

1 Kings 20:1-43

'A Man Whom I Appointed to Utter Destruction'

In the previous chapter, God gives Elijah a word of hope: Elijah would soon anoint a man called Hazael to be king over Syria (in place of Benhadad) and then anoint Jehu as king over Israel in the place of Ahab. That would mean that Ahab and Jezebel would be dethroned, although how that would happen was not spelled out for Elijah.

In this chapter nothing has changed yet. Ahab and his queen Jezebel still rule over Israel, and Benhadad is king of Syria. But events are moving to bring God's saying to pass.

God was allowing Ahab's evil to fully come to fruition, in the same way that God squeezed/hardened Pharaoh's heart and why Israel could not take the promised land because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (**Genesis 15:16**).

Has our own iniquity been revealed to us in its fullness? Usually God only gives a glimpse of the depth of our evil - Like the rabbis said, the search for leaven before Passover is conducted with a candle, because using a torch we would be overwhelmed by the amount we find.

But the scriptures tell us that we're no better than Ahab:

- **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

War with Syria

1 Kings 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."

This was Benhadad the second, the son of that earlier Benhadad, whom Asa sent for to help him against Baasha (**1 Kings 15:18**).

Why are there 32 kings? Possibly because most adults have 32 permanent teeth. These kings would be the "teeth" which Benhadad planned to use to help him bite and devour Israel in battle.

Benhadad sends a message to Ahab. It assumed Ahab realizes the Syrian king's superiority in troops and demands that he give over everything he has to Benhadad. Benhadad in fact assumes he already owns it.

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

"Wives" because Ahab probably had lesser wives and concubines alongside Jezebel.

A new side of Ahab emerges - No doubt he was still confused by Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal. Faced with a serious foreign threat, he caves. He reveals himself to be a cowardly and unwise leader

Ahab responds to the message, "according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have."

This emboldens Benhadad to further humiliate Ahab. He says he intends to not wait for Ahab to deliver, but he will send an armed contingent into the city to take possession of whatever they want... the next day! (**1 Kings 20:6**)

Maybe Ahab hoped to spare the people the ravages of an invading army by agreeing to pay tribute to Syria. Now the Syrian army was being sent to pillage and loot everyone in the city.

Now the elders and the people of the city urged him to resist.

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

Under pressure from the people, Ahab changes his mind, and turns down the whole deal from Benhadad.

1 Kings 20:9 - "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."

Benhadad is claiming that his army numbers more than all the dust of Samaria.

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."

i.e. don't count your chickens before they're hatched. The victory is not always to the strong.

So Benhadad makes preparation for an attack.

A Prophet with a Promise

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.'

The rabbis said this prophet was Micaiah, who also shows up later - perhaps one of the hundred that hid in the cave.

When Ahab asks how this can happen and who will lead, the prophet says "You will."

This put Ahab in the awkward position as a Baal worshiper to trust in Yahweh as he goes forth to 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."

The number 232 is the gematria value of the phrase "The Word of YHVH," "Let there be light" and the word "brightness."

The entire army numbered 7,000, the same number of those who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Ahab, apparently, did not go out to lead them, but stayed behind.

Benhadad and his 32 kings were drunk and carousing at midday.

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

Once Ahab saw that the Syrians were falling back, he came out with his royal guard and joined the fray.

Slay Your 'Man'

One important note - Each of the 7,000 in the army and each of the 232 princes "slew every one his man."

Victory is achieved when we accept our death on the cross and "slay our man." The old man Adam, the flesh, the "natural man" has to die. Paul tells us to "reckon yourselves as dead" (**Romans 6:11**)

- **Galatians 2:20** - "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

I believe this truth is embedded in the story here for our edification.

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."

And already, the Syrians were rationalizing their defeat and the humiliation of their gods.

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."

Divinities were always linked to the places they were worshipped. An invisible God who was sovereign everywhere in the universe was beyond the capacity of the ancient mind to grasp - even for most Israelites much of the time.

Benhadad was advised to kick out the 32 kings who were given over to self indulgence and fought for personal glory. Instead, he replaced them with "captains" of a lower class, who he hoped would be tougher, and fight for honor and the good of the nation.

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."

Spiritually, the enemy will return, to replace the 7,232 'men' slain. Benhadad, as a type of the Evil One, wants to replace those who were "reckoned as dead," to put the Old Man back in charge of your life. As Paul says, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor" (**Galatians 2:18**)

Satan wants to reinstate control, set up the old idolatries and high places that ruled our lives and return us to living by the value systems of the world.

Sure enough, the next year Benhadad went to war again.

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."

The two flocks facing the mighty Syrian army were the princes who numbered 232 and the army of Israel at 7,000 - same as before.

Another Prophetic Word

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."

After seven days, the battle was enjoined.

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 an hundred thousand footmen in one day."

The seventh day has special significance in Jewish tradition. It doesn't say this was a

sabbath - it was against the Law to work or fight on the sabbath. But the number seven has special significance in the Bible.

The seventh day is a day of rest. Jesus fulfilled this sabbath rest as He lay in the grave. It is only from a position of rest that we become a conduit for the power of God.

So the battle begins and a hundred thousand Syrians were killed, and things just went from bad to worse for Benhadad.

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 Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber."

The rabbis said the Lord was fighting with Israel from Heaven. The city walls collapsed, perhaps by an earthquake at God's hand, killing 27,000 of the remaining enemies who had been sheltering there.

Benhadad desperately burrowed "into a chamber within a chamber" to hide.

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."

Apparently the Jewish kings had a reputation for justice as well as clemency - even the bad kings like Ahab were a cut above the surrounding pagan rulers in that regard.

Benhadad sent his servants and stewards, decked for humility sackcloth and ashes and with a rope around their necks, explain that Benhadad is begging for his life to be spared. So Ahab calls for Benhadad to be brought to him.

1 Kings 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."

Ahab is apparently touched by the humility of Benhadad. Or maybe he just enjoyed seeing him grovel and preferred having him remain as Israel's vassal. So they struck a deal, a "covenant" with Benhadad giving up certain cities.

This is similar to King Saul's sparing of Agag after defeating the Amalekites (**1 Samuel 15**).

A Prophetic Buzzkill

1 Kings 20:35-36 - "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. 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.

This unnamed prophet uses a parable to show Ahab that God wanted him to punish Benhadad once he had been taken into Ahab's control. He was expected to "smite" him. The prophet waits and using a ruse gets to talk to the king, where he delivers his message.

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."

Benhadad - like Satan, like Pharaoh, like our old man - is "appointed for destruction." When we make a deal with the enemy, a covenant with hell, we incur God's wrath.

- **Isaiah 28:15-16** - "Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves ... (but) I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the level. Hail will sweep away your refuge of lies, and water will flood your hiding place...."

Ahab is a complex character, unlike Jezebel. Although he is a promoter of Baal worship, he saw the power of God displayed against the prophets of Baal. Now he believes this unnamed prophet. He vacillates between idolatry and true faith in Yahweh. He "halts between two opinions," (**1 Kings 18:21**) like Elijah said most of the rest of Israel had been doing.

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

Ahab didn't even have time to enjoy his military victory. He couldn't shake the prophet's pronouncement of doom.

Summary: The thread running through this story for us is the need to "slay each his man" and go to the cross.

- **Luke 9:23** - "If any man will come after me, let him deny (abandon) himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."