

1 Kings 20 - Ahab Defeats the Syrians

II. The divided kingdom from the North-South division until the Assyrian invasion (1 Kings 12:1—2 Kings 17:41)

(12) Israel during Elijah's Ministry (1 Kings 17:1—2 Kings 1:18)

(C) Ahab's ongoing covenant rebellion (1 Kings 20:1—22:40)

(a) Ahab's foolish treaty with the Arameans (20:1-29)

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(a) Ahab's foolish treaty with the Arameans (20:1-29)

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1 A little while later, King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered an army of cavalry and chariots in a military confederacy with 32 kings, invaded Samaria, and set up siege encampments there.

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 the first of three battles recorded in 1 Kings (Cf. 20:26-43; 22:1-38) between Ahab and Ben-Hadad II, king of Aram, Israel's northern neighbor

— Ben-Hadad II was evidently the son of Ben-Hadad I whom Asa had hired to attack Baasha some years earlier (Cf. 15:18, 20; 20:34)

— Allied with Ben-Hadad II were 32 kings, probably rulers of neighboring city-states. Together they went up the hill of Samaria and attacked it, placing it under siege.

2 Then he sent messengers to the city to Ahab, king of Israel, and said to him, "This is what Ben-hadad says:

2 Then he sent messengers to the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad,

2 Then he sent envoys to visit King Ahab of Israel and told him, "This is what Ben-hadad says:

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

3 'Your silver and your gold **are mine**; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.'

3 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.'

3 'Your silver and gold belong to me. So do the most beautiful of your wives and children.'

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

- Ben-Hadad then sent messengers to Ahab with his demands for withdrawal

- "...are mine" - Ben-Hadad's word meant that Israel was a client state to the more powerful Aramean state

— This wasn't a political formality...it was a demand for complete surrender of everything of value, any person of worth, of whatever was pleasant in Ahab's eyes, to be handed over to the foreign monarch

4 And the king of Israel replied, "As you say, my lord, O king; **I am yours**, as well as all that I have."

4 The king of Israel replied, "It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have."

4 "Whatever you want, your majesty," the king of Israel answered. "I belong to you, as does everything I own."

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.

- "...I am yours" - Ahab's reply acknowledged Ben-Hadad's statement in v3, that Israel was the subservient party in this treaty

5 Then the messengers returned and said, "Ben-hadad says this: 'I did indeed send *word* to you, saying, "You shall give me your silver, your gold, your wives, and your children";

5 Then the messengers returned and said, "Thus says Ben-hadad, 'Surely, I sent to you saying, "You shall give me your silver and your gold and your wives and your children,"

5 After delivering Ahab's answer, the envoys returned with this message: "This is what Ben-hadad says: 'I've sent my envoys to you to tell you that your silver, gold, wives, and children are to be given to me.

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 but about this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and they will take in their hands everything that is pleasing to your eyes, and take *it all* away."

6 but about this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and whatever is desirable in your eyes, they will take in their hand and carry away."

6 About this time tomorrow, I'll send my servants to you, and they'll search through your palace and your servants' houses. Whatever is important to you will be seized and taken away."

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.

- Evidently Ben-Hadad regretted that he had demanded such "easy" terms after Ahab had accepted them. He felt he could get much more than that. So he sent his messengers back with a new demand, namely, that Ben-Hadad's men be allowed to enter the palace and the officials' houses and plunder them.

7 Then the king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said, "Please be aware and see that this man is looking for trouble; for he sent me *his demand* for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold, and I did not refuse him."

7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, "Please observe and see how this man is looking for trouble; for he sent to me for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him."

7 Then the king of Israel called together all of the elders of the land and told them, "Please note that this man is here looking for trouble. He sent a message to me, demanding my wives, my children, and my silver and gold, and I haven't refused him."

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.

- Ahab assembled the elders of the land and pointed out that Ben-Hadad was looking for trouble

— The king had not refused Ben-Hadad's demands for his own most valued possessions, but now the Aramean enemy wanted everything of value he could lay his hands on

8 Then all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen nor consent."

8 All the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent."

8 "Don't listen to him," all the elders and the people replied. "And don't agree to his terms."

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

9 So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'Everything that you sent as a *demand* to your servant at the first, I will do; but this thing I cannot do.'" Then the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

9 So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant at the first I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" And the messengers departed and brought him word again.

9 So he told Ben-hadad's envoys, "Tell his majesty the king, 'Everything that you asked for the first time I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" So the envoys left to deliver Ahab's response. They returned a little while later.

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.

- Ahab sent his decision back to Ben-Hadad through the messengers: he would hold to his first promise, but not to this second demand

10 Ben-hadad sent *word* to him and said, "May the gods do so to me and more so, if the dust of Samaria will be enough for handfuls for all the people who follow me."

10 Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "May the gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me."

10 Beh-hadad sent this message back: "May the gods do so to me, and more than that also, if the dust that remains of Samaria is enough to fill up a few handfuls for all of the armies at my disposal."

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.

- Shortly thereafter, Ahab received a third message from his adversary

- The Arameans now threatened to destroy Samaria totally. Like Jezebel with Elijah, Ben-Hadad risked his life in an oath (Cf. 19:2; see also 2:23).

11 Then the king of Israel replied, "Tell *him*, 'He who straps on *his weapons* had better not boast like one who takes *them* off.'"

11 Then the king of Israel replied, "Tell *him*, 'Let not him who girds on *his armor* boast like him who takes *it* off.'"

11 But the king of Israel replied, "Tell him, 'The one who is starting to strap on his battle armor should never brag like the one who is taking it off.'"

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 when *Ben-hadad* heard this message, while he was drinking with the kings in the temporary shelters, he said to his servants, "Take *your* positions." So they took *their* positions against the city.

12 When *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he was drinking with the kings in the temporary shelters, he said to his servants, "Station *yourselves*." So they stationed *themselves* against the city.

12 Ben-hadad received Ahab's response while he was celebrating with his kings in the battle pavilions. "Sound 'Battle Stations!'" he ordered, and the army began to prepare their attack.

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.

- Ben-Hadad's greed and boasting seem to have been heightened since he and his kings were under the influence of strong drink

— Since negotiations had broken down, Ben-Hadad prepared to attack Samaria

13 Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, and said, "This is what the LORD says: 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I am going to hand them over to you today, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

13 Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

13 Right about then, a prophet approached King Ahab of Israel and told him, "This is what the LORD says: 'You see all of this great big army, do you? Well now, I'm going to deliver them all right into your hand, and you will learn that I am the LORD!'"

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.

- Meanwhile, a prophet, whose name is not given, went to Ahab with a message from the LORD

— God, he said, was going to deliver the huge Aramean army into Ahab's hand so Ahab would know that He is the LORD

— God's goodness on this occasion obviously was not prompted by Ahab's godliness, but by God's own grace

— This was another step in His seeking to get His people to acknowledge that He is the LORD

— The danger that Ben-Hadad posed, as his demands on Ahab continued to escalate, made the Israelite king receptive to the directives of Yahweh's prophet

14 But Ahab said, "By whom?" So he said, "The LORD says this: 'By the **young men** of the leaders of the provinces.'" Then he said, "**Who will begin the battle?**" And he said, "You will."

14 Ahab said, "By whom?" So he said, "Thus says the LORD, 'By the young men of the rulers of the provinces.'" Then he said, "Who shall begin the battle?" And he answered, "You."

14 "By whom?" Ahab asked. "This is what the LORD says," the prophet replied. "'By the young men who serve as officials within the provinces.'" "Who is to begin the battle?" Ahab asked. "You," the prophet answered.

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.

- "...young men" - *na'ar*, servants of these rulers; young male servants, not elite soldiers (Cf. 3:7; 11:17; 14:3,17,28; 18:43; 19:3)

— God ordered a relatively weak force to oppose the Arameans initially, as He had done in the past (Judges 7:7; 1 Sam 17:33), so it would be obvious that He granted the victory

- "...Who will begin the battle?" - who will lead these servants into battle? God responded: You (Ahab)

— Ahab willingly followed God's orders since he had no other hope

15 So he mustered the young men of the leaders of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered all the people, all the sons of Israel: seven thousand.

15 Then he mustered the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered all the people, *even* all the sons of Israel, 7,000.

15 So Ahab gathered together 232 young men who served as officials within the provinces and then mustered 7,000 soldiers from among the Israelis.

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 They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who were helping him.

16 They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him.

16 They attacked at noon, just as Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the battle pavilions, along with the 32 kings who had joined him.

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.

17 The young men of the leaders of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out *scouts*, and they reported to him, saying, "Men have come out from Samaria."

17 The young men of the rulers of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out and they told him, saying, "Men have come out from Samaria."

17 The young men who served as officials within the provinces led the charge, and somebody informed Ben-hadad, "Some men have come out from Samaria."

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 Then he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive *as well*."

18 Then he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

18 "Take them alive, whether they've come in peace or not," he ordered.

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 *men* went out from the city, the young men of the leaders of the provinces, and the army which followed them.

19 So these went out from the city, the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and the army which followed them.

19 Meanwhile, as the young men who served as officials within the provinces left the city, their army followed after them.

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

- Evidently it was not clear to Ben-Hadad if the 232 men approaching him were coming to talk peace or whether they were intending to fight

— This probably resulted in his being unprepared for their attack

— The Israelite army (of 7,000; Cf. v15) followed along behind the young officers and proceeded to rout the Arameans

20 And they killed, each one, his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad the king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen.

20 They killed each his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen.

20 Each man struck down his opponent, and the Arameans ran away with Israel in pursuit. King Ben-hadad of Aram escaped on horseback with the help of his cavalry.

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 The king of Israel also went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans in a great slaughter.

21 The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter.

21 The king of Israel went out and attacked the cavalry and chariots and killed the Arameans in a massive victory.

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

22 Then the prophet approached the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, show yourself courageous and be aware and see what you have to do; for at the turn of the year the king of Aram will march against you."

22 Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself and observe and see what you have to do; for at the turn of the year the king of Aram will come up against you."

22 The prophet approached the king of Israel and told him, "Go replenish your forces and prepare for the future, because early this next year the king of Aram will attack you again."

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.

- After Ahab had returned to Samaria the prophet went to him again. He warned the king, undoubtedly by the word of the Lord, that he should expect Ben-Hadad to attack again in the spring, the most popular time of the year for kings to wage war (Cf. 2 Sam 11:1).

— In view of this, Ahab was warned to build up his defenses

— God was telling Ahab, I have given you victory now, but be careful that you don't return to the worship of Baal

23 Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the mountains; for that reason they were stronger than we. But let us fight them in the plain, *and* we will certainly be stronger than they.

23 Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we; but rather let us fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we will be stronger than they.

23 Sure enough, the advisors to the king of Aram told him, "Their gods are mountain gods. That's why they were stronger than we were. But when we fight them on the plains, we're certain to be the stronger army!"

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.

- In the camp of the Arameans, Ben-Hadad was also receiving advice

— His counselors concluded that they had lost the battle because Israel's gods were gods of the hills. If they would fight Israel on the plains these gods would not help them and the Arameans would win.

24 Carry out this plan: remove the kings, each from his place, and put governors in their place,

24 Do this thing: remove the kings, each from his place, and put captains in their place,

24 So do this: remove the kings from command⁹ and replace them with captains.

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

25 and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, *and* we will certainly be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.

25 and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.

25 Then replace the army that you lost, horse-for-horse and chariot-for-chariot. We'll fight them on the plains, and we're certain to be the stronger army." Ben-hadad listened to what they had to say and carried out their advice.

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.

- They also advised the king to replace the 32 allied kings with regular army commanders and to build up his forces to their former numbers

— Ben-Hadad followed this advice and prepared to return to Samaria the following spring

26 So at the turn of the year Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

26 At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

26 Early the next year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and invaded Aphek in a battle against Israel.

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.

- As the Lord had revealed (v22), the next spring (856 BC) Ben-Hadad assembled his troops and proceeded to Aphek

— Several towns in Israel bore this name (meaning "a fortress"). This one may have been located on the tablelands east of the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee) between Samaria and Damascus (modern day Golan Heights)

— This was not the same Aphek where Saul had battled the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1; 29:1)

— Ben-Hadad chose a flat battleground this time, as his counselors had advised

27 And the sons of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went to meet them; and the sons of Israel camped opposite them like two little flocks of goats, while the Arameans filled the country.

27 The sons of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went to meet them; and the sons of Israel camped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Arameans filled the country.

27 The Israelis were mustered, equipped with provisions, and sent out to fight. The Israeli encampment looked like two little flocks of goats compared to how the Aramean encampments filled the countryside!

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 Aramean forces greatly outnumbered the Israeli forces

28 Then a man of God approached and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, "This is what the LORD says: 'Since the Arameans have said, "The LORD is a god of mountains, but He is not a god of valleys," therefore I will hand over to you all this great multitude, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

28 Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Arameans have said, "The LORD is a god of *the* mountains, but He is not a god of *the* valleys," therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"

28 Right about then, a man of God approached and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans keep saying "The LORD is a mountain god, but isn't a valley god," I'm going to deliver this entire vast army right into your control, so you'll learn that I really am the LORD.'"

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.

- The man of God, evidently the same prophet (v13,22), informed Ahab that Israel would win this battle

— Again, he said that the Lord's purpose was to prove to Ahab, as well as the Arameans and the Israelites, that He is the LORD (Cf. v13)

29 So they camped, one opposite the other, for seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans a hundred thousand foot soldiers in a single day.

29 So they camped one over against the other seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day.

29 So they remained in opposing camps for seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle commenced, and the Israelis killed 100,000 Aramean infantry troops in a single day.

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 striking parallels to the conquest of Jericho, as the interval of seven days before the battle and the falling of the city walls, clearly identified the battles at Samaria and Aphek as holy war.

30 But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men who were left. And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city, *going from one* inner room to another.

30 But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on 27,000 men who were left. And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city into an inner chamber.

30 The rest of the Aramean army retreated into Aphek, but the city wall collapsed on 27,000 soldiers who had taken shelter there. Ben-hadad himself ran away and hid inside a closet somewhere in the city.

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.

- God enabled the soldiers of Israel to defeat their enemy, but He also used supernatural means to assist them

— 100 casualties a day in ancient warfare was considered heavy, but God gave His people 1000x that number that day

It is important to recognize that *all* of Israel's military victories were won by obeying the Lord. Of no other nation can such a statement be made.

31 But his servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Please let's put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will let you live."

31 His servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings, please let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will save your life."

31 "Look, now," his advisors suggested, "we've heard that the Israeli kings are merciful. So let's clothe ourselves with sackcloth, tie our hair back with ropes, and go out to the king of Israel. Maybe he'll spare your life."

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 put **sackcloth** around their waists and **ropes** on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "**Your servant** Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And *Ahab* said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

32 So they girded sackcloth on their loins and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

32 So they put on some sackcloth, tied their hair back with ropes, and approached the king of Israel. "Your servant Ben-hadad says this," they said. "Please let me live." "Is he still alive?" Ahab asked. "He's my brother."

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.

- "...sackcloth" - expressed remorse

- "...ropes" - indicated servitude; a sign of captivity or subjection

- "...Your servant" - this is what Ben-Hadad was willing to become if Ahab would have mercy on him

33 Now the men took this as a *good* omen, and quickly accepting it from him, they said, "Your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go, bring him." Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he had him mount the chariot.

33 Now the men took this as an omen, and quickly catching his word said, "Your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go, bring him." Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he took him up into the chariot.

33 Ben-hadad's advisors, quickly analyzing the signs in what Ahab was saying, responded, "Yes, your brother Ben-hadad."

"Go get him," Ahab responded. So Ben-hadad came out to him, and Ahab took him up into his personal chariot.

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.

- Ahab said he was willing to receive Ben-Hadad as his "brother." He was, of course, not his real brother; Ahab had in mind a treaty for defense against Assyria in which he and Ben-Hadad would join as brothers.

— Trained in the technique of discerning the capricious royal will, the servants regarded the query of Ahab as a good omen and hastily laid hold upon it. Thus Ahab bound himself by an oath to save Ben-hadad's life.

— This was not only the greatest injustice to his own subjects, but open opposition to God, who had foretold the victory and had delivered the enemy into his hands

— Ahab's peace treaty with Ben-Hadad was contrary to God's Law, which called for the deaths of Israel's enemies (Deut 20:10-15) (Cf. Saul's refusal to execute Agag, 1 Sam 15:9)

34 And *Ben-hadad* said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you can make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." *Ahab said*, "And I will let you go with this covenant." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

34 *Ben-hadad* said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." *Ahab said*, "And I will let you go with this covenant." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

34 Ben-hadad made this promise to Ahab: "I will restore the cities that my ancestors took from your ancestors. You'll be able to build streets named after yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria."

"With this promise I will release you," Ahab replied. So Ahab made a treaty with Ben-hadad and let him go.

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.

- Quick to placate his enemy, Ben-Hadad pledged to return the cities his father Ben-Hadad I had taken from Ahab's father (predecessor) Baasha (Cf. 15:20)
- In addition, the Aramean king offered trade privileges to Ahab in Damascus which Ben-Hadad's father had enjoyed in Samaria
- The two kings formalized the treaty and with this promise of non-aggression, Ahab let Ben-Hadad go back home
- Ahab figured that it would be better for Israel to make a treaty than to obey God's Law (Cf. Ex 23:32)
- Perhaps one of the reasons Ahab was eager to make this treaty was that the Assyrian Empire was expanding toward Israel from the northeast and an alliance with Aram would help secure Israel's safety

Three years later (853 BC) Ahab and Ben-Hadad faced their mutual foe, Assyria, led by mighty King Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC) and repelled him at Qarqar on the Orontes River in Aram. Ahab supplied 10,000 troops and 2,000 chariots for this coalition. This battle is not referred to in Scripture, but a record of it written by Shalmaneser has survived. It is now in the British Museum. [See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 278-9]

35 Now a man from the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of the LORD, "Please strike me." But the man refused to strike him.

35 Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of the LORD, "Please strike me." But the man refused to strike him.

35 Right about then, one of the members of the guild of prophets told another through a message from the LORD: "Please strike me!" But the man refused to do so,

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.

- The sons of the prophets were students in the schools of the prophets, well-established institutions in Israel designed to perpetuate the Law of Moses and the Word of the Lord
- One of these young men received an assignment from the Lord. His unusual request that his companion injure him with a weapon was by the word of the LORD.
- The friend's refusal, though understandable, was an act of disobedient rebellion against the Lord

36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not listened to the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as you leave me, a lion will kill you." And as soon as he left him a lion found him and killed him.

36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not listened to the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as you have departed from me, a lion will kill you." And as soon as he had departed from him a lion found him and killed him.

36 so he told him, "Because you haven't obeyed the LORD's voice, as soon as you leave here, a lion will kill you." As soon as the man left, a lion found him and killed 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.

- What happened to the man who refused to strike the prophet was exactly what would happen to Ahab, and for the same reason: disobedience to the Word of the LORD

— The implication is clear: if disobedient prophets cannot escape God's judgment, then disobedient kings certainly will not either

— Compare Samuel's first words against Saul for his disobedience in sparing Agag (1 Sam 13)

— God again used a lion to execute his judgment (Cf. 13:24)

37 Then he found another man and said, "Please strike me." And the man struck him, injuring him.

37 Then he found another man and said, "Please strike me." And the man struck him, wounding him.

37 Later, he found another man and told him, "Please strike me!" So the man struck him and wounded 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 road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

38 Then the prophet left and waited for the king to pass by, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes.

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

- The prophet disguised himself using a headband over his eyes. Without this, the king would have recognized him immediately as a prophet (Cf. 20:41).

— Interestingly this is the second time in 1 Kings when a person disguised himself (Cf. 14:2). Later Ahab disguised himself in battle (22:30).

39 And as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man; if for any reason he goes missing, then your life shall be *forfeited* in place of his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.'

39 As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man; if for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.'

39 As the king was passing by, he cried out to the king and told him, "Your servant went out into the middle of the battle, and a soldier turned aside, brought a prisoner to me, and told me, 'Guard this man. If he turns up missing for any reason at all, you'll pay for it with your life or be fined one talent of silver.'

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.

- Apparently Ahab thought he had met this man before. The prophet told the king that he, the prophet, was told in combat to guard a prisoner who got away. The prophet added that either his own life was to have been taken or he had to pay a talent (ca. 75 pounds) of silver.

40 Now while your servant was busy here and there, he disappeared." And the king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself determined *it*."

40 While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." And the king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided *it*."

40 While your servant was busy here and there, the prisoner escaped."

The king told him, "By your actions you've earned the proper judgment!"

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.

- Ahab quickly assessed the storyteller's guilt; this was an obvious case of negligence

41 Then he quickly took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him, that he was *one* of the prophets.

41 Then he hastily took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets.

41 Then the prophet quickly tore off his bandage, and the king of Israel recognized him as being one of the prophets.

41 And he hastened, and took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets.

42 And *the prophet* said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Since you have let go from *your* hand the man I had designated for destruction, your life shall be *forfeited* in place of his life, and your people in place of his people.'"

42 He said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have let go out of *your* hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'"

42 He told the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because you let the man whom I had dedicated to destruction go free, therefore your life is to be forfeited for his life, and your people for his people.'"

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.

- The king responded to the prophet in words that condemned himself...God would later kill Ahab for not killing Ben-Hadad (22:37)

— The prophet, immediately revealing his identity, told the king he had been negligent in his responsibility to obey the order received from God to execute Ben-Hadad

— Though this order is not recorded in the Biblical text, it is clear that Ahab had received it

— Rather than obeying the Lord, which probably would have resulted in a final end of the conflict with the vexing Aramean army, Ahab chose to follow his own plan.

— He believed Ben-Hadad's help against Assyria would be more valuable to Israel than Ben-Hadad's death. Therefore Ahab would forfeit his own life in exchange for Ben-Hadad's (Cf. 1 Kings 22:37).

— Ahab foolishly chose to follow his own plan instead of obeying the Lord

This verse is not given to teach Christian morality in the event of a situation involving prisoners of war. Rather, the spiritual principle set forth is that believers must not extend toleration, even in the name of mercy, to the forces of Satan. It was within the power of Ahab to forever end the life and death struggle between Syria and Israel. Now with Ben-hadad free, the struggle would continue, with disastrous results.

43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and furious, and came to Samaria.

43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria.

43 After hearing this, the king of Israel rode back to his palace in Samaria, frustrated and in a foul mood.

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

