

1 Kings 20 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

1 Kings 20:1
1 Kings 20:2
1 Kings 20:3
1 Kings 20:4
1 Kings 20:5
1 Kings 20:6
1 Kings 20:7
1 Kings 20:8
1 Kings 20:9
1 Kings 20:10
1 Kings 20:11
1 Kings 20:12
1 Kings 20:13
1 Kings 20:14
1 Kings 20:15
1 Kings 20:16
1 Kings 20:17
1 Kings 20:18
1 Kings 20:19
1 Kings 20:20
1 Kings 20:21
1 Kings 20:22
1 Kings 20:23
1 Kings 20:24
1 Kings 20:25
1 Kings 20:26
1 Kings 20:27
1 Kings 20:28
1 Kings 20:29
1 Kings 20:30
1 Kings 20:31
1 Kings 20:32
1 Kings 20:33
1 Kings 20:34
1 Kings 20:35
1 Kings 20:36
1 Kings 20:37
1 Kings 20:38
1 Kings 20:39
1 Kings 20:40
1 Kings 20:41
1 Kings 20:42
1 Kings 20:43

Chart from recommended resource [Jensen's Survey of the OT](#) - used by permission
[1 Kings Chart](#) from Charles Swindoll

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

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(NOTE: Many consider Amaziah and Hezekiah as "good" kings)
SEE ALSO:
[ESV chart - kings of Israel - more information](#)
[ESV chart - kings of Judah - more information](#)
[Another Chart with Variable Dates for Reigns of Kings](#)

1 Kings 20:1 Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army, and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria and fought against it.

- **Benhadad:** 1Ki 15:18,20 2Ki 8:7-10 2Ch 16:2-4 Jer 49:27 Am 1:4
- **Thirty and two:** 1Ki 20:16,24 Ge 14:1-5 Jdg 1:7 Ezr 7:12 Isa 10:8 Eze 26:7 Da 2:37
- **and horses:** Ex 14:7 De 20:1 Jdg 4:3 1Sa 13:5 Isa 37:24
- **besieged:** Lev 26:25 De 28:52 2Ki 6:24-29 17:5,6
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Kings 15:18-20+ (KING ASA'S CAPITULATION TO ARAM) Then Asa took all the silver and the gold which were left in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the treasuries of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants. And King Asa sent them to Ben-hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying, 19 "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you a present of silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me." 20 So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah and all Chinneroth, besides all the land of Naphtali.

Dale Ralph Davis summarizes 1 Kings 20-22 - We must therefore realize how the Bible writer has arranged the last three chapters of 1 Kings. As he united chapters 17-19 around the 'God war', so he combines chapters 20-22 into another triad in which each chapter emphasizes the failure of Ahab and how the word of God stands opposed to him. Because of Ahab's spineless moderation, both Ahab and Israel stand under doom (1Ki 20:42); because of his heartless oppression, his household will be exterminated (1Ki 21:21-24); and because of his thick-headed obtuseness, his life is forfeit (1Ki 22:19-23, 29-38). No other king receives such a literary battering from the sacred writer, but no other king the likes of Ahab had come along (1Ki 21:20, 25; cf. 16:30, 33). Chapters 20-22 then intend to display Ahab's repeated (and fatal) opposition to the word of Yahweh.

[ESV Study Bible](#) has an interesting note - After Elijah's recruitment of Elisha, one expects to read of his anointing of Hazael as king over Syria and of Jehu as king over Israel (cf. 1Ki 19:15-18). Instead, one finds a story in which a different prophet appears and in which a different king of Syria (Ben-hadad) loses a war with Ahab. The message of ch. 19 is thus underlined: **Elijah is not the only servant of God left, in spite of what he has claimed (1Ki 19:10, 14); and the quiet ways of God must take their course for a while before the events spoken of in 1Ki 19:17 come to pass.** (Bolding added)

[Brian Bell](#) - It seemed that in the last chapter the only thing that we were waiting for was Ahab & Israel's judgment...but remember...our patient God, is a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires to grant life and forgiveness. As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness (turn your life around, reverse your evil ways), O people of Israel! Why should you die? Ezek.33:11 And so...see if you pick up on, in the story this evening...God's grace, mercy, loving kindness, wisdom given, His omnipotence, & His providence as we read through this. Their national religion faded. God's Word lost its place. So dry rot & decay ate away the strength of the national heart.

Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army - Ben-Hadad means "son of Hadad" where Hadad was a storm god of both Edom and Syria and is related to the Arabic root "make a loud rise," such as falling rain. The title Ben-hadad is like Pharaoh or Caesar which could refer to several individuals. [Aram](#) is another name for [Syria](#), the region north and east of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. *Ben-Hadad* Hadad or Adad was the god of storm and thunder, and, as was common in that epoch of history, kings were seen as sons of the primary god of the region. The reason for this war is not given but likely is because Ahab had refused to pay tribute to Ben-Hadad.

There are 3 Ben-hadads mentioned in the Bible.

1. in the time of Asa, King of Judah, 1 Kgs. 15:18,20; 2 Chr. 10:2,4
2. in the time of Ahab, King of Israel, 1 Kings 20; 2 Kgs. 6:24; 8:7,9
3. in the time of Amaziah, King of Judah and Jehoahaz, King of Israel, 2 Kgs. 13:3,24-25

GotQuestions.org says "In 1 Kings 20, Ben-Hadad once again attacks the northern kingdom of Israel, where Ahab is now the king. It is possible that this is the same Ben-Hadad who attacked in 1 Kings 15, or it could be a son, Ben-Hadad II. It seems that this time Ben-Hadad is attacking on his own without consideration for any treaty with Judah. And this time, although he had 32 kings helping him (1 Kings 20:1), he is defeated by King Ahab and the army of Israel. About three years later, Israel and Syria renew their conflict, leading to Ahab's final battle and death (1 Kings 22)."

Dilday - "Ben-Hadad may be the same king Asa enlisted against Baasha in 15:18; or he may be that king's son or grandson by the same name." (See [Preacher's Commentary - Vol. 09: 1 and 2 Kings - Page 29](#))

And there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots - While the kings were probably minor tribal chiefs, still the army would be a massive force arrayed against Samaria (cf "great multitude" in 1Ki 20:13), the capital of the Northern Kingdom. And later (1Ki 20:29, 30) we see 127,000 Arameans were killed substantiating the premise that this was a large force.

And he went up and besieged Samaria ("watch-mountain" or "watch-tower") **and fought against it** - **Samaria** was located about 30 miles north of Jerusalem and about 6 miles northwest of Shechem. **Samaria** is referred to as "the hill of Samaria" in 1Ki 16:24, and the elevation provided a natural defense with 3 steep slopes making assaults difficult and forcing invaders to lay siege instead of storming the city. In addition to having only one easy access point, Samaria had its own water supply.

QUESTION - Who were the Arameans?

ANSWER - *Aram* was the Hebrew designation for the nation of Syria, so the Arameans mentioned in the Bible are Syrians. In fact, some translations such as the ESV and KJV, when translating the Hebrew word for "Aramean," substitute the word *Syrian* instead (see 2 Kings 7:6). The Arameans lived on an elevated tableland, and the topography is reflected in the fact that the word [Aram](#) comes from a root meaning "heights." *Aram Naharaim* in Genesis 24:10 means "highland of the two rivers."

The borders of Aram encompassed a broad region immediately to the northeast of Israel, extending to the Euphrates River and including Mesopotamia. Among the major cities inhabited by ancient Arameans were Damascus (Genesis 14:15) and Hamath (Numbers 13:21). Much later, Syrian Antioch was built and is mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 11:19; 13:1). The various kingdoms comprising ancient Aram gradually unified under Damascus, which grew to be the most dominant of the Aramean kingdoms.

When Abraham sought a wife for his son Isaac, he sent a servant to the land of Aram to find Rebekah (Genesis 24:10; 25:20). Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, is called an Aramean in Genesis 31:10. Jacob himself is called "a wandering Aramean" in Deuteronomy 26:5, since both his mother and his grandfather were from Mesopotamia and therefore considered Arameans by the Hebrews.

During the reign of King David, the Arameans of Damascus came to the help of another group of Syrians. David defeated them, and the Arameans were forced to pay tribute (2 Samuel 8:5–6). Later, the Arameans joined forces with the Ammonites in war against Israel (2 Samuel 10). The Israelites defeated Aram again and kept them in subjugation. This arrangement lasted through the reign of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:21).

After the time of Solomon, the Arameans were a perennial thorn in Israel's side. They fought Israel during King Ahab's time, and Israel won (1 Kings 20). In another battle, however, they killed Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:34). They raided Israel (2 Kings 6:8) and later laid siege to the capital, Samaria (verse 24). Elisha predicted the atrocities that the Arameans would commit (2 Kings 8:12). The Arameans fought King Joram of Israel and wounded him (2 Kings 8:28). And they fought King Joash of Judah and wounded him (2 Chronicles 24:23–25). The eventual fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon was aided by the Arameans (2 Kings 24:2).

In a wonderful demonstration of God's grace and power, Elisha healed [Naaman the Syrian](#) of leprosy (2 Kings 5). Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, was an enemy of Israel, but he humbled himself enough to seek the Lord's help. Naaman discovered that God is merciful to all those who call upon Him—even Arameans—and that discovery drastically changed Naaman's worldview: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

QUESTION - [Who was Ben-Hadad in the Bible?](#) | GotQuestions.org

ANSWER - Ben-Hadad seems to have been the title of the reigning king of [Aram \(Syria\)](#). *Ben-Hadad* means "son of Hadad." Hadad

or Adad was the god of storm and thunder, and, as was common in that epoch of history, kings were seen as sons of the primary god of the region.

In the Bible, Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, is mentioned in 1 Kings 15:18–22; throughout 1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6:24; 8:9; 13:24–25; 2 Chronicles 16:2–4; Jeremiah 49:27; and Amos 1:4. Since *Ben-Hadad* is a title much like *Pharaoh* or *President*, the term can refer to different individuals at different times. The context of each passage must be studied to determine just who is involved. Most students of history accept the existence of three Ben-Hadads who ruled in Damascus: Ben-Hadad I, who ruled c. 900–860 BC; his son (or grandson) Ben-Hadad II, who ruled 860–841; and another, unrelated Ben-Hadad, the son of the man who assassinated Ben-Hadad II.

In 1 Kings 15:18, Ben-Hadad is designated as the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion. In this passage, [King Asa](#) of Judah makes a treaty with Ben-Hadad to help protect himself against the king of Israel, who was threatening Judah. (This is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 16:2–4.) Ben-Hadad sent soldiers against Israel and King Baasha and conquered a number of towns, bringing some relief to Judah.

In 1 Kings 20, Ben-Hadad once again attacks the northern kingdom of Israel, where Ahab is now the king. It is possible that this is the same Ben-Hadad who attacked in 1 Kings 15, or it could be a son, Ben-Hadad II. It seems that this time Ben-Hadad is attacking on his own without consideration for any treaty with Judah. And this time, although he had 32 kings helping him (1 Kings 20:1), he is defeated by King Ahab and the army of Israel. About three years later, Israel and Syria renew their conflict, leading to Ahab's final battle and death (1 Kings 22).

In 2 Kings 6–7, about nine years after Ahab's death, Ben-Hadad II invades Israel and lays siege to Samaria, the capital. The siege went on for so long that the people in the city were starving to death. However, in the middle of the night, the Lord caused the Aramean army to hear sounds of an advancing army. Thinking the king of Israel was receiving help from foreign nations, all of Ben-Hadad's men fled, leaving everything behind.

In 2 Kings 8, the [prophet Elisha](#) travels to Damascus and relays a paradoxical prophecy to Ben-Hadad II, who was ill: "Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover.' Nevertheless, the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die" (verse 10). Just as Elisha said, Ben-Hadad began to recover from his illness, but then a man named [Hazeal](#) murdered Ben-Hadad and took the throne of Aram. In 2 Kings 13, Hazeal is succeeded by his son, who is also named Ben-Hadad. This final Ben-Hadad was defeated three times by King Jehoash of Israel, fulfilling another prophecy of Elisha (2 Kings 13:1–25).

In Jeremiah 49:27, the word of the Lord says, "I will set fire to the walls of Damascus; it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad." At the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, none of the Ben-Hadads mentioned above would have been alive. The reference may be to the current king of Aram or perhaps to a fortress that had been built by and now bore the name of a former king. In Amos 1:4 we have a similar prophecy: "I will send fire on the house of Hazeal that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad." By this time, the original Ben-Hadad had been killed, and Hazeal was king. As above, "the fortress of Ben-Hadad" could simply refer to a fortress of the current king or to a specific fortress that was known by that name.

In summary, *Ben-Hadad* is the title of the Aramean king, "son of Hadad," a prominent deity in the region. Several kings of Aram had extensive interaction with the kingdom of Israel and attacked several times. The Lord used Ben-Hadad and the Arameans to bring judgment on rebellious Israel, but He punished Aram for her evil, as well.

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

- 2Ki 19:9 Isa 36:2-22 37:9,10
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

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

QUESTION - [Who was King Ahab in the Bible?](#)

ANSWER - Ahab was one in a line of increasingly evil kings in Israel's history, starting with the reign of Jeroboam. King Ahab "did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him" (1 Kings 16:30). Among the events chronicled in Ahab's life that led to his downfall was his marriage to an evil woman named [Jezebel](#) who had a particular hatred for God's people (1 Kings 18:4). Because of his marriage to a pagan woman, Ahab devoted himself to the worship of the false gods [Baal](#) and [Asherah](#) in Israel (1 Kings 16:31–33).

The evil of King Ahab was countered by the prophet Elijah who warned Ahab of coming judgment if he did not obey the Lord. Ahab blamed Elijah for bringing trouble on Israel (1 Kings 18:17), but it was Ahab's promotion of idolatry that was the true cause of the three-and-a-half-year famine (verse 18). In a dramatic confrontation between Elijah and Ahab's false prophets, God proved to Israel that He, not Baal, was the true God (1 Kings 18:16–39). All of Ahab's men of Baal were killed that day (verse 40).

King Ahab also disobeyed the Lord's direct command to destroy [Ben-Hadad](#), the king of Aram. God set it up so that Ahab would lead Israel to victory, but Ahab made a treaty with the king he was supposed to kill (1 Kings 20). "Therefore," God told Ahab through an unnamed prophet, "it is your life for his life, your people for his people" (verse 42).

The event that sealed Ahab's doom was his murder of an innocent man (1 Kings 21). Ahab coveted a vineyard belonging to a man named [Naboth](#). The king offered to buy the vineyard, but Naboth refused, because the Law forbade him to sell it (1 Kings 21:2–3; cf. Leviticus 25:23). While Ahab sulked about it in his palace, his wife arranged Naboth's murder. Once the vineyard's owner was out of the way, King Ahab took the vineyard for himself. Elijah came to Ahab and told him the Lord would deal with him by cutting off all his descendants. Also, Ahab himself would suffer an ignoble fate: "In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!" (1 Kings 21:19). Upon hearing this, Ahab ["tore his clothes](#), put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly" (verse 27). In response to Ahab's repentance, God mercifully postponed the destruction of Ahab's dynasty until after Ahab was dead (verse 29).

The prophesied judgment against Ahab came true exactly as Elijah predicted. God used Ahab's own false prophets to entice him into going to the battle at Ramoth-Gilead, where he was hit by a "random" arrow and slowly bled to death in his chariot. Later, "they washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared" (1 Kings 22:38). After Ahab's death, [Jehu](#) killed Jezebel (2 Kings 9) and all of Ahab's descendants (2 Kings 10).

King Ahab was justly judged by God because he disobeyed the Lord's direct commands, he abused his responsibility as Israel's king, and he led God's people right into idolatry. In the end, "there was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols" (1 Kings 21:25–26).

1 Kings 20:3 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.'"

- Ex 15:9 Isa 10:13,14
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BEN-HADAD'S HUMILIATING REQUEST OF AHAB

Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine- To take the silver and gold was one thing, but to take the wives and children was surely meant to be a humiliating request of Ahab.

[The Pulpit Commentary](#): Nothing reveals Ben-hadad's object more clearly than the mention of Ahab's wives. When we consider how jealously the seraglio of an Eastern prince is guarded, and how the surrender of the harem is a virtual surrender of the throne (2Sa 16:21, 22), and certainly a surrender of all manhood and self respect, we see that his aim was to wound Ahab in his tenderest point, to humble him to the lowest depths of degradation, and possibly to force a quarrel upon him.

1 Kings 20:4 The king of Israel replied, "It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have."

- **I am yours,;** Lev 26:36 De 28:48 Jdg 15:11-13 1Sa 13:6,7 2Ki 18:14-16
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

AHAB'S UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

The king of Israel replied, "It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have- My lord, O king is Ahab addressing Ben-Hadah as an inferior to a superior. In spite of the ridiculous nature of the request, spineless Ahab is ready to capitulate. Ahab's weakness reminds us of the prophecy in Lev 26:36 "I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies." Ahab is spineless as he is willing to compromise family and wealth in face of the military threat.

[David Guzik](#) reasons that "Ahab believed he was in no position to resist Ben-Hadad. No doubt, the national and military might of Israel was greatly weakened by the three-and-a-half-year drought and famine that had just ended."

1 Kings 20:5 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,"

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BEN-HADAD RECEIVES AHAB'S AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER

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,"

1 Kings 20:6 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:6 But now at this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you and they will search through your palace and your servants' houses. They will carry away all your valuables."

CSB 1 Kings 20:6 But at this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your palace and your servants' houses. They will lay their hands on and take away whatever is precious to you."

ESV 1 Kings 20:6 Nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants and lay hands on whatever pleases you and take it away."

NIV 1 Kings 20:6 But about this time tomorrow I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away."

NLT 1 Kings 20:6 But about this time tomorrow I will send my officials to search your palace and the homes of your people. They will take away everything you consider valuable!"

- **search:** 1Sa 13:19-21 2Sa 24:14 2Ki 18:31,32
- **desirable,** Ge 27:15 Ezr 8:27 Isa 44:9 Jer 25:34 La 1:7,10 Ho 13:15 Joe 3:5 *margins

SHOCKING ESCALATION OF DEMANDS

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 - NLT = "But about this time tomorrow I will send my officials to search your palace and the homes of your people. They will take away everything you consider valuable!" Ben-Hadad sees Ahab's spineless surrender so in his greed he adds that he will take anything **desirable** from Ahab! Sin is never satiated!

1 Kings 20:7 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:7 The king of Israel summoned all the leaders of the land and said, "Notice how this man is looking for trouble. Indeed, he demanded my wives, sons, silver, and gold, and I did not resist him."

CSB 1 Kings 20:7 Then the king of Israel called for all the elders of the land and said, "Think it over and you will see that this one is only looking for trouble, for he demanded my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold, and I didn't turn him down."

ESV 1 Kings 20:7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, "Mark, now, and see how

this man is seeking trouble, for he sent to me for my wives and my children, and for my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him."

NIV 1 Kings 20:7 The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, "See how this man is looking for trouble! When he sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him."

NLT 1 Kings 20:7 Then Ahab summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, "Look how this man is stirring up trouble! I already agreed with his demand that I give him my wives and children and silver and gold."

- **the elders:** 1Ki 8:1 2Ki 5:7 1Ch 13:1 28:1 Pr 11:14
- **Please observe :** 2Ki 5:7
- **looking for trouble** Job 15:35 Ps 7:14 36:4 62:3 140:2 Pr 6:14 11:27 24:2 Da 11:27 Ro 3:13-18
- **I did not refuse him** 1Ki 20:4
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

AHAB CONVENES A COUNCIL

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 - We have to at least give Ahab credit for seeking counsel from the elders. Ahab explains the over the top demands of Ben-hadad. It is interesting that Ahab does not seek advice from Baal, possibly because he remembers the impotence of Baal against Yahweh on Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 20:8 All the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent."

- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WISE COUNSEL FROM ELDERS

All the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent(Lit - "do not be willing")." - The wisdom of the elders is to refuse Ben-Hadad. The elders apparently understood that to surrender to Ben-Hadad's over the top request would mark the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Israel.

Warren Wiersbe - (Ben-Hadad) his covetousness led to his defeat. In addition to taking the king's wealth and the royal family, Ben-hadad wanted to send officers to search all the royal buildings and take whatever they wanted! Agreeing with this request was much too humiliating for proud Ahab, so he and his advisers refused to accept it. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

1 Kings 20:9 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:9 So he said to the messengers of Ben Hadad, "Say this to my master, the king, 'I will give you everything you demanded at first from your servant, but I am unable to agree to this latest demand.'" So the messengers went back and gave their report.

CSB 1 Kings 20:9 So he said to Ben-hadad's messengers, "Say to my lord the king, 'Everything you demanded of your servant the first time, I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" So the messengers left and took word back to him.

ESV 1 Kings 20:9 So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you first demanded of your servant I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" And the messengers departed and brought him word again.

NIV 1 Kings 20:9 So he replied to Ben-Hadad's messengers, "Tell my lord the king, 'Your servant will do all you demanded the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.' " They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad.

NLT 1 Kings 20:9 So Ahab told the messengers from Ben-hadad, "Say this to my lord the king: 'I will give you everything you asked for the first time, but I cannot accept this last demand of yours.' " So the messengers returned to Ben-hadad with that response.

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AHAB REFUSES THE SECOND DEMAND

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 - NLT = "So Ahab told the messengers from Ben-hadad, "Say this to my lord the king: 'I will give you everything you asked for the first time, but I cannot accept this last demand of yours.' " So the messengers returned to Ben-hadad with that response." Ahab's response is still spineless for not only would he let Ben-Hadad have the silver and gold but also the wives and children! Ahab draws the line at Ben-Hadad taking inanimate items (as if they are more valuable than the lives of wives and children).

1 Kings 20:10 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:10 Ben Hadad sent another message to him, "May the gods judge me severely if there is enough dirt left in Samaria for my soldiers to scoop up in their hands."

CSB 1 Kings 20:10 Then Ben-hadad sent messengers to him and said, "May the gods punish me and do so severely if Samaria's dust amounts to a handful for each of the people who follow me."

ESV 1 Kings 20:10 Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me."

NIV 1 Kings 20:10 Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful."

NLT 1 Kings 20:10 Then Ben-hadad sent this message to Ahab: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if there remains enough dust from Samaria to provide even a handful for each of my soldiers."

- **The gods:** 1Ki 19:2 Ac 23:12
- **dust:** 2Sa 17:12,13 2Ki 19:23,24 Isa 10:13,14 37:24,25
- **follow me:** Heb. are at my feet, Ex 11:8 Jdg 4:10
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Kings 19:2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

2 Kings 6:31 Then he said, "May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today."

BEN-HADAD'S RASH OATH

[Ben-hadad](#) sent to him and said, "May the gods (fertility gods of Syria) do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me - NLT = "Then Ben-hadad sent this message to Ahab: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if there remains enough dust from Samaria to provide even a handful for each of my soldiers."

1 Kings 20:11 Then the king of Israel replied, "Tell him, 'Let not him who girds on his armor boast like him who takes it off.'"

NET 1 Kings 20:11 The king of Israel replied, "Tell him the one who puts on his battle gear should not boast like one who is taking it off."

CSB 1 Kings 20:11 The king of Israel answered, "Say this: 'Don't let the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.'"

ESV 1 Kings 20:11 And the king of Israel answered, "Tell him, 'Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off.'"

NIV 1 Kings 20:11 The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: 'One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.' "

NLT 1 Kings 20:11 The king of Israel sent back this answer: "A warrior putting on his sword for battle should not boast like a warrior who has already won."

NRS 1 Kings 20:11 The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: One who puts on armor should not brag like one who takes it off."

- **Let not him:** etc. 1Sa 14:6,12,13 17:44-47 Pr 27:1 Ec 9:11 Isa 10:15,16 Mt 26:33-35,75
- **who girds on his armor:** Ex 13:18.
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH!

Then the king of Israel replied, "Tell him, 'Let not him who girds on his armor boast like him who takes it off- NLT = "A warrior putting on his sword for battle should not boast like a warrior who has already won." This was no doubt a proverbial mode of expression. It is foolish to boast about winning before the fight has even begun! Boast after the battle, not before!

NET NOTE on **Let not him who girds on his armor boast...** The point of the saying is that someone who is still preparing for a battle should not boast as if he has already won the battle. A modern parallel would be, "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

Spurgeon Study Bible - 1Ki 20:11 "Don't let the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off." It is right to learn even from the lips of the wicked, for they are seldom as foolish in worldly things as they are in spiritual. Those who put on the armor are the more apt to be proud because they often mistake their intentions for accomplishments. The text is peculiarly adapted to those who are commencing the battle of the Christian life. The young person who is newly converted is putting on his armor; he has newly made the profession of his faith and has come forward to be baptized and united with the church. Soon he is going back to the warehouse where they will know that he professes to be a Christian. Or he will go home to a family whose other members have no respect for the things of God, and he will have to bear witness among them. The young woman has to go back to her friends who have not the same love of Jesus that she has, to begin her lifelong testimony in their midst. It will do also for young men and women who are beginning life for themselves, lately married, beginning housekeeping, and intending to do well; opening a new shop with good prospects; moving to a new farm with such bright hopes. It may be a word in season to these people. Putting on the armor, we have not taken it off yet, and, therefore, we should not boast. There is a difference, and more than a slight one, between intentions and accomplishments. We do not always perform what we think we will, nor do we always reach where we hope to arrive; failures are as numerous as successes, and even the most successful have failures to mourn over. The gist of all I have said is this: we should trust in God but distrust ourselves.

C H Spurgeon - [Girding on the Harness \(full sermon\)](#) 1 Kings 20:11

The devil whispers, 'Ah, now we are somebody.' We have commenced to teach in the Sunday school and feel pleased to think we are to be teachers of the young: is it not a noble work? Nobody will be able to say now that we are mere babes in grace. Why, we are getting to be quite defenders of the faith and bold servants of Christ; surely we may be allowed a little self-respect! If we have begun to preach and have been praised by many of our hearers, it is probable that we scarcely know whether we are in the body or out of it; we think we are Whitefields already and apostles in embryo. What preachers we are going to be and what wonders we shall certainly accomplish! Satan has patted us with his black paw and told us that we have done amazingly well and deserve great credit, and we fully believe him. It is well known that even in natural things Jack in office is bound to be proud, and the like thing will occur even to good young men when they are put a little forward. They can scarcely be trusted even to open the door of the Lord's house or to sweep a crossing in the streets of the New Jerusalem, but straightway they become important. It is much easier to be puffed up than to be built up, much easier to grow in self-conceit than in vital godliness; a little advancement turns many brains. Baruch

was employed by the prophet Jeremiah to write the roll, and straightway he had high ideas of what Baruch must be and needed the message, 'seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not'. We are always up in the air unless God in his infinite mercy chains us down to the rock and keeps us there, for pride is like the eagle and delights to soar on high.

1 Kings 20:12 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.

- **drinking:** 1Ki 20:16 16:9 1Sa 25:36 2Sa 13:28 Pr 31:4,5 Da 5:2,30 Lu 21:34 Eph 5:18
- **Shelters:** Jer 43:10
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ESV Study Bible page 638

PREPARATION TO ATTACK SAMARIA

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 - Likely inebriated, Ben-Hadad tells his men prepare to storm the city. So as in the case of Belshazzar (Da 5:1-30+), so here, drunkenness was predecessor of defeat. Drunkenness often creates a false sense of assurance or over-confidence!

1 Kings 20:13 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.'"

- **Have you seen all this great** 2Ki 6:8-12 7:1 13:23 Isa 7:1-9 Eze 20:14,22
- **you shall know** : 1Ki 20:28 1Ki 18:37 Ex 14:18 16:12 Ps 83:18 Isa 37:20 Eze 6:7 Joe 3:17
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Kings 20:28+ 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.**'"

1 Kings 18:37+ (ELIJAH'S PRAYER WAS FOR GOD'S GLORY) "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again."

A PROPHET SPEAKS TO AHAB

Now **behold**, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Have you seen all this great multitude (Lit horde)? - With the statement **this great multitude** this nameless prophet (either one of the 100 Obadiah had rescued and/or one of 7000 who have not bowed their knee to Baal) emphasizes the chances of defeat are great. God is magnified even more when the situation seems humanly impossible.

[Brian Bell](#) - Though Elijah wasn't going to speak to him anymore, an unknown prophet comes. If someone won't listen to the trumpet, maybe the flute?

Grace. *God's Loving Kindness follows us
into the far country of undisciplined living.*

-- [Brian Bell](#)

Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know([yada](#); Lxx - [ginosko](#) = know intimately, experientially) **that I am the LORD** - This is a surprising promise not based on Ahab's loyalty but on God's love for His chosen people. This verse recalls Paul's words in Eph 2:4+ "God, being (present tense - continually) rich in mercy." Two prophetic promises are given, one for victory (**deliver...into...hand** = into your power) and the second that this humanly implausible victory would motivate Ahab to come to truly

know ([yada](#); Lxx - [ginosko](#) = know intimately, experientially) Yahweh. God is the God of the second chance so here we see chance number 2 for Ahab who had seen Yahweh's victory over Baal at Mount Carmel. We can see the lovingkindness of God and His gracious provision to this man who had continually rejected Him in exchange for that which is no god.

THOUGHT - This shows the power of idolatry to deceive and ensnare. Little wonder Paul commands "Therefore, my beloved, **flee** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) from idolatry." (1Cor 10:14+) And John adds "Little children, **guard** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves from idols." (1Jn 5:21+).

I am reminded of Romans 2:4+ "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His **kindness** and **tolerance** and **patience**, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Yahweh was seeking to lead Ahab and Israel to repentance.

John MacArthur on **I will deliver them into your hand today** - These were the words of assurance given before battles when the Lord was about to fight on Israel's side (Jos 6:2, 16; Josh 8:1, 18; Jdg 7:2; 18:10; 1Sa 23:4; 24:4, 2Ch 13:16, 2Ch 16:8). 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 (vv. 14, 15). (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

Bob Utley - "**and you shall know that I am the Lord**" YHWH wanted the northern kingdom to survive and prosper (vv. 13,25), but they must obey the covenant of Moses. This phrase first occurred in Exodus of Israel knowing YHWH – Exod. 6:7; 16:6; 29:46, of Egypt knowing YHWH – Exod. 7:5. YHWH wants all the world to know Him.

In His high priestly prayer Jesus said "'This is eternal life, that they may **KNOW** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.." (John 17:4+) Yahweh does not want "for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2Pe 3:9+).

Know ([03045](#)) **yada** to know, to learn, to perceive, to discern, to experience, to confess, to consider, to know people relationally, to know how, to be skillful, to be made known, to make oneself known, to make to known. As noted below in several examples, the Septuagint translates yada often with the Greek verb ginosko, which conveys the sense of to know by experience and/or to know intimately (as used in Mt 1:25KJV and ESV which says Joseph "knew her not" which the NAS paraphrases "kept her a virgin"). And many of the uses of **yada** also have this experiential emphasis as with the Greek [ginosko](#).

1 Kings 20:14 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:14 Ahab asked, "By whom will this be accomplished?" He answered, "This is what the LORD says, 'By the servants of the district governors.'" Ahab asked, "Who will launch the attack?" He answered, "You will."

CSB 1 Kings 20:14 Ahab asked, "By whom?" And the prophet said, "This is what the LORD says: 'By the young men of the provincial leaders.'" Then he asked, "Who is to start the battle?" He said, "You."

ESV 1 Kings 20:14 And Ahab said, "By whom?" He said, "Thus says the LORD, By the servants of the governors of the districts." Then he said, "Who shall begin the battle?" He answered, "You."

NIV 1 Kings 20:14 "But who will do this?" asked Ahab. The prophet replied, "This is what the LORD says: 'The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it.' " "And who will start the battle?" he asked. The prophet answered, "You will."

NLT 1 Kings 20:14 Ahab asked, "How will he do it?" And the prophet replied, "This is what the LORD says: The troops of the provincial commanders will do it." "Should we attack first?" Ahab asked. "Yes," the prophet answered.

- **By the young men** Ge 14:14-16 Jdg 7:16-20 1Sa 17:50 1Co 1:27-29
- **Who shall begin the battle?"** 1Ki 18:44
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Ahab said, "By whom?" - That is **by whom** would the victory over Ben-Hadad be accomplished? This (in my opinion) is an expression of Ahab's unbelief/doubt, for the prophet had just clearly stated **I will deliver them into your hand today**. The battle was the LORD's (cf 1Sa 17:47, 2Ch 20:15, 2Ch 32:8) and He would bring about a great victory (2Sa 23:10, 12, 2Ki 13:17, 1Ch 11:14, 1Ch 29:11, Ps 98:1, Pr 21:31 and the ultimate victory = 1Co 15:57+).

So he said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘By the young men of the rulers of the provinces.’” - ESV- "By the servants of the governors of the districts." [ESV](#) note says "The servants (plural of Hb. na'ar) are to initiate the battle—young men unschooled in military matters, like the young and untrained David, who is also called a na'ar in 1 Sam. 17:33 (a “youth,” in contrast to the warrior Goliath)."

[Peter Pett](#) has an interesting comment - Ahab had been sufficiently impressed by what had happened at Mount Carmel to listen, and he then asked the prophet by whom this deliverance was to take place. Who were those to be involved? The reply brings out YHWH's sense of humour. Benhadad had demanded Ahab's children, had he? Well, he could have them. The deliverance would be by 'the young men' (the word can also mean children) of the princes of the provinces, those not defiled by contact with the court and the Baalism of Samaria.

Then he said, “Who shall begin the battle?” And he answered, “You. - NLT = "Should we attack first?" Ahab asked."Yes," the prophet answered." Ahab seems to be ready to listen to the prophet for here he seeks strategic advice regarding the battle. One has to believe that Ahab's Mount Carmel experience with Yahweh opened him to be receptive to another prophet of Yahweh. One wonders how Ahab would have responded if that prophet had been name "Elijah?" (Just wondering!)

1 Kings 20:15 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:15 So Ahab assembled the 232 servants of the district governors. After that he assembled all the Israelite army, numbering 7,000.

CSB 1 Kings 20:15 So Ahab counted the young men of the provincial leaders, and there were 232. After them he counted all the Israelite troops: 7,000.

ESV 1 Kings 20:15 Then he mustered the servants of the governors of the districts, and they were 232. And after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand.

NIV 1 Kings 20:15 So Ahab summoned the young officers of the provincial commanders, 232 men. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all.

NLT 1 Kings 20:15 So Ahab mustered the troops of the 232 provincial commanders. Then he called out the rest of the army of Israel, some 7,000 men.

- **two hundred:** Jdg 7:7,16 1Sa 14:6 2Ch 14:11
- **seven thousand:** 1Ki 19:18 1Sa 14:2 2Ki 13:7 Ps 106:40-43
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Kings 19:18+ “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

ISRAEL'S SMALL ARMY

Then he mustered (drew up for battle) **the young men** ([na'ar](#); Lxx - paidarion) **of the rulers of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered** (drew up for battle) **all the people, even all the sons of Israel, 7,000** - Why **7000**? I could speculate (perfect number, parallels 7000 who have not bowed knee to Baal) but frankly I am not sure. I do not think the writer is saying (1) these are the same 7000 mentioned in 1 Kings 19:18+ or (2) that this 7000 had not bowed the knee to Baal. Seven speaks of divine perfection and completeness. In this context 7000 would prove to be perfectly sufficient to route the enemy forces which greatly outnumbered Israel. Certainly this relatively small number would have been clear evidence that the victory was from God and not from military strength. One is reminded of Gideon's army of 300 in Judges 7:7.

Young men is [na'ar](#) which generally denotes a "young man" who is of marriageable age but is still a bachelor. The Septuagint translates it with paidarion (only in Mt 11:16, Jn 6:9) which refers to a youth and can be an adult youth. The point is that those **mustered** would be relatively young with the implication that they were not highly trained in warfare and/or had never even experienced war. If this is an accurate assessment, it makes the victory over the large Aramean army that much less humanly possible and that much more clearly God possible!

[Thomas Constable](#) adds that "The **young men** [Heb. [na'ar](#)] of the rulers of the provinces" were apparently the servants of these rulers, since the Hebrew word elsewhere (1Ki 3:7; 11:17; 14:3, 17, 28; 18:43; 19:3) describes young male servants (not elite soldiers). Thus God ordered a relatively weak force to oppose the Arameans initially, as in the past (Judg. 7:7; 1 Sam. 17:33), so that it would be obvious that He had granted the victory.

1 Kings 20:16 They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him.

NET 1 Kings 20:16 They marched out at noon, while Ben Hadad and the thirty-two kings allied with him were drinking heavily in their quarters.

CSB 1 Kings 20:16 They marched out at noon while Ben-hadad and the 32 kings who were helping him were getting drunk in the tents.

ESV 1 Kings 20:16 And they went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings who helped him.

NIV 1 Kings 20:16 They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk.

NLT 1 Kings 20:16 About noontime, as Ben-hadad and the thirty-two allied kings were still in their tents drinking themselves into a stupor,

- **Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk:** 1Ki 20:11,12 16:7 Pr 23:29-32 Ec 10:16,17 Ho 4:11
- **the thirty-two king** Isa 54:15
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BEN-HADAD THE DRUNKEN COMMANDER

They went out at noon, while [Ben-hadad](#) was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him - NLT - "About noontime, as Ben-hadad and the thirty-two allied kings were still in their tents drinking themselves into a stupor." They struck at noon which is the traditional time for rest! Thus it was a surprise attack. This is when you are overconfident that your far superior numbers are unbeatable and you foolishly drink alcohol when the battle is imminent!

Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge - The Syrians, the besiegers, had their directions from a drunken king, who gave orders over his cups, while he was drinking at noon. Drunkenness is a sin which is most detestable in all, but more so in a king than in a private individual, inasmuch as the greater weight a man's situation carries, whether from accumulated riches, family connections, hereditary authority, or invested command, so is the influence which his vices must have on those around him. Perhaps it may be said, from past experience, that drunkenness, which is a most heinous sin in the sight of God, may be charged on those who indulge only now and then in that which may eventually lead them into drunkenness; for they shut their eyes against the most palpable facts, and rather than give up the paltry gratification of a debauch, involve thousands by their example to positive harm. Ben-hadad's drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall. Belshazzar also, we read, drank wine with his princes, his wives, and his concubines, and praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone: and in the same hour came forth the finger of a man's hand and wrote his doom on the plaster of the wall. Those who fancy themselves perfectly secure, and above the possibility of falling, are commonly nearest their destruction: there is always an Ahab read to take advantage of and improve the self-imposed imbecility.

1 Kings 20:17 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:17 The servants of the district governors led the march. When Ben Hadad sent messengers, they reported back to him, "Men are marching out of Samaria."

CSB 1 Kings 20:17 The young men of the provincial leaders marched out first. Then Ben-hadad sent out scouts, and they reported to him, saying, "Men are marching out of Samaria."

ESV 1 Kings 20:17 The servants of the governors of the districts went out first. And Ben-hadad sent out scouts, and they reported to him, "Men are coming out from Samaria."

NIV 1 Kings 20:17 The young officers of the provincial commanders went out first. Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts, who reported, "Men are advancing from Samaria."

NLT 1 Kings 20:17 the troops of the provincial commanders marched out of the city as the first contingent. As they approached, Ben-hadad's scouts reported to him, "Some troops are coming from Samaria."

- 1Ki 20:14,15,19
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL ATTACKS FIRST

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 - One wonders if Ben-Hadad the commander in chief is still inebriated but at the very least he is "hung over!"

1 Kings 20:18 Then he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

NET 1 Kings 20:18 He ordered, "Whether they come in peace or to do battle, take them alive."

CSB 1 Kings 20:18 So he said, "If they have marched out in peace, take them alive, and if they have marched out for battle, take them alive."

ESV 1 Kings 20:18 He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive. Or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

NIV 1 Kings 20:18 He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."

NLT 1 Kings 20:18 "Take them alive," Ben-hadad commanded, "whether they have come for peace or for war."

- 1Sa 2:3,4 14:11,12 17:44 2Ki 14:8-12 Pr 18:12
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BEN-HADAD'S CONFUSING REPLY

Then he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive- This is somewhat confusing but could reflect the confused words of a drunken leader, Ben-Hadad. This statement could reflect his overconfidence that whether the Israelites came in peace or war, they could be easily captured without a fight. Either way Ben-Hadad's (drunken) arrogance in underestimating the enemy led to his defeat. One takeaway we see here is that man's pride can never stand against God's will and be successful.

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

NET 1 Kings 20:19 They marched out of the city with the servants of the district governors in the lead and the army behind them.

CSB 1 Kings 20:19 The young men of the provincial leaders and the army behind them marched out from the city,

ESV 1 Kings 20:19 So these went out of the city, the servants of the governors of the districts and the army

that followed them.

NIV 1 Kings 20:19 The young officers of the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them

NLT 1 Kings 20:19 But Ahab's provincial commanders and the entire army had now come out to fight.

NRS 1 Kings 20:19 But these had already come out of the city: the young men who serve the district governors, and the army that followed them.

- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

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

Patterson gives us human logic for why Israel won the battle (Be a Berean with commentaries, even conservative ones and even this one!) writing "The battle strategy appears to have been to send out the small but well trained advance party who could perhaps draw near to the Syrians without arousing too much alarm and then, at a given signal, initiate a charge that, joined by Ahab's main striking force, would both catch the drunken Arameans off guard and throw them into confusion. The plan was more successful than Ahab dared to imagine."

While there may be some truth in Patterson's comment, he seems to give far too much credit to human ingenuity/strategy and takes away the credit and glory from the only One Who could have brought about this unimaginable victory. Yes, Israel had a responsibility to fight, but the ultimate power and victory belonged to Yahweh! He would be glorified and His desire was that Ahab and Israel would come to know Him as their Victorious Warrior and Savior!

1 Kings 20:20 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:20 Each one struck down an enemy soldier; the Syrians fled and Israel chased them. King Ben Hadad of Syria escaped on horseback with some horsemen.

CSB 1 Kings 20:20 and each one struck down his opponent. So the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, but Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with the cavalry.

ESV 1 Kings 20:20 And each struck down his man. The Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them, but Ben-hadad king of Syria escaped on a horse with horsemen.

NIV 1 Kings 20:20 and each one struck down his opponent. At that, the Arameans fled, with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen.

NLT 1 Kings 20:20 Each Israelite soldier killed his Aramean opponent, and suddenly the entire Aramean army panicked and fled. The Israelites chased them, but King Ben-hadad and a few of his charioteers escaped on horses.

- **killed each his man:** 2Sa 2:16 Ec 9:11
- **the Arameans fled:** Lev 26:8 Jdg 7:20-22 1Sa 14:13-15 2Ki 7:6,7 Ps 33:16 46:6
- **Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped:** 1Sa 30:16,17 2Ki 19:36
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

VICTORY ACHIEVED BUT LEADER ESCAPES

They killed each his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them - NLT = "suddenly the entire Aramean army panicked and fled." Is this evidence of the supernatural intervention analogous to the situation with Jonathan in 1Sa 14:13-15+?

And Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen - The "head of the snake" unfortunately made his getaway. He would soon return seeking vengeance for this loss.

ISRAEL had battled successfully against the Syrians in the hills. The Syrians concluded their defeat was because Israel's God was a God of the hills but not of the valleys. Therefore, the Syrians decided to war against Israel in the valleys to defeat Israel. But God sent a prophet to Israel's king and announced that He would give Israel victory in the valleys, too. From our verse we note the limiting of God in the valley, the looking to God in the valley, and the learning about God in the valley.

Limiting of God in the valley. Many folk conclude as the Syrians did, that the valley is where we are beyond God's help. It is easy to believe God is with us on the hills of health, wealth, good job, good family life, few trials, and much sunshine. But when we travel through the valley of heartache, sickness, disappointment, and tragedy we often limit God and think He cannot help us in these dark valleys.

Looking to God in the valley. The prophet's message encouraged the king of Israel to look to God for victory in the valleys. Though the Syrians should attack with a great army there, God promised Israel would be victorious anyway. If you are a weary traveler in the valley today, do not give up on God and think He cannot help you. Call upon Him for help, for He gives victory in the valleys, too.

Learning about God in the valley. When God promised victory in the valley, He said that in the valley they would "know that I am the LORD." Thus the valley would be a learning experience. In the valley they would "know" the Lord in a better way. We will learn important truths in the valley we will never learn on the hills. For one thing we learn that God can help in the valleys just as much as anywhere else. The Psalmist recognized this encouraging truth when he said, "God is ... a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

1 Kings 20:21 The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter.

NET 1 Kings 20:21 Then the king of Israel marched out and struck down the horses and chariots; he thoroughly defeated Syria.

CSB 1 Kings 20:21 Then the king of Israel marched out and attacked the cavalry and the chariots. He inflicted a great slaughter on Aram.

ESV 1 Kings 20:21 And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow.

NIV 1 Kings 20:21 The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.

NLT 1 Kings 20:21 However, the king of Israel destroyed the other horses and chariots and slaughtered the Arameans.

- **went out:** Jdg 3:28 7:23-25 1Sa 14:20-22 17:52 2Ki 3:18,24
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL ACHIEVES GREAT SLAUGHTER

The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter- We have to give credit where credit is due and it appears Ahab did not sit back and watch the battle but joined in the fray striking even soldiers on horses and chariots (the ancient equivalent of army tanks).

1 Kings 20:22 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."

NET 1 Kings 20:22 The prophet visited the king of Israel and instructed him, "Go, fortify your defenses. Determine what you must do, for in the spring the king of Syria will attack you."

CSB 1 Kings 20:22 The prophet approached the king of Israel and said to him, "Go and strengthen yourself, then consider what you should do, for in the spring the king of Aram will march against you."

ESV 1 Kings 20:22 Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, "Come, strengthen

yourself, and consider well what you have to do, for in the spring the king of Syria will come up against you."

NIV 1 Kings 20:22 Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, "Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again."

NLT 1 Kings 20:22 Afterward the prophet said to King Ahab, "Get ready for another attack. Begin making plans now, for the king of Aram will come back next spring. "

- **the prophet:** 1Ki 20:13,38 19:10 22:8 2Ki 6:12
- **strengthen:** 2Ch 25:8,11 Ps 27:14 Pr 18:10 20:18 Isa 8:9 Joe 3:9,10 Eph 6:10
- **at the turn:** 1Ki 20:26 2Sa 11:1 1Ch 20:1 Ps 115:2,3 Isa 26:11 42:8
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SAME PROPHET SECOND MESSAGE

Then - Marks progress in the narrative - in this case the story is not over!

The prophet came near to the king of Israel - **The prophet** has the definite article ("the") preceding "prophet" and thus this nameless prophet appears to be the same one mentioned in 1Ki 20:13.

And said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself and observe and see what you have to do - The prophet gives Ahab 4 commands. In short, the prophet tells Ahab to prepare for a second attack. While God would bring about the victory, He was telling Ahab that Israel had a responsibility to do their part (God's sovereignty and Man's responsibility is the pattern throughout the Bible).

*Victory is sweet
but vigilance is essential.*
-- Dale Ralph Davis

For (term of explanation) **at the turn of the year** (spring) **the king of Aram will come up against you** - The prophet explains why Ahab was to ready his army. He even tells Ahab when the attack would come, **at the turn of the year** which would be next spring!

John Kitto - Tuesday. The God of the Hills—I Kings 20:22–23

When the Syrians were beyond harm's reach, they began to speculate upon the causes of their extraordinary and most humbling discomfiture. As they saw no adequate human cause, they rightly referred the matter to the power of the God of Israel. And, in fact, from the corrupt state of religion among the Israelites, it might be difficult to discover what God they worshipped. With this the Syrians probably did not concern themselves much. But their reasoning upon this conclusion is curious to us, although perfectly natural to them, who entertained the belief in the mere local power of particular deities: "Their gods are gods [or "their god is a god"] 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."

Believing that the God of Israel was merely a national god like their own, and that, like theirs, his power was limited by local or other circumstances, it was easy for them to infer that He was a God of the hills and not of the valleys. Their impression in this matter may have arisen from the traditional knowledge, that this God had given his law to his people from Mount Sinai; that on a mountain had died their great lawgiver, and their first High pontiff. They must also have heard of the recent miraculous manifestation of his power upon Mount Carmel; and they saw that Canaan was a mountainous country, with all its chief cities seated upon hills. All these recollections may have had their basis in the practical experience that the parts of the country into which they had ventured were unsuited to chariots, in which their military force seems to have chiefly consisted; and in the conclusion that if they kept more exclusively to the plains and valleys, a very different result might be expected.

In the parceling out of the earth among national and territorial gods, and among gods who presided over the various forms, and powers, and qualities of nature, we find many gods of the mountains, and some, but not so many, of the valleys. At the present day the Hindus have their gods of the hills, and also of the lower places. Thus Siva, Vishnu, and Murruga-Murte, are those of the high places; while Vyravar, Urruttera, and many demons, are the deities of the lower regions. So in classical antiquity we meet with Collina, the goddess of hills, and Vallina, of valleys. We also hear of the god Montinus, and of a god Peninus, who had his name from a part of the Alps, so called, where he was worshipped, and where also the goddess Penina was honored. Even Jupiter had names from mountains, as Olympius, Capitolinus, etc.; and the "great universal Pan" is called "mountainous Pan" by Sophocles. Some have expressed surprise that the Syrians should have conceived their own god to be a god of the valleys—supposing this an admission of inferiority. We see not this; and as the greater part of their territory was level country, and the capital was seated in one of the finest plains in the world, they could scarcely, when they came to this mode of reasoning, and compared the difference

between the two countries, arrive at any other conclusion. This was, however, a conclusion ruinous to them; for this attempt “to limit the Holy One of Israel,” by making Him a mere God of mountains, made it necessary that He should vindicate his universal power and the honor of his own great name. This is, indeed, assigned by the prophet, who promised another and crowning victory, as the reason for the Lord’s further and decisive interposition in behalf of a people who had so little deserved His care.

The king had been forewarned of this second invasion, and was not this time taken unprepared, though his utmost preparations bore no comparison to the Syrian power. This time, however, he concluded he would not be again shut up in Samaria, but that the contest should be in the open country. The Syrians, firm to their purpose, chose a route which led them to the plains and valleys—though this was necessarily circuitous—and would not be drawn among the hills, although the presence of the Israelites attending their march upon the hills tempted them to action. Six days this caution was maintained on both sides; but on the seventh day they came to blows, as it would seem, by the Israelites venturing down from the hills to give battle, undeterred by the chariots which were so formidable in the plains. On this occasion we are told that the army of Israel appeared in comparison “like two little flocks of kids,”—a significant simile, flocks of goats being smaller than those of sheep; and they were not only flocks of goats, but small goats or kids; and not only flocks of kids, but little flocks; and not only little flocks, but “two” little flocks—not that they were necessarily of that number, but “two” being, as we have already explained, an epithet of fewness.

Again, through the might of the Lord, were the Israelites victorious. They fell upon the Syrians with great vigor, and slew large numbers of them. The rest fled, and sought shelter in Aphek, which they appear to have taken on their march. But even here many of them were crushed beneath a wall which fell upon them. The wall was cast down probably by an earthquake. Hither Benhadad himself came, and withdrew to an inner chamber to hide his sorrow and his shame. There was no chance of escape; nor, since the wall had fallen, any defence for the city against the pursuers. The case was manifestly desperate; and there was no hope but in throwing himself upon the clemency of Ahab. Remembering how roughly the old theocratists had been wont to handle their captives, there might well have been room for a doubt even in this; but the servants of Benhadad assured him that they had heard the kings of Israel were merciful kings—which we take to mean that the present and some past kings of Israel had manifested so much sympathy for, and friendly feeling towards, foreign idolaters, that the chances were greatly lessened of his being harshly treated.

Benhadad accordingly sent ambassadors to meet Ahab, and to beg the Syrian king’s life from him—nothing more than life; but with injunctions to note the manner in which the application was received, and to frame their demeanor accordingly. Ambassadors charged with such a suit are wont to present themselves in a pitiable plight, in order to express their affliction, and to move compassion. In the present case the messengers not only clad themselves in sackcloth, but appeared with ropes about their necks. This, though probably an old custom of suppliants—intended to express that their fate lay in the hands of him before whom they appear—is here for the first time mentioned in Scripture; but we see prisoners of war strung together by ropes around their necks in the sculptures of ancient Egypt and Persia. In the present and such like cases, it seems to express their entire helplessness and dependence upon the king’s mercy. He might hang them up if he liked; and here were the ropes ready for him to do it with. Or it may be that, as we see captives were thus dealt with, they appeared tied together by the necks to show that they were prisoners of war.

The language of the ambassadors corresponded with their appearance. “Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live,”—language in edifying contrast with the former arrogance of this same Benhadad. But it has always been observed that the men most arrogant in prosperity, are in adversity the most abject and cast down. So it was now. The easy-tempered Ahab was moved to commiseration at this marked change of language and fortune in his greatest enemy; and yielding, as usual, to the impression of the moment, he said quickly, “Is he yet alive? He is my brother.” The men, keenly watching the impression made on his mind, caught eagerly at the words, and replied, “Thy brother Benhadad liveth.” On this, he desired him to be called, and on his appearance took him up into his chariot. Eventually he was restored to liberty on his own terms—that of allowing the Israelites to have a quarter in which they might observe their own laws, customs, and worship in Damascus, and is giving up the northern towns that had been formerly taken from Israel.

At the first view, one is rather favorably impressed with this clemency of Ahab towards the great enemy of his country. But as we afterwards perceive that it was visited with the Divine displeasure, we are obliged to examine it more closely. We may then find that what might have been magnanimity becomes in reality a gross weakness; and that this extravagant and uncalled-for generosity, which might entitle a man to praise if shown towards a private enemy, may become a crime in a king towards a public adversary. It corresponds to the case of [Agag whom Saul spared](#), but whom Samuel slew. The Lord had appointed this man to “utter destruction;” and Ahab knew it. He was appointed to taste the utmost dregs of that calamity with which the Governor of the world so often punishes the pride of kings. He was to be taught to know, in avenging justice, the greatness of that God he had blasphemed; and the power of the state he ruled was to be so broken as to render it incapable of giving further trouble to Israel. All these public duties Ahab had neglected, to gratify a private sentiment; and, doubtless, from a sympathy with idolatry, which it ill became a king of Israel to show. It was in this that he offended; and his offence was great. To view it rightly, we must look to the misery thereafter caused Israel by the very power which he threw away this opportunity of rendering harmless; and with peculiar intensity must we regard the fact that, a few years after, Ahab met his death in battle with the very king he thus befriended, and under the orders of that king to his soldiers to aim their weapons exclusively against the life of the man who had spared his own.

Suppose that five-and-thirty years ago, when the great troubler of Europe was brought a prisoner to our shores, the Regent had (supposing it in his power) behaved like Ahab in setting him free. No doubt, some sentimentalist would have applauded his “magnanimity” towards the greatest enemy his country had ever known. But Europe would have mourned his “weakness;” and his people would have execrated it, if, as is likely, instead of the longest peace known in their history, the thirty-five subsequent years had been marked with trouble, distress, confusion, warfare, rapine, and blood; and the Regent would doubtless have experienced from this “Themistocles” gratitude of the same quality as that which Ahab received from the Syrian king.

1 Kings 20:23 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:23 Now the advisers of the king of Syria said to him: "Their God is a god of the mountains. That's why they overpowered us. But if we fight them in the plains, we will certainly overpower them.

CSB 1 Kings 20:23 Now the king of Aram's servants said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hill country. That's why they were stronger than we were. Instead, we should fight with them on the plain; then we will certainly be stronger than they will be.

ESV 1 Kings 20:23 And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

NIV 1 Kings 20:23 Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they.

NLT 1 Kings 20:23 After their defeat, Ben-hadad's officers said to him, "The Israelite gods are gods of the hills; that is why they won. But we can beat them easily on the plains.

- **Their gods:** 1Ki 20:28 14:23 1Sa 4:8 2Ki 19:12 2Ch 32:13-19 Ps 50:21,22 121:1,2 Isa 42:8
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

IDOL WORSHIP LEADS TO FALSE REASONING

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 - They are preparing for a rematch. This passage shows how worship of idols leads men to make foolish statements, rash rationalizations! Their logic was illogical because no-gods are illusory. There were no gods over the events of either the mountains or the plain! Yet such was the belief of deceived men in the ancient world.

Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge - It was the general belief in the heathen world, that each district had its tutelary and protecting deity, who could do nothing out of his own province.

[Reformation Study Bible](#) - It was understood that wars were fought not only by armies but also by their gods, and the Syrians wanted to fight in the plains where they thought Yahweh would be outside his sphere of influence and hence in a weak position.

[Bob Utley](#) - In the ancient near east, gods were limited to the region in which they were worshiped. The servants of Ben-hadad assumed YHWH was a regional fertility god (i.e., storm god of the mountains). - Mt. Moriah, Sinai/Horeb, Mt. Ser, Mt. Zion, the mountain in the far north (i.e., Isa. 14:13)

Spurgeon - The art of god-making is very common among men. Instead of going to revelation to see what God is, and humbly believing in Him as He reveals Himself, men sit down and consider what sort of God He ought to be, and in so doing they are no wiser than the man who makes a god of mud or wood or stone”.... (Spurgeon applies their illogical reasoning writing) Will God aid a Whitfield and not help a poor local preacher holding forth upon the green? Will he assist the earnest minister who addresses thousands, and desert the simple girl who teaches a dozen little children the old, old story of the cross? Is this after the fashion of God, to patronise the eminent and neglect the lowly? Does Jesus despise the day of small things?"

1 Kings 20:24 “Do this thing: remove the kings, each from his place, and put captains in their place,

NET 1 Kings 20:24 So do this: Dismiss the kings from their command, and replace them with military commanders.

CSB 1 Kings 20:24 Also do this: remove each king from his position and appoint captains in their place.

ESV 1 Kings 20:24 And do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in their places,

NIV 1 Kings 20:24 Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers.

NLT 1 Kings 20:24 Only this time replace the kings with field commanders!

- **remove the kings:** 1Ki 20:1,16 22:31 Pr 21:30
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BEN-HADAD'S SERVANT'S STRATEGY FOR BATTLE

Do this thing: remove the kings, each from his place, and put captains in their place - NLT picks up the sense of this instruction "Only this time replace the kings with field commanders!" Why remove the kings? Either they no longer supporter Ben-Hadad or they were seen as unhelpful to the cause. Utley adds the thought that "the separate small kingdoms united into one Syrian kingdom."

1 Kings 20:25 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:25 Muster an army like the one you lost, with the same number of horses and chariots. Then we will fight them in the plains; we will certainly overpower them." He approved their plan and did as they advised.

CSB 1 Kings 20:25 Raise another army for yourself like the army you lost-- horse for horse, chariot for chariot-- and let's fight with them on the plain; and we will certainly be stronger than they will be." The king listened to them and did so.

ESV 1 Kings 20:25 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 shall be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.

NIV 1 Kings 20:25 You must also raise an army like the one you lost--horse for horse and chariot for chariot-- so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

NLT 1 Kings 20:25 Recruit another army like the one you lost. Give us the same number of horses, chariots, and men, and we will fight against them on the plains. There's no doubt that we will beat them." So King Ben-hadad did as they suggested.

- **and surely:** Ps 10:3
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SERVANT'S CONFIDENCE OF VICTORY IN THE PLAIN

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 - They are confident but their foundation for confidence was their false belief in their no-gods being stronger in the plain. Again we see the utter foolishness of idolatry which distorts men's ability to think clearly. Of they are convinced that in the plain their horses and chariots would give them a distinct advantage (cf Jdg 1:19+).

And he listened to their voice and did so - Not surprisingly Ben-Hadad likes his servant's foolish advice.

NET 1 Kings 20:26 In the spring Ben Hadad mustered the Syrian army and marched to Aphek to fight Israel.

CSB 1 Kings 20:26 In the spring, Ben-hadad mobilized the Arameans and went up to Aphek to battle Israel.

ESV 1 Kings 20:26 In the spring, Ben-hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

NIV 1 Kings 20:26 The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

NLT 1 Kings 20:26 The following spring he called up the Aramean army and marched out against Israel, this time at Aphek.

- **Aphek:** 1Ki 20:30 Jos 13:4 19:30 Jdg 1:31, Aphik, 1Sa 4:1 29:1 2Ki 13:17, 2Sa 11:1
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ESV Study Bible page 638

ARAMEAN ATTACK EXACTLY AS GOD PREDICTED

At the turn of the year (the spring), [Ben-hadad](#) mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel- **At the turn of the year** (the spring) for as we learn in 2Sa 11:1+ "it happened **in the spring**, at the time when kings go out to battle," which was exactly the timing the prophet had given to Ahab. From the map note that Aphek is much farther north than the first battle at Samaria. [Ben-hadad](#) made the decision to muster the troops (his will), but from Proverbs 21:1 we know that "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." And in this case Yahweh turned Ben-Hadad's heart to prepare for attack (again we see the mystery of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility).

MacArthur: Though several towns in Israel bore the name **Aphek**, the one mentioned here probably lay about 3 mi. E of the Sea of Galilee, N of the Yarmuk River. (See [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge - Supposed to be the Aphek near the river Adonis, between Heliopolis and Biblos, and probably the same place that Paul Lucas mentions in his Voyage to the Levant. It was swallowed up by an earthquake, and formed a lake about nine miles in circumference, in which he says there were several houses still to be seen entire, under the water.

1 Kings 20:27 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:27 When the Israelites had mustered and had received their supplies, they marched out to face them in battle. When the Israelites deployed opposite them, they were like two small flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the land.

CSB 1 Kings 20:27 The Israelites mobilized, gathered supplies, and went to fight them. The Israelites camped in front of them like two little flocks of goats, while the Arameans filled the landscape.

ESV 1 Kings 20:27 And the people of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went against them. The people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country.

NIV 1 Kings 20:27 When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.

NLT 1 Kings 20:27 Israel then mustered its army, set up supply lines, and marched out for battle. But the Israelite army looked like two little flocks of goats in comparison to the vast Aramean forces that filled the countryside!

- **The sons of Israel were mustered and were provisioned**, Jos 1:11 Jdg 7:8
- **like two:** De 32:30 Jdg 6:5 1Sa 13:5-8 14:2 2Ch 32:7,8 Ec 9:11

- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A Figurative Depiction of the Two Forces

ISRAEL WAS SMALL BUT WAS MIGHTY WITH GOD

The sons of Israel were mustered and were provisioned (had received their supplies) **and went to meet them** - **CSB** - "The Israelites mobilized, gathered supplies, and went to fight them." **NLT** - "Israel then mustered its army, set up supply lines, and marched out for battle."

And the sons of Israel camped before them (Israelites deployed opposite them) **like two little flocks of goats, but the Arameans filled the country** - **NLT** = "But the Israelite army looked like two little flocks of goats in comparison to the vast Aramean forces that filled the countryside!" Our writer makes it very clear that the Israeli forces are massively outnumbered! Of course, we know that our God loves impossible situations for then He Alone can receive the glory!

NET NOTE on **two little flocks of goats** - The noun translated "small flocks" occurs only here. The common interpretation derives the word from the verbal root חָשַׁח, "to strip off; to make bare." In this case the noun refers to something "stripped off" or "made bare." HALOT 359 s.v. חָשַׁח derives the noun from a proposed homonymic verbal root (which occurs only in Ps 29:9) meaning "cause a premature birth." In this case the derived noun could refer to goats that are undersized because they are born prematurely.

1 Kings 20:28 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.'"

NET 1 Kings 20:28 The prophet visited the king of Israel and said, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Syrians said, "The LORD is a god of the mountains and not a god of the valleys," I will hand over to you this entire huge army. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

CSB 1 Kings 20:28 Then the man of God approached and said to the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans have said: Yahweh is a god of the mountains and not a god of the valleys, I will hand over all this great army to you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

ESV 1 Kings 20:28 And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Syrians have said, "The LORD is a god of the hills 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.'"

NIV 1 Kings 20:28 The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.' "

NLT 1 Kings 20:28 Then the man of God went to the king of Israel and said, "This is what the LORD says: The Arameans have said, 'The LORD is a god of the hills and not of the plains.' So I will defeat this vast army for you. Then you will know that I am the LORD."

- **man of God came near** : 1Ki 20:13,22 13:1 17:18 2Ch 20:14-20
- **Because the Arameans have said,**: 1Ki 20:23 Isa 37:29-37
- **therefore will**: 1Ki 20:13 De 32:27 Jos 7:8,9 Job 12:16-19 Ps 58:10,11 79:10 Isa 37:29,35 Jer 14:7 Eze 20:9,14 36:21-23,32
- **know**: 1Ki 20:13 Ex 6:7 7:5 8:22 De 29:6 Eze 6:14 11:12 12:16 36:22 39:7
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE PROPHET PROMISES VICTORY

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 (into your power), **and you shall know** ([yada](#); Lxx - [ginosko](#) = know intimately, experientially) **that I am the LORD** - So notice that not only does the prophet say the victory would cause Israel to **know** that it was from Yahweh (and that they might

truly know Him) and not their preparations (for their forces were only as large as **two little flocks of goats**), but he is also saying the Arameans would realize Israel's God was omnipresent and not just restricted to the mountains.

THOUGHT - The key promise (then and in our battles today beloved) is **I will give all this great multitude into your hand**. I am reminded of Paul's encouraging words in 2Co 10:3-5: "For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses**. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Oh, how we need to continually recall God's strategy for victory when we are in spiritual struggles (cf Eph 6:10-18+). Let it be so LORD for Thy glory and honor. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

[Adam Clarke](#) adds "God resents their blasphemy, and is determined to punish it. They shall now be discomfited in such a way as to show that God's power is everywhere, and that the multitude of a host is nothing against him."

[Brian Bell](#) - What is God to you? Is He only the God of the Hills (mnt tops)? We expect religion to serve us when we come to the great summits of experience. These are times of rapture and vision where we stand with God on these holy mountains of our life. But is that all? God is with us in the Valleys. When we descend into the valley of weeping. Ps.84:6 When they walk through the Valley of Weeping(Baca), it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. Or when we descend into the valley of shadow of death, or the valley of obscurity and loneliness, or the valley of conflict, we can say with the Psalmist, Thou art with me. Ps.23:4 Most of us, spend a large part of life in the valleys, walking among commonplace duties. Let's make sure in these shadowed days that we are walking in close companionship with our divine friend. And when our path does ascend...w/the mountain breeze is in our face...& when our view widens, may we stand with God on our high places as with hinds feet. Hab. 3:19 The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. So, the 1st victory was to teach Ahab that the Lord was the true God. The 2nd victory was to show the enemy that the Lord was not weak & limited, like the heathen gods.

Man of God - 78x in 73v - Deut. 33:1; Jos. 14:6; Jdg. 13:6; Jdg. 13:8; 1 Sam. 2:27; 1 Sam. 9:6; 1 Sam. 9:7; 1 Sam. 9:8; 1 Sam. 9:10; 1 Ki. 12:22; 1 Ki. 13:1; 1 Ki. 13:4; 1 Ki. 13:5; 1 Ki. 13:6; 1 Ki. 13:7; 1 Ki. 13:8; 1 Ki. 13:11; 1 Ki. 13:12; 1 Ki. 13:14; 1 Ki. 13:21; 1 Ki. 13:26; 1 Ki. 13:29; 1 Ki. 13:31; 1 Ki. 17:18; 1 Ki. 17:24; 1 Ki. 20:28; 2 Ki. 1:9; 2 Ki. 1:10; 2 Ki. 1:11; 2 Ki. 1:12; 2 Ki. 1:13; 2 Ki. 4:7; 2 Ki. 4:9; 2 Ki. 4:16; 2 Ki. 4:21; 2 Ki. 4:22; 2 Ki. 4:25; 2 Ki. 4:27; 2 Ki. 4:40; 2 Ki. 4:42; 2 Ki. 5:8; 2 Ki. 5:14; 2 Ki. 5:15; 2 Ki. 5:20; 2 Ki. 6:6; 2 Ki. 6:9; 2 Ki. 6:10; 2 Ki. 6:15; 2 Ki. 7:2; 2 Ki. 7:17; 2 Ki. 7:18; 2 Ki. 7:19; 2 Ki. 8:2; 2 Ki. 8:4; 2 Ki. 8:7; 2 Ki. 8:8; 2 Ki. 8:11; 2 Ki. 13:19; 2 Ki. 23:16; 2 Ki. 23:17; 1 Chr. 23:14; 2 Chr. 8:14; 2 Chr. 11:2; 2 Chr. 25:7; 2 Chr. 25:9; 2 Chr. 30:16; Ezr. 3:2; Neh. 12:24; Neh. 12:36; Ps. 90:1; Jer. 35:4; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:17

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE GOD 1 Kings 20:28 - John Mayshack

We underestimate God when:

1. We Misunderstand the Wisdom of an All-wise God
2. We Overlook the One Who Possesses All Power

C H Spurgeon - [God of the Hills and God of the Valleys \(full sermon\)](#) 1 Kings 20:28

There is no trial or temptation, though it be low, degrading, base, in which the Lord cannot as much assist you, when labouring under it, as in the sublimer struggles of the most noble life. Commit yourself to God and entertain no fears as to his all-sufficiency and faithfulness. But you say, 'I would not entertain any of those fears if I were like eminent saints, but I am far inferior to the godly men of whom I read and hear. I am obscure and insignificant; I have little talent and even less grace. I am a nobody.' But is our God the 'God of the hills' and not the 'God of the valleys'? Will God help Oliver Cromwell and not a private soldier who trusts in God and keeps his powder dry? Will God aid a Whitefield and not help a poor local preacher holding forth upon the green? Will he assist the earnest minister who addresses thousands, and desert the simple girl who teaches a dozen little children the old, old story of the cross? Is this after the fashion of God, to patronise the eminent and neglect the lowly? Does Jesus despise 'the day of small things'? Surely you have misread the Scriptures if you think so, for the Christ of the gospels took note of a widow's small coins, and was pleased with the hosannas of boys and girls. He rejoiced that his Father revealed his great things not to the wise and prudent, but to babes, and he called to his work not the high priests and philosophers, but the fishermen and tax-collectors. So, because you see a difference between yourself and others, and a change in the circumstances of your trial, do not begin to think that the Heavenly Father will desert you, or I shall again have to tell you that he is God of the valleys as well as the hills.

Spurgeon Study Bible - 20:28 "Because the Arameans have said: The LORD is a god of the mountains and not a god of the valleys, I will hand over all this whole huge army to you. Then you will know that I am the LORD." Because of this blasphemy of the

Syrians, God was pleased to deliver his people Israel. It is not the only time, but one of many, in which the blasphemies of the adversary have worked good for the people of God. We might have supposed that God would have said, "It does not matter what these ignorant heathen say. Who cares for their slanderous falsehoods?" But our God is jealous; he is ever represented in Scripture as being tender of his own glory and, therefore, though Israel was guilty, and Ahab, their king, was detestable, yet God determines that Ahab and Israel will strike Ben-hadad and Syria because of what Syria had said. But as the Syrians fell into a great and blasphemous sin by thinking God was a local God, a God of the hills and not of the valleys, we may fall into much evil by the same thought process. We must beware imitating the Syrians by limiting the Holy One of Israel under any circumstances whatever. For example, the temptation is at times heavy on us to think that the gospel cannot conquer the world, that the truth of Jesus cannot spread in the midst of the thick darkness which surrounds us, that the good old cause is falling into a desperate condition, and that perhaps the victory we have looked for will not come after all. May the Lord increase our faith, and let us never dream that Jehovah, the God of the hills, is not the God of the valleys.

THE GOD OF THE VALLEYS

"the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys 1 Kings 20:28

The king of Syria, Ben-hadad, together with his great army, had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Israel. Since Palestine is rather mountainous, the king erroneously concluded that the Israelites had been successful because their deity was a God of the hills. If he could but engage them again in the valley, he was sure that he could easily overcome them. However, the prophet of the Lord spoke to King Ahab assuring him that to vindicate the Lord's honor, and to show He was God of all places and circumstances, Israel would again defeat the Syrian hosts. When the battle came, God's people won an even more impressive victory. They were thus reassured that the Lord was always at their side - even in the valley of deepest testing!

Many people today still think God is with them when they enjoy prosperity, yet mistakenly feel He has forsaken them when they are called to suffer affliction.

A merchant was informed by his confidential secretary that his company was in serious financial difficulty. "It's been a bad year, sir," said the employee; "there have been vast losses and few gains." The merchant saw that bankruptcy was imminent. When at last he spoke, his voice was low and steady. "No, John, it has been a good year in spite of everything. Every one of those figures 'in the red' represent hours of agonizing prayer on my part - experiences that have made me so spiritually rich that I cannot despair over any earthly losses. The future is bright, for the Lord has promised, 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.'" The secretary looked at him for a moment, and then said, "I want to tell you it was your steadiness under the testings of the past year that has made me long to know Christ as you do; and so the other night I received Him as my Savior. I agree, sir; it has indeed been a good year!" Both men had come to realize in a wonderful way that the Lord is also "the God of the valleys!"

God's "green pastures" are often found in the lowlands of trial! - H. G. Bosch

Vance Havner - GOD OF THE VALLEYS 1 Kings 20:28.

We are inclined to think of our God as the God of the hills, the lofty and exalted experiences of life. But He is also the God of the valleys, the dark and trying days, when the sun does not shine and the journey is long and painful. We shall surely be overcome by the enemy if we are hill children without the faith that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe in the lowlands of sorrow. Where there are mountains, there must be valleys. But there never was a winter that was not followed by spring. The Christian life is up and down, heights of fellowship with God and lofty vision but also the valleys, even of the shadow of death. But we need fear no evil for the God of the hills is with us when we travel the valleys below.

Vance Havner - God of the Valleys (See 1 Kings 20:23, 28.)

There is a precious lesson hidden in this account. As Christians we are inclined to worship only the God of the hills. We think of Him only in terms of the high and exalted experiences of life, the mountain peaks and heights of glory bright. But He is also the God of life's valleys, dark and trying days when the sun does not shine, when the journey is lonely and painful. Some of life's greatest victories are won in the valleys and not on the mountain tops. If we are hill Christians all the time, trying to live on spiritual excitements, flitting from one thrill to another, building tabernacles on the peaks as Peter wanted to do on the Mount of Transfiguration, we shall certainly be overcome by the enemy. We must know the God of the valleys as well as the God of the peaks. Where there are mountains there must be valleys and we had better be prepared for both. The Christian life is up and down, visions and valleys. Paul dropped all the way from third heaven to the thorn in the flesh to learn that God's grace is sufficient for depth as well as height. Satan's strategy is to defeat us in the lowlands.

Job was a righteous man, faithful in his religious observances, while prosperity smiled upon him in the hills of success, but when he

sat in desolation—family gone, possessions gone, health gone and a wife saying, "Curse God and die"—it was then that he took a postgraduate course getting acquainted with the God of the valleys.

John the Baptist could stand on Jordan and shout his bold faith in Jesus Christ but John the Baptist in jail fell so low that he inquired, "... Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3).

One grows a little suspicious of these souls who say they never doubt or fear, who walk in triumph without ever a defeat, who look with condescending scorn on less radiant saints playing in a minor key. Somehow it is often the very people who boast of highest exaltation and loftiest ecstasies who go down quickly in ignominious defeat. They are not geared for low elevations and need a faith that will not shrink when pressed by many a foe.

Doctor Torrey used to say that those who think they have attained some sublime height of faith and trust, because they never know any agony of conflict or of prayer, have surely gotten beyond their Lord and the mightiest victors for God. There is a fight of faith as well as a rest of faith, and your knowledge of God is inadequate for life's storm and stress if you know only the God of the hills. He is the same God as the God of the valleys. Blessed is the man who has found that neither hill nor valley, neither height nor depth, can separate us from His love.

1 Kings 20:29 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:29 The armies were deployed opposite each other for seven days. On the seventh day the battle began, and the Israelites killed 100,000 Syrian foot soldiers in one day.

CSB 1 Kings 20:29 They camped opposite each other for seven days. On the seventh day, the battle took place, and the Israelites struck down the Arameans-- 100,000 foot soldiers in one day.

ESV 1 Kings 20:29 And they encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle was joined. And the people of Israel struck down of the Syrians 100,000 foot soldiers in one day.

NIV 1 Kings 20:29 For seven days they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day.

NLT 1 Kings 20:29 The two armies camped opposite each other for seven days, and on the seventh day the battle began. The Israelites killed 100,000 Aramean foot soldiers in one day.

- **seven days:** Jos 6:15 1Sa 17:16 Ps 10:16
- **100,000 foot soldiers:** 2Sa 10:18 2Ch 13:17 20:23-25 28:6 Isa 37:36
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Joshua 6:15+ Then on the seventh day they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times; only on that day they marched around the city seven times.

YAHWEH WINS ISRAEL A MASSIVE VICTORY

So they camped one over against the other seven days- The reason for the delay of 7 days is not clear. However, one is reminded of Joshua's victory over Jericho after marching around the city for seven days, God's number of completion or perfection. See the other parallel with Jericho in the next verse where the wall fell (cf Joshua 6:20+).

And on the seventh day the battle was joined (the battle began), **and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day** - For the small force of Israelis to achieve this number of enemy casualties, is nothing short of supernatural. Clearly this is a manifestation of the hand of the LORD on the Israeli forces! They fought, but He enabled. Some writers propose this was too large a number but the Septuagint supports it and the Aramean army was obviously very large

THOUGHT - What is even more amazing is Yahweh's kindness and grace to supernaturally enable these Baal worshipping Israelites (one surmises that most were not Yahwists) to defeat the Arameans. Indeed this clearly demonstrates that an excellent descriptive definition of God's grace is that it gives **undeserved favor**. Are we too not daily recipients of His undeserved favor? (Rhetorical!) Thank you LORD!

1 Kings 20:30 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:30 The remaining 27,000 ran to Aphek and went into the city, but the wall fell on them. Now Ben Hadad ran into the city and hid in an inner room.

CSB 1 Kings 20:30 The ones who remained fled into the city of Aphek, and the wall fell on those 27,000 remaining men. Ben-hadad also fled and went into an inner room in the city.

ESV 1 Kings 20:30 And the rest fled into the city of Aphek, and the wall fell upon 27,000 men who were left. Ben-hadad also fled and entered an inner chamber in the city.

NIV 1 Kings 20:30 The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room.

NLT 1 Kings 20:30 The rest fled into the town of Aphek, but the wall fell on them and killed another 27,000. Ben-hadad fled into the town and hid in a secret room.

- **the rest:** Ps 18:25
- **wall:** Isa 24:18 Jer 48:44 Am 2:14,15 5:19 9:3 Lu 13:4
- **Ben-hadad fled:** 1Ki 20:10,20 Da 4:37
- **came into the city into an inner chamber.** Heb. into a chamber within a chamber. 1Ki 22:25 2Ch 18:24
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD MOVES WALLS TO DESTROY ARAMEANS

But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on 27,000 men who were left- God continued to move in supernatural ways to assist Israel in the victory, the wall falling just as it did in Jericho (Joshua 6:20+). Sadly the Arameans did not see the supernatural intervention as an opportunity to come to a knowledge of the truth about their idols and the One True God.

THOUGHT- This reminds me of the old 1993 Promise Keeper's song [-Let the Walls Fall](#) - it rocks a little but the message is still apropos today.

And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city into an inner chamber- The head of the snake was still alive and like a snake was hiding in a burrow!

James Smith - BEN-HADAD'S FALL AND RESTORATION 1 Kings 20:30–34

“Jesus, who to Thy Father prayed
For those who all Thy love repaid
With this dread cup of woes,
Teach me to conquer, Lord, like Thee,
By patience and benignity,
The thwarting of my foes.”
—FABER.

The cause of the defeat of the great host of Syrians was a denial of God. They did not believe that the God of Israel had any power in the valleys (v. 28). An imperfect and false idea of God has been, and is still, the source of ruin to many. “They that know their God shall be strong” (Dan. 11:32). To the believer God is the God of every hill and valley of their daily life. We do not attempt here an exposition of the above Scripture, but wish to use it only as an illustration or historical picture of the great salvation. Notice then a—

I. **Fearful Condition.** “Ben-hadad fled into an inner chamber” (1Ki 20:30). The marginal reading of the Revised Version is “from chamber to chamber,” as one convicted of danger and seeking safety, but finding no place to rest. How like this is to an awakened sinner, running as it were from place to place, from sin to sin, and from pleasure to pleasure, seeking rest and relief to his troubled soul, but never getting any assurance of salvation. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.”

II. **Hopeful Proclamation.** “We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings” (1Ki 20:31). These servants who had heard this good news did not hide the tidings from the anxious Ben-hadad, but carried them at once to him. Have we not heard

that the King of Heaven is merciful, and that He “delighteth in mercy,” and is “ready to pardon?” Are we hiding the good news, like the lepers of Samaria, from those timid and fearful souls who, like Ben-hadad, have been crushed and defeated in the battles of life, and who run to and fro secretly seeking a place of rest?

III. **Self-humbling Intercession.** “They put sackcloth on their loins, and ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and prayed for him” (1Ki 20:32). In praying for Ben-hadad they were praying for one who had forfeited his life through open rebellion. These intercessors identified themselves with the guilty one for whom they prayed. The sackcloth and the ropes spoke of repentance and a readiness to die for his sake. The way to pray for others is to put ourselves in their position and circumstances. Did our Lord Jesus Christ not do this? Where is our sackcloth and ropes when we make intercession for transgressors before our merciful King? Is our sympathy manifested?

IV. **Heartening Revelation.** “He is my brother” (1Ki 20:32). When the king of Israel deigned to call him, who had been his enemy, his “brother,” it was the throwing open of the door of grace and mercy to the petitioners. They were quick to catch it, and take advantage of it, by saying, “Thy brother.” What an encouragement we have in praying for others when we know that He loves His enemies and is prepared to receive them and treat them as brothers!

V. **Peaceful Reconciliation.** “He caused him to come up into the chariot” (1Ki 20:33). A little while ago he was fighting against the king of Israel, now he is reconciled to him, and having fellowship with him in his own chariot. Once we were enemies to the Son of God by our wicked works, but now, through grace and a mighty intercession, we have been brought nigh, and lifted up, and made to sit with Him in heavenly places. Our fellowship is now with the Son in the chariot of His salvation.

VI. **Voluntary Restitution.** “Ben-hadad said, The cities which my father took from thy father I will restore” (1Ki 20:34). Now that he had been “saved by grace” he was prepared to yield up to him all that beforetime had been taken from him. Should not the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ constrain us to yield up to Him that life which was beforetime taken from His service and spent in opposition to His will? (Rom. 12:1). “Thou hast loosed my bonds.... What shall I render unto the Lord?” (Psa. 116:12, 16, 17).

VII. **Blessed Consummation.** “So he made a covenant with him” (1Ki 20:34). They made a mutual agreement to seek one another’s welfare in time to come. Surely all self-seeking should end when we have been forgiven and reconciled unto God through the death of His Son. Is there not also a mutual understanding between the saved sinner and the Son of God, that while He looks after our interests in Heaven we should look after His interests on earth? As He has brought us into sonship shall we not agree to be His bond-slaves? “I determined not to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). So said Paul, whose whole soul had been captivated by the covenanting grace of God.

1 Kings 20:31 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.”

NET 1 Kings 20:31 His advisers said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the Israelite dynasty are kind. Allow us to put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads and surrender to the king of Israel. Maybe he will spare our lives."

CSB 1 Kings 20:31 His servants said to him, "Consider this: we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. So let's put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and let's go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life."

ESV 1 Kings 20:31 And his servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads and go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life."

NIV 1 Kings 20:31 His officials said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful. Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads. Perhaps he will spare your life."

NLT 1 Kings 20:31 Ben-hadad's officers said to him, "Sir, we have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. So let's humble ourselves by wearing burlap around our waists and putting ropes on our heads, and surrender to the king of Israel. Then perhaps he will let you live."

- **His servants:** 1Ki 20:23 2Ki 5:13
- **merciful kings:** Pr 20:28 Isa 16:5 Eph 1:7,8

- **put sackcloth:** 1Ki 21:27-29 Ge 37:34 2Sa 3:31 14:2 2Ki 19:1,2 Es 4:1-3 Isa 22:12 Isa 37:1 Jon 3:5,6 Rev 11:3
- **perhaps he will save your life:** 2Ki 7:4 Es 4:16 Job 2:4 Mt 10:28
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Lamentations 3:22-24 The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

APPEAL TO AHAB FOR MERCY

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 - NIV = "sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads" in some way would symbolize surrender and submission. In ancient times, wearing **ropes** around the head or neck was a sign of captivity and submission. It indicated that they were at the mercy of the victor, essentially saying, "We are your prisoners and surrender completely." These actions were comparable to raising a white flag on the battlefield or throwing in the towel in a boxing match.

[Bob Utley](#) adds that "It is possible that **"around the neck"** is meant as a means of taking prisoners into custody or exile (i.e., Assyrian and Egyptian wall art).

August Konkel writes that "A rope on the head indicates servitude, either as a prisoner of war or as someone who has given up his rights to one who has the power of life and death." (See [1 and 2 Kings - Page 326](#))

God's wrath comes by measure.

His mercy without measure

And go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will save your life- NLT = "Then perhaps he will let you live."

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, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

NET 1 Kings 20:32 So they put sackcloth around their waists and ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel. They said, "Your servant Ben Hadad says, 'Please let me live!'" Ahab replied, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

CSB 1 Kings 20:32 So they dressed with sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, went to the king of Israel, and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please spare my life.'" So he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

ESV 1 Kings 20:32 So they tied sackcloth around their waists and put ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please, let me live.'" And he said, "Does he still live? He is my brother."

NIV 1 Kings 20:32 Wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says: 'Please let me live.' " The king answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

NLT 1 Kings 20:32 So they put on burlap and ropes, and they went to the king of Israel and begged, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live!' " The king of Israel responded, "Is he still alive? He is my brother!"

- **Thy servant:** 1Ki 20:3-6 Job 12:17,18 40:11,12 Isa 2:11,12 10:12 Da 5:20-23 Ob 1:3,4
- **he is my brother:** 1Ki 20:42 1Sa 15:8-20
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE ARAMEAN'S APPAREL APPEAL

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.’” - How the tables are turned! **Ben-hadad** who had threatened to take Ahab's wives, children and whatever else he desired, now makes the pretentious declaration that he is Ahab's servant!

And he (Ahab) said, “Is he (Ben-Hadad) still alive? He is my brother - Ahab's response indicates that he wants to make a parity treaty and treat Ben Hadad as an equal partner. This is a very sad statement indicating Ahab is sucked in by the "Aramean Apparel Ruse." These are words that show Ahab was disposed to enter into a covenant, which he in fact did.

Bob Utley - Ahab spared Ben-hadad against YHWH's orders (cf. v. 42). Ahab even went so far as to make a covenant with Ben-hadad, which surely involved the Syrian deities. **"Brothers"** is an idiomatic reference to a covenant partner, not a kin issue (cf. 1 Kgs. 9:13).

John Trapp - "This was not courtesy, but foolery. Brother Ben-Hadad will ere long fight against Ahab with that life which he had given him (1Ki 22:31)."

James Smith - ROPES AND SACKCLOTH; or, how to meet God. 1 Kings 20:32.

King Edward III, in 1327, besieged Calais, and when it was in extremity agreed to spare the place on condition that six of its principal citizens came out, clothed in sackcloth and halters round their necks. They were spared death only through the intercession of his wife, Queen Adelaide. We wonder if Edward III got his idea from the Bible? For there is a similar scene in 1 Kings 20. During the life of the Prophet Elijah, 5 years after Carmel, Benhadad, King of Syria, assisted by 32 Kings, came against Israel. Ahab was frightened, and agreed to pay an indemnity to save himself and people. But Benhadad went too far, and God delivered him into the hand of Ahab, a great slaughter following. Now without an army, in a strange land, he was in a dreadful position. Then his advisers spake.

"We have heard that the Kings of Israel are merciful Kings," said they, and they decided to throw themselves on his mercy. Clothing themselves with sackcloth, and with ropes around their necks, a deputation thus waited upon the King, and succeeded in securing life and liberty.

On the lonely Isle of Patmos, which is only 15 miles in circumference, lived a hermit. Asked why he was living in such seclusion, he replied: "Some day I have to meet God. I am preparing for that day."

His desire for readiness is commendable, but not the mode of preparation. The best preparation to meet God up in the Better Land is to meet Him down here. "There will I meet with you," said God to Moses, referring to the Ark with its blood-sprinkled Mercy Seat. God has His meeting-place, and that is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reading this story, note:

I. Their Peril. They were enemies, and had taken up arms against Israel. We are rebels to God both by birth and choice. "He that is not with Me, is against Me," is the Word of the Lord.

II. Their Hope. They heard of the mercy of Israel, whom they had come up to fight. Is not our God merciful? Mercy is one of His moral attributes. We have a merciful God.

III. Their Action.

1. Clothed themselves with sackcloth—emblem of sorrow—our grief on account of our sins.
2. Put ropes around their necks—their confession by deed that they were worthy of death.
3. Their confession by word of mouth, and plea for mercy.

IV. Their Salvation.

1. Pardon. "Come up into the chariot."
2. Friendship. Treated as friends and not as enemies.
3. Restoration. Restored him back to his house and friends and to his former possessions. We gain in Christ more than we lost in Adam.
4. Covenant. See Hebrews 8:10-13.

1 Kings 20:33 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:33 The men took this as a good omen and quickly accepted his offer, saying, "Ben Hadad is

your brother." Ahab then said, "Go, get him." So Ben Hadad came out to him, and Ahab pulled him up into his chariot.

CSB 1 Kings 20:33 Now the men were looking for a sign of hope, so they quickly picked up on this and responded, "Yes, it is your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go and bring him." So Ben-hadad came out to him, and Ahab had him come up into the chariot.

ESV 1 Kings 20:33 Now the men were watching for a sign, and they quickly took it up from him and said, "Yes, your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go and bring him." Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot.

NIV 1 Kings 20:33 The men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up his word. "Yes, your brother Ben-Hadad!" they said. "Go and get him," the king said. When Ben-Hadad came out, Ahab had him come up into his chariot.

NLT 1 Kings 20:33 The men took this as a good sign and quickly picked up on his words. "Yes," they said, "your brother Ben-hadad!" "Go and get him," the king of Israel told them. And when Ben-hadad arrived, Ahab invited him up into his chariot.

- **the men:** Pr 25:13 Lu 16:8
- **and he caused:** 2Ki 10:15 Ac 8:31
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ENEMIES NOW CHARIOT CHUMS

Now the men (the other Arameans) **took this as an omen** ([nachash](#)) The other Arameans took this as a divine sign. The Septuagint uses oionizomai which means to take omens from the flight and cries of birds, to divine from omens and then to learn from divination. The Arameans clearly were very superstitious!

and quickly catching his word said, "Your brother [Ben-hadad](#)." NLT - "Quickly picked up on his words. ""Yes," they said, "your brother Ben-hadad!"

[Bob Utley](#) - Those hearing King Ahab call Ben-hadad a "brother" caught the meaning of the word and knew he was not to be killed but become a covenant partner.

Then he said, "Go, bring him." - Ahab should have said, "Go slay him," but he was weak and foolish.

Then [Ben-hadad](#) came out to him, and he took him up into the chariot- To be invited into the king's chariot was an honor, so Ahab is now "all in" to grant Ben-Hadad a pardon.

Omen (05172) [nachash](#) not to be confused with Hebrew word for serpent [nachash](#) = "Because of the similarity of nachash to nāḥāsh meaning "snake," some make a connection to [snake charming](#). More contend that there is a similarity of hissing sounds between enchanter and serpents and hence the similarity of words." - TWOT) means to practice divination, observe signs and is only in the Piel intensive stem. First use of Laban to Jacob "I have **divined** that the LORD has blessed me on your account." (Ge 30:27). "Both in Genesis 44:5, 15 the doubly intensive form (infinitive absolute plus finite verb) occurs. There we learn that Joseph claimed for his brothers' benefit that he could "divine" with a special cup and so knew secret things such as that his brothers, still unaware of who he was, had his cup in their possession. But divination is outlawed in Leviticus 19:26 and is spoken of with condemnation in 2 Kings 17:17 and 2 Kings 21:6 (cf. 2 Chron. 33:6). It is in the list of forbidden occult practices of Deut. 18:10. (TWOT)

Gilbrant - The practice of divination was widespread throughout the ancient Near East. Omens were taken before attempting a wide variety of significant events, such as engaging in warfare or building projects. Further, omens were used at Mari as a check against individuals who made claims that a god was communicating through them. Omens stem from observation of the natural world with the assumption that anything which deviates from the natural order does so under the influence of the divine realm as a means of communication. Unusual events in the political order could be tied to unusual events in the natural order, the subject of omens. An unusual sheep liver, discovered in the course of ritual sacrifice, was understood by the peoples surrounding the Israelites as the announcement of a coming event. There existed long lists of the significance of particular omens in Akkadian literature, and a number of liver models (for learning divination) have been discovered throughout Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine. Though an integral part of other ancient

societies, the practice was banned among the ancient Israelites, who were to communicate legitimately with God through prayer and prophetic utterances (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10). One of the causes for the captivity of the northern tribes was the practice of divination (2 Ki. 17:17). Among his many other occultic practices, King Manasseh likewise was guilty of practicing divination (2 Ki. 21:6; 2 Chr. 33:6). Laban divined that the Lord had blessed him because of Jacob (Gen. 30:27). Joseph gave the impression that he practiced divination with the cup he had hid in Benjamin's saddlebag (Gen. 44:5, 15). When king Ahab defeated the Syrian army, the officers of Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, carefully watched Ahab for an omen of mercy (1 Ki. 20:33) and interpreted Ahab's use of the term "brother" as a good sign; on the basis of this sign, they negotiated a favorable peace treaty with Ahab. (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

1 Kings 20:34 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:34 Ben Hadad said, "I will return the cities my father took from your father. You may set up markets in Damascus, just as my father did in Samaria." Ahab then said, "I want to make a treaty with you before I dismiss you." So he made a treaty with him and then dismissed him.

CSB 1 Kings 20:34 Then Ben-hadad said to him, "I restore to you the cities that my father took from your father, and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, like my father set up in Samaria." Ahab responded, "On the basis of this treaty, I release you." So he made a treaty with him and released him.

ESV 1 Kings 20:34 And Ben-hadad said to him, "The cities that my father took from your father I will restore, and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." And Ahab said, "I will let you go on these terms." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

NIV 1 Kings 20:34 "I will return the cities my father took from your father," Ben-Hadad offered. "You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." Ahab said, "On the basis of a treaty I will set you free." So he made a treaty with him, and let him go.

NLT 1 Kings 20:34 Ben-hadad told him, "I will give back the towns my father took from your father, and you may establish places of trade in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." Then Ahab said, "I will release you under these conditions." So they made a new treaty, and Ben-hadad was set free.

- **The cities:** 1Ki 15:20 2Ch 16:4
- **So he made a covenant:** 1Ki 20:42 22:31 2Ch 18:30 Isa 8:12 26:10
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Kings 15:20+ So **Ben-hadad** listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah and all Chinneroth, besides all the land of Naphtali.

BEN-HADAD MAKES CONCESSIONS & COVENANT

Ben-hadad said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father (See 1Ki 15:20+) I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." - NLT = "I will give back the towns my father took from your father, and you may establish places of trade in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." **Make streets** apparently refers to allowing Ahab this must refer to set up stalls for merchants to sell their goods, which would be like making a trade agreement.

Reformation Study Bible - you may establish bazaars. International trade could bring substantial income (1Ki 10:23-29), and the guarantee of a market in another country would afford a distinct economic advantage for the merchants of Israel.

Ahab said, "And I will let you go with this covenant." So he made a covenant with him and let him go- CSB = "Ahab responded, "On the basis of this treaty, I release you." So he made a treaty with him and released him." A **covenant** was the most solemn, binding agreement one could make in the ancient world and Ahab, an Israelite, chose to make a covenant with a Gentile. Clearly Ahab either did not know the Pentateuch or simply chose to ignore the words on Moses which said "when the LORD your

God shall deliver them (CANAANITES) before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them (THAT MEANT KILL THEIR LEADERS ALSO). You shall **make no covenant** with them and **show no favor to them.**" (Dt 7:2+). Ahab was refusing to slay Ben-Hadad and now was showing him favor and cutting a covenant.

Warren Wiersbe writes that "That the king of Israel should make such a treaty with the enemy is remarkable, but Ahab had no convictions (except those of his wife) and always took the easy way out of any situation. Furthermore, he needed the support of Aram in case the Assyrians should decide to move south. This treaty lasted three years (1Ki 22:1+). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

TSK - One of the conditions of this covenant, we learn, was, that Ahab should have "streets (chutsoth) in Damascus;" a proposal better relished by Ahab than understood by the generality of commentators. This, however, is well illustrated by Mr. Harmer, from William of Tyre, the great historian of the Crusades; from whom it appears that it was customary to give those nations which were engaged in them, churches, streets, and great jurisdiction therein, in those places which they assisted to conquer. The Genoese and Venetians had each a street in Acon, or Acre, in which they had their own jurisdiction, with liberty to have an oven, mill, baths, weights, and measures, etc.

Brian Bell - Not claiming a complete Victory. In which area of your life have you come only part of the way? Partial victory? When you think the battle is over, you may face your greatest danger and experience your greatest defeat.

Question 84 What does it mean that Ben-Hadad will let Ahab build “streets” in Damascus(1 Kings 20:34)? - David E O'Brien

You've heard the adage, "To the victor go the spoils." The streets in Damascus were part of the spoils of Ahab's victory over Syria. These were commercial streets, trade zones, where Israel's merchants were allowed to do business without hindrance or tax in the capital of their traditional enemy. These trade zones were like Japan's tariff-free commerce in the United States today. Israel's trade zones in enemy territory were a graphic demonstration of Ahab's total defeat of Ben-Hadad. They allow us to see Ahab as he really was: a powerful, feared monarch. We focus our attention on his spiritual bankruptcy, but his contemporaries weren't concerned about that. They saw him as an ally to be courted and an enemy to be feared.

Assyrian records tell us that a coalition formed between Ahab, Damascus, and Hamath stood against Shalmaneser III in a battle at Qarqar. Ahab's 2,000 chariots would have been a key element in that force. While Shalmaneser boasted of a great victory, he was actually stopped cold for several years.

Ahab's streets in Damascus are a token of the power he was able to exercise among Israel's neighbors. ([Today's Handbook for Solving Bible Difficulties - Page 273](#))

1 Kings 20:35 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:35 One of the members of the prophetic guild, speaking with divine authority, ordered his companion, "Wound me!" But the man refused to wound him.

CSB 1 Kings 20:35 One of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow prophet by the word of the LORD, "Strike me!" But the man refused to strike him.

ESV 1 Kings 20:35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the LORD, "Strike me, please." But the man refused to strike him.

NIV 1 Kings 20:35 By the word of the LORD one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, "Strike me with your weapon," but the man refused.

NLT 1 Kings 20:35 Meanwhile, the LORD instructed one of the group of prophets to say to another man, "Hit me!" But the man refused to hit the prophet.

NRS 1 Kings 20:35 At the command of the LORD a certain member of a company of prophets said to another, "Strike me!" But the man refused to strike him.

- **of the sons:** 1Ki 20:38 1Sa 10:12 2Ki 2:3,5,7,15 4:1,38 Am 7:14
- **by the word of the LORD:** 1Ki 13:1,2,17,18
- **strike me** 1Ki 20:37 Isa 8:18 20:2,3 Jer 27:2,3 Eze 4:3 Mt 16:24
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PREPARATION FOR CONFRONTING KING AHAB

Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another(unclear whether this is another man or another prophet) **by the word of the LORD, "Please strike (wound) me."** But the man refused to strike (wound) him - **NLT** - "At the command of the LORD a certain member of a company of prophets said to another, "Strike me!" But the man refused to strike him" In support for this "another" also being a prophet is the fact that this man incurred the death penalty implying that he knew the penalty for disobedience. The point of wounding the prophet was that he might appear to be a wounded soldier and Ahab would not recognize him as a prophet.

Sons of the prophets does not refer to physical children but those who belonged to this prophetic association possibly led by either Elijah or Elisha. This phrase **sons of the prophets** occurs 12x in 11v - 1 Ki. 20:35; 2 Ki. 2:3; 2 Ki. 2:5; 2 Ki. 2:7; 2 Ki. 2:15; 2 Ki. 4:1; 2 Ki. 4:38; 2 Ki. 5:22; 2 Ki. 6:1; 2 Ki. 9:1; Acts 3:25

David Guzik - Directed by God, the prophet needed an injury to display to King Ahab. When his neighbor refused, the prophet announced coming judgment on the neighbor, through the unusual method of a lion attack

The identity of **a certain man of the sons of the prophets** is not certain. Some writers think he is a different prophet than the one mentioned earlier (1Ki 20:13, 22) because 1Ki 20:41 says **the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets** In other words, it does not say Ahab recognized him as THE prophet.

Bob Utley - "**the sons of the prophets**" The earliest form of the prophet was an ecstatic community group (i.e., 1 Sam. 19:20; 2 Kgs. 2:3-6,7,15; 4:1,38; 5:33; 6:1; 9:1). Josephus (*Antiq.* 8.14.5) identifies him as Micaiah (cf 1 Kings 22). "**said to another**" The Masoretic Text has "said to his neighbor or fellow prophet" (BDB 945 II). The context implies one prophet spoke to another in YHWH's name.

Donald Wiseman - "This is the first reference to these special bands of prophets (2 Kings 2:3-7, 2:15; 4:1, 4:38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1) who appear during the critical period of the Omride dynasty but are otherwise not well attested." (See [1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary - Page 192](#))

Clarence Macartney - [The Parables of the Old Testament](#) **The Parable of the Lost Prisoner** 1 Kings 20:35–43

ISRAEL had just won a great victory over her inveterate enemy, Benhadad, king of Syria. Because of the previous defeat in the hill country, the Syrians fancied that a battle in the valleys would bring them victory, for they said, "Their god is a god of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we." But the battle in the plain proved even more disastrous than that of the hills. An hundred thousand fell in the combat and the remaining twenty thousand perished in an earthquake. The very stars in their courses were fighting against Syria. The army had been beaten, but the heart and soul of that army was still alive. There are some causes and some armies which are never beaten till the leader who incarnates them is beaten. From his secret hiding-place, Benhadad sends messengers to Ahab. They find him in high feather over his victory. As he surveyed the field where so many Syrians had fallen and so few Israelites, he was tempted to a foolish magnanimity. Instead of destroying Benhadad, or at least taking precaution to prevent his further outbreaks, he gave him a ride in his chariot and sent him off to Syria with a treaty of peace which Benhadad at once proceeded to violate.

"But a certain man of the sons of the prophets!" One of God's nameless ambassadors of conscience was at hand to rebuke the foolish king and pronounce his judgment. As in the parable of The Ewe Lamb, the plan is to have the king condemn himself by passing judgment on an imaginary case. In the disguise of a wounded soldier, the man of God sat lamenting by the roadside. As the chariot of the king rolled by, he sprang up with his tale of woe. "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.' And as thy servant was busy here and there, behold, he was gone." And the king of Israel said to him, "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hath decided it." Then the man unwound the bandage about his head and the king of Israel discerned that he was of the prophets. With bowed head and heavy heart he listened to the word of doom: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I devoted to destruction, therefore thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people." And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased. Oh, these nameless monitors who sit ever by the roadside and wait for us as we return from the fields of desire! How they turn the sweets of victory into bitterness of gall! How they make the ivory palace of our pride seem stale, flat and unprofitable! Who can penetrate the disguise? Who can avoid the hiding-place and waiting-place of conscience, God's unrelenting prophet? Whether it be a king who passes in his chariot fresh from victory in war, or a peasant with lowly tread, there conscience waits to tell us of our folly and name our judgment. It is not enough that the battle has been won and the army beaten. Conscience comes, not to praise us for what we have done, but to rebuke us for what we have left undone; to tell us that one hundred thousand slain foes will not compensate for one king of evil dismissed in peace; to tell us that a hundred prayers and gifts and deeds cannot

atone for one act of disobedience, or stay the approaching hand of judgment.

Not the main lesson, but one of the by-products of this parable, is the manner in which it illustrates the danger of half-way measures with evil and sin. Three years after Ahab let Benhadad go free and sent him back to his own country, Ahab and Jehoshaphat are again at war with him before the walls of Ramoth Gilead. Remembering the words of the man of God, that the king whom he had let go would one day take his life, Ahab went into battle in the disguise of a common soldier. But a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and Ahab was slain. His life was for the life of the man he let go. The conduct of Ahab, in view of the past and the present and the future, was a stupendous piece of folly. If, after Waterloo, the Allies, thinking that an emperor whose legions had been crushed could never again menace the peace of Europe, had let Napoleon go free, or established him on the continent of Europe, their folly would have been of a piece with that of Ahab. It was sad to see him digging in the garden at Longwood, or standing on the naked cliff at Helena, musing over the past, feeling himself only a memory, a dead man not yet buried, bothered with petty officials and quarrelling with his companions in captivity. But it was good for the peace of Europe. It was an instance where severity was mercy. There are national problems which now and then confront the statesmen of a nation and the tendency will always be to half-way measures of compromise. In our Civil War the Valley of Virginia was the granary of Lee's army. Union forces marched through it and gained victories; but the crops grew again, the sheep and oxen and cattle waxed fat, and all the resources of that well-watered valley were propping up the Confederate Government. Finally Grant sent Hunter and then Sheridan into the valley and told them to burn it out; not to leave a mill-wheel that could turn, or a barn that could store the grain, or a crop that could feed the animals: to lay it waste, and desolate it so that even a crow flying over it would have to carry its own rations. A howl of rage went up, North and South, but the torch of Sheridan and Hunter did more to bring the war to a close and end the sufferings of North and South than the explosion of the shell or the thrust of the bayonet.

When it becomes plain that a thing is devoted to destruction by God, then man had better line up on the side of God. In 1808 Congress forbade the further importation of slaves, thus recognizing that the thing was wrong and dangerous. But for fifty-three years the nation fooled and compromised and debated, and then slavery had to be washed out in a sea of blood. To right-thinking men and women it must be increasingly apparent that the liquor traffic is a thing devoted by God to destruction. If God's curse doesn't rest on it, then God never has and never will curse an evil thing. In the 'forties and 'fifties the danger was recognized in this country. Then it would have been an easy matter to destroy the business. But instead of that, States and Government began to regulate, license, limit, compromise, until now hell from beneath is stirred if you but put your little finger on the business. Busy here and there with canal-digging and road-making and financial reforms, the Nation has let this hideous prisoner, potential with so much damnation and woe, escape to its stronghold with sundry promises and regulations, only to come back at the return of the year with a bigger army and renewed vigour.

What is true of man collectively is true of man as the individual. The time to destroy sin and crush evil habits is when you have them in your power. If you have had some encounter with a besetting sin, or evil habit, don't be content to let it go with compromise. God told Saul to destroy Amalek. Saul thought he was wiser than God and let some of them escape. Years have passed by, and Saul, lying self-wounded on the field of Gilboa, called to a man, "Stand upon me and slay me." "So I stood upon him and slew him, and I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm." And that man was an Amalekite. That is the natural history of sin when we spare it, and treat it lightly. One day it comes back to find us weak, and it stands upon us and takes the crown of manhood from our dishonoured brow. When you deal with sin, deal with it—not as an hypothesis of theology—but as a foe who will one day show you no quarter.

"As thy servant was busy here and there, behold he was gone." The precious prisoner escaped him while he was busy with other things. The great business of that man's day was to guard that prisoner. But he went here and there, to do this and that, and the prisoner escaped. Every period of life has its irrevocable and irreparable. The farmer who doesn't get his plough out in March and April and turn up the soil, and sow the seed, will starve when December comes. There is a time to plant, and a time to reap. There are things to be done in March that cannot be done in December. Youth is a prisoner committed to our keeping for only one day. If we neglect to do some things in youth, train the body, clothe the mind, we must pay for it in after life. There is an angel who comes down to stir the pool of life in the days of youth. He who will not step down then, steps down never. In the early morning, after the sun is up, the roses on a June morning will sparkle with a thousand diamonds of beauty and glory. In a little moment the dew is gone, and gone the glory of it. At high noon you may take a pitcher of water and pour it over the rosebush, but no matter how abundant the water, and how pure it may be, all your pouring will never bring back that golden glitter of the short-lived dew of sunrise. Rejoice, O young man, young woman, in thy youth! Remember thy Creator in the days of youth. Fit body, mind and soul in the days of thy youth. One day you will awake to find youth, that elusive prisoner, is gone, and gone forever.

"Break, break, break, at the foot of thy crags,
O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

Opportunity for doing good comes to all of us, but its day is brief. No one of us is so limited in sphere or so humble in place but he can shed heaven about him. Recall for the moment how it is the little kindnesses and courtesies and thoughtfulnesses which constitute the staple of human happiness. The power lies within the reach of us all, but it does not lie there forever, for the simple reason that those to whom we might do good are not always at our hand, and we ourselves may suddenly be called to our account. Therefore, redeem the time. There is Jesus kneeling in agony in prayer in the moonlit shadows of Gethsemane, and the Three whom He had asked to watch with Him—Peter, James and John—asleep. “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” Just one hour! The opportunity of serving Jesus in that way lasted just one hour. They failed to awake and use the hour, and when it was past, Jesus came to them and finding them still sleeping, said sadly, “Sleep on now and take your rest! Whether you wake or sleep makes no difference to me. Your hour of holy service and fidelity is past. Sleep on now!” Do we not deal with our friends and beloved and fellow men as these disciples did with Jesus? We sleep as if we could have the same chance to-morrow. The one with whom you ought to watch, by whose side you ought to stand, at this very hour may be kneeling in his garden, distilling from his brow the drops of agony, and you asleep, careless, indifferent. You are busy here and there, and while you are busy the precious prisoner is gone, and all Eternity can never bring him back. Oh, do not live and do not work, and do not love as though you were fixed in your present state and relationship for Eternity, and not for a little segment of time between the two eternities. Whatsoever is in your heart and mind to do, and to say, and to be, do it, say it, be it NOW! To-morrow you may take up the morning paper and find that he is gone and your chance is gone. To-morrow you may call and none will answer. To-morrow the still face, the vacant place, the unlifted book, the unfinished letter, will speak to you with a rebuke that your vexed soul will scarce be able to bear:—“Sleep on now! Sleep, sleep forever! You had it in your heart, you meant to do it, you meant to say it, ‘But as thy servant was busy here and there, behold, he was gone!’ ”

“I did not know how short your day would be!
I had you safe, and words could wait awhile—
E’en when your eyes begged tenderness of me,
Behind their smile.

“And now for you, so dark, so long, is night!
I speak, but on my knees, unheard, alone—
What words were these to make a short day bright

“—If I had known!
Ah, love—if I had known!”

One final application of this parable. This life is a probation for the next. Time is a trial for eternity. That is the teaching of Christianity. Neither you nor I can prove that it is so; but if it isn't so, then worship, prayers and sermons are all a farce. Christ must have known, and if you go through His teachings you will find that He always dwells on that, that this life is the probation for the next. If I could show you that your period of probation would come to an end this night at six o'clock, and when I came again to this pulpit for the evening service you would be in eternity, what now would be your thoughts? You, like all others, would think of things done that you would either do differently or not at all; of things not done that you would do; of friends from whom you are alienated and to whom you would seek to be reconciled; of little debts of love, of kindness that you would make haste to pay. But the greatest thing that could engage your mind would be this: How do I stand in regard to the offer of salvation and eternal life which God has made to me through Jesus Christ? Then you would not be too busy here and there to neglect to do what Christ said every wise man ought to do—Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Between now and six o'clock this evening is six hours. But whether it be six hours, or six days, or six years, nothing is more certain than that your probation will end, and the chance and trial of life will be over. Do I speak to some who have been busy here and there, careless of the great thing? Remember that between you and eternity there is nothing but time, which is of all things the frailest. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near!

1 Kings 20:36 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.

NET 1 Kings 20:36 So the prophet said to him, "Because you have disobeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." When he left him, a lion attacked and killed him.

CSB 1 Kings 20:36 He told him, "Because you did not listen to the voice of the LORD, mark my words: When you leave me, a lion will kill you." When he left him, a lion attacked and killed him.

ESV 1 Kings 20:36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down." And as soon as he had departed from him, a

lion met him and struck him down.

NIV 1 Kings 20:36 So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.

NLT 1 Kings 20:36 Then the prophet told him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, a lion will kill you as soon as you leave me." And when he had gone, a lion did attack and kill him.

- 1Ki 13:21-24,26 1Sa 15:22,23
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A PARABLE PLAYED OUT IN ACTION

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 - The one who did not strike the prophet was showing he did not obey the voice of the LORD and his penalty for disobedience was death. Recall that the old prophet from Bethel had spoken a similar judgment against the man of God from Judah (1Ki 13:20-25+), the point being that even prophets must obey God's word. No one gets a pass for disobedience. And in this context, we will see that if prophets cannot escape God's judgment, then neither can disobedient kings like Ahab!

[Bob Utley](#) - The use of a [lion](#) as a means of YHWH's judgment for disobeying His word is also found in 1 Kgs. 13:24-25. ([LIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT](#))

[Adam Clarke](#) on **a lion found him and killed him** - This seems a hard measure, but there was ample reason for it. This person was also one of the sons of the prophets, and he knew that God frequently delivered his counsels in this way, and should have immediately obeyed; for the smiting could have had no evil in it when God commanded it, and it could be no outrage or injury to his fellow when he himself required him to do it."

1 Kings 20:37 Then he found another man and said, "Please strike me." And the man struck him, wounding him.

NET 1 Kings 20:37 He found another man and said, "Wound me!" So the man wounded him severely.

CSB 1 Kings 20:37 The prophet found another man and said to him, "Strike me!" So the man struck him, inflicting a wound.

ESV 1 Kings 20:37 Then he found another man and said, "Strike me, please." And the man struck him-- struck him and wounded him.

NIV 1 Kings 20:37 The prophet found another man and said, "Strike me, please." So the man struck him and wounded him.

NLT 1 Kings 20:37 Then the prophet turned to another man and said, "Hit me!" So he struck the prophet and wounded him.

- **Please strike me** 1Ki 20:35 Ex 21:12
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PROPHET FINDS A WILLING STRIKER

Then he found another man and said, "Please strike me." And the man struck him, wounding him - Perhaps this man had heard the story about the one who refused to strike the prophet! In any event he strikes the prophet, not killing him but wounding him. The actual wound would be a vivid, bloody picture to Ahab regarding his failure to strike Ben-Hadad.

1 Kings 20:38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

NET 1 Kings 20:38 The prophet then went and stood by the road, waiting for the king. He also disguised himself by putting a bandage down over his eyes.

CSB 1 Kings 20:38 Then the prophet went and waited for the king on the road. He disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

ESV 1 Kings 20:38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes.

NIV 1 Kings 20:38 Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes.

NLT 1 Kings 20:38 The prophet placed a bandage over his eyes to disguise himself and then waited beside the road for the king.

- **disguised:** 1Ki 14:2 22:30 2Sa 14:2 Mt 6:16
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DISGUISED WOUNDED PROPHET WAITS FOR AHAB

So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes- He did not want Ahab to recognize him as a prophet, so made himself look like an Israeli soldier who had been injured in the battle. There is a bit of irony here because later Ahab will also disguise himself as a soldier in the battle against the Syrians, in order to trap a prophet, but his disguise would fail while the prophet's disguise succeeded. (1 Kings 22:29–40+)

1 Kings 20:39 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.’

NET 1 Kings 20:39 When the king passed by, he called out to the king, "Your servant went out into the heat of the battle, and then a man turned aside and brought me a prisoner. He told me, 'Guard this prisoner. If he ends up missing for any reason, you will pay with your life or with a talent of silver.'

CSB 1 Kings 20:39 As the king was passing by, he cried out to the king and said, "Your servant marched out into the middle of the battle. Suddenly, a man turned aside and brought someone to me and said, 'Guard this man! If he is ever missing, it will be your life in place of his life, or you will weigh out 75 pounds of silver.'

ESV 1 Kings 20:39 And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said, 'Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.'

NIV 1 Kings 20:39 As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.'

NLT 1 Kings 20:39 As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Sir, I was in the thick of battle, and suddenly a man brought me a prisoner. He said, 'Guard this man; if for any reason he gets away, you will either die or pay a fine of seventy-five pounds of silver!'

- **Your servant went out into** Jdg 9:7-20 2Sa 12:1-7 14:5-7 Mk 12:1-12
- **life:** 1Ki 20:42 2Ki 10:24
- **or else:** Ex 21:30 Job 36:18 Ps 49:7 Pr 6:35 13:8 1Pe 1:18,19
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE PROPHET'S PLAUSIBLE STORY

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 (75 pounds of silver) - The amount of silver was large and was not what a common soldier could afford. Thus the implication was that it would cost him his life for having let the prisoner escape.

Bob Utley - **your life shall be for his life or else you shall pay.** . ." This seems to imply that the death penalty could be redeemed with money. This amount of redemption money is extravagant, since slaves could be purchased for about 30 shekels (i.e., Exod. 21:32). This highlights the parable context. Parables often use hyperbolic language to make a point.

1 Kings 20:40 "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."

NET 1 Kings 20:40 Well, it just so happened that while your servant was doing this and that, he disappeared." The king of Israel said to him, "Your punishment is already determined by your own testimony."

CSB 1 Kings 20:40 But while your servant was busy here and there, he disappeared." The king of Israel said to him, "That will be your sentence; you yourself have decided it."

ESV 1 Kings 20:40 And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it."

NIV 1 Kings 20:40 While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared." "That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself."

NLT 1 Kings 20:40 But while I was busy doing something else, the prisoner disappeared!" "Well, it's your own fault," the king replied. "You have brought the judgment on yourself."

- **your judgment be:** 2Sa 12:5-7 Job 15:6 Mt 21:41-43 25:24-27 Lu 19:22
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

AHAB PRONOUNCES JUDGMENT ON PROPHET

While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone - NLT - " But while I was busy doing something else, the prisoner disappeared!" The phrase **busy here and there** clearly signifies he had no excuse at all.

F B Meyer - This was likely enough to happen on a battlefield. It would not be possible to hold your prisoner, and to busy yourself about other things at the same time."

THOUGHT - APPLICATION FROM G CAMPBELL MORGAN - "If a man is called to preach the Word, and becomes busy over a hundred things other than that of his central work, and so loses the opportunity to preach, his failure is complete. That which is our God-appointed work, we must do. If we fail in that, the fact that we have been 'busy here and there,' doing all sorts of other things, is of no avail"

David Guzik on **He was gone**: Even as the fictional prisoner escaped, so many opportunities escape us in the Christian life. "I want you all to remember this morning that if any portion of life has not been spent in God's service *it is gone*. Time past is gone. You can never have it back again, not even the last moment which just now glided by" (Spurgeon). (**ED**: SEE MY ARTICLE ON REDEEM THE TIME AND MY [Youtube Recording on Redeeming the Time](#))

*Be careful about being busy with so many petty details,
we may end up missing divinely given opportunities.*

And the king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it - NLT - "Well, it's your own fault," the king replied. "You have brought the judgment on yourself." Ahab rightly judged that he should be held responsible for his failure to guard what was entrusted to him. Little did Ahab know that he (like David below) was pronouncing judgment on himself!

Brian Bell - The king was self-condemned in his judgment of the prophet. Let's remember, in deciding the case of others, we are pronouncing sentences on ourselves.

Ahab succumbed to the parable in action just as David had done after the prophet Nathan's "parable" (2Sa 12:1-4+) when he uncovered David's sin with Bathsheba and his role in the murder of Uriah...

2 Samuel 12:5-7+ Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD

lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. 6 “He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion.” 7 Nathan then said to David, “**You are the man!**” Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul.’

Spurgeon Study Bible - 20:40 “While your servant was busy here and there, he disappeared.” This story was originally told in order to touch the conscience of King Ahab, who had allowed Ben-hadad, king of Syria, to escape when providence had put the cruel monarch into his hands that he might receive his doom. Ahab is no more, but this Scripture is not. Like a spent shell, there is truth and power in it. It is a law of discipline in the army that what someone is ordered to do by legitimate authority he must do. So the man’s chief business was to detain his captive till he could hand him over to the officer. We are under a higher obligation still—to serve, honor, and glorify God. Every person is bound to serve his Creator and live to his glory. We would never have existed if it had not been for his power; we would cease to exist at this instant if that power did not sustain us. Surely that existence which was originated by God should be spent to his honor, and the being which hourly depends on him should be used for his glory. For this end the Almighty made us, that we might glorify God and enjoy him forever. When someone fashions a vessel or a tool, it is that it may fulfill the purpose for which he designed it; and if it does not fulfill his purpose, he casts it away. Though people should set us on a column high in the air and say we are heroes, if we have not lived for God, we have lived in vain. As an arrow which falls short of the mark, as a fig tree which yields no figs, as a candle which smokes but yields no light, as a cloud without rain and a well without water is one who has not served the Lord. He has led a wasted life, a life to which the flower and glory of existence are lacking. Call it not life at all, but write it down as animated death.

C H Spurgeon - [Gone. Gone For Ever \(full sermon\)](#) 1 Kings 20:40

Is it not a sad thing to have neglected that which is evidently the main business of life? If I am God’s creature, I must have been meant to serve God, and if I have not served him, even as a creature, I have not done what I was meant for; but if I profess to be a Christian, then the thing assumes a more solemn form. Have I professed to be bought with Jesus’ blood, and have I lived as if I were my own? I profess to be filled with the Spirit of God by being regenerated—have I lived like one who has been born again? If I have been baptized upon a profession of my faith, I gave myself up to be buried in the water professing that I was dead to the world—have I been dead to the world? I said that I was going to live in newness of life as one risen from the dead—have I so lived? Professing Christians, have you been true to your professions, or have those professions been only lies? Conscience, answer me, I charge you! O Spirit of God, quicken conscience in every one here present, so that none may ‘be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin’. To serve God is the only thing worth living for; when we lie upon the sick bed and begin to look into the future, we judge it to be so. It makes a good man greedy to serve God when he thinks that his life will soon be over. He condemns himself for every wasted hour and laments that his every faculty has not been spurred to the uttermost in the service of him who bought him with his blood. I never yet heard regrets from dying men that they had done too much for Christ, or lived too earnestly for him, or won too many souls, or given too much of their substance to the cause of God: but the regrets all lie the other way. God save us from them for his mercy’s sake.

G Campbell Morgan - As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.—1 Kings 20.40.

These words constitute the central light in a parable which one of the sons of the prophets employed to rebuke Ahab for his failure in the matter of Ben-hadad. God had created for the king an opportunity of return to Himself. Ben-hadad, drunken, profligate, despotic, came in the pride of his arms against Samaria. By the prophets Jehovah spoke to Ahab, who acting under Divine direction, gained complete victory over his enemy. Then followed failure in the very hour of triumph. He made a covenant with the man whom God had devoted to destruction. He had one thing to do by the command of God, and while he did a hundred things he neglected the one. That was the meaning of the parable. What a revelation this of a perpetual reason and method of failure! We are given some one responsibility by God, some central definite thing to do. We start to do it with all good intention; and then other things, not necessarily wrong in themselves, come in our way. We get “busy here and there,” doing many things, and neglect the one central thing. That is failure of the most definite kind. If a man is called to preach the Word, and becomes busy over a hundred things other than that of his central work and so loses the opportunity to preach, his failure is complete. That which is our God-appointed work, we must do. If we fail in that, the fact that we have been “busy here and there,” doing all sorts of other things, is of no avail. Concentration upon the work entrusted to us is a solemn obligation. Diffusion of energy over all sorts of things not appointed to us, is a waste, and a wrong.

F B Meyer - 1 Kings 20:40 **As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.**

This was likely enough to happen on a battlefield. It would not be possible to hold your prisoner, and to busy yourself about other

things at the same time. This man, in the prophet's parable, made a great mistake to concern himself about a number of trifles, when so serious a matter as his own life depended on giving all his attention to the custodianship of the prisoner entrusted to his care. But is it not thus that men miss the main end of life?

Busy here and there and life is gone.— Many spend their days in mere trivialities. Like children they dig in the sand; like the butterfly they flit from flower to flower. A round of visits, a few novels, a good many hours of light gaiety; vanity, fashion, and amusement; these fill their hours, the days flash by, and life is gone. They have nothing to show for it.

Busy here and there, and the chance of saving others is gone.— Lives touch lives, for the chief purpose that one should influence the other. But too often we deal only with superficialities, busying ourselves in the slightest interests, but not seeking the salvation of those with whom we associate. The dance, the game, the business relationship, monopolize our thought, and our friends are swept from us in the eddying whirl of life's battle, and are gone.

Busy here and there, and the knowledge of God is gone.— Remember how the birds caught away the seed of the Kingdom; and be sure that, in the same way, the cares and riches of this world, and the lusts of other things may enter in, and destroy the impression made on the heart. The ephemeral interests of life press hard on its real interests. Like boys, we squander in trifling the hours given to prepare for an examination on which all the future must turn.

Spurgeon - My Sermon Notes - 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.”

A man must be hard run indeed when he cannot forge an excuse. This is a very common one for the loss of the soul,—“I was very busy, and had no time to attend to religion.” They say, “a bad excuse is better than none:” this is very questionable. Here is an excuse which condemned the man who made it. The man in the prophet's story was ordered to keep a prisoner, and it became his first duty to do so; but he preferred to follow out his own wishes, and attend to his private concerns, and so the prisoner “was gone.” It is clear that he had power to have attended to the king's business, for he attended to his own. His excuse was a confession that he was wilfully disobedient.

I. IT IS AN EXCUSE WHICH SOME CANNOT USE.

1. They have but little to occupy them. They are noblemen, or ladies with no occupation, or persons of large leisure, or invalids who can do nothing for a livelihood, and therefore have ample time for reflection and reading.
2. They have done all their hard work, and are retired upon their savings, and find it hard to pass their time.
3. They are never busy, for they are idlers whom nothing could provoke to industry. They kill time.

II. IT IS AN EXCUSE WHICH IS NOT VALID.

1. There was no absolute need to be so busy. Many people make slaves of themselves with a view to gain, when they could earn enough for their needs, and yet have abundant leisure to care for their souls.
2. To have believed in the Lord would have lessened the needful care of life, and so the pressure of business would have been lightened. The fact is that no man can afford to neglect his soul, for thus he hinders his own life-work.
3. You find time for other necessities,—to eat, drink, dress, converse, and sleep. And have you no time to feed your soul, to drink the living water, to put on the robe of righteousness, to talk with God, and to find rest in Christ?
4. You have time for diversion. Think of the many hours wasted in idle chat, unprofitable reading, or worse. If offered a holiday, or an evening's entertainment, you make time if you cannot find it. You have, then, time for weightier matters.
5. You find time for judging others, questioning great truths, spying out difficulties, and quibbling over trifles. Have you no time for self-examination, study of the Word, and seeking the Lord? Of course you have; where is it?

III. IT IS AN EXCUSE WHICH ACCUSES THE PERSON WHO MAKES IT.

1. You have enjoyed many mercies in your daily work, for you have been able to attend to your business; should not these have won your gratitude?
2. You have seen many trials while busy here and there; why did they not lead you to God?
3. You have abilities for business; and these should have been used for God. Did he not give them to you? Why expend them on your own selfish money-getting?

IV. IT IS AN EXCUSE WHICH WILL WOUND THE MEMORY OF SOME.

- To have worked hard for nothing: to live hard, and lie hard, and yet to fail, and die poor at last, will be sad.
To have to leave all when you have succeeded in accumulating wealth will be wretched work. Yet so it must be.

V. IT IS AN EXCUSE WHICH CANNOT RESTORE THE LOSS.

If you have lost the time, you certainly had it entrusted to you, and you will be called to account for it: but you cannot regain it, nor make up for its loss.

How wretched to have spent a life in idly travelling, collecting shells, reading novels, &c., and to have therefore left no space for serving God, and knowing the Redeemer!

Men do worse than this: they sin, they lead others to sin, they invent ways of killing time, and then say they have no time.

They give their minds to sceptical thought, to propagating atheism, undermining Scripture, or arguing against the gospel, and yet have no time to believe and live!

Call to the young to use time while time is theirs.

Call to the aged to spend the remnant of their days well.

Call to Christians to look well to their children's souls, lest they slip from under their influence while they are busy here and there.

Call to experienced believers to see to their own joy in the Lord, lest they lose it in the throng.

In London, such is the hum of business, that the great clock of St. Paul's may strike many times and not be heard. God speaks often, and men hear him not because other voices deafen them. A great earthquake happened when two armies were in the heat of battle, and none of the combatants knew of it. Preoccupation of mind will prevent the most solemn things from having due weight with us.

Nero, when Rome was famishing, sent ships to Alexandria, not to bring corn for the starving people, but to fetch sand for the arena. He fiddled while Rome was burning. Are not many thus cruel to themselves? Are they not spending, on fleeting merriments, precious hours, which should be used in seeking after pleasures for evermore?

Whatever negligence may creep into your studies, or into your pursuits of pleasure or of business, let there be one point, at least, on which you are always watchful, always alive: I mean, in the performance of your religious duties. Let nothing induce you, even for a day, to neglect the perusal of Scripture. You know the value of prayer; it is precious beyond all price. Never, never neglect it.—Buxton to his Son.

King Henry the Fourth asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed the great eclipse of the sun which had lately happened. "No," said the Duke, "I have so much to do on earth, that I have no leisure to look up to heaven." Ah, that this were not true of professors in these days! It is sad to think how their hearts and time are so taken up with earthly things, that they have no leisure to look after Christ and the things that belong to their everlasting peace.—Thomas Brooks.

A treatise on the excellence and dignity of the soul, by Claude, Bishop of Toul, ends thus: "I have but one soul, and I will value it"

"Moments seize;

Heaven's on their wing: a moment we may wish,

When worlds want wealth to buy."—Young.

Grotius, the historian, cried in death, "Ah, I have consumed my life in a laborious doing of nothing. I would give all my learning and honour for the plain integrity of John Urick" (a poor man of eminent piety).

A dying nobleman exclaimed, "Good God, how have I employed myself! In what delirium has my life been passed! What have I been doing while the sun in its race, and the stars in their courses, have lent their beams, perhaps only to light me to perdition! I have pursued shadows, and entertained myself with dreams. I have been treasuring up dust, and sporting myself with the wind. I might have grazed with the beasts of the field, or sung with the birds of the woods, to much better purpose than any for which I have lived."

1 Kings 20:41 Then he hastily took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets.

NET 1 Kings 20:41 The prophet quickly removed the bandage from his eyes and the king of Israel recognized he was one of the prophets.

CSB 1 Kings 20:41 He quickly removed the bandage from his eyes. The king of Israel recognized that he was one of the prophets.

ESV 1 Kings 20:41 Then he hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

NIV 1 Kings 20:41 Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

NLT 1 Kings 20:41 Then the prophet quickly pulled the bandage from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

- **took the bandage away:** 1Ki 20:38 2Sa 13:19 Job 2:8 Jer 6:26
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PROPHET UNVEILED AS GOD'S MESSENGER IN DISGUISE

Then he hastily took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets- Ahab is about to get the point (pun because Ahab was killed by an arrow -1Ki 22:34) of the parable in action!

David Guzik on **The king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets:** This showed why the prophet found it wise to disguise himself as a soldier recently returned from battle, and why the wound was necessary. Ahab consciously shielded himself from the prophets.

1 Kings 20:42 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.'"

NET 1 Kings 20:42 The prophet then said to him, "This is what the LORD says, 'Because you released a man I had determined should die, you will pay with your life and your people will suffer instead of his people.'"

CSB 1 Kings 20:42 The prophet said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because you released from your hand the man I had set apart for destruction, it will be your life in place of his life and your people in place of his people.'"

ESV 1 Kings 20:42 And 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 be for his life, and your people for his people.'"

NIV 1 Kings 20:42 He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.' "

NLT 1 Kings 20:42 The prophet said to him, "This is what the LORD says: Because you have spared the man I said must be destroyed, now you must die in his place, and your people will die instead of his people."

- **Because:** 1Ki 20:34 22:31-37 1Sa 15:9-11
- **your life shall go for his life:** 1Ki 22:31-37 2Ki 6:24 8:12 2Ch 18:33,34
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Leviticus 27:28+ 'Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD.

Joshua 6:17+ "The city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.

Joshua 7:1+ But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel.

Joshua 7:20-26+ (COST OF TAKING SOMETHING UNDER THE BAN) 20So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it." 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. 23 They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD. 24 Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. 25 Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. 26 They raised over him a

great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day.

Exodus 21:23 "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty **life for life**,

THE MAIN POINT OF THE PARABLE!

He (God's prophet) **said to him** (King Ahab) "**Thus says the LORD** - These opening words would have been déjà vu to the ears of Ahab, for he had three times recently heard "**Thus says the LORD**" (1Ki 20:13,14, 1Ki 20:28), each time indicating prophecies that had all come to pass! So Ahab knows that whatever is about to follow will surely come to pass!

Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction ([herem](#)), **therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people** - **NLT** = "Because you have spared the man I said must be destroyed." The action parable does not give Ahab an option to pay silver to barter for his life. Yahweh had **devoted to destruction** Ben-Hadad and the price would be Ahab's life for Ben-Hadad's life!

And your people for his people - In other words, because Ahab let Aram's king live, the people of Israel would later be attacked and oppressed by Aram. This prophecy was fulfilled when Aram (Syria) later attacked Israel and caused severe destruction (1 Kings 22:31-36; 2 Kings 8:12). This shows how one act of disobedience led to widespread suffering. When we ignore God's commands, it can have serious consequences—not just for us, but for others as well.

Dale Ralph Davis on **devoted to destruction**: Yahweh here labels Ben-hadad, literally, 'the man of my destruction [*herem*],' Ahab had spared the man Yahweh meant to destroy; he had been 'busy here and there' (v. 40) preening his image as the moderate, temperate, reasonable victor, and had let Yahweh's prisoner escape. Hence the destruction designed for Ben-hadad will fall upon Ahab and his people. This is the import of Yahweh's word. Ahab begins by sparing his enemy (vv. 31–34) and will end by destroying his people (v. 42).

John MacArthur - **destruction**. By declaring the battles to be holy war (1Ki 20:13, 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 (Dt 7:2; 20:16). By freeing Ben-hadad, Ahab had disobeyed the law and would suffer the ban in place of Ben-hadad. (See [MacArthur Study Bible](#))

[Reformation Study Bible](#) - **devoted to destruction**. - The wars were campaigns fought and won by God Himself, using the Israelites as His agents. In fighting these wars Israel was to conduct itself in a prescribed manner, observing stipulations of holy conduct. Ahab was willing to accept divine victory, but he violated the rules for the holy war by making a treaty with Ben-hadad and yoking Israel to a foreign power (Deut. 7:1-6; 20:16-18).

[Bob Utley](#) - "**devoted to destruction**" This is the Hebrew term *herem* (BDB 356) used in the sense of that which is devoted/given to YHWH cannot be used by humans (i.e., Jericho, Joshua 7 and 1 Samuel 15). This is Holy War theology and terminology.

[Peter Pett](#) Then the prophet made clear that he had been speaking about the king himself. He in his blindness had let go the very man whom YHWH had devoted to destruction. His judgment thus returned upon himself. He had failed YHWH and he and his people would have to pay the price of his failure.

John Gates: the spiritual principle set forth is that believers must not extend toleration, even in the name of mercy, to the forces of Satan. It had lain within the power of Ahab to end forever the life and death struggle between Syria and Israel. Now with Benhadad free, the struggle would continue, with disastrous results. ([Wycliffe Bible Commentary](#))

Donald Wiseman: An acted parable is used to lead Ahab to realize his inconsistency and guilt in going against God's express will and postponing judgment on Ben-Hadad. This was to cost Israel dearly in death and destruction (cf. 2 Kgs 10:32) and lead to the final fall of the Northern Kingdom. The literary device of the story to bring conviction or error can be compared with Samuel's condemnation of Saul (1 Sam. 13:14-30), and Nathan of David (2 Sam. 12:1-13). It is the responsibility of a prophet to direct one who errs to the right interpretation of events and so lead to self-judgment. Here we are reminded that not even a king is above the law but is subject to divine-justice (v.42). (See [1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary - Page 192](#))

Devoted to destruction (to be utterly destroyed) ([02764](#)) [herem](#) is something devoted unto divine service, and is under a ban. In some context as the present use, it describes a curse or extermination which implies total destruction (see Dt 7:26; 1Sa 15:18; Zech 14:11). MacKay says "The 'curse' is the ban, the utter devotion to destruction (Isa. 43:28 — and NIV footnote; Jer. 25:9) of what is an abomination in the LORD's sight."

Eugene Merrill - The ban (**herem**) was the judgment of God on places, things, and hopelessly unrepentant people that resulted in the extermination of living beings and the destruction or appropriation by YHWH of the rest. Were God's people at last to remain in unbelief and rebellion, they must suffer the fate of those placed under **herem**, for they, too, would be under His everlasting curse. The whole earth would suffer similarly, for without the mediatorial ministry of Israel, the kingdom of priests, the program of YHWH for universal redemption would collapse and the design for a universal kingdom come to an end. ([Malachi Commentary recommended](#))

Herem is not the normal word for **curse**, and as noted refers to the practice of devoting things or persons irrevocably to God, often by total destruction. Cities of Canaan were put under the "curse," and thus the people were to be exterminated (cf. Dt. 13:12-18; 20:16ff).

Herem "conveys the "basic meaning is the exclusion of an object from the use or abuse of man and its irrevocable surrender to God. The word is related to an Arabic root meaning "to prohibit, especially to ordinary use." The word "harem," meaning the special quarters for Muslim wives, comes from it. Usually āram means a ban for utter destruction, the compulsory dedication of something which impedes or resists God's work, which is considered to be accursed before God. The idea first appears in Nu 21:2-3, where the Israelites vowed that, if God would enable them to defeat a southern Canaanite king, they would "utterly destroy" (i.e. consider as devoted and accordingly utterly destroy) his cities. This word is used regarding almost all the cities which Joshua's troops destroyed (e.g. Jericho, Josh 6:21; Ai, Josh 8:26; Makkedah, Josh 10:28; Hazor, Josh 11:11), thus indicating the rationale for their destruction. In Dt 7:2-6, the command for this manner of destruction is given, with the explanation following that, otherwise, these cities would lure the Israelites away from the Lord (cf. Dt 20:17-18). Any Israelite city that harbored idolators was to be "utterly destroyed" (Deut 13:12-15; cf. Ex 22:19). A man who was the object devoted to God came under the same ban." (Leon Wood - TWOT)

HEREM - 21V - accursed(2), ban(2), curse(2), devoted(2), devoted to destruction(1), devoted thing(2), set apart(1), something banned(1), things devoted(1), things devoted to destruction(1), things under(10), things under the ban(10), under the ban(3), which is put under(1). Lev. 27:21; Lev. 27:28; Num. 18:14; Deut. 7:26; Deut. 13:17; Jos. 6:17; Jos. 6:18; Jos. 7:1; Jos. 7:11; Jos. 7:12; Jos. 7:13; Jos. 7:15; Jos. 22:20; 1 Sam. 15:21; 1 Ki. 20:42; 1 Chr. 2:7; Isa. 34:5; Isa. 43:28; Ezek. 44:29; Zech. 14:11; Mal. 4:6

1 Kings 20:43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria.

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

NET 1 Kings 20:43 The king of Israel went home to Samaria bitter and angry.

CSB 1 Kings 20:43 The king of Israel left for home resentful and angry, and he entered Samaria.

ESV 1 Kings 20:43 And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

NIV 1 Kings 20:43 Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.

NLT 1 Kings 20:43 So the king of Israel went home to Samaria angry and sullen.

- **went:** 1Ki 21:4 22:8 Es 5:13 6:12,13 Job 5:2 Pr 19:3
- [1 Kings 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SULLEN & VEXED BUT NOT REPENTANT!

So - Term of conclusion. There was no happy ending to this "parable." Ahab henceforth would not live "happily ever after," because the Word of the LORD had spoken and sealed his fate. As R G Lee eloquently said (speaking of Ahab and Jezebel especially regarding killing Naboth and stealing his vineyard in 1 Kings 21) there would be **Pay Day Someday** ([watch the video of this classic sermon](#)).

The king of Israel went to his house sullen (sar - heavy, bitter, resentful) **and vexed, and came to Samaria** - **Sullen** (sar; Lxx = sugcheo - dismayed, confounded, troubled, stirred up) describes Ahab again in 1Ki 21:4+ ("sullen and vexed") this time because

Naboth refused to sell Ahab his vineyard. The third and last use of this Hebrew word is from Jezebel who asks "How is it that your spirit is so **sullen** that you are not eating food?" (1Ki 21:5+)

Bob Utley - Ahab was unrepentant. He had seen YHWH work in marvelous victories twice but his heart was still hard (see NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 299, #5). Ahab represented all Israel. Their hard heartedness, even after the displays of YHWH's mercy and power, will bring a Divine response. YHWH will break His covenant with the northern tribes. They will go into exile by Assyria.

Ahab's reaction and failure to repent reminds us Paul's distinction between remorse (worldly sorrow like Ahab had) and repentance in 2Co 7:9-11+

I now rejoice, **not that you were made sorrowful**, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but **the sorrow of the world produces death**. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

Sullen (05620) sar from **sarar** = to be stubborn, resentful or rebellious. Sar describes one who is sullen, stubborn, rebellious. It includes the idea of deep, brooding or smoldering anger not just a temporary disappointment. Sar occurs in two contexts, both of which describe Ahab's psychological condition as being sullen and aggravated when being rebuked or rebuffed. In both its OT occurrences, sar describes the emotional state of King Ahab after being rebuked by the prophet (1Ki 20:43) and refused by Naboth (1Ki 21:4f). Although Ahab was being silent, his rage was apparent to his wife.

Vexed (02198) za'eph from a root za'aph which is from the Aramaic cognate zeap ("to storm, rage against,") means to storm, blow, or breathe hard. The idea includes being dejected or enraged. The only other use is again of Ahab in 1Ki 21:4+! A cognate (za'aph) is used in Jonah 1:15 to describe the raging sea. KB suggests "be embittered against," "be dejected," BDB adds "be enraged."