

1Kings 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.

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

1Kings 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, gathered together an army including horses and chariots from a coalition of 32 kings (rulers, probably of smaller tribes) and set siege to Samaria. He then sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, telling him that he was going to take possession of his gold, silver, and his best looking wives and children.

1Kings 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.

Ahab answered by declaring that Benhadad could have it all. He knew he was vastly outnumbered and could not win.

I wonder if Jezebel knew about his response. Was she exempt because she was queen?

1Kings 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;

1Kings 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.

Benhadad sent messengers a second time to Ahab. He basically said: Even though I told you I was only going to take your silver, gold and best looking wives and children, I have decided to send my servants to also search your house and the houses of your servants to take away the things that you value the most.

1Kings 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.

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

1Kings 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.

The second message upset Ahab. It seems he did not mind giving up his wives and children, but he certainly did not want to give up his favorite treasures.

Today, that would probably equate with his fancy cars and technology gadgets. He met with the elders of the land and told them about the messages.

The elders urged him not to consent. So Ahab sent the messengers back to tell Benhadad that he had asked for too much. He would not comply.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

Benhadad then sent back a threatening message. He swore with an oath by his gods, that he would attack with an army so large that the dust of Samaria would only allow each a handful.

Ahab basically responded: I wouldn't boast until the battle is over. Or...Don't count your chickens before they hatch (as we would say today).

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

When Benhadad received Ahab's answer, he was enjoying a drinking fest with the kings that formed his coalition. He ordered his soldiers to prepare for battle against Samaria.

Meanwhile, an unnamed prophet came to Ahab with a message from the LORD. He remarked about the vast army arrayed against him. He then declared that the LORD would give him the victory that day to once again attest to the truth that He is the LORD, the self-existent eternal God.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

Ahab basically asked how the LORD would do this. The prophet declared that the LORD would use the young men that serve the district governors. Ahab then asked who should attack first and was told that he should.

So Ahab numbered the young men and found that there were 232. He then numbered the fighting men of Israel and found 7000. They went out to meet the enemy at noon. Meanwhile, Benhadad and his cohorts were getting drunk.

Clarke adds possible insight: "These were probably the king's life or body guards; not all the militia, but two hundred and thirty of them who constituted the royal guard in Samaria."

Sometimes I can't help but wish there was a prophet of God available to answer questions so immediately and specifically.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

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

1Kings 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.

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

The 232 young men went out first, and Benhadad's lookouts warned him that troops from Samaria were headed their way. Benhadad ordered that they be captured alive whether they approached in peace or for war. The army of 7000 then followed the young men. The men of Israel killed the men they encountered, until the rest of the Syrians fled in fear with the men of Israel in pursuit. Benhadad escaped on a horse with his cavalry. Ahab led the attack on the horses and chariots; they destroyed the Syrians in a great victory.

So where are the words of praise and gratitude to the LORD God of Israel?

1Kings 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 same prophet came again to Ahab and told him to get prepared because Benhadad and his troops would return the next year.

Principle: God expects His people to stay prepared and ready to engage the enemy even as they depend on Him to fight for them and through them.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 20:24 And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his

place, and put captains in their rooms:

1Kings 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.

Benhadad's servants explained to their king that the men of Israel's gods were the gods of the hills. This was why they had lost. They advised the king to engage them in battle in the plain, and they would surely overcome them. They also advised him to replace the kings with military commanders. He should prepare an army that matched the one he had lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. By choosing to fight the men of Israel in the plain, they would prove to be stronger.

The king did as his servants advised.

1Kings 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. 1Kings 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 next year, Benhadad took his troops and encamped at Aphek to engage the Israelites in battle. The troops of Israel resembled little flocks of goats in comparison to the massive army of the Syrians.

1Kings 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. 1Kings 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. 1Kings 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.

Another man of God came to Ahab with another message from the LORD. He basically said: The Syrians have claimed that I am the God of the hills, but not of the valleys. I will respond to such lies by giving you the victory yet again. You (and they) will know that I am the LORD over all of My creation.

For seven days the two armies did nothing. On the evening of the seventh day the battle began. The children of Israel killed 100,000 Syrian footmen in one day. The rest of the Syrian troops fled to the city of Aphek, but the wall fell and crushed 27,000 more. Benhadad escaped into the city proper and hid.

Can anyone honestly deny that Israel's victory was a miracle of God? I have a set of DVDs entitled, "Against All Odds: Israel Survives." I believe the evidence

proves that the LORD is still working miracles today on behalf of yet unrepentant Israel as He nears the conclusion of the fulfillment of His plan that will culminate in the return of the LORD Jesus as King of kings.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.*

Benhadad's servants proposed that they throw themselves on the mercy of the king since they had heard that the kings of Israel were usually merciful. They suggested that they present themselves clothed in sackcloth and with ropes on their heads (a sign of submission). They went to Ahab and told him that Benhadad asked that his life be spared. Ahab asked if he was really still alive and then acknowledged him as his brother.

Ahab just didn't have much common sense it seems. He's so ready to forgive and forget the actions of this evil king that had threatened him, his family and his kingdom with such obvious disdain in arrogance and pride.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

The men took Ahab's response as meaning that he would spare Benhadad's life, and affirmed that he was indeed Ahab's brother. The king then instructed them to go and bring Benhadad to him. When he arrived, Ahab took him up into his chariot. Benhadad promised to restore the cities to Israel that his father had captured. He also promised to allocate a portion of Damascus to the Israelites to establish places of business as his father had done in Samaria. Ahab then promised to set him free under those terms. They then affirmed their covenant.

The NIV Commentary adds some possible insight: "One reason for Ahab's leniency toward Ben-Hadad may lie in his appraisal of the troublesome political situation of those days. Already Assyria was on the move against the Aramean tribes. By joining in forces with Ben-Hadad, Ahab hoped to have a sufficiently large force of chariots and infantry to stand up to the Assyrians."

If that is true, he was totally disregarding what the LORD had done on his behalf. He should have realized that turning to the LORD in faith and repentance would have made him and his kingdom far more secure.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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*.

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

Enter on the scene a “certain man” of the sons of the prophets. He asked one of his associates to hit him, but the man refused. He told the man that because he had refused, a lion would kill him that very day; and it did. He then approached another man and asked him to hit him. The man hit him so hard that it wounded him. This was evidently what the man of God wanted. He then disguised himself with a covering or bandage on his head and went out to wait for the king to pass by.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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*.

When he saw the king, he called out to him. He told the king that he was in the midst of battle when a soldier brought a man to him and told him to guard him with his life. If he allowed the man to escape, he would forfeit his life or pay a talent of silver. He continued to explain that he got very busy, and the man escaped. The king told him that he would be judged as had been decreed and he had reported to him.

1Kings 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.

1Kings 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.

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

The man of God quickly pulled the bandage from off his face, and the king recognized him as one of the prophets. He then told Ahab that because he had let Benhadad live, a man that the LORD had appointed to utter destruction, he had forfeited his life and the lives of his people.

Commentators note that the man of God used the same method that Nathan had used against David in confronting him concerning his actions toward Uriah and Bathsheba (see 2Samuel 12). He basically got him to pronounce sentence upon himself.

Ahab went back home to Samaria both sad and angry.

It seems he at least had enough of a healthy fear of God that he did no harm to the prophet.