

Traveling with Elijah

Seven lessons from the life of Elijah



Created by
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Lesson Five:

War on the Saints

1 Kings 20:1-43, 22:1-40

1. Biblical text

Ahab's Wars with Syria

20 Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together. Thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and closed in on Samaria and fought against it.

2 And he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad: 3 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your best wives and children also are mine.'"

4 And the king of Israel answered, "As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have." 5 The messengers came again and said, "Thus says Ben-hadad: 'I sent to you, saying, "Deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children." 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.'" 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." 8 And all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent." 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. 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." 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.'" 12 When Ben-hadad heard this message as he was drinking with the kings in the booths, he said to his men, "Take your positions." And they took their positions against the city.

Ahab Defeats Ben-hadad

13 And behold, a prophet came near to Ahab king of Israel and said, "Thus says the Lord, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

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." 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.

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. 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."

18 He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive. Or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

19 So these went out of the city, the servants of the governors of the districts and the army that followed them. 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. 21 And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow. 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."

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." 24 And do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in their places, 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.

Ahab Defeats Ben-hadad Again

26 In the spring, Ben-hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. 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. 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.'" 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. 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. 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." 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." 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. 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.

A Prophet Condemns Ben-hadad's Release

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. 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. 37 Then he found another man and said, "Strike me, please." And the man struck him—struck him and wounded him. 38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. 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.'" 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." 41 Then he hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 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.” 43 And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

Ahab and the False Prophets

22 For three years Syria and Israel continued without war. 2 But in the third year Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3 And the king of Israel said to his servants, “Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?” 4 And he said to Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?” And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.” 5 And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Inquire first for the word of the Lord.” 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?” And they said, “Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.” 7 But Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?” 8 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is yet

one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say so.” 9 Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, “Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah.” 10 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 11 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.’” 12 And all the prophets prophesied so and said, “Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.”

Micaiah Prophesies Against Ahab

13 And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, “Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.” 14 But Micaiah said, “As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak.” 15 And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah,

shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." 16 But the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" 17 And he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" 18 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" 19 And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; 20 and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.' 22 And the Lord said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' 23 Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has

declared disaster for you." 24 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?" 25 And Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself." 26 And the king of Israel said, "Seize Micaiah, and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, 27 and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace.'" 28 And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, all you peoples!"

Ahab Killed in Battle

29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. 31 Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." 32 And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight

against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 34 But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." 35 And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. 36 And about sunset a cry went through

the army, "Every man to his city, and every man to his country!"

37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria.

38 And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken.

39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

40 So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

2. Meaning of the story

2.1 Fighting God's battle (1 Kings 20:1-22)

King Ahab was facing an invasion from his strong northern neighbour, Aram. This attack by Ben-hadad II [Picture 1] occurred in 857 BC. Probably Ben-hadad II wanted to strengthen his southern flank, as Assyria, his northern neighbour, was growing ever stronger. Ahab's treaties with Judah and Phoenicia now proved to be justified. They were probably meant to offset the threat from Aram.

Ben-hadad II demanded gold, silver, women, children, and King Ahab gave in. Then Ben-hadad came with more humiliating demands, and now King Ahab drew his line in the sand. He decided to fight.

King Ahab took his stand; a prophet came to him, and promised him victory. The prophet even commanded King Ahab to take the initiative and attack. Ahab followed these instructions carefully, and was duly rewarded. The Israelites won a great victory. The prophet, however, warned them not to indulge themselves because 'the King of Aram will attack you again'.



QUESTIONS:

- What sort of lessons can we learn from the war stories in the Old Testament? (See 1 Corinthians 10:1-11)
- Where is our battleground? (See Ephesians 6:10-20)
- Who are the 'prophets' in your life? Who or what do you allow to speak into your life? (See Hebrews 4:11-13)

2.2 *Compromise (1 Kings 20:22-43)*

Again King Ben-hadad II ordered attack, just as the prophet had predicted. Again Ahab's army won a great victory because he listened to the prophet's advice.

Ahab thought it would be wise to strike a profitable deal with the defeated Ben-hadad, rather than kill the Aramaeans as God had commanded. He negotiated the return of Israel's previously confiscated land, and arranged permission for Israelite traders to open their own market in Damascus.

King Ben-hadad's officials spoke with gratitude about Ahab's great mercy. What these heathens perceived as mercy, was seen by God as disobedience.



[Picture 1, Ben-hadad I]



QUESTIONS:

- When is a compromise in Christian life wise? (See 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
- Compare how today people sometimes look at Christian mercy while God may not be pleased?

2.3 Discerning the spirits (1 Kings 22:1-40)

King Ahab must have been feeling powerful, as he decided to break his treaty with Ben-hadad II and re-conquer Ramoth-Gilead. His good ties with Judah were helpful; King Jehoshaphat was willing to cooperate.

The king of Judah wanted to know the will of God first, and asked for the prophets. He had some doubts about the honesty of the 400 prophets whom Ahab produced, so he requested for a 'second opinion'.

Unwillingly, King Ahab introduced the prophet Micaiah. However, the kings of Israel and Judah did not heed Micah's advice to keep the peace. The combined armies of Israel and Judah engaged Aram in war. King Ahab was killed by divine intervention, as some prophets had predicted.

QUESTIONS:

- How can you discern whether something is the will of God when there are conflicting views and voices? (See Romans 12:2, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:18, John 6:38-40, Ephesians 5:17)
- King Ahab lost his life because he thought he understood the will of God. Why did he misunderstand?

