebel, has turned into a death sentence. We shall find in the next two chapters how God brings this to pass.

This is certainly a warning to the children of God. When we are given commandment, we are to follow that commandment as God has laid it out. We are not to make political maneuvers, to save face with our own people, and expect to escape chastisement. We are not to make covenants with the world, those who are against God's word of truth, which is exactly what Ahab did.

Just think of all the miraculous things that God has performed before Ahab. God has given Ahab four miracles which should have moved him to fall on his face before God and repent of all his evil.

- God sent Elijah and said it shall not rain except by the word of Elijah, which God fulfilled.
- God sent Elijah and performed the burning of the sacrifice of Elijah, and the killing of the 450 prophets of Baal.
- God sent a prophet to tell Ahab that God would give the Syrians into his hand, and they would not destroy Samaria, and God performed what he said to uphold God's great name before Ahab.
- God sent a prophet to tell Ahab that God would deliver the host of the Syrians into his hand, because the Syrians said he was a God of the hills and not of the plains, which he did. Again, this was to remind Ahab of who God was.

Notice that Ahab's heart was heavy, only with the unhappy sentence pronounced upon him. He was not so grieved in heart that he turned to the Lord in repentance. He doesn't even pray for forgiveness. Wherefore, Ahab has no excuse for not repenting before, and turning to, God, who is the LORD. Comparably, God has sent to all of us enough miracles to let us know that he is the LORD, and we are without excuse, when we fail to put God in first place in our lives.

Benhadad is a picture of the devil and his minions. Ahab is a picture of the inherited sin nature of mankind. Remember, that in this scene; we have the devil fighting against God's chosen people, through their inherited sin nature. However, the fact that Israel wins these battles is not based on them being good people at making war. Instead, it is because the devil was defaming the name of God, and God is simply using Israel to defend his great name. God is displaying to Israel, and to us, a reminder of the great God who delivered them, and us, out of Egypt into the land of promise.

Obviously, Ahab does not get the picture, and Ahab saves Benhadad alive, and makes a covenant with him. This is a picture of one that is not born again, who is living in the inherited sin nature of the flesh, making a covenant with the devil, to live in harmony with the devil. It reminds us of the scripture in **Joh 12:40; 37 ¶** ***"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: 38 That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? 39 Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, 40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."***

It also reminds us that Ahab is quick to judge others in condemnation, but does not have discernment to judge himself, as we are commanded to do in **Mt 7:1-2; 1 ¶** ***"Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."*** We shall see that Ahab's judgment of condemnation on the prophet of God becomes his own judgment. A warning to us to be sure we judge ourselves first, against the standard of God, his holy word. If we are to stand in judgment of others, we need to be in right standing with God. We must be sure we know, and understand, all the facts in a case, before we make a judgment of condemnation.

The prophets, used in this chapter, are a picture of the word of God, the Holy Spirit of God, with which we are enlightened when we are born again. When we are born again; the word of God should dwell in us richly; and thus, we can easily cut down our inherited sin nature with the sword of the Spirit, as is demonstrated by the battles set forth here. Wherefore, let us, the born-again children of God, live life with God as our guiding light. Let us read and study the written word of God, to know more about our God, and what he would have us to do. Let us learn from the mistakes of men recorded in the King James Bible, who did not believe God, nor listen to the voice of the LORD.

Let us praise and glorify the name of our God, the LORD, and our King, Jesus Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit of Christ in us, always giving thanks to them, for our eternal forgiveness of sins, our eternal life, and the hope of the resurrection of our bodies at the return of Christ. We pray these things in the finished work of Jesus Christ, in his name, and for his sake, Amen!