

1 Kings Chapter 20

1 Kings 20:1 "And Ben-hadad 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."

“Ben-hadad”:

This was likely Ben-hadad II of Syria (see note on 15:18), who marched on the capital of Israel and demanded surrender by Ahab (verses 2-6).

“Thirty and two kings”:

These were probably rulers of client city-states in the land of Syria (see notes on 10:29).

Three Aramean “kings” bear the name “Ben-hadad: Ben-hadad I (885-860 B.C.), Ben-hadad II (860-842 B.C.), and Ben-hadad III (802-unknown), son of Hazael, the usurper.

We mentioned earlier, that there are many Ben-hadads.

This one is possibly, king of Syria, because his father was king of Syria before him.

The thirty-two kings with him were kings over very small kingdoms.

They were probably leaders of some of the Hittites.

At one time, this Ben-hadad was said to have 4,000 chariots.

Whether these are the ones mentioned here, I do not know.

Samaria was a city and a country.

He probably was specifically mad at Ahab.

1 Kings 20:2 "And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad,"

Who there remained, and attempted not to go forth and meet him, and stop his progress, though he must have passed great part of his dominions to come to Samaria.

"And said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad”:

By them, his messengers, as follows.

We see the messengers he sent were to Ahab.

He might have been jealous of Ahab being king of Israel.

This is certainly a message to humiliate Ahab.

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

Ben-hadad's demands called for Ahab to surrender and Israel to become his vassal state.

Verses 4-6

"Ben-hadad" was no longer asking for a treaty, which Ahab had granted him, he was now demanding complete surrender.

1 Kings 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."

So he said to Ben-hadad's messengers, representing him, as acknowledging his sovereignty over him.

"According to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have":

Which he understood of holding all that he had of him, by giving him homage, and paying him tribute.

Not that he was to deliver all his substance, and especially his wives and children, into his hands.

It seemed that Ahab was a weak man.

When Ben-hadad asked for all of the silver and gold, and the wives and children, he agreed without a fight.

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

From Ben-hadad.

"And said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying":

At the first message.

"Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children":

Into his possession, and not as Ahab understood it, that he should be his vassal, and pay a yearly tribute for his quiet enjoyment of them.

Yet even this he would not now abide by, growing still haughtier upon the mean submission of Ahab, as by what follows.

1 Kings 20:6 "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."

He gave him twenty four hours to consider of it.

"And they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants":

The royal palace, and the houses of the noblemen, and even of every of his subjects in Samaria.

"And it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away":

Not be content with what should be given, but search for more; and if any in particular was more desirable to the possessor than anything else, that should be sure to be taken away.

Which was vastly insolent and aggravating.

Ahab had agreed to his unreasonable request, but now he is not even satisfied with that.

Ahab had offered to send what he had requested to him.

He is not satisfied, but intends to send servants to search and make sure Ahab had done what he requested.

1 Kings 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."

His poor sneaking spirit was a little aroused with the last message, and therefore called a council of the elders of the people upon it, which was a piece of wisdom in him.

"And said, mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief":

Nothing less than the entire ruin of the nation.

"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":

In the sense he understood him, which was, that he was to be a vassal, and tributary to him, for the sake of holding these, which yet was very mean.

But he wanted to have these in hand, and not them only, but the pillaging of all his subjects.

This meeting is to explain to these elders, that he had tried to comply with the request of Ben-hadad, but he is unreasonable.

He wants not only the wealth of the king, but of all the people as well.

1 Kings 20:8 "And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not [unto him], nor consent."

They were unanimous in their advice.

"Hearken not unto him, nor consent":

Promising, no doubt, that they would stand by him.

The people would certainly be opposed to this.

They expressed their opinions knowing that they would be involved in this battle too.

1 Kings 20:9 "Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, 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."

"I will do ... I may not do":

Ahab was willing to give tribute to Ben-hadad as his vassal (verses 2-4), but he refused to allow the Syrian king to plunder his palace (verses 5-8).

Ahab still wanted to settle this without a battle if possible.

He still offers his own wealth, but will not allow the second request.

Verses 10-11

Ben-hadad boasted that his army would level the hill of Samaria to dust (verse 10).

Ahab replied that Ben-hadad should not boast of the outcome of the battle before it began (verse 11).

1 Kings 20:10 "And Ben-hadad 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."

“Ben-hadad” suggests that his forces were so powerful and numerous that he not only could reduce “Samaria” to “dust,” but his many men could carry it off by the “handfuls”.

1 Kings 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."

Very mildly and very wisely.

"Tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off":

That is, he that prepares for the battle as he that has got the victory; the sense is, let no man triumph before the battle is over and the victory won.

The events of war are uncertain; the battle is not always to the strong.

They exchange insults here.

Ben-hadad vows that he will leave Samaria as a heap of dust.

In modern language, the king of Israel tells him to do whatever he is big enough to do.

They will see who prevails.

Verses 12 and 16

Ben-hadad was an arrogant drunkard.

He celebrated his victory before he had even begun the battle.

1 Kings 20:12 "And it came to pass, when [Ben-hadad] 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."

Though it was at noon, or before (1 Kings 20:16), which shows that he and they were addicted to intemperance.

"That he said unto his servants":

Some of the principal officers of his army.

"Set yourselves in array":

Prepare for battle, betake yourselves to your arms, invest the city at once, and place the engines against it to batter it down.

"And they set themselves in array against the city":

Besieged it in form, at least prepared for it.

For it seems after all that it was not properly done.

They immediately set themselves around the city of Samaria for combat, when they get the news back.

The fact that Ben-hadad was drinking is possibly to show that he was not thinking clearly.

Ben-hadad sometimes had as many as 100,000 troops with him in battle.

We are not told how many there were, but we know that they outnumber Ahab.

Verses 13-15

God's battle plan was not logical according to the rules of warfare.

He told Ahab to lead the battle with the "young leaders, those who were inexperienced and unschooled in the tactics of war.

Once again, God arranged the details so that He could declare, "Thou shall know that I am the LORD", upon giving Ahab the victory (20:28).

This same message was sent in the Exodus, when He led Israel in victory over Egypt (Exodus 6:7; 7:5; 10:2; 14:4; 16:12).

1 Kings 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."

"I will deliver it into thine hand this day":

These were the words of assurance given before battles when the LORD was about to fight on Israel's side (Joshua 6:2, 16; 8:1, 18; Judges 7:2; 18:10; 1 Sam. 23:4; 24:4).

Further, the victory would show Ahab that the LORD was in every respect the mighty God He claimed to be.

Though the people and king of Israel had dishonored God, He would not utterly cast them off (verses 14-15).

How graciously God continued to deal with "Ahab!" the whole episode (verses 13-21), should have convinced Ahab of God's reality and claim upon his life.

Neither one of these kings deserve the help of the LORD.

We may safely assume then, that this is the LORD protecting the priests and prophets, who are still here and protecting the thousands who have not bowed to Baal.

Ben-hadad might have been even more evil at this time than Ahab.

Notice, the LORD is doing this for Ahab to prove once again, that He is the LORD.

1 Kings 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."

Knowing he had no army with him sufficient to go out with against the Syrian army.

"And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces":

Either such, as Kimchi thinks who were brought up with him.

Or, as others, the sons of governors of provinces, who were kept as hostages that their fathers might not rebel.

Neither of which is likely: but rather the servants of such princes who waited on them, and lived delicately and at ease, and were not trained up to military exercise, even by these should the victory be obtained.

"Then he said, who shall order the battle?"

Begin the attack, we or they?

Or who shall conduct it, or be the general of the army, go before it, and lead them on?

Ahab might think, being an idolater, that the LORD would not make use of him, or otherwise who could be thought of but himself?

"And he answered, thou":

Thou must be the commander, go forth with the army, and make the attack upon the enemy.

The LORD and even one is a majority.

We will see the handful of men of Ahab fighting against the large army of Ben-hadad.

These princes of the outlying area had probably come to Samaria, when they saw this large army of Ben-hadad.

The LORD told Ahab that he would order the battle.

1 Kings 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."

This was a very small number to go forth against so great an army as the host of the Syrians, and these were raw unexperienced young men.

"And after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand":

Which could never be the number of all the people in the land, nor even in the city of Samaria, who were able to bear arms.

But it must mean such who were willing to go out to war on this occasion.

And the number was the same as of those that would not bow the knee to Baal.

This has led the Jewish commentators to conclude that these were the men that were numbered for war.

But it is not likely that they were all in Samaria or that none but those would go to war, though it must be confessed that the number is remarkable.

This is a small army of 232 princes.

It is interesting to me that there are 7,000 people here.

This is the same number who has not bowed to Baal.

1 Kings 20:16 "And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad [was] drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him."

From Samaria, the two hundred and thirty two young men, and the 7000 Israelites, openly, with great spirit and courage, fearless and undaunted.

But it is not said that Ahab went out at the head of them; it seems as if he did not by what is said (1 Kings 20:21).

"But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions":

Or booths, or tents.

"He and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him":

Who either were his subjects, or his tributaries, or confederates.

Being secure and having nothing to fear from Ahab, he and they gave themselves up to carousing and drinking even at noon.

So destruction came upon them unawares, as on Belshazzar.

These 32 kings were the leaders of this group along with Ben-hadad.

It appears they have been drinking so much that they are drunk.

Verses 17-21

The battle strategy was to send out the young leaders who could perhaps draw near to the Syrians without arousing too much alarm and then, at a given signal, initiate a charge joined by Ahab's main striking force that would catch the drunken Syrians off guard and throw them into confusion.

The glorious victory won so easily and with such a small force, was granted so that Ahab and the people would know that God was sovereign.

1 Kings 20:17 "And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria."

From Samaria, before the 7000 did.

"And Ben-hadad sent out":

Of his pavilion, a messenger or messengers to his sentinels, to know what news, and how matters stood, whether Ahab had sent any message, signifying his compliance with his terms.

"And they told him, saying, there are men come out of Samaria":

But upon what account they could not say.

This seems to be a scouting expedition.

They come back with the report, that some of the men have already come out of Samaria.

1 Kings 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."

To propose terms of peace.

"Take them alive":

Make them prisoners, which was contrary to the laws of nations.

"Or whether they be come out for war, take them alive":

He made no doubt of their being easily taken.

But he would not have them be put to death, that he might examine them, and know the state of things in Samaria, and what Ahab intended to do, that he might take his measures accordingly.

It appears that Ben-hadad is operating under the influence of the alcohol he drank.

He tells his men to take the men of Samaria alive.

Perhaps he wanted to take them captive, and then kill them.

We are not told exactly why he gave these instructions.

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

First, as before observed, and marched forwards towards the Syrian camp.

"And the army which followed them": Consisting of 7000 men.

This is speaking of the 232 princes coming out of Samaria with the 7,000 close behind them.

1 Kings 20:20 "And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen."

The Syrian army, or at least a body of men detached from them, met them, opposed them, and fought them, and they slew of them 7232 men.

They killed as many as they themselves had.

"And the Syrians fled":

Not expecting such a rebuff.

"And Israel pursued them":

To make some further advantage of their victory.

"And Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the horsemen":

With two couple of horsemen, as the Targum; with these to guard him he galloped away as fast as he could for his life.

Ben-hadad and his men of authority, we must remember, were drunk.

This is saying the men of Ahab killed the men that Ben-hadad had sent out to meet them in battle, and Ben-hadad and all those with horses fled for safety.

1 Kings 20:21 "And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter."

Of Samaria; when he saw the Syrians fleeing, and his army pursuing, he went forth, perhaps, with more forces, which were now willing to join with him.

Josephus says, Ahab had another army within the walls.

"And smote the horses and chariots":

That is, the men that rode on horses; and in chariots, the Syrian cavalry.

"And slew the Syrians with a great slaughter":

How many were slain is not said; but the Jewish historian says they plundered the camp, in which were much riches, and great plenty of gold and silver, and took their chariots and horses, and returned to the city of Samaria.

Ahab's army killed all of the Syrians they found.

Ahab had remained inside of Samaria, until the Syrians began to run.

He then came out with the men, and killed the remaining Syrians and then disabled their horses and chariots.

1 Kings 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."

"The return of the year":

Spring was the usual time for battles in the ancient Near East (see note on Sam. 11:1), and a prophet warned Ahab that Ben-hadad would retaliate in the following year.

We are not told which prophet this is.

He could possibly be one that had been hidden for safety in the caves.

He is now actively being used of God.

Perhaps the reason the LORD is not using Elijah here, is because of the remark Jezebel had made about Elijah.

She had sworn to kill him.

Ahab probably did not agree with her, but she was his queen.

Whoever the prophet is, he warns Ahab that they must prepare for a war with Ben-hadad a year from that time.

Verses 23-25

The Aramaeans believed all “gods” were limited to specific geographical regions; thus Israel’s “gods” were mountain gods (“of the hills”), who specialized in warfare in this terrain, while the horses and chariots of Aram would be more effective on level land.

These men did not understand that the true God is not limited by space or time (Psalms 90:2; 139:7-12).

1 Kings 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."

“Their gods are gods of the hills”:

The advisors of Ben-hadad believed that Israel had won the previous battle because it occurred in mountainous terrain; the area they believed was ruled by Israel’s “gods”.

They counseled Ben-hadad to strengthen his army and fight Israel again, only on level ground (verse 25).

Obviously, this attitude insulted Israel’s God, the LORD, who is sovereign over the whole earth (2 Kings 19:16-19).

That blasphemous depreciation of the LORD’s power meant certain defeat for the Syrians (See verse 28).

This is speaking of the servants of Ben-hadad.

They do not recognize the God of Israel.

They think of Him being limited.

They are saying the reason they lost the battle, was because it was fought in the hills.

The hills would be a disadvantage to Syria.

They do not believe that Israel's God will help them in the plains.

If they choose the place of the battle, they believe they can win.

They have underestimated the God of Israel.

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

Also take this further piece of advice.

"Take the kings away, every man out of his place":

For being brought up delicately, they were not given to war or expert in the art of it.

And being addicted to pleasure, gave themselves to that, and drew the king into it, which they observed was the case before, though they did not care to mention it.

And if they were tributaries or allies, they would not fight as men do for their own country.

Also take this further piece of advice.

"And put captains in their rooms":

Of his own people, men of skill and courage, and who would fight both for their own honor, and for the good of their country.

The kings were to be replaced, to get captains who were more skilled in the ways of war.

They would be the choicest of the army.

1 Kings 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."

Raise an army of an equal number, which they supposed he was able to do.

"Horse for horse and chariot for chariot":

As many horses and chariots as he had before.

"And we will fight against them in the plain":

Where they could make use of their horses and chariots to greater advantage than on hills and mountains (see Judges 1:19).

"And surely we shall be stronger than they":

And beat them.

"And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so":

Took their counsel, and prepared an army, and placed captains in it instead of kings.

He is not asking Ben-hadad for more men or chariots, because he wants to prove the superiority of the Syrians.

It is true that the Syrians were superior to the army of Ahab, but the LORD is stronger than them all.

Ben-hadad had been embarrassed by the loss of the battle at Samaria, so he is eager to do this.

1 Kings 20:26 "And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel."

"Aphek":

Though several towns in Israel bore the name Aphek, the one mentioned here probably lay about 3 miles east of the sea of Galilee, north of the Yarmuk River.

"Aphek" means fortress, and this could be speaking of any of several fortresses.

We do know that it would be located on the plain, because they do not want to fight in the hills.

1 Kings 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."

"Like two little flocks of kids":

Compared to the massive herd of Aramaeans covering the land, Israel looked like two little goat flocks.

Goats were never seen in large flocks or scattered like sheep; hence the description of the two compact, small divisions.

The army of Israel is very small compared to the vast army that the Syrians had.

The Israelites were gathered in two parts.

1 Kings 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."

"Man of God" (see note on 12:22).

"God" continued to deal with Ahab.

Like the first victory, the second was designed to bring about Ahab's repentance, the knowledge of God, and obedience.

God had shown Israel, over and over, that He was God.

They perhaps had begun to fear this tremendous number of Syrians who had come to fight them.

God wanted to prove to Israel, as well as to these Syrians that He is indeed, the God of all the earth.

He is just as powerful in the valleys as He is in the hills.

God is above all the earth.

1 Kings 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 a hundred thousand footmen in one day."

Very probably the Israelites pitched upon a hill, and the Syrians waited till they changed their position, not caring to fall upon them, though so very supernumerary to them, for the reason before given.

"And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined":

Or they that made war drew nigh, as the Targum, and both sides engaged in battle.

"And the children of Israel slew of the Syrians a hundred thousand footmen in one day":

Which was a prodigious slaughter to be made by so small an army; the hand of the LORD was visible in it.

The Syrians greatly outnumbered the Israelites, but they both seemed reluctant to start the battle.

On the seventh day, the Israelites killed 100,000 footmen.

This would seem to be impossible, if we had not been informed earlier that The LORD would deliver Syria into their hands.

The reason for the great slaughter was because they had defied God.

They said He was not powerful in the valley, but just in the hills.

1 Kings 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 Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber."

That perhaps was in the hands of the Syrians, and was designed for a retreat for them, should they be beaten.

"And there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left":

Not slain in the battle.

Here again the LORD might be seen, who, as Abarbanel observes, fought from heaven, and either by a violent wind, or an earthquake, threw down the wall upon them just as they had got under it for shelter.

"And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber":

Or, "into a chamber within a chamber", for greater secrecy.

Literally "a room in a room", a safe, well-hidden place.

Aphek was a fortress and they probably, fled to that for coverage from the oncoming Israelites.

We see that it truly was God who destroyed them.

The fact that 27,000 had a wall fall on them cannot be explained any other way.

This chamber could have been like a tunnel built under the street.

1 Kings 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."

"Sackcloth ... and ropes":

Sackcloth traditionally symbolized mourning and penitence.

Ropes around the heads were symbols of surrender.

This would be a sign of humbling themselves before Ahab and his men.

Probably, he was a little more merciful than some of the heathen kings.

They are in mourning clothes, and perhaps, the ropes show that they are at the mercy of Ahab.

1 Kings 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 Ben-hadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, [Is] he yet alive? he [is] my brother."

Ben-hadad's counselors wore the traditional symbols of mourning, supplication, and subservience.

This appears to be the captains, or the leaders, that had advised Ben-hadad to go to this battle.

It appears that they lived long enough to plead for the life of their king.

These are the same men, who had bragged about how they could win this battle easily. Now the tables are turned, and they are begging for their lives.

1 Kings 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 Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot."

That would be a good omen to them, and encourage them to hope for success.

They observed him as diligently by his words and behavior as soothsayers do when they look out for a lucky sign; for the word is sometimes used of divining.

"And did hastily catch it":

As soon as it was out of his mouth, and laid hold on it to improve it to advantage, being wiser than him.

"And they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad":

Him whom thou calls thy brother; he is thy brother, and is alive.

This they caught, and expressed it, to observe whether it was a slip of his tongue, and whether he spoke it heartily, and would abide by it, or whether he would retract it.

"Then he said, Go ye, bring him":

Meaning from the city to the place where he was.

"Then Ben-hadad came forth to him":

Out of his chamber, upon the report of his servants.

"And he caused him to come up into the chariot":

To sit and converse with him there.

Ben-hadad was not truly his brother, but the men believed that he was, and went and got Ben-hadad out of hiding.

He received Ben-hadad into his chariot with him, which was a sign of respect for him.

1 Kings 20:34 "And [Ben-hadad] 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."

"Streets":

Literally "outside places".

Bazaars were set up in a foreign land (Neh. 13:16), a lucrative market for Israelite goods.

"Ahab" probably knew the times well, for even then Shalmaneser III, the king of Assyria (859-824 B.C.), was pushing westward toward the Mediterranean sea.

Ahab doubtless hoped for a friendly "Ben-hadad" and his Aramean allies to form a buffer for Israel against Assyria.

Ahab, Ben-hadad, and several other Aramean kings soon faced Shalmaneser III in the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C.

God had twice delivered Ahab (verses 13-22; 28-30), in the face of overwhelming odds.

God calls for His servants to trust Him and obey Him implicitly, rather than trusting in self or other men (Deut. 28:1-7; Prov. 3:5-6; Micah 6:8).

The agreement they made was satisfactory to both kings, and Ahab sent Ben-hadad back to his home without killing him.

Verses 35-42

To show King Ahab his sin, the prophet used a tactic similar to the one Nathan used with David (2 Sam. Chapter 12).

In this instance, he disguised himself and told the story of an ordinary soldier who was required to pay an exorbitant fine of a “talent of silver” or forfeit his life.

When Ahab agreed with the death sentence for this soldier, the prophet gave him the same sentence for allowing an enemy king to go free (20:34; 22:29-40).

Verses 35-36

The prophet needed to be wounded as if in battle to carry out the drama.

The refusal to do as the prophet said was wrong, as it was a withholding of necessary aid to a prophet of God in the discharge of his duty.

It was severely punished as a warning to others (13:2-24).

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

“Sons of the prophets”:

An association of prophets that met and possibly lived together for study, encouragement and service (see note on 1 Sam. 10:5).

It appears that after the defaming of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, some of the prophets had come out of hiding.

This prophet wanted to be smitten, because of the disobedience of Ahab in letting a man go that God had planned to destroy.

This could also be a visible sign of what will happen to Ahab for disobeying God.

1 Kings 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."

In not smiting him; which, if he was a prophet, he must know how great an evil it was to disregard or disobey what was said by a prophet in his name.

This would be inexcusable.

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":

Which may seem severe, yet being an act of disobedience to the command of God, by a prophet of his, was punishable with death.

This is the prophet speaking to his neighbor, who was probably a prophet also.

This prophet had disobeyed God as well.

The lion does slay him just as he said.

1 Kings 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]."

This is not said to be his neighbor, nor one of the sons of the prophets, but a rustic man, and so stuck not to take him at his word.

"And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him":

In his face; made some incision in his flesh, broke the skin, and fetched blood of him.

Perhaps somewhere about his eyes, by what follows: this he got done to him, that he might look like a wounded soldier, and thereby get the more easily to the speech of Ahab.

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

As he went from Aphek; the place where the battle had been fought, to Samaria, his royal seat.

"And disguised himself with ashes upon his face":

The Targum is, he covered his eyes with a vail, or piece of cloth, which he wrapped about his head, as men do when they have got a wound or bruise in such a part, which seems very probable.

For if he had smeared his face with ashes, clay or dust, or any such thing; he could not so easily have got it off (as in 1 Kings 20:41).

The fact that he was injured proved that he probably, was not a prophet.

He also disguised himself, hoping to get audience with the king.

The king will think he was injured in the battle.

Verses 39-43

The prophet illustrated that, just as a soldier pays dearly for losing a prisoner in war, Ahab will pay for letting Ben-hadad, the idolatrous enemy of God, live.

1 Kings 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."

This is showing Ahab that just as a soldier in battle should obey his commanding officer, Ahab should have obeyed God.

"Silver" speaks of redemption, and a talent was 125 pounds.

We see this is speaking of someone very important for the amount to be so great.

1 Kings 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]."

"Thy judgment":

This "judicial parable" was designed to trap Ahab into announcing the punishment for his own crime (see 2 Sam. 12:1-12).

Unknowingly, Ahab declared his own judgment (verse 42).

Ahab told the servant, that it would be as he had said.

He had sealed his own doom.

1 Kings 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."

Took off the linen cloth from his eyes, unveiled or unmasked himself.

"And the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets":

He knew him again, having seen him once or twice before.

Otherwise there could be nothing in his face that could discover him to be a prophet; rather he was to be known by his habit.

1 Kings 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."

“Destruction”

By declaring the battles to be holy war (verses 13, 22, 28), the LORD had put Ben-hadad and the Syrians under the ban, a reference to something belonging to the LORD and destined to be destroyed (Deut. 7:2; 20:16).

By freeing Ben-hadad, Ahab had disobeyed the law and would suffer the ban in place of Ben-hadad.

The king, Ahab, had spoken his own judgment upon himself unknowingly.

Now that the prophet had disclosed who he is, it is too late, it is already done.

This may seem to be cruel punishment for releasing Ben-hadad, but we must remember that Ahab is a cruel king himself.

He was evil.

He really was not on the LORD's side from the beginning.

The only reason the LORD allowed him victory, was because of the rash remarks Ben-hadad had said about God.

The prophet speaks the judgment of death on Ahab and his people.

Ahab had not won the war, the LORD had.

Ahab had no right to make this decision.

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

“Heavy and displeased”:

Ahab was resentful and angry because of the LORD's reaction to his actions (21:4).

The victory is a shallow one now, knowing that he and his people will die.

Instead of being repentant, he was mad at God.

1 Kings Chapter 20 Questions

1. How many kings were with Ben-hadad?

2. What city did they besiege?
3. What were these kings over?
4. How many chariots did Ben-hadad have?
5. What humiliating message did he send to Ahab?
6. How did Ahab answer him?
7. Was Ben-hadad satisfied with Ahab's answer?
8. Who did Ahab call together for advice?
9. What advice did they give Ahab?
10. When Ben-hadad found out that Ahab would not comply with his second request, what message did he send to Ahab?
11. What were Ben-hadad and his kings doing, when they got the final message?
12. What message did the LORD send Ahab in verse 13?
13. Who was to order the battle?
14. How many princes were with Ahab?
15. How many did the other people number?
16. What was the condition of Ben-hadad, when the confrontation began?
17. What did Ben-hadad say to do with the men of Ahab that came out?
18. What happened to the Syrians under the leadership of Ben-hadad?
19. As soon as the battle was over, what message did the prophet bring to Ahab?
20. How did the Syrians underestimate God?
21. What will be different about the next battle?
22. How were the troops of Syria compared to the troops they had in the first battle?
23. Where was this second battle fought?
24. How was the army of Israel compared to the army of Syria?
25. What message did God send to Ahab just before the battle?
26. How many days did they wait, before the battle began?

27. How many footmen of Syria were killed in one day?
28. What happened to twenty-seven thousand of their men?
29. What did the Syrians do to themselves before they came out to beg for mercy from the army of Ahab?
30. What did Ahab do to Ben-hadad?
31. What did the prophet ask his neighbor to do to him?
32. How did the prophet disguise himself to Ahab?
33. What does "silver" speak of?
34. How much does a talent of silver weigh?
35. Why did Ahab go to his house heavy and displeased?